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| **Adult Education System Evaluation Final Report 2020**  Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations  Combined Document: Adult Education System Evaluation Final Report 2020, Adult Education System Evaluation Focus Group Summary Report 2020, Adult Education System Evaluation Interview Summary Report 2020, and Adult Education System Evaluation Survey Summary Report 2020 |
| December 23, 2020 |

Adult Education System Evaluation Final Report 2020

***Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations***

Prepared by the UMass Donahue Institute’s  
Applied Research & Program Evaluation Group

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# Executive Summary

#### Introduction

The mission of the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is “to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy, math and numeracy, and other skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.” In 2018, ACLS provided learning opportunities to approximately 12,000 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and 7,000 adult basic education (ABE) and high school equivalency (HSE) students.

In spring 2019, ACLS and DESE contracted with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) to conduct an evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system. This multi-method evaluation gathered the perspectives of students, directors, teachers, advisors, ACLS staff, and other stakeholders, and collected data through focus groups, interviews, and online surveys. Data collection was intended to surface a range of information, from student academic and workforce needs, to program successes and challenges, to recommendations for potential changes to the adult education system.

This document is the final report for the evaluation. It is a high level summary of the key findings and recommendations that surfaced through analysis of data from three collections (focus groups, interviews, and surveys). UMDI produced separate reports summarizing the findings and considerations derived from each data collection method. These reports are included in the appendices. For ease of reference, this document includes links to related sections in each of the method-specific reports.

#### Key Findings

The report includes key findings and recommendations associated with the following nine topic areas:

* Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
* Student Needs
* ACLS Policies and Practices
* Curriculum and Instruction
* SABES and Professional Development
* Enrollment and Retention
* Relationships and Communication
* Digital Literacy / Distance Education
* Resources and Additional Support

Ten key findings are presented below, and are described in greater detail in the body of the report. Most key findings have multiple sub-findings which provide additional detail.

1. **Adult education students are highly diverse, and not all student groups are served equally well.**

The students adult education programs serve are highly diverse not only with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, first language, and age, but also in terms of employment status, mental and physical health challenges, learning disability status, literacy level, income, personal support systems, and more. Many directors and teachers reported (through surveys) that programs do a good job serving individuals without a high school credential, English language learners, and individuals who receive public assistance. However, both directors and teachers frequently reported serving ‘somewhat well’ or ‘not at all well’ individuals with learning disabilities, mental/emotional health challenges, and physical challenges.

1. **The needs of participating students are diverse, there are insufficient resources available to meet those needs, and—in some ways—the system is not well aligned with the needs of adult learners.**

Directors, teachers, and advisors acknowledged that some student needs were beyond the scope of the services their program provides. They perceived students’ workforce needs as having multiple dimensions, and the lack of alignment of programs’ workforce goals with students’ workforce goals was consistently mentioned by directors, teachers, and advisors across data collections.

1. **The source, purpose, and relative importance of various policies is not always clear to directors, teachers, and advisors—particularly those who are new to the field.**

Some directors, teachers, and advisors did not know if a policy or practice originated with their program, with ACLS, with the state of Massachusetts, or with the federal Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA). While most directors were satisfied with the supports ACLS provided for interpreting policies, some reported that they received inconsistent or inadequate guidance which led to frustration.

1. **Regional workforce priorities and WIOA requirements are difficult for programs to fulfill.**

Over one-third of advisors identified contacting former students regarding post-program employment or education as the most challenging federal WIOA requirement to implement.

1. **Directors, teachers, and advisors identified differentiation as a key strategy for student success and requested support for providing it.**

Assistance with best practices for differentiation was a common additional support requested by directors and teachers.

1. **Most directors, teachers, and advisors agreed that the professional development provided by SABES had a positive impact on their practice; and directors and teachers frequently noted that additional professional development would be beneficial.**

Directors, teachers, and advisors reported finding SABES services—and professional development more generally—to be productive, useful, and a good investment of time and funding.

1. **While a majority of directors agreed that policies linking student enrollment and outcomes to program funding have been helpful, many reported that those policies have had some unintended negative consequences.**

While three-fourths of directors who responded to the survey found policies that based funding on achievement or enrollment targets were ‘very helpful’ or ‘somewhat helpful,’ many focus group and interview participants expressed some level of concern regarding ACLS policies that linked continued program funding to student enrollment and outcomes. Concerned respondents said this link decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, and increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff.

1. **Meaningful relationships and high quality collaboration and communication at all levels—from teacher-student communication to ACLS-program communication—are central to student and program success.**

Directors, teachers, and advisors expressed a desire for improved cross-program collaboration. They also reported that improved communication with ACLS could improve program services. At the classroom level, programs identified students’ educational and workforce needs primarily through students’ relationships with staff.

1. **Some students do not have ready access to technology or the level of digital literacy necessary to effectively participate in distance learning activities; and, some program staff members’ level of digital literacy negatively impacts their ability to implement distance education effectively.**

Several program staff members said that some students do not have access to a computer and/or the internet at home, or the level of digital literacy necessary to effectively participate in distance learning activities. Some program staff commented that some of their coworkers did not have an adequate level of digital literacy.

1. **A primary challenge across the adult education system is a lack of resources.**

Directors, teachers, and advisors who participated in interviews and focus groups stressed that there is more to be done to serve adult education students than can be accomplished with the current level of resources available across the system (i.e., federal, state, and program level).

#### Recommendations

This report includes a number of recommendations that span the aforementioned topic areas. A summary of these recommendations is provided below. Each recommendation is further described in the body of the report.

1. While diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are principles central to—and valued by—the adult education field, many opportunities exist to further support these principles. We recommend that ACLS:

* Further engage the field around the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
* Affirm that diversity is a strength and source of opportunities.
* Continue efforts to gather feedback from students—ensuring the inclusion of students at correctional institutions—about their experiences with adult education programs.

1. Directors, teachers, and advisors described a variety of student needs and offered suggestions for addressing those needs. We recommend that ACLS and programs:
   * Improve efforts to identify and support students with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities.
   * To the extent possible within the WIOA framework, ACLS and programs should collaborate to align policies and practices with student needs.
2. Directors, teachers, and advisors described multiple areas where ACLS might improve policies and practices and their implementation. We recommend that ACLS:
   * Slow the rate of change to policies and practices, prioritizing fewer changes and supporting their implementation before introducing any additional changes. This is particularly important for policies and practices implemented and evaluated at the level of individual ABE/ESOL programs. Consider and implement strategies to address the unintended consequences of linking program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.
   * Consider carefully how and when to encourage flexibility in programming and policy.
   * Work with programs to better understand the relationship between available resources, program costs, and service provision.
   * Review and refine ACLS’ Theory of Action in order to make the relationship between elements of the adult education system more transparent and improve communication about goals and outcomes.
3. Many directors, teachers, and advisors made recommendations associated with expanding resources for curriculum and instruction. We recommend that ACLS:
   * Explore ways programs might receive additional assistance with curriculum development, including suggestions for differentiation, professional development, technical assistance, and sample lessons to support the needs of diverse learners.
   * Develop strategies to increase program staff’s understanding of, and guidance for, differentiating instruction.
   * Explore providing additional suggested—and customizable—curriculum with examples for differentiation.
4. SABES is a valuable resource for adult education directors, teachers, and advisors. Many staff made suggestions for how SABES services might be expanded. We recommend that ACLS:
   * Explore how resources for professional development might be expanded.
   * Explore additional remote training options that would have more flexible timing.
   * Refine strategies to identify effective professional development activities.
5. Enrollment and retention policies have important ramifications for who is served by the adult education system and for how well students are served. We recommend that ACLS:
   * Facilitate additional dialogue among programs concerning best practices for enrollment and attendance/retention policies and disseminate information about best practices.
   * Increase support for ABE programs’ efforts to enroll and retain students.
6. Effective collaboration and communication across all levels of the adult education system, and with external partners, is important to program success. In addition, the post-COVID world requires expanding communication within the virtual environment. We recommend that ACLS:
   * Consider ways to improve the consistency and clarity of communication between ACLS and programs—particularly communication relevant to policy.
   * As appropriate, assist programs with communicating and collaborating with external partners.
   * Consider ways to create supportive relationships between teachers/advisors and students within the distance education framework, given the existing challenges for both students and staff in accessing and using appropriate technology.
7. It is important for ACLS to continue and expand its support for improving the digital literacy of both program staff and students, as well as ensuring that staff and students have the resources to engage in a virtual environment. We recommend that ACLS:
   * Support programs’ efforts to provide as many students as possible with the digital literacy skills—and technology—needed to engage in distance education.
   * As needed, bolster the digital literacy of adult education program staff to improve both their ability to participate in remote/virtual professional development and implement remote/virtual instructional practices.
   * Continue to address the gaps in participation and outcomes potentially exacerbated by the need for remote learning.

# Introduction

The mission of the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is “to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy, math and numeracy, and other skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and family sustaining employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.” In 2018, ACLS provided learning opportunities to approximately 12,000 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and 7,000 adult basic education (ABE) and high school equivalency (HSE) students.

In spring 2019, ACLS and DESE contracted with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) to conduct an evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system. This multi-method evaluation was designed to include the perspectives of students, directors, teachers, advisors, ACLS staff, and other stakeholders, and collect data through focus groups, interviews, and online surveys. Data collection was intended to gather a range of information, from student academic and workforce needs, to program successes and challenges, to potential changes to the adult education system.

This document is the final report for the evaluation. It is a high level summary of the key findings and recommendations that surfaced through analysis of data from three collections (focus groups, interviews, and surveys) and multiple stakeholder groups (ACLS staff, program directors, program teachers/advisors, students). UMDI produced separate reports summarizing the findings and considerations derived from focus groups, interviews, and surveys. These reports are included in the appendices. For ease of reference, this document includes links to related sections in each of the method-specific reports.

# Key Findings

This section presents key findings by topic area. Each key finding contains secondary findings which are bolded in the text. Links to evidence and additional information in the three reports—one each for focus groups, interviews, and surveys—are provided throughout the key findings.

The topic areas presented include:

* [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#_Diversity,_Equity,_and)
* [Student Needs](#_Student_Needs)
* [ACLS Policies and Practices](#_ACLS_Policies_and)
* [Curriculum and Instruction](#_Curriculum_and_Instruction)
* [SABES and Professional Development](#_SABES_and_Professional)
* [Enrollment and Retention](#_Enrollment_and_Retention)
* [Relationships and Communication](#_Relationships_and_Communication)
* [Digital Literacy / Distance Education](#_Digital_Literacy_/)
* [Resources and Additional Support](#_Resources_and_Additional)

These topic areas emerged over time from the original evaluation questions and through data analysis, and were refined through multiple discussions with ACLS. Results for each topic area are presented separately, but there was significant overlap among these topics in the data. Respondents frequently provided reflections that crossed multiple topic areas. The presentation of findings by topic area is intended to provide readers with a helpful organizing framework for understanding the key findings, but is necessarily a simplification of the nuanced connections that exist among these topics in the field. Some findings included in this report may be at odds with other findings as different participants, understandably, varied in their responses and/or offered complex responses.

While links from the method-specific reports back to the final report are not included, pressing the Alt key and left arrow (Alt + ←) simultaneously will return you to the point where you left off (e.g., the location of the original hyperlink). You can also use the navigation pane (an option available in the View ribbon of the word version of this document). The navigation pane contains a list of all headers in the document—each hyperlinked to their respective section—and is useful for moving around to different parts of the documents.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

#### Key Finding 1: Adult education students are highly diverse, and not all student groups are served equally well.

**ACLS was clear that they promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout the adult education system. Directors, teachers, and advisors consistently confirmed and affirmed that they also value DEI and support ACLS’ efforts to consider these priorities in guiding decisions.**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are central to adult education in Massachusetts: Local programs engage a highly diverse set of students; the goal of adult education is to help the Commonwealth promote equity among residents; and programs seek to serve students who face many barriers to learning, including both documented and undocumented learning difficulties.

**The students who are served by adult education programs are highly diverse not only with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, first language, and age, but also in terms of employment status, mental and physical health challenges, learning disability status, literacy level, income, personal support systems, and more.** Most interview and focus group participants reported that the students being served had many—and frequently multiple—needs. **Many** **respondents from all data collections indicated that** **not all student groups are served equally well.** Manydirectors and teachers reported (through surveys) that programs do a good job serving individuals without a high school credential, English language learners, and individuals who receive public assistance. However, more than 70% of directors and teachers reported through surveys that individuals with learning disabilities, mental/emotional health challenges, and physical challenges were served ‘somewhat well’ or ‘not at all well’. Teachers further indicated that they did not serve homeless individuals, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals, and out-of-school youth well. According to teachers, identifying and supporting students with learning disabilities was particularly difficult because many learning disabilities were undiagnosed (especially among students who had moved from other countries). As a result, teachers had to guess at what accommodations were needed to help a student learn. Learning disabilities greatly affected some students’ ability to read, which then affected their ability to learn other content (e.g., science, social studies).

For additional information about diversity, equity, and inclusion please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* + - [Diversity Section](#_Diversity)
    - [Equity Section](#_Equity)
    - [Inclusion Section](#_Inclusion)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Section](#_Diversity,_Equity,_and)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Enrollment and Retention of Students Section](#_Enrollment_and_Retention_2)

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### Student Needs

#### Key Finding 2: The needs of participating students are diverse, there are insufficient resources available to meet those needs, and—in some ways—the system is not well aligned with the needs of adult learners.

**Directors, teachers, and advisors discussed three general types of adult learner needs: (1) educational needs, (2) life needs, and (3) workforce needs.** Many thought that the system either lacked an understanding of or was not well equipped to deal with the level and variety of needs presented by adult education students.

Within the category of educational needs, there were multiple sub-areas, including subject area (e.g., ELA, ESOL, numeracy) needs, instructional needs (e.g., differentiation in pedagogical strategies, modes of instruction), resource needs, logistical needs, and relationship needs. During focus groups, students said the thing adult education programs needed most was more teachers so that students could have more one-on-one attention. Students recognized that teachers had big workloads which was one factor preventing teachers from meeting the individualized needs of all students in a class. **Students saw one-on-one attention from teachers as essential to their success.**

**Directors, teachers, and advisors acknowledged that some student needs were beyond the scope of their program.** Student needs was a recurring theme in all data collection activities, and the list of student ‘life needs’ mentioned was extensive. For example, needs included (1) reliable transportation, (2) housing security, (3) food security, (4) reliable and affordable childcare, (5) access to healthcare (especially mental and behavioral healthcare), (6) support for sick family members, (7) assistance with immigration issues, (8) assistance in working with their children’s schools, (9) help gaining citizenship, and (10) poverty. Directors, teachers, and advisors acknowledged that life needs were a common barrier to student enrollment, retention, and achievement, and many connected students to community services in order to support student success. When asked (via surveys) to prioritize changes or additional supports needed to improve student outcomes in their programs, nearly half of directors and teachers and two-thirds of advisors cited childcare assistance to students. Directors and advisors also frequently identified support for transportation assistance as a potential key support. Fifty-seven percent of both directors and teachers cited the instability in the lives of students as the top reason for under-enrollment in their programs.

**Directors, teachers, and advisors perceived students’ workforce needs as having multiple dimensions.** They acknowledged that most students needed job stability and sustainable wages, noting that many of their students found work through temp agencies that did not pay well and did not have reliable hours. Teachers, directors, and advisors reported that many students, if asked about what their workforce goals were upon intake, either (1) had no idea what they wanted to do or, (2) gave a response about a job area they had heard was hiring, even though they did not know what was required to attain that job. **The lack of alignment of programs’ workforce goals with students’ workforce goals was consistently mentioned across data collections**. This included a lack of alignment between the job areas students could or wanted to find employment in and the regional workforce priority areas.[[1]](#footnote-1) Furthermore, programs’ workforce orientation generally was out of alignment with students who were already retired, were approaching retirement, already had jobs they liked, or simply were not interested in having a job. Lastly, teachers saw a lack of knowledge among students who did have employment goals about the steps it would take for them to attain their goals. This translated into a need for better employment pathway education.

**Directors, teachers, and advisors reported multiple ways the adult education system could better serve the needs of adult learners or programs.** Directors and teachers reported that programs could use a great deal of support related to all aspects of serving students with learning disabilities—how to identify learning disabilities, how to teach to learning disabilities, how to fund formal assessments, etc. Some teachers estimated that as much as 50% of their students likely had a learning disability of some kind. No program reported having a learning disabilities specialist on staff, even though some directors thought the proportion of students in their classes with a learning disability was quite high. To support students with learning disabilities, teachers said they needed to scaffold and differentiate curriculum and instruction. Teachers reported that they did not have the time and resources needed to differentiate instruction in a manner that would meet the needs of students with learning disabilities.

Teachers also reported that it was difficult to present workforce training resources and opportunities in classes where most students were unable to access those resources or opportunities (either because of low literacy levels or because their immigration status prevented them from accessing the available resource). Several teachers reported that many immigrant students were not interested in college. Rather, they were focused on surviving in a new country and obtaining immediate employment. Advisors suggested that it would be helpful to have further guidance and support from DESE/ACLS regarding how best to recruit, serve, and assess the workforce needs of low-literacy students, undocumented students, and students who do not have work authorizations. Advisors also noted that many adult education students were ineligible to receive at least some MassHire services because of their immigration status.

Teachers who participated in the focus groups reported two primary areas where the Massachusetts adult education system was neither aligned with, nor informed by, the needs of adult learners. **The first area pertained to a lack of understanding in the system about working with a highly transient population.** Whether ABE or ESOL teachers, many observed that their students moved frequently, which had several effects, including confusion around how to process students with regard to intake and exit. Transience also disrupted instruction for both the individual who moved and for the other students in their class. This study did not focus on the needs of transient students or their impact on programs. Additional information would need to be collected in order to understand how transience impacts adult education programs and how programs might best serve transient students.

**Teachers also reported that meeting the needs of older adults is not well integrated into the adult education system.** The priorities of many older adults did not match the workforce and educational attainment priorities of the system. The system focused on people securing jobs (if they were unemployed), moving into better jobs (if they were employed), or joining some kind of higher education or training program. Some interviewees and focus group participants reported that many students in their mid-40s or older were not interested in getting a job if they were unemployed, moving into a new job if they were employed, or entering higher education or some training. Instead, these adults sought education or language acquisition for more practical, but still important, reasons: to read to grandchildren, to go to the doctor without the assistance of a translator, or to perform better at their current job.

For additional information about student needs please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* + - [Research Question 2B: What are adult learners’ educational and workforce needs?](#_Research_Question_2B:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Student Enrollment and Retention Section](#_Student_Enrollment_and)

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### ACLS Policies and Practices

#### Key Finding 3: The source, purpose, and relative importance of various policies is not always clear to directors, teachers, and advisors—particularly those who are new to the field.

S**ome directors, teachers, and advisors did not know if particular policies or practices originated with their program, with ACLS, with the state of Massachusetts, or with the federal Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA)**. For example, WIOA requirements (from the federal government) or attendance rules (from the program level) were often referred to generically as “ACLS policies.” This confusion may contribute to misunderstandings—and frustration—about the level of flexibility available to programs in implementing or adjusting particular policies or practices (e.g., data gathering and reporting, student attendance, professional development).

**UMDI also observed that some directors and teachers had difficulty interpreting or implementing various policies.** Survey results indicate that 92% of director respondents thought ACLS program specialists were ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful.’ However, some interviewees and focus group participants commented that they had received delayed, incomplete, or conflicting responses from program specialists and that the system as a whole was frustrating. In terms of policy, directors saw a conflict between the invitation in the latest RFP for flexible program design and the LACES (i.e., data entry) and WIOA requirements, because some programs with an innovative design could not track their activities in LACES or receive “credit” for their students’ achievements through WIOA outcomes. For example, a few interviewees said that their program had considered implementing innovative practices related to class scheduling, students’ class assignments, instructional, advising, or wrap-around services (e.g., immigration support, transportation support, childcare support), but ultimately chose not to change their current practices because they were unsure about what the outcomes would be.

#### Key Finding 4: Regional workforce priorities and WIOA requirements are difficult for programs to fulfill.

**Regional workforce needs were not a high level concern among adult education directors, teachers, or advisors.** Generally, this was because their primary objective was fulfilling the immediate educational needs of students, even if those needs were not aligned with priority employment areas. Directors and teachers noted that students’ basic life needs (e.g., transportation, childcare, immigration status) directly affected students’ ability to pursue numerous trainings or job opportunities. That is, students frequently were unable to attend job trainings or employment opportunities unless they first received support for their basic life needs.

**While many directors thought that DESE/ACLS was knowledgeable about student needs, the federal requirements that DESE/ACLS asked programs to meet were seen as not well aligned with their students’ needs**. According to one director, “It is fair to acknowledge that DESE has the same requirements we do. They are being pulled and pushed by federal funding and regulations. I think they do their very best to establish a framework and supports that honor what students need, but they are being pushed into this workforce mold, too.”

**Tracking student employment outcomes after students had exited the program was noted as a challenge by many directors, teachers, and advisors.** Because federal WIOA policies emphasize employment outcomes, programs were very concerned when former students did not update their contact information or respond when contacted by program staff. Through their survey, over one-third of advisors identified contacting former students regarding post-program employment or education as the most challenging federal WIOA requirement to implement. They recommended providing incentives for students to respond; improving outreach through social media, mailings, and postings; and partnering with community organizations / social service organizations.

For additional information about ACLS policies and practices please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 2: In what ways is the AE system aligned with, and informed by, the needs of adult learners, regional workforce needs, and the needs of different programs (e.g., rural, urban, ESOL, ABE)?](#_Research_Question_2:)
* [Research Question 2C: Is the adult education system aligned with student educational and workforce, regional workforce, and program needs?](#_Research_Question_2C:)
* [Research Question 2D: What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs?](#_Research_Question_2D:)
* [Research Question 2E: Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how?](#_Research_Question_2E:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies Section](#_ACLS_Policies)

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### Curriculum and Instruction

#### Key Finding 5: Directors, teachers, and advisors identified differentiation as a key strategy for student success and requested support for providing it.

**Differentiation was a key strategy identified by directors, teachers, and advisors for addressing student instructional and advising needs.** During focus groups and interviews, differentiation was primarily discussed within the context of learning disabilities. Differentiation, however, can be much more complex than customizing curriculum for a student’s learning disability: differentiation can take into account many different factors including learning levels, learning styles, and study skills. Directors reported that the primary driver of instructional content and pedagogy was information about students (e.g., test scores, LACES data review, learning inventories) or from students (e.g., intake interviews, student disclosures, classroom-based discussions).

One teacher reported, “Differentiation is probably one of the hardest parts of teaching at the ABE level because of the resources that we don’t have, similar to what you would have in a public school setting, like [special education] teams dedicated to students working at different [academic] levels.” Directors indicated that teachers invested a significant amount of time, energy, and effort in determining their students’ learning needs.

**Assistance with best practices for differentiation—especially more advanced techniques which are appropriate for experienced teachers to implement in their classrooms—was a common additional support requested by teacher survey respondents as well as teacher and director focus group participants.** In the survey, more teachers cited wanting ‘a great deal of support’ for using technology to support student learning (38%) and for supporting students with learning disabilities (33%) than they did other instructional practices. In addition, some teachers and advisors suggested that it would be helpful for ACLS or SABES to develop and implement a plan for collecting and sharing best practices across programs.

In the survey, **teachers identified a number of helpful resources that were provided by ACLS including various state standards for curriculum and instruction.** Overall, teachers reported a high level of utility of the state standards to inform their practice. For each set of standards (Massachusetts College and Career Readiness, Massachusetts English Language Proficiency, Massachusetts Adult Education and ESOL Professional Standards), at least 90% of teachers indicated they used the standards ‘some of the time’ or ‘all of the time.’ The standards most often informed lesson planning and curriculum planning (58% and 56% reported using ‘all of the time’, respectively).

For additional information about Curriculum and Instruction please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 1A: What are the ways in which programs determine the instructional content and pedagogy that best meet their students’ needs?](#_Research_Question_1A:)
* [Research Question 1B: How do programs determine whether students are making progress in their academic and workforce skills and abilities, as well as whether and how students need additional support?](#_Research_Question_1B:)
* [Research Question 1D: What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction?](#_Research_Question_1D:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Curriculum and Instruction Section](#_Curriculum_and_Instruction)
* [Differentiation Section](#_Differentiation)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Instructional Quality Section](#_Instructional_Quality)

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### SABES and Professional Development

#### Key Finding 6: Most directors, teachers, and advisors agreed that the professional development provided by SABES had a positive impact on their practice; and directors and teachers frequently noted that additional professional development would be beneficial.

**Directors, teachers, and advisors reported finding SABES services—and professional development more generally—to be productive, useful, and a good investment of time and funding**. On the survey, over 60% of directors rated each of the SABES general support types as ‘very’ or ‘somewhat helpful.’ The most helpful (rated ‘very helpful’) were the SABES PD workshops (75%) and the SABES website (63%). ACLS curriculum and instruction supports were also well-received by directors. Most directors—and especially those who had been a director for five years or less—found SABES and ACLS general supports very helpful (particularly SABES PD workshops, the SABES website, the State as Partner Webinar, and the English Language Proficiency Standards). **The least used supports (reported as ‘have not used’) were SABES onsite coaching (42%)** **and SABES Sharing Groups (18%)**. The UMass Center for Educational Assessment also reported that supports for assessment and testing were generally underutilized.

Staff indicated professional development was an essential aspect of their professional culture. **Interviewees reported that professional development was most beneficial when it was aligned with standards; mandatory (i.e., required either by ACLS or the program); introduced new resources; embedded in the self-assessment of staff; and responsive to staff, student, and program needs.**

Of the seven potential challenges to professional development participation listed in their survey, teachers cited location and timing as the factors that most impeded participation. **Three-quarters of teachers reported that the timing of the professional development activities impeded their ability to participate to ‘some extent’ or to ‘a great extent,’ while over 70% reported that location of professional development activities was similarly a challenge.** Correspondingly, nearly half of teachers suggested that increased on-site professional development (i.e., training delivered to all staff at a program site simultaneously) would increase their participation. One-third of teachers recommended more online training for the same reason. Over a dozen teachers commented that they would be more likely to complete SABES follow-up activities if they had more immediate applicability to their lessons.

Notably, 41% of teachers who responded to the survey reported having more than 10 years of experience as educators, and 93% reported having some relevant previous experience. Comparatively, 32% of directors and 14% of advisors reported having 10 years of experience. Not surprisingly, when asked what changes would increase their participation in SABES professional development, 42% of teachers recommended more advanced content for experienced teachers. A few teachers recommended leveraging that teacher experience by creating opportunities for teachers from different programs to learn from one another, in particular for new teachers to learn from more experienced teachers.

For additional information about SABES and professional development please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 6: Do SABES services reflect the needs of adult education programs?](#_Research_Question_6:)
* [Research Question 7D: What changes in the SABES system would help to improve instructional practices and teaching behavior?](#_Research_Question_7D:)
* [Research Question 7F: How have changes to SABES affected the MA AE field? (teachers, advisors, administrators)](#_Research_Question_7F:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) Section](#_System_for_Adult)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Professional Development Section](#_Professional_Development)

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### Enrollment and Retention

#### Key Finding 7: While a majority of directors agreed that policies linking student enrollment and outcomes to program funding have been helpful, many reported that those policies have had some unintended negative consequences.

Most directors and teachers reported that the classes in their programs were not under-enrolled. In the surveys of directors and teachers, **classroom under-enrollment was reported more frequently by directors and teachers from ABE programs than ESOL programs**.

While three-fourths of directors who responded to the survey found policies that based funding on achievement or enrollment targets were ‘very helpful’ or ‘somewhat helpful,’ **many focus group and interview participants expressed some level of concern regarding ACLS policies that linked continued program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.** Interviewees noted that funding policies pushed programs to prioritize student outcomes over considerations for equity or inclusion.

**Some interviewees described how policies that link funding to student enrollment and performance led to an inherent tension between** **enrolling high-need students (of which there were many) and students who were more likely to achieve official outcome targets (of which there were fewer)**. Some interviewees explained that this link decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, and increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff.

**Interviewees noted that tying funding to student enrollment and performance increased competition among programs to provide services to students at the lowest possible cost per student.** Over time, this competition could serve to drive down the quality of adult education services because programs that underestimate the cost of their services are more likely to be funded and less likely to have the resources necessary to support high quality instruction for all students. While more students might be reached in this manner, a lower proportion of students are likely to achieve positive outcomes.

Interviewees also noted that linking funding to student enrollment and retention made it more difficult for adult education centers to function as educational institutions. **Interviewees reflected that uncertainty around program funding made it more difficult to develop local support, promote staff comradery, or provide assurance of long-term organizational stability for individuals seeking their services.** For example, local social service agencies might be hesitant to refer clients to an adult education program if there is uncertainty that the program will continue to operate in the future.The result is increased levels of uncertainty and anxiety among directors, teachers, and advisors.

**Open-enrollment policies have been a challenge for some programs—creating problems with curriculum and instruction which can then lead to problems with student retention**. One director detailed how open enrollment had affected their program:

Turning away from managed enrollment and back to open enrollment has been terrible. We used to have five periods of enrollment spaced out. The teachers could teach longer units, we could do CALM [Curriculum for Adults Learning Math] for math, which requires cohorts of people that stay together for longer periods. If we have to fill seats right away as they open up, it interrupts the group. We try to start them during the first week of the month, but it doesn’t always work that way, so there is a constant churning of students coming in and going out. We are losing students because it feels too chaotic. New students come in and need to be caught up, but it slows down the students who are ready to move on. Teachers aren’t sure who is in their classes from one month to the next. It is not good, and there has to be a way for [ACLS] to reconsider this.

**Staff saw student retention as closely connected to student needs.** Two strategies frequently reported as ‘very helpful’ for student retention by teachers in the survey included improved partnerships with organizations that can help students with non-school issues (53%) and increased student access to advisors, social workers, or counselors (43%).

For additional information about Enrollment and Retention please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 2: In what ways is the AE system aligned with, and informed by, the needs of adult learners, regional workforce needs, and the needs of different programs (e.g., rural, urban, ESOL, ABE)?](#_Research_Question_2:)
* [Research Question 2E: Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how?](#_Research_Question_2E:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Student Enrollment and Retention Section](#_Student_Enrollment_and)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Enrollment and Retention of Students Section](#_Enrollment_and_Retention_2)

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### Relationships and Communication

#### Key Finding 8: Meaningful relationships and high quality collaboration and communication at all levels—from teacher-student communication to ACLS-program communication—are central to student and program communication.

Frequent, high quality communication among stakeholders (i.e., students, program staff, ACLS and SABES staff, external partners, etc.) is critical for the success of students, as well as for effective implementation of components of the adult education system. Many directors, teachers, and SABES interviewees encouraged ACLS to continue their efforts to communicate clearly with the field and to facilitate frequent and high quality communication among stakeholders. For example, interviewees identified the “state as partner” webinar series as a successful communication strategy.

**Building partnerships with other organizations was seen as one means for expanding resources.** Survey results indicated that coordinated outreach to social service agencies was consistently among the top three most frequently identified recruiting strategies to increase enrollment of new students. Further, three-quarters of directors and just over half of teachers reported (through surveys) that improved partnerships with organizations that can help students with non-school issues was a helpful strategy for retaining students in their programs. Interviewees also noted that successful partnerships are the result of strategic, high quality communication and effective collaboration and coordination among multiple stakeholders. Several interviewees encouraged ACLS to consider their role in facilitating partnerships, especially those with large or statewide organizations who may be more responsive to a state-level partner—one focused on impacting outcomes at the state level.

However, teachers also reported that the requirement to work with partner organizations[[2]](#footnote-2) was an area of program need that was out of alignment with the adult education system. **While all teachers reported seeing value in partnerships, they felt that some partners had different, and sometimes even conflicting, goals from their own program**. For example, whereas the adult education program might be concerned about students gaining an Education Functioning Level (EFL), a partner organization may only be interested in seeing people pass the citizenship test. Many teachers reported difficulties working with the local Workforce Investment Board (WIB) / Regional Employment Board (REB) to which they were assigned as part of their partnership requirements. They commented that often the requirements for entering trainings at the WIB/REB were higher than their students could meet (e.g., the training required a level of literacy that was higher than a student possessed); consequently, the WIB/REB had no interest in their students. There was a sense that if the adult education student could not help the partner agency meet their own goals, then they were not welcome.

**Directors and teachers expressed a desire for improved cross-program collaboration.** Survey data showed that directors, teachers, and advisors agreed that the facilitation of networking and/or collaboration across programs is among their top two priorities for adult education in Massachusetts. Directors suggested that a shared network of substitute teachers among programs could be very helpful, as well as groups dedicated to sharing best practices for teachers and advisors. Some comments from teachers further supported this point—several recommended improving cross-program communication to encourage sharing of expertise and best practices.

Many program directors described the communication and collaboration between program directors and ACLS program specialists as a success. Several directors reported that they were able to communicate effectively and productively with their ACLS program specialist. (Some directors did report challenges, described later in this report.) According to directors, positive relationships between directors and ACLS program specialists were facilitated by ACLS program specialists who were “very hands on,” frequently sent out useful information, and available for anything with which the director needed help. In addition, when the relationship was positive, directors expressed empathy with the restrictions placed on their ACLS program specialists—that the ACLS program specialists did what they could in light of federal regulations.

**Staff reported that improved communication with ACLS could improve program services by clarifying how various policies should be implemented**. Directors described some communication difficulties between programs and DESE/ACLS, especially regarding program specialists and policy changes. Some directors commented that they had received delayed, incomplete, or conflicting responses from program specialists and that the system as a whole was frustrating because it was sometimes unclear how to interpret a policy or from whom one could receive a definitive answer. Multiple interviewees reported that communication from ACLS to program staff was most effective when it was honest, objective, and based on an understanding of a particular program’s circumstances.

Interviewees also reported challenges related to Program Quality Review (PQR) visits. Some teachers and directors reported that PQR visits were very intimidating and stressful, that the visits seemed focused on identifying what was wrong with their program, and that the time allotted for PQR visits did not seem adequate to accurately assess a program. For example, both teachers and directors described classroom observations as only taking 15 minutes. Interviewees said that unless this observation period was timed exactly right, and the class ran in an ideal fashion, an observer might not see in-depth, effective, evidence-based instruction in practice (and, consequently, be penalized in the PQR). An observation scheduled for the first 15 minutes of class might be taken up by settling down and setting up procedures. An observation scheduled for the middle of class might involve the teacher needing to attend to a student having anxiety issues rather than leading the whole group in a student-led discussion. Many interviewees were frustrated that they were unable to show what they do well during a PQR visit. ACLS staff acknowledged that PQR visits could be difficult for program staff.

At the classroom level, programs identified students’ educational and workforce needs primarily through communication between students and staff that was facilitated by students’ relationships with staff. While measures like tests and homework contributed to knowledge of a student’s academic needs, and surveys or focused discussions to a student’s workforce needs, **the development of trusting relationships between students and staff contributed the most to identification of students’ overall needs**.

Directors reported that knowledge of students’ non-academic needs usually developed from a relationship with a staff member (most commonly a teacher or advisor). As a result, knowledge of students’ non-academic needs might have lagged behind knowledge of academic needs since the staff member needed to establish a solid relationship with the student before the student would disclose their non-academic challenges. In addition, **students’ academic, workforce, and personal needs often changed or evolved during their time in a program so that the existence of an ongoing relationship was essential to staying up-to-date on how to best serve them**.

For additional information about Relationships and Communication please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 1D: What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction?](#_Research_Question_1D:)
* [Research Question 2D: What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs?](#_Research_Question_2D:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Priorities from the Field Section](#_Priorities_from_the)

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### Digital Literacy / Distance Education

#### Key Finding 9: Some students do not have ready access to technology or the level of digital literacy necessary to effectively participate in distance learning activities; and, some program staff members’ level of digital literacy negatively impacts their ability to implement distance education effectively.

Teachers and directors reported that technology resources were limited—that some programs did not have adequate internet access or enough computers or tablets for students—resulting in an inability of programs to adequately prepare students for the digital world. Interviewees reflected that technology was an important instructional tool—especially for differentiating instruction—and benefited students in multiple ways (e.g., increasing their digital literacy when they did not have a computer at home).

Several program staff members said that some students do not have access to a computer and/or the internet at home, or the level of digital literacy necessary to effectively participate in distance education activities. Work could **not be assigned to these students electronically**. Furthermore, some **teachers and directors described colleagues who did not possess the knowledge or skills needed to teach digital literacy or use certain software or other resources**. In a few cases, even basic tasks (e.g., finding templates on the ACLS website) were difficult for staff. Some interviewees suggested that gaps in digital literacy may contribute to some staff not being able to access or use SABES professional development that is offered online.

Issues with technology were also acknowledged by ACLS interviewees. They recognized that the level of facility with technology differed by program depending on the technology skills of their staff members and that some programs used technology well while others did not. Interview and survey participants’ recommendations for improving curriculum and instruction included the creation of a professional development sequence to support the digital literacy of students and staff members.

Survey findings show a **strong need for improved support for online learning, likely prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic**. In open-ended comments, directors expressed their appreciation for the ACLS leadership through the COVID shutdown; however, more resources are needed to support teachers and improve student online learning. When asked what type of additional learning opportunities for adult learners they would be most interested in implementing at their programs, directors’ top choice and teachers’ second choice was implementing distance education. Similarly, teachers frequently reported wanting ‘a great deal of support’ in using technology to support student learning (38%) in order to improve quality of instruction. Teacher comments also linked COVID-19 related challenges, such as limited WIFI access and lack of a computer, to program under-enrollment. Staff additionally recommended improved access to technology for remote learning as a support that could most improve student outcomes and cited that remote learning should be an ACLS priority.

For additional information about Digital Literacy / Distance Education please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 2B: What are adult learners’ educational and workforce needs? What are regional workforce needs? What are program needs?](#_Research_Question_2B:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Additional Learning Opportunities for Students Section](#_Additional_Learning_Opportunities)

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### Resources and Additional Support

#### Key Finding 10: A primary challenge across the adult education system is a lack of resources.

Nearly all interviewees and focus group participants commented that adult education programs, ACLS, and SABES all have limited resources (e.g., funding, staffing, capacity/expertise, curricular materials) to support adult education in Massachusetts. That is, **there is an inherent mismatch between requirements/expectations for program performance and the resources available for programs to meet those requirements/expectations.** Interviewees also noted that there are a multitude of demands on those resources. The focus of teachers and directors in the field was to provide the best services possible for their students. **Directors, teachers, and advisors who participated in interviews and focus groups stressed that there is more to be done to serve adult education students than can be accomplished with the current level of resources available across the system (i.e., federal, state, and program level).** When new demands were placed on programs, staff were forced to make hard decisions about how to allocate limited resources and hence what student services and/or staff training to forego and which to focus on (e.g., decrease time spent differentiating curriculum so that more time could be spent on LACES data input) that directly and negatively impacted service provision. Ideally, the field would like to have additional funding and access to training/expertise. Absent additional resources, some directors and teachers encouraged ACLS to (1) communicate clearly what programs should prioritize given limited resources, and (2) work with programs to determine how resources might be (re)allocated.

Directors, teachers, and advisors all indicated that increased funding would help programs offer the full range of supports students needed. Focus group participants suggested that additional funding could support additional staff, paid staff time, technology, and other resources. Both directors and teachers spoke to how much more support was needed to serve students with learning disabilities—whether it was financial support for testing or professional development for specialized teaching approaches and practices.

**Interviewees frequently reported not having enough staff time and program resources to complete required administrative duties, develop staff, or implement program-wide strategies to improve student outcomes**. These interviewees said that program staff hours were insufficient to meet various ACLS requirements (e.g., LACES data input); program budgets were insufficient to cover substitute teachers when staff wished to attend professional development opportunities; and both staff time and program budgets were insufficient to support students’ instruction and advising in all the ways students needed in order to achieve target outcomes. **Notably, programs have largely part-time staff.** While most directors reported (through surveys) working full-time (84%), 71% of teachers and 51% of advisors worked part-time. This makes it difficult for programs to plan meetings, schedule trainings, and implement certain policies.

Directors identified additional staff time as an area of need since staff (especially part-time staff) did not have enough time to do everything they needed. Added time would be helpful in many areas, including for staff meetings, data entry, teaching, and addressing student barriers to successful learning. Specifically, there was also almost no time for teachers to work together in study groups, to observe each other, or to co-plan, which would enhance the coherence of educational programming and provide a better teaching environment.

While **retaining teachers does not appear to be an issue, teachers did call for improved working conditions**. A majority of teachers (81%) did not think retention of teachers was a challenge for their programs; among those who did, however, the top reason they reported teachers leave programs was inadequate pay. Similarly, some teachers in their comments advocated for higher wages, health insurance, and more paid time for PD and instructional preparation.

Teachers often mentioned that **additional support was needed for teaching resources**, whether they were adult-appropriate curriculum (including, potentially, a statewide standard curriculum), hardcopy materials such as texts and workbooks (including “leveled” textbooks), or technology resources such as up-to-date computers and (very importantly) free wireless internet access for students. Once again, this would require increasing program budgets to accommodate resources needed by students for effective, technology-based learning.

For additional information about Resources and Additional Support please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 1D: What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction?](#_Research_Question_1D:)
* [Research Question 2D: What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs?](#_Research_Question_2D:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Section](#_Diversity,_Equity,_and)
* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)
* [Curriculum and Instruction Section](#_Curriculum_and_Instruction)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Supports and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Supports_and)

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# Recommendations

This section of the report includes recommendations presented by topic area. Links to evidence and additional information provided other reports (appended to this document) are provided throughout this section, as relevant.

As with the key findings, the recommendations are presented by topic area:

* [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#_Diversity,_Equity,_and_1)
* [Student Needs](#_Student_Needs_1)
* [ACLS Policies and Practices](#_ACLS_Policies_and_1)
* [Curriculum and Instruction](#_Curriculum_and_Instruction_1)
* [SABES and Professional Development](#_SABES_and_Professional_1)
* [Enrollment and Retention](#_Enrollment_and_Retention_1)
* [Relationships and Communication](#_Relationships_and_Communication_1)
* [Digital Literacy / Distance Education](#_Digital_Literacy_/_1)
* [Resources and Additional Support](#_Resources_and_Additional_1)

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

While diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are principles central to—and valued by—the adult education field, many opportunities exist to further support these principles. We recommend that ACLS:

* **Further engage the field around the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.** For example, ACLS could communicate more transparently how current ACLS policies, practices, and resources are intended to support DEI. ACLS could also engage the field in conversations regarding policies, practices, and resources that would most benefit students or further involve program representatives in the development of DEI initiatives that are intended to be implemented at the program level.
* **Affirm that diversity is a strength and source of opportunities.** A successful strategy that was reported in interviews for attending to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) involved teachers and directors encouraging others to view diversity—in identities and abilities—as a strength rather than a challenge to overcome or weakness to accommodate, particularly with regard to ESOL students.
* **Continue efforts to gather feedback from students—ensuring the inclusion of students at correctional institutions—about their experiences with adult education programs.** Student involvement in this evaluation was limited to participation in five focus groups. As DESE/ACLS and adult education programs reflect on the findings of this evaluation, we recommend that additional efforts be made to gather feedback from students. In addition, teachers and directors from programs located at correctional institutions commented in focus groups, interviews, and surveys that their student population had many special needs that the adult education system did not adequately consider.

For additional information about diversity, equity, and inclusion please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* + - [Diversity Section](#_Diversity)
    - [Equity Section](#_Equity)
    - [Inclusion Section](#_Inclusion)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Section](#_Diversity,_Equity,_and)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Enrollment and Retention of Students Section](#_Enrollment_and_Retention_2)

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### Student Needs

Directors, teachers, and advisors described a variety of student needs and offered suggestions for addressing those needs. We recommend that ACLS and programs:

* **Improve efforts to identify and** **support students with suspected or diagnosed learning disabilities.** More support is needed in order for programs to effectively serve students with learning disabilities: professional development for teachers, appropriate curriculum materials, and assistance for students to obtain official documentation of their disabilities in order to secure accommodations on the HiSET or GED. Additionally, facilitating the provision of appropriate curriculum and learning materials and serving as a liaison between programs and both ETS and GED all represent potential opportunities for DESE/ACLS to increase inclusion of and appropriate instruction for students with learning disabilities within programs.
* **To the extent possible within the WIOA framework, ACLS and programs should collaborate to align policies and practices with student needs.** Directors, teachers, advisors, and students all saw a wide range of needs for adult learners, including academic (e.g., the need for more one-on-one teaching) and non-academic needs (e.g., the need to address a range of issues associated with poverty). Adult learners have many needs, some of which could be addressed by programs, but many of which could not. Program needs were viewed in the context of what students needed to succeed, with addressing staffing levels or hours being a priority. While many directors and advisors (and a few teachers) were aware of the workforce priority areas of their region, they did not see their role as filling these needs. Rather, their role was to meet students where they were and help them achieve their desired goals.

For additional information about student needs please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* + - [Research Question 2B: What are adult learners’ educational and workforce needs?](#_Research_Question_2B:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Student Enrollment and Retention Section](#_Student_Enrollment_and)

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### ACLS Policies and Practices

Directors, teachers, and advisors described multiple areas where ACLS might improve policies and practices and their implementation. We recommend that ACLS:

* **Slow the rate of change to policies and practices, prioritizing fewer changes and supporting their implementation before introducing any additional changes. This is particularly important for policies and practices implemented and evaluated at the level of individual ABE/ESOL programs.** Slowing the rate of change would reduce demands on program resources and help programs better understand what works. Each change creates disruptions in programming that may have far-reaching effects in multiple areas. New policies and practices are not always implemented smoothly during their first year, and program staff need time to add new skills, reconfigure program policies, and reallocate budgets and resources appropriately. Therefore, ACLS could consider focusing on supporting and addressing the fidelity of implementation of new programs/policies during their first year of implementation and begin to monitor efficacy in later years.
* **Consider and implement strategies to address the unintended consequences of linking program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.** While interviewees identified some unintended consequences of such linking (i.e., decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff), it is not clear how pervasive these consequences are in the field. As a first step, ACLS could work with the field to better understand the facets and pervasiveness of these concerns.
* **Consider carefully how and when to encourage flexibility in programming and policy.** While Massachusetts K–12 schools have a strong tradition of local control (and local support), applying the principles of local control and local support has been a challenge for some adult education programs. Policies that encourage flexibility, adaptation, and/or customization of adult education programs at the local level may require significant resources to implement—resources that some programs simply do not have. Providing strategic guidance and/or targeted recommendations regarding key decisions (e.g., curriculum selection, developing organizational partnerships, deploying recruitment resources) could help some programs maintain and/or improve the quality of services offered to students.
* **Work with programs to better understand the relationship between available resources, program costs, and service provision.** It is important to promote a shared understanding of how to price services so that funding can be used to serve students well. That means being realistic about how many students can be served and the costs associated with providing services to those students (e.g., cost of staff time, cost of recruitment, cost of classroom supports). Through the next competitive RFP, ACLS should also communicate how budgets will be used to evaluate proposals—if at all. ACLS could work with programs to share guidance or best practices for balancing the price of service against the total amount of service they plan to deliver.
* **Review and refine ACLS’ Theory of Action** in order to make the relationship between elements of the adult education system more transparent and improve communication about goals and intended outcomes**.** ACLS’ Theory of Action identifies key components of Massachusetts adult basic education system. It has served to focus adult education policy, clarify system goals, and prioritize program practices. It also informed aspects of this evaluation and helped to define topics for investigation. Efforts to refine the Theory of Action could help DESE/ACLS communicate (for example) the intended inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and goals of the system; as well as the intended connections between those components.

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 2: In what ways is the AE system aligned with, and informed by, the needs of adult learners, regional workforce needs, and the needs of different programs (e.g., rural, urban, ESOL, ABE)?](#_Research_Question_2:)
* [Research Question 2C: Is the adult education system aligned with student educational and workforce, regional workforce, and program needs?](#_Research_Question_2C:)
* [Research Question 2D: What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs?](#_Research_Question_2D:)
* [Research Question 2E: Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how?](#_Research_Question_2E:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies Section](#_ACLS_Policies)

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### Curriculum and Instruction

Many directors, teachers, and advisors made recommendations associated with expanding resources for curriculum and instruction. We recommend that ACLS:

* **Explore ways programs might receive additional assistance with curriculum development, including suggestions for differentiation, professional development, technical assistance, and sample lessons to support the needs of diverse learners.** For example, ACLS could evaluate the pros and cons of facilitating and/or promoting an online portal through which program staff share materials and best practices with their colleagues around the state. Alternatively, ACLS could facilitate other opportunities for programs to share key curricular resources.
* **Develop strategies to increase program staff’s understanding of, and guidance for, differentiating instruction.** Interviewees noted that additional resources—such as more technology (e.g., specialized software for students with learning disabilities), teaching materials (e.g., a wider variety of differentiated materials), training about how to differentiate instruction, and increases in staff time and/or staffing (e.g., teaching assistants)—would help. In addition, although ACLS had provided some resources related to curriculum and lesson planning (e.g. scope, sequence, and unit templates), some staff requested additional resources, particularly resources related to differentiation. ACLS might continue to increase understanding of, and guidance for, differentiating instruction at the program level.
* **Explore providing additional suggested—and customizable—curriculum with examples for differentiation.** For example, providing suggested, standard curriculum that is well aligned with relevant standards could help reduce the redundancy of efforts currently being conducted by individual programs and teachers in the field to develop and update curricula. Similarly, interviewees suggested that it would be helpful for ACLS to develop and/or recommend a curriculum for ESOL for all levels of ability.

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 1A: What are the ways in which programs determine the instructional content and pedagogy that best meet their students’ needs?](#_Research_Question_1A:)
* [Research Question 1B: How do programs determine whether students are making progress in their academic and workforce skills and abilities, as well as whether and how students need additional support?](#_Research_Question_1B:)
* [Research Question 1D: What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction?](#_Research_Question_1D:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Curriculum and Instruction Section](#_Curriculum_and_Instruction)
* [Differentiation Section](#_Differentiation)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Instructional Quality Section](#_Instructional_Quality)

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### SABES and Professional Development

SABES is a valuable resource for adult education directors, teachers, and advisors. Many staff made suggestions for how SABES services might be expanded. We recommend that ACLS:

* **Explore how resources for professional development might be expanded.** Across all data collections and stakeholders, comments about SABES and professional development were generally positive. Interviewees reported finding SABES—and professional development more generally—to be productive, useful, and a good investment of time and funding. More specifically, these interviewees suggested that ACLS provide professional development focused on topics such as enrollment and retention, differentiation (including training at an advanced level), and cultural responsiveness.
* **Explore additional remote training options that would have more flexible timing.** Of the seven potential challenges to professional development participation listed in the survey, teachers cited location and timing as the most impeding factors. About one-third of teachers (35%) found location impeded their ability to participate to ‘a great extent,’ and 36% ‘to some extent.’ Similarly, 29% and 48% reported timing as a factor to ‘a great’ and ‘to some extent.’ Notably, 70% of adult education teachers who responded to the survey indicated they only worked part time. Participating in professional development activities may be more difficult for part-time individuals.
* **Refine strategies to identify effective professional development activities.** The original (pre-COVID-19) plan for this evaluation included an investigation into which professional development activities were most effective and that plan was changed because of data limitations introduced by COVID-19. Engaging in this research when student outcomes are once again available could inform decisions about the content, format, and topics of future professional development activities. Completing a needs assessment focused on professional development associated specifically with technology and remote learning could also be helpful.

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 6: Do SABES services reflect the needs of adult education programs?](#_Research_Question_6:)
* [Research Question 7D: What changes in the SABES system would help to improve instructional practices and teaching behavior?](#_Research_Question_7D:)
* [Research Question 7F: How have changes to SABES affected the MA AE field? (teachers, advisors, administrators)](#_Research_Question_7F:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) Section](#_System_for_Adult)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Professional Development Section](#_Professional_Development)

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### Enrollment and Retention

Enrollment and retention policies have important ramifications for who is served by the adult education system and for how well students are served. We recommend that ACLS:

* + **Facilitate additional dialogue among programs concerning best practices for enrollment and attendance/retention policies and disseminate information about best practices.** Such facilitation would also serve as a means for clarifying how enrollment/retention strategies fit with different ACLS policies.
* **Increase support for ABE programs’ efforts to enroll and retain students.** In the surveys of directors and teachers, program under-enrollment was reported more frequently by directors and teachers from ABE programs than ESOL programs. This could indicate that ACLS might provide greater guidance and support for enrollment of students at ABE programs. Exploring data to identify programs that are having more or less success with recruitment and retention could be a helpful first step.

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 2: In what ways is the AE system aligned with, and informed by, the needs of adult learners, regional workforce needs, and the needs of different programs (e.g., rural, urban, ESOL, ABE)?](#_Research_Question_2:)
* [Research Question 2E: Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how?](#_Research_Question_2E:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [Student Enrollment and Retention Section](#_Student_Enrollment_and)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Enrollment and Retention of Students Section](#_Enrollment_and_Retention_2)

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### Relationships and Communication

* Effective collaboration and communication across all levels of the adult education system, and with external partners, is important to program success. In addition, the post-COVID world requires expanding communication within the virtual environment. We recommend that ACLS: **Consider ways to improve the consistency and clarity of communication between ACLS and programs—particularly communication relevant to policy.** Teachers suggested ACLS improve its communication to programs regarding official initiatives. In addition, several teachers in multiple focus groups reported that site visits and PQRs caused them stress. Again, most teachers acknowledged that site visits and PQRs could be a very positive and useful exercise: They could be a means of gathering information on best practices and then sharing those practices across programs; they could provide teachers and programs feedback on what they were doing well and what they could improve; and, they could be a source of information for DESE/ACLS regarding how their policies were working. However, instead of being seen as a positive experience, site visits were reported by a number of teachers as stressful, negative, and uninformative.
* **As appropriate, assist programs with communicating and collaborating with external partners.**
* **Consider ways to create supportive relationships between teachers/advisors and students within the distance education framework, given the existing challenges for both students and staff in accessing and using appropriate technology.** Many directors, teachers, and advisors described how relationships between staff and students were key to student retention and success. In moving to a virtual environment because of Covid-19, ACLS might consider researching best practices for how staff-student relationships might be developed and supported online and then aid programs in implementing those best practices.

For additional information about Relationships and Communication please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 1D: What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction?](#_Research_Question_1D:)
* [Research Question 2D: What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs?](#_Research_Question_2D:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Priorities from the Field Section](#_Priorities_from_the)

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### Digital Literacy / Distance Education

It is important for ACLS to continue and expand its support for improving the digital literacy of both program staff and students, as well as ensuring that staff and students have the resources to engage in a virtual environment. We recommend that ACLS:

* **Support programs’ efforts to provide as many students as possible with the digital literacy skills—and technology—needed to engage in distance education.** Supporting programs’ efforts to ensure that all staff are prepared to effectively engage students online may be an important component of this effort. ACLS might consider surveying adult education program staff and students to determine how best to move forward with distance education.
* **As needed, bolster the digital literacy of adult education program staff to improve both their ability to participate in remote/virtual professional development and implement remote/virtual instructional practices.** Some teachers and advisors reported that they had colleagues who had low levels of digital literacy. Insufficient program staff digital literacy may affect not only the ability of staff to participate in online professional development, but also their ability to provide instruction in a virtual environment. SABES could provide more professional development generally associated with digital literacy that was tied directly to teaching and learning in a virtual environment.
* **Continue to address the gaps in participation and outcomes potentially exacerbated by the need for remote learning.** Moving to a virtual environment to provide instructional services has the potential to leave students who do not have access to technology even further behind than they might be for in-person learning. ACLS might explore what types of supports programs can offer to at least some students so that those without resources can participate in distance learning.

For additional information about Digital Literacy / Distance Education please see:

*Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report:*

* [Research Question 2B: What are adult learners’ educational and workforce needs? What are regional workforce needs? What are program needs?](#_Research_Question_2B:)

*Adult Education Interview Summary Report:*

* [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)

*Adult Education Survey Summary Report:*

* [Additional Learning Opportunities for Students Section](#_Additional_Learning_Opportunities)

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### Resources and Additional Support

Recommendations for resources and additional support can be found in the recommendations for other topic areas.

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# Conclusion

This study gathered reflections about a number of topics at the system and program levels. Data showed that the students being served are diverse, and that their needs are extensive—spanning a variety of academic, workforce, and life issues. A challenge for the adult education system is that there are not enough resources—at the program, state, and federal levels combined—to meet the needs of all students well. Also, directors and teachers reported that some student groups are generally well served (e.g., English language learners) and others less so (e.g., students with learning disabilities).

Because funding is limited, teachers do not always have the tools or resources they need. For example, a primary instructional strategy used by teachers to meet the needs of their diverse learners is differentiation. However, differentiation can be resource intensive—it requires training, time, and appropriate curricular materials. Some teachers and directors conveyed frustration with resource limitations when they hampered their ability to help students reach their full potential. Others expressed that differentiation is something they would like to do better, and that they need more support.

The adult education system in Massachusetts has experienced a great deal of change over the past few years. While some of the changes have been viewed by most as mainly beneficial (e.g., adjustments to professional development supports), others (e.g., changes to program funding policies) have had unintended negative consequences. The extent and speed of change in adult education policies that affect the work of programs and organizations across the field has also resulted in communication challenges at many levels (e.g., between ACLS and programs, between programs and partner organizations).

Despite these challenges, the adult education field in Massachusetts is staffed by extraordinarily dedicated individuals who are committed to providing opportunities for learning—and preparation for employment—to students so they might better their lives. Both ACLS and program staff seemed eager to identify and do what is best for students. When asked about suggestions for improving various aspects of the adult education system, those in the field responded with numerous ideas, some of which might be accomplished through a reallocation of resources as opposed to requiring additional funding.

One thing this study did not do in detail was look at student-level data. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACLS—and therefore the evaluation team—was unable to obtain outcomes data for students or to survey students to get their perspectives. While the evaluation team collected some information from students through five focus groups, engagement was quite limited. Learning more about students’ views could help inform future changes to policy and practice.

It should also be noted that while the interview and survey data collections occurred as the COVID-19 pandemic was unfolding, this study included participants’ reflections on their pre-COVID world. Further data collection from directors, teachers, advisors, and students could be useful for informing teaching and learning in the post-COVID world.

Many focus group, interview, and survey participants described what they saw as strengths of the Massachusetts adult education system. ACLS’ State as Partner webinars were praised for their transparency and clear presentation of policy changes. SABES was described as a valuable resource. Many respondents found multiple ACLS resources to be helpful. Students reported that teachers and advisors were strongly committed not only to their learning, but also to their general well-being. The recommendations described in this report are offered with the hope that the Massachusetts adult education system might build on its strengths and continue to improve its services for this group of students who have many compelling needs to be addressed.

# Methods

The findings and recommendations summarized in this report emerged from analysis of data gathered through:

1. Focus Groups with directors, teachers, advisors, and students (conducted fall 2019).
2. Interviews with directors, teachers, ACLS staff, SABES staff, and UMass CEA staff (conducted spring 2020).
3. Surveys of directors, teachers, and advisors (conducted spring 2020).

Each of the above items are linked to the full methods description in a report for each data collection. We present here a brief overview of each to provide context for the key findings and recommendations presented in this report.

**Focus Groups**

UMDI analyzed the results of 16 focus groups: five with directors, five with teachers, two with advisors, and four with students. Fifteen (15) of the focus groups were conducted in person and one was conducted via Zoom. A total of 94 individuals (i.e., 20 directors, 25 teachers, six advisors, and 43 students) participated in the focus groups and represented a range of geographical locations, program types, years of experience (or time within a program), and educational backgrounds (or pathways).

Participants for the focus groups were recruited through email (program directors), messaging from directors and handouts (teacher and advisors), and messaging from teachers and handouts (students). Only the student participants received an incentive for participating (a $10 Dunkin Donuts gift card). All focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts of the discussions were then reviewed to explore the content of the responses. A coding system based on a combination of the evaluation questions, the protocol questions, and additional themes was developed and applied to all of the transcripts. The coded responses were then analyzed in their thematic grouping(s) to identify key findings and patterns.

**Interviews**

UMDI conducted a total of 39 interviews with 44 individuals in March–May of 2020. We interviewed:

* 15 program directors
* 15 teachers
* Eight ACLS staff members (six total interviews; two interviews included two participants)
* Five SABES staff members (two interviews; one interview included three participants, and the other included two participants)
* One staff member from UMass CEA

Volunteers for the director and teacher interviews were recruited electronically (through emails to program directors). Interested individuals signed up through a short online survey. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling to maximize diversity. Participants in the ACLS and SABES interviews were purposely chosen to represent a variety of roles and perspectives. There was only a single CEA interview with the center’s director. No incentives were provided for the interviews.

All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom and recorded. Transcripts of the interviews were then reviewed to explore the content of the responses. A coding system based on a combination of the evaluation questions, topic areas, interview protocol questions, and additional themes was developed and applied to all of the transcripts using NVivo software. The coded responses were then analyzed using grounded theory to identify thematic groupings and patterns, and subsequently to identify key findings.

**Surveys**

Three surveys were developed and administered to program directors, teachers, and advisors during April-May 2020. Individuals were recruited to participate through email and handouts: Directors were sent an email about the surveys with recruiting handouts for teachers and advisors which they could then forward to their staff. Individuals who completed the surveys could choose to enter a drawing for one of ten, $47 Visa Gift Cards. A total of 276 teachers, 72 advisors, and 56 directors completed at least the background component of the surveys.

Survey data were analyzed for all participants. Break-outs of the data according to program type and years of professional experience were also analyzed. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for all questions. In accordance with DESE regulations, only data with an N of 10 or more were reported.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation team intended to survey Adult Education Students. However, restrictions and uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in DESE/ACLS and UMDI making the joint decision to forgo the student survey.

**Evaluation Questions**

A set of evaluation questions was developed at the beginning of this project and used for the focus group protocols and analysis. However, due to the emergence of strong themes from the data, and new priorities over the course of the project, the project shifted to a topic-based data collection and analysis. This topic-based data collection and analysis had a utilization focus: That is, an objective of the data collection and analysis was to help inform changes to the Massachusetts adult education system by gathering recommendations from the field.

Please see each of the individual methods-specific reports at the end of this document for more details about methodology. The direct links to these sections are:

* [Adult Education Focus Group Summary Report](#_Methodology_2)
* [Adult Education Interview Summary Report](#_Methodology)
* [Adult Education Survey Summary Report](#_Methods_1)

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| Adult Education System Evaluation Focus Group Summary Report 2020  Focus Groups Conducted for DESE/ACLS Fall 2019 |
| January 31, 2020 |

Adult Education System Evaluation Focus Group Summary Report 2020

***Focus Groups Conducted for DESE/ACLS Fall 2019***

Prepared by the UMass Donahue Institute’s  
Applied Research & Program Evaluation Group

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Project Leader**  Jeremiah Johnson, Senior Research Manager  **Project Staff**  Jean Supel, Research Manager  Shirah Hecht, Senior Research Analyst |  | |
| The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute is an outreach and economic development arm of the University of Massachusetts President’s Office. Established in 1971, the Institute strives to connect its clients with the resources of the University, bridging theory and innovation with real-world public and private sector applications. For more information, visit [www.donahue.umass.edu](http://www.donahue.umass.edu).  The Institute’s Applied Research & Program Evaluation (ARPE) group enables education, public health, and human service organizations to make data-driven decisions to enhance program quality and capacity.  Specializing in rigorous and innovative social science research methods, ARPE works closely with federal, state, and local agencies, quasi-public agencies, and both non-profit and for-profit organizations to support programmatic and system-wide decision making. | |

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# Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge all of the time, effort, and thought that numerous participants and stakeholders put into these student, director, teacher, and advisor focus groups. Their ideas and comments provided valuable information that will help improve the Massachusetts adult education system.

# Executive Summary

##### Background

The mission of the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy, math and numeracy, and other skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen. In FY 2018, ACLS provided learning opportunities to almost 12,000 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and about 7,000 adult basic education (ABE) and high school equivalency (HSE) students.

In spring 2019, ACLS and DESE contracted with the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) to conduct an evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system. This multi-method evaluation was to include the perspectives of students, directors, teachers, advisors, ACLS staff, and other stakeholders, and collect data through focus groups, phone interviews, and online surveys. Data collection was intended to surface a range of information, from student academic and workforce needs, to program successes and challenges, to potential changes to the adult education system.

This document is part of that larger evaluation, and summarizes the responses from 16 focus groups as they relate to a subset of project research questions. Themes from these responses are presented in the “Results” section by research question and, within research question, by focus group type. A concluding “Reflections and Considerations” section includes a discussion of additional topics of importance to DESE/ACLS or raised by focus group participants.

##### Methodology

UMDI analyzed the results of 16 focus groups for this report: five with directors, five with teachers, two with advisors, and four with students. A fifth focus group with students at a program located in a state correctional institution is planned for spring 2020 and was not included here.

In the summer of 2019, UMDI developed the focus group protocols and sampling plan in collaboration with DESE/ACLS. Each protocol included questions based on a relevant subset of the project’s research questions, as outlined in the project proposal, and tailored to the focus group participant types.

The sampling plan for the focus groups combined convenience and purposeful sampling to gain a range of views and address specific topics (e.g., regional issues). Communication to the adult education field and recruitment for focus group participation occurred during September 2019, and the focus groups were held during October and November. Fifteen of the 16 focus groups were conducted in person, and one teacher focus group was conducted online via the Zoom meeting platform.

A total of 94 individuals (i.e., 20 directors, 25 teachers, six advisors, and 43 students) participated in the focus groups and represented a range of geographical locations, program types, years of experience (or time within a program), and educational backgrounds (or pathways).

Researchers audio-recorded the focus groups (with permission) and transcribed the discussions. Transcripts were then reviewed to explore the content and coded based on the research questions, the protocol questions, and additional themes that arose during discussions with DESE/ACLS. The coded responses were then analyzed in their thematic grouping(s) to identify key findings and patterns.

##### Summary of Results

Analysis of the focus group transcripts surfaced diverse findings. Highlights included the following:

1. The primary driver of instructional practice and pedagogy[[3]](#footnote-3) was student need. Teaching staff sought to deliver the subject content—and develop the instructional methods—needed by each individual student to fulfill their academic needs within the state frameworks and standards.
2. Programs utilized multiple approaches to gather information from and about students, ranging from formal assessments to informal one-on-one discussions. Information was gathered through an ongoing process, from student intake through exit and beyond.
3. Staff had numerous suggestions for additional program guidance and support needed to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction. These ranged from big-picture issues, such as increased funding (and alternative funding allocation formulas), to practical training such as professional development associated with learning disabilities.
4. Staff identified multiple ways the Massachusetts adult education system was not well aligned with the needs of adult learners and, as a result, program needs. These included, for example, a lack of support for the non-academic needs of the students being served (e.g., transience, lack of documentation) and a failure to account for older students’ employment and other goals in Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA) outcomes.
5. Students presented with myriad academic, workforce, and life needs that affected their ability to succeed. Many teachers referenced Maslow’s hierarchy of needs in relation to students and suggested that students were still trying to fulfill lower-level needs while the system was expecting them to meet higher-level needs.
6. New policies and outcomes associated with the federal WIOA legislation were frequently viewed negatively by staff. While staff could see potential benefits to some aspects of the changes (e.g., better data collection for data-driven decision making), they did not generally believe those benefits were actualized.

##### Reflections and Considerations

The “Results” section summarized responses to the research questions as formulated in the focus group protocols. However, the discussions that occurred during the focus groups sometimes addressed topics that crossed research questions, and sometimes addressed topics beyond those raised in the protocols.

Additionally, UMDI and DESE/ACLS agreed that UMDI would consider issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the analysis of focus group data. While no questions in the protocols specifically addressed these issues, certain themes arose that were relevant.

Some of these topics included:

1. The roles and manifestations of diversity, equity, and inclusion within the Massachusetts adult education system.
2. Programs’ role in students’ lives extended beyond the walls of the program site or the time period in which students were formally enrolled in services.
3. Family literacy was an important sub-component of the learning experience for a number of students.
4. There was potentially a greater role for ACLS to play in helping staff access and share materials and resources.
5. Staff views of system successes and challenges were tied to deeper philosophical discussions of the purpose of education, both generally and for adult students in particular.
6. Many of the challenges faced by the adult education system indicated a wider shift related to general professionalization of the field.

##### Next Steps in the Research

Focus group results are currently informing development of interview protocols and surveys to be administered during spring 2020. An end-of-project report planned for December 2020 will present results from the interviews and surveys, as well as results of secondary data analysis regarding program participation and outcomes.

# Background

This focus group summary is the first part of a yearlong data collection series that will include interviews and surveys in spring 2020 as well as analysis of secondary data. Collection of the focus group data was part of the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute’s (UMDI’s) evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system that was commissioned by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The mission of ACLS is to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy, math and numeracy, and other skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen. In FY 2018, ACLS provided learning opportunities to almost 12,000 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and about 7,000 adult basic education (ABE) and high school equivalency (HSE) students.

ACLS has implemented a number of changes over the past few years that have potentially affected programs, staff, and students. The evaluation commissioned by DESE/ACLS was multi-purpose. Full evaluation project results will include:

1. data on how ACLS’ changes to the adult education system may have affected the field;
2. data on student, staff, and program needs;
3. details related to how quality curricula and pedagogy were chosen and implemented;
4. details related to how the SABES professional development system fulfilled staff and program needs; and,
5. suggestions for adult education system improvements.

The focus groups included questions related to all of these topics. Appendix A lists the specific research questions addressed through the focus groups.

This report summarizes the responses gathered through the focus groups. The results are organized by research question and, within each research question, by type of focus group participants. Highlight quotations representative of common comments or issues of interest to DESE/ACLS are set off in text boxes throughout the document. The next section—“Methodology”—outlines details about the development of protocols and the implementation of the focus groups. The last section—“Reflections and Considerations”—discusses wider issues that emerged from the focus group data and that may be of interest to DESE/ACLS.

# Methodology

UMDI planned the following focus groups for the DESE/ACLS adult education evaluation project:

1. Five with program directors
2. Five with teachers (one conducted bilingually in English and Spanish)
3. Two with advisors
4. Five with students (two conducted in Spanish and one with state prisoners to be conducted at a later date)

Beginning in summer 2019, UMDI worked with DESE and ACLS to develop the protocols for the four categories of focus groups. UMDI drafted an initial set of protocol questions based on the project proposal’s research questions, with individual research questions selectively connected to the perspectives of different populations (see Appendix A for the list of proposal research questions linked to the different focus groups; see Appendices B, C, D, and E for the final protocols).

UMDI also worked with DESE/ACLS to formulate a sampling strategy for participants in focus groups that combined convenience and purposeful sampling. Focus group participants were recruited as follows:

* Directors were recruited for focus groups through convenience sampling. Invitations were sent to all directors which included a list of available focus group dates, times, and locations. Directors voluntarily signed up for their selected focus group through an online Qualtrics survey. Director focus groups took place across the state in Holyoke, Devens, Boston, and Brockton.
* Teachers were recruited through a mix of convenience and purposeful sampling, with initial communication through program directors. First, directors were asked to distribute a pre-written invitation to all program teachers which included focus group dates, times, and locations. Teachers then voluntarily signed up for the focus group they wished to attend using an online Qualtrics survey link. This method was applied to three of the focus groups. For the purposeful sample, one of the five focus groups was specifically identified by DESE/ACLS and selected due to the special services it provides to mothers in the Latino community. This focus group was conducted in both Spanish and English, with only teachers from that program participating. Another planned, in-person focus group in Central Massachusetts did not have any attendees and was therefore changed to a purposeful sample of participants from selected programs in that region who participated in an online focus group using the Zoom platform. The teacher focus groups took place in Holyoke, Brockton, Lawrence, Boston, and Central Massachusetts (via Zoom).
* Advisors were recruited through convenience sampling. As with teachers, directors received a pre-written invitation to distribute to all program advisors which included two focus group dates, times, and locations. Advisors signed up for the focus group they wished to attend through an online Qualtrics survey link. The two focus groups were held in Pittsfield and Boston.
* Students were recruited through a multi-level, purposeful sampling technique. At the highest level, specific program sites were chosen by DESE/ACLS to represent different types of programs: Amherst represented a multi-site, community organization program; Mount Wachusett Community College represented a community college site; Lawrence represented a public school site with a large Spanish-speaking population (and was conducted in Spanish); Boston represented a specialty site focused on mothers (and was also conducted in Spanish); and one student site (to be determined) will be held with students in a program located in a state correctional institution. At the second level, within each site, directors recruited students who represented the diversity within their respective programs. Individual students then opted into focus group participation (with the option also not to participate).

All student participants were given $10 Dunkin Donuts gift cards as a thank you for their participation. Staff participants (i.e., directors, teachers, and advisors) were served refreshments at their focus groups but received no other participation incentive. Appendix F includes an administration schedule of the focus groups.

In total, focus group participants included: 20 directors, 25 teachers, six advisors, and 43 students. Participating directors, teachers, advisors, and students represented a range of geographical locations, program types, years of experience (or time within a program), and educational backgrounds (or pathways).

All focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts of the discussions were then reviewed to explore the content of the responses. A coding system based on a combination of the research questions, the protocol questions, and additional themes was developed and applied to all of the transcripts. The coded responses were then analyzed in their thematic grouping(s) to identify key findings and patterns.

# Results

The following section presents summaries of information from the focus groups organized according to the project’s research questions. Each summary includes an introduction followed by the themes and ideas derived from each focus group type. The concluding section (“Reflections and Considerations”) contains overarching cross-question thoughts related to the research question summaries. Please note that only those research questions addressed in the focus groups are presented here.

### Research Question 1A: What are the ways in which programs determine the instructional content and pedagogy that best meet their students’ needs?

##### Introduction

Directors indicated that teachers were greatly invested in determining students’ individual learning needs as accurately as possible. They reported that teachers utilized multiple methods over time to gain knowledge of students’ strengths and challenges, ranging from formal assessments to informal discussions. Teachers’ responses also reflected a variety of approaches, although at a much higher level of detail. A synthesis of teachers’ focus group responses yielded five general methods for determining needs: (1) tests and assessments; (2) curriculum organization; (3) student self-assessment; (4) teacher professional judgement; and (5) available research, online materials, and other resources. Advisors’ contributions to the determination of instructional content and pedagogy varied from program to program, with most advisors reporting that they had limited roles in these areas. The exception to this were cases in which advisors came into classes to present on different workforce issues.

##### Director Responses

Directors suggested that **the primary driver of instructional content and pedagogy was information about students** (e.g., test scores, LACES data review, learning inventories) **or from students** (e.g., intake interviews, student disclosures, classroom-based discussions). Teachers were the most frequently mentioned position associated with the formulation of instructional content and pedagogy, although directors described a system that also included advisors or other staff who did one-on-one academic or workforce counseling with students. Some directors themselves were involved in curriculum determination as well, although this seemed to vary according to a director’s previous experience and program size.

“*Our teaching approach is broadly student centered, though a recent focus on workforce and preparing people for work has changed somewhat what we do because we are not able to be guided so much by the goals of individual students as were in the past. It has gotten to be more technical around workforce*.”

—Director

Directors indicated clearly that **teachers invested a great deal of time, energy, and effort in determining their students’ learning needs**. In addition to various tests, teachers used student journaling, classroom focus groups, one-on-one discussions with students, and regular review of LACES data to develop a detailed picture of each student’s learning needs and to inform professional judgement about what to teach any given student. One director explained, “My teacher knows exactly what every student needs.” It was also evident that **programs gathered information at multiple points in time, from program intake through exit**. From the directors’ perspective, determining instructional content and pedagogy was an ongoing process for each individual student that involved multiple staff members and an understanding of each student’s situation. As reported by directors, an important aspect of gathering so much information was that frequent testing was often not a reliable indicator of knowledge or progress and that students began to take the tests less seriously as a result.

From the directors’ perspective, **academic needs were frequently tied to non-academic needs**. Directors often commented on non-academic barriers to student learning, and many connected students to community services in order to support student retention. As one director said, “[We reinforce] that we are a safe and supportive place of learning. Just a place to come—with all of the bravery it took to come—if you are overwhelmed, it’s okay. We will work with you.”

##### Teacher Responses

Teachers discussed a wide range of methods for gathering information to determine the instructional content and pedagogy that would best meet their students’ needs. A synthesis of the focus group responses yielded five general methods: (1) tests and assessments; (2) curriculum frameworks; (3) student self-assessment; (4) teacher professional judgement; and (5) available external resources such as research or online materials.

**Teachers reported using multiple tests and assessments such as MAPT, HiSET practice tests, TABE, DAR, and STAR.** These tests/assessments were used both “as is” and as starting points for back mapping what students would work on in class (particularly with the HiSET). According to one teacher, “[I] figure out what it [HiSET] is testing, and then figure out what my students need based on what they are testing, and then come up with something to fit that. Students ask if information is on the HiSET because that is their goal.”

“*We get information from assessments and from them we figure out what we need to add to the curriculum*.”—Teacher

Though they used them frequently**, several teachers expressed a number of concerns with the tests and assessments available for adult education students**. Many teachers commented that they were unsure about the relationship between HiSET attainment and other placement and progress tests, with a few reporting that they did not see any relationship at all between MAPT and HiSET. Others reported that they were unsure about the effectiveness of testing so frequently, especially at student intake, and that it was possible to overwhelm students with testing when they entered the program (and possibly contribute to students dropping out before they really got started). Lastly, teachers expressed several times a general concern about running classes that simply “teach to the test” and do not convey broader learning.

Curriculum standards and frameworks were a frequently mentioned method for determining instructional content and pedagogy, although curriculum in practice varied not only among programs, but sometimes among teachers within a program. **Teachers reported having a scope and sequence, built within/upon various DESE/ACLS curriculum standards and frameworks (i.e., College & Career Readiness [CCR], Adult Education [AE], or English Language Proficiency [ELP]), that outlined class content, which in turn defined the content for units, which were then divided into lesson plans.** Almost all teachers commented on the lack of a standardized textbook or pre-made curriculum that could fit the needs of all of their students; everything that was available needed to be supplemented with other materials or resources. Furthermore, because of the multi-grade nature of adult education classes (whether ABE, HiSET, or ESOL), any curriculum chosen for a particular class had to be scaffolded to accommodate beginning, intermediate, and advanced students. One teacher reported that, in reality, adult education teachers taught dozens of classes throughout the year because of this need to accommodate a range of students within a classroom. As a further complication, it was not uncommon for a student to be at one level in one subject and at another level in another subject, leading to a need to coordinate with teachers in other classes to make sure the student’s learning needs were met.

**Student self-assessment or self-reporting also informed instructional content and pedagogy**. Teachers gathered this information through a variety of means, including having students write letters upon intake (or do some other kind of writing); administering surveys, pre-tests, and forms that captured formative information; and talking with students about what they wanted to learn. Teachers then relied on their professional judgement to refine learning content and pedagogy based on their observations of, and interactions with, students. Lastly, teachers used a variety of research, data, best practices, online materials, and other resources to formulate their curriculum.

“*We look at what the students have told us is missing that they need. That’s number one.”—*Teacher

##### Advisor Responses

Advisors’ role in determining the instructional content and pedagogy varied by site, topic, and student need. **Most advisors indicated that they played a limited role in determining instructional content and pedagogy**, though some were more involved than others. All advisors indicated that they met regularly with students (though some more frequently than others and some in more structured interactions than others), and they shared what they learned about students’ learning needs and preferences with administrators and teachers during regular meetings and through one-on-one conversations about individual students’ progress.

Several advisors indicated that they had multiple roles or responsibilities that overlapped with academic instruction. For example, **several advisors indicated that they presented special lessons to students, related to workforce and other issues**. At one site, the advising team oversaw the development of a scope and sequence for advising whereby they created unit plans and lesson plans, and integrated those activities into the regular curriculum for ESOL and HSE students. At another site, advisors ran a class for advising each week. During that class, advisors worked with students to complete activities such as developing resumes, reviewing interview and employment skills, hosting local speakers, or discussing general progress with students. Advisors indicated that some advising occurred in the classroom setting, especially in larger programs, because there was not always enough time to share information with students one-on-one.

One advisor said that the part-time nature of her position did not allow her to become involved in content delivery. This advisor noted that she felt like she was missing out, and she worked to attend weekly staff meetings in order to have a better understanding of how the program worked. Another advisor indicated that a teacher at their site had recently quit, and they were asked to assume regular teaching duties until a replacement teacher was hired (which would take one week).

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 1B: How do programs determine whether students are making progress in their academic and workforce skills and abilities, as well as whether and how students need additional support?

##### Introduction

Directors outlined numerous methods for gathering information from and about students. Directors commented on how both teachers and advisors contributed to knowledge of student progress and that their role usually was to coordinate information sharing among staff. Some directors in smaller programs were directly involved in assessing student progress, but this was less common than directors overseeing a process involving teachers and advisors. Teachers used many tools, including assessments, class/unit benchmarks, and detailed records and data, to determine whether students were making progress or needed additional support. Advisors routinely monitored student data and either held formal advising sessions or initiated informal conversations with students to stay abreast of student progress and needs for support.

##### Director Responses

As indicated in Question 1A, **programs gathered information from and about students in many ways, from formal assessments to informal one-on-one discussions**. This information was then analyzed by teachers and advisors to determine whether students were making progress in their academic and workforce skills, as well as whether and how students needed additional support. One director commented that learning about students’ academic gains and learning needs was much easier than learning about their employment gains and workforce needs, even with the stronger emphasis on workforce outcomes. Personal involvement of a director in addressing student needs varied according to program size. In larger programs, many directors had little direct contact with students and, consequently, relied on teachers and other staff to bring forth any issues with which the director might assist. In smaller programs, some directors both knew and spoke with their students personally and, in such cases, were able to participate in addressing student needs in a much more hands-on fashion.

“*It is ongoing, all the time, daily. Checking LACES all the time to monitor when students have acquired the 65 hours. We generate a roster of all students in each class, ongoing, and that list includes pre- and post-test data. That list is updated on a weekly basis. I am constantly looking at those scores. Teachers are given explicit instructions about what to do with those lists. I share student outcomes with teachers at the monthly check-in meetings*.”—Director

**Directors were able to speak to both the academic and workforce needs of their students and reported coordinating activities between advisors and teachers (and sometimes other staff like caseworkers)**. Directors reported holding regular staff meetings in which staff could bring up issues related to the academic or workforce progress of their students (either as individuals or generally). Directors were highly cognizant of students’ non-academic needs that could impede their progress. Programs frequently worked to assist students with those issues as well.

“*For us it is a team approach. We have a student progress portion of the staff meeting agenda. We meet every other week, so it is brought up as a team with advisors and teachers. We have a ‘student at risk form’ so if their attendance is poor, or their attitude, or homework … we write out a form and ask them what we can do to support them so that they meet program expectations, and if they don’t we’ll let them go*.”—Director

##### Teacher Responses

**Teachers reported three primary ways they determined whether students were making progress academically and whether they needed additional support.**

**First, teachers used formative and summative assessments**. In addition to the assessments discussed in the previous question (i.e., MAPT, HiSET practice tests, TABE, DAR, and STAR), teachers developed their own formative tests and assessments. As one teacher explained, “We constantly do assessments so we have our standards and we base our lesson objectives off of the standards and then there is an assessment. At least one every class.” These formative and summative assessments gave details about how a student was progressing—what skills or concepts the student needed extra support with or where they may have accomplished what they needed.

“*I teach English. So I do a writing assessment and then some sort of verbal assessment that everybody does. And then based on that, that’s when I start to point people in certain directions. Because once they are assigned to your class, you know better than the assignment to the class that someone may need a little bit more than another person*.”—Teacher

**Second, teachers used unit- and class-level benchmarks to monitor student progress.** Benchmarks were derived from state curriculum standards (CCR, AE, or ELP) or determined by the individual teacher for their particular curriculum. Progress was monitored according to several standards, including the required Educational Functioning Levels, Measureable Skills Gains, and standards associated with specific state curriculum or topical unit. Teachers noted that one difficulty here was that student progress was often uneven, with gains being made in one area while another area had little change—to the point where a student may have had different functioning levels in different domains.

**Third, teachers maintained detailed records and regular documentation of student work which they used to assess student progress.** Activities like class presentations or homework were graded, and teachers looked for students to make progress in these over time. Some teachers sought to determine how a student’s progress mapped to their attendance in order to get a sense of how rapidly a student was able to make progress. That way, if the teacher saw a change in the rate of a student’s learning, they could look for a reason that might be addressed. Furthermore, teachers used data from many sources—for instance, LACES, attendance hours, grades, results of formative and summative assessments, comparison to rubrics, etc.—to monitor student progress across different types of learning.

##### Advisor Responses

Multiple factors influenced advisors in determining whether students were making progress in their academic and workforce skills and abilities, as well as whether and how students needed additional support.

**Most advisors indicated that they were proactive in monitoring students’ attendance, academic progress, and employment status, and in initiating conversations with students on a regular basis.** All advisors agreed that information was shared with teachers and directors during regular staff meetings and/or through program-specific databases (like a Google spreadsheet) designed to track student participation and progress.

“*We meet weekly as a team and provide an update on each student. The director is very involved.”* —Advisor

Some advisors said that **larger caseloads prevented them from checking in with each student on a regular basis**. One advisor said that the frequency of meetings with students varied from once a week to once a month, depending on the need of each student. An advisor with a heavy caseload indicated that they prioritized meetings with new students (to discuss their goals) and with students who were closer to leaving or completing the program (to discuss their plans). This advisor said, “I wish I could meet with everyone more frequently to build that relationship and make sure they are getting what they would like to get out of our program, out of advising and reaching their education and career goals.“

Advisors with smaller caseloads said that they checked in regularly with each student and shared what they learned about each student’s needs with relevant program staff. For example, one part-time advisor said that they had 10 students and that they regularly observed class, checked in with each student, and updated teachers regarding student needs at weekly staff meetings.

**All advisors agreed that their efforts to monitor student progress complemented those of the director and the teachers in their program.** Advisors indicated that they had both structured and unstructured check-in meetings with students. One advisor said, “Our program … is like a family so everybody feels really comfortable coming to the director, coming to me, or coming to our other advisor. As they need they’ll approach us.”

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 1D: What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction?

##### Introduction

Directors, teachers, and advisors all indicated that funding increases would help programs offer the additional support students needed. In all cases, this was explicitly focused on new funding, above and beyond current funding, and not on a reallocation of current resources from something considered less effective to something more effective. Focus group participants suggested that additional funding could support additional staff, paid staff time, technology, and other resources. Both directors and teachers spoke to how much more support was needed with regard to students with learning disabilities—whether it was financial support for testing or professional development for specialized teaching approaches and practices. Particular to teachers were some comments about how better support was needed around student assessment—that, in their opinion, current assessments were not well aligned with the HiSET. Advisors reported that support from DESE/ACLS could be better aligned with student needs.

##### Director Responses

Directors suggested four areas where additional support or guidance for programs could improve student outcomes and classroom instruction. **First, directors identified time as an area of needed support** since staff (especially part-time staff) did not have enough time to do everything they needed**.** Added time would be helpful in many areas, including for staff meetings, data entry, teaching, and addressing student barriers. Specifically, there was also almost no time for teachers to work together in study groups, to observe each other, or to co-plan, which would build community and provide a better teaching environment. Lastly, in this category was an expressed need for more appropriate timing of professional development so that it could be accessed in particular by part-time evening teachers who had other full-time day jobs.

“*In some [schools] K-12 students are funded at $12K a seat. You get full-time skilled professionals with health insurance, pensions that you can retain. When you’re looking at $3,030 a seat - $3,300 a student, which is max, and we’re competing with Boston Public Schools.… and they’re expecting teachers to have degrees, to participate in staff development, to do outreach, to enter data, to work with learning disabilities, to do methodologies, and, and, and. For the program directors: there’s a staggering list of what we’re supposed to do in a week’s time. Every one of us works more than the minimum. But there’s a time when you just run out of time.”*—Director

**The second primary support that directors commented on was funding**. Some directors referred to additional non-DESE funding they obtained in order to support their program—a fundraising effort that also took time. According to one director, “We need support with adequate funding. I would say this—40% of the cost of our program does not come from DESE. It’s way beyond the match that we put in. We supplement enormously. So first of all, it would be great to be fully funded, or closer to fully funded.” Directors perceived unfunded mandates, such as being held accountable for post-exit outcomes but not being funded for providing any post-exit supports. Directors noted that the administrative cost cap was not high enough to cover all expenses in that category, including data entry. Teacher (and advisor) pay was considered too low (especially for part-time teachers) to compete in the current job market. One director reported that someone said they would get paid more waitressing. This made it hard to get highly qualified people either full- or part-time. More funding for teachers might allow for specialization—that is, to match professional backgrounds to teaching topics (e.g., math teachers, social studies teachers, etc.). Generally, directors saw adult education as moving toward having K-12 demands without the K-12 funding. Lastly, directors indicated a need for technology, which required more funding, to support and advance improved instruction.

“*It is difficult to be all things to all people. Especially with the way funding goes. The demands are like K-12, but the funding is not. Support is not. But the demands are getting closer and closer to that. I have a great staff that goes above and beyond, but we have limitations. When we have to grovel for funding every year it doesn’t help. Expecting full-time stuff with part-time programs.”*—Director

**Third, directors wanted improved policy communication and cross-program linkages.** Directors suggested that a shared network of substitute teachers among programs could be very helpful, as well as sharing groups for teachers and advisors. They also cited communication difficulties between programs and DESE/ACLS, especially regarding policy changes and involving program specialists. Many directors commented that they had received delayed, incomplete, or conflicting responses from program specialists and that the system as a whole was frustrating. In terms of policy, directors saw a conflict between the new RFP flexible program design invitation and the LACES and WIOA requirements, such that programs with a flexible design could not track their activities in LACES and WIOA outcomes.

Finally, directors thought that **programs could use a great deal of support and guidance concerning students with learning disabilities**. No program reported having a learning disabilities specialist on staff, even though some directors thought the percentage of learning disabled students in their classes was quite high. Students’ learning disabilities resulted in teachers needing to scaffold learning in more ways than just according to academic subject level. Such differentiation required considerable planning time that was not available (as discussed within the first area of support).

##### Teacher Responses

**Teachers had numerous ideas about what additional support or guidance programs needed in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction.**

“*On the form to fill out for this, it asked, “Are you full-time or part-time?” I’m 30 hours which is technically part-time, but I work 40 so it’s a full-time job no matter what way you cut it. Whether or not we are getting paid for those hours*.”—Teacher

**First, they commented on the issue of paid time—**to develop or share lesson plans, for collaboration, for professional development, etc. According to one teacher, “I started the school year trying to work within the number of hours I’m allotted per week. I just tried to see if it was possible. It’s completely impossible.” Related to this, several teachers suggested that program budgets needed to be increased to cover what was essentially unpaid work time and to provide substitute teachers to cover classes while the regular teacher participated in professional development activities. In addition, for some teachers, the issue of paid time was related to the difficulty programs had in hiring and retaining good teachers: While the demands of being an adult education teacher had increased and become more professionalized, the rate of pay and number of hours allotted for teaching-related work had not.

**Second, teachers reported that they needed support for all aspects of learning disabilities**—how to identify them, how to teach to them, how to cover formal assessments, etc. Some teachers estimated that as much as 50% of their students likely had learning disabilities of some kind.

Third, teachers often mentioned that **additional support was needed for teaching resources**, whether they were adult-appropriate curriculum (including, potentially, a statewide standard curriculum), hardcopy materials such as texts and workbooks (including “leveled” textbooks), or technological resources such as up-to-date computers and (very importantly) free wireless internet access for students. Once again, this would require increasing program budgets to accommodate resources needed by students for effective, technology-based learning. Teachers also reported that many students did not have computers at home, so work could not be assigned to them electronically; rather, it needed to be a hardcopy worksheet that could be taken home.

“*I took a digital literacy from SABES, but I couldn’t use half of it in my day-to-day teaching because we don’t have the ability. Like one of the things was, an action you can do on your phone. Yes, many of my students have the phone. But we don’t have it in our budget to put them on our wireless, and I don’t feel comfortable asking my students to use their data*.”—Teacher

A fourth area of support that emerged during teachers’ discussions was the desire for **more guidance around student assessment**, especially in cases where there was not necessarily a match between what was being assessed and what the end goal of a student’s studies was (e.g., MAPT and HiSET). Some teachers merged the concepts of screening, placement, and assessment or were unsure which tests could be used in each situation. Other teachers were concerned about over-testing students or that classes were being reduced to “teach-to-the-test” lessons.

“*I think they want us to MAPT three times a year. That seems really excessive. The message is inconsistent or unclear if you can use MAPT as a placement tool or not. We get different messages about that. So if we don’t use MAPT as a placement tool, what do we use as a placement tool? But then does that mean we’re testing for that and then we are required to do MAPT?*”—Teacher

##### Advisor Responses

Advisors had several ideas about support or guidance from DESE/ACLS that programs needed in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction.

**Both advisor focus groups acknowledged that additional funding was needed to support improved services and outcomes.** The groups suggested that additional funding could be used to increase the number of full-time staff, thereby reducing the number individuals working multiple part-time jobs (and subsequent burnout) and increasing overall job satisfaction and longevity in the field. Both groups also said that there were redundancies in the system that could be reduced, streamlined, or eliminated, and that doing so would free up resources for other activities.

Both advisor focus groups acknowledged that **it would be helpful for DESE/ACLS to better align their expectations with student needs**. All focus group participants reported that the students being served had many and diverse needs and that the system was not well designed to address all of those needs. They thought that DESE/ACLS would do well to acknowledge and incorporate this knowledge into their assessments of program performance. One advisor indicated that their site would like DESE/ACLS to recognize that the goals of many program participants were not well aligned with the goals of the state.

Advisors also suggested that **it would be helpful to have further guidance and support from DESE/ACLS regarding how best to recruit, serve, and assess undocumented students**. Advisors noted that this population had particular needs and interests that were in some ways well met by the system (e.g., language acquisition skills), but in other ways were not well served (e.g., tracking the job placement of individuals who were reluctant to report their employment status or promoting services that undocumented students were ineligible to receive).

“*MassHire, and we do try to work closely with MassHire. So we have an outstationing coordinator that does the same thing as the advisor. It just creates confusion in such a small community. People don’t know who to talk to or I’m supposed to know something that they heard from the other person. So, more direction on the goals I think.*”—Advisor

Two advisors suggested that it would be helpful for DESE/ACLS to improve collaboration and coordination between programs and workforce organizations such as MassHire.

One advisor suggested that **it would be helpful if DESE/ACLS could develop a website or database for students (and potentially one for educators) that organized and summarized available resources by region and topic (e.g., food, housing, immigration, job training)**. One focus group participant noted that people could use the Adult Literacy Hotline to learn more about programs that existed in a particular area but that there was no database of other resources (including advisors in other programs) to which an advisor could refer. Advisors explained that they were charged with developing their own referral lists. One advisor said, “I know one of the things I do to remain a good advisor is to be part of different community groups where you get to meet resources like mental health. That’s how I learn about new programs in the city, and add to our list. I think that’s part of what we have to be doing. I’m also on the NE advisors sharing group.”

An advisor from one site noted that their program had received funding to run HSE courses for Spanish speakers, but DESE/ACLS had not approved an assessment for Spanish-speaking HSE students. This advisor noted that staff at their site felt like the system had undervalued the Spanish diploma. They suggested that **it would be helpful for the state to invest more in developing Spanish-language assessments**. She noted, “You can get into colleges with a Spanish credential…. It makes no sense to me. [The program] is helping people get into jobs and get into college. It just happens to be in Spanish.”

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 2: In what ways is the AE system aligned with, and informed by, the needs of adult learners, regional workforce needs, and the needs of different programs (e.g., rural, urban, ESOL, ABE)?

##### Introduction

Directors, teachers, and advisors reported multiple ways the Massachusetts adult education system was not well aligned with the needs of adult learners or programs. Many thought that the system either lacked an understanding of, or was not well equipped to deal with, students’ issues, both inside and outside the classroom. In addition, the system seemed to teachers to lack alignment with the workforce needs and priorities of an older population—that outcomes were defined with a younger population in mind.

Regarding program needs, directors once again commented on the lack of alignment between available funding and what was needed by programs to serve adult education students. Teachers saw partnership requirements for programs to be a problem in some instances where partner organizations had client outcomes that did not mesh with the outcomes stipulated within the adult education system.

Whether the system was well aligned with regional workforce needs was not a high-level concern among adult education staff. Generally, this was because their primary orientation was fulfilling the needs of students, even if they did not fit within the system of priority employment areas.

##### Director Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Whether the adult education system was aligned with adult learner needs depended in part on which aspect of the system a director saw as most prominent. For example**, while many directors thought that DESE/ACLS was knowledgeable about student needs, the federal requirements that DESE/ACLS had to meet were seen as not well aligned with their students’ needs**. According to one director, “It is fair to acknowledge that DESE has the same requirements we do. They are being pulled and pushed by federal funding and regulations. I think they do their very best to establish a framework and supports that honor what students need, but they are being pushed into this workforce mold, too.”

“*How well are they meeting the needs? Not super well in that peoples’ lives are just complicated. I think they want to meet the student needs, it’s just really hard. If someone cannot come on a regular basis, all the time consistently, then it really is hard for us to keep serving that person because it will hurt our program. Directly tied to loss of money. And the more money we lose, because we aren’t ‘doing what we are supposed to’ the harder it then gets*.”—Director

The existence of contradictory timelines for student progress was mentioned by some directors as a source of difficulty. For example, some directors reported that they had students who were in a rush to complete the HiSET. As a result, a curriculum like CALM, which was designed to be implemented over multiple years, was inappropriate for those students who wished to progress quickly. Other directors commented on the opposite situation: They had students who needed to progress much slower than the MSG or increases in EFL requirements demanded; that is, these students needed more time to demonstrate any gains.

Lastly, **directors commented on a number of non-academic needs of students that were not being met by the adult education system but were met within the public K-12 system**. These included needs like access to transportation, learning disability specialists, and social workers. Directors commented that meeting these needs was just as important to the success of adult learners as it was to K-12 students.

**Program Needs**

**Program financial needs were the most commonly mentioned system item that was out of alignment with programs**. This had a great deal to do with all of the additional guidance and support that programs needed to improve instructional content and pedagogy, as described earlier. Some directors expressed that they felt they were being required to meet K-12 standards with dramatically smaller budgets. Other directors commented that DESE/ACLS only looked at program budgets as a whole, not at just what the DESE/ACLS portion of program funding yielded, and that programs without fundraising capabilities were being compared to those that could fundraise from non-DESE/ACLS sources, which would pay for student needs not covered by DESE/ACLS.

Some directors commented that **programs were not being treated as a system that might have some common needs**. Some directors had heard that one program received funding to put ads on busses in the local area. These directors felt that advertising of adult education services was a need common to all programs, yet knowledge of this kind of allowable expense was not communicated to them. Furthermore, they thought that, since advertising was a universal item across all programs, this type of expenditure should be made at the DESE/ACLS level through a statewide communications initiative as opposed to being done by individual programs.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

The only item mentioned by directors concerning the alignment of the adult education system with regional workforce needs pertained to the implementation of classes for ESOL students that were focused on learning language for a particular job area (e.g., nursing). One director gave an example of wanting to hold a class about learning English as applied to a specific job. They were told they could not because that would count as workforce development rather than English language learning.

##### Teacher Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Teachers who participated in the focus groups reported two primary areas where the Massachusetts adult education system was neither aligned with, nor informed by, the needs of adult learners. **The first area pertained to a lack of understanding in the system about working with a highly transient population.** Whether ABE or ESOL teachers, many observed that their students moved frequently, which had several effects, including confusion around how to process students with regard to intake and exit. How was a student who left for three weeks to visit family in another country, but then returned, to be counted? If a student was able to move to a different program and completed there, how could the first program receive some credit for the student’s progress? How did programs with highly seasonal populations (or in places where there was no public transportation in winter) deal with enrollment requirements? Another effect related to classes: The rolling enrollment process meant that some students could enter a class in the middle of the term but still only be at the beginning level of the class. This resulted in a high level of disruption for the class, both in terms of curriculum and cohesion. Lastly, this transience inhibited the ability of programs to engage in the required NRS follow-up.

“*If I have to prove my outcomes by doing NRS follow-up like calling my students whose phone number changes every three months, it’s really difficult to prove how my students are. To me, that’s just really tone deaf in terms of the population. That’s my number one: If I could change something, it would be that, NRS follow-up, because it is just ineffective.*”—Teacher

**Another area of learner needs that teachers reported as being out of alignment with the system concerned the needs of working with older adults.** The priorities of many older adults did not match the workforce and educational attainment priorities of the system. The system focused on people securing jobs (if they were unemployed), moving into better jobs (if they were employed), or joining some kind of higher education or training program. Many students in their mid-40s or older were not interested in getting a job if they were unemployed (e.g., if they were primary caregivers in their families), moving into a new job if they were employed (e.g., if they had a job that they were happy with already), or entering higher education or some training (e.g., that might be expensive and the cost of which would never be recouped during the remainder of their working life). Instead, these adults sought education or language acquisition for more practical, but still important, reasons: to read to grandchildren, to go to the doctor without the assistance of a translator, or to move up a level in their current job, which was not part of a priority employment area.

“*The hardest part about this work is that that’s 80% of the work is those successes that don’t get accounted for as successes, which is like maddening when you are like, ‘Oh my God, you are so close with this person’s success, but it didn’t count. It didn’t get an EFL gain, they didn’t get their HiSET or whatever.’ But it’s like, ‘Man, they’re reading books to their kid at night*.’”—Teacher

“*The average of the students in my classes is 45. They’re not interested in getting a job. They want to be able to talk to, to help their grandchildren. We’re asking them all the time, ‘Who’s looking for a job? How’s the job search coming?’ And they’re like, ‘Can someone please talk to me about the present perfect tense? [laughter] Let’s get this going, I don’t care!’ We’re asking, ‘When are you going to start college? Who’s going to college?’ And it’s like, ‘Please no. It’s a waste—it’s such a huge waste of time. If this is an initiative that we’re supposed to have our foot on the gas for—tell us when it’s over. Because we need to focus on something else*.’”—Teacher

**Program Needs**

**Teachers reported** **that the requirement of working with partner organizations** **was** **an area of program need that was out of alignment with the system.** While all teachers reported seeing value in partnerships, they felt that partners often had different, and sometimes even conflicting, goals from their own program. For example, whereas the adult education program might be concerned about students gaining an EFL, a partner organization may only be interested in seeing people pass the citizenship test. Many teachers reported difficulties working with the local WIB/REB to which they were assigned as part of their partnership requirements. They commented that often the requirements for entering trainings at the WIB/REB were higher than their students could meet; consequently, the WIB/REB had no interest in these students. There was a sense that if the adult education student could not help the partner agency meet their own number goals, they were not welcome.

“*Every day I get email—the numbers, the data. Very rarely does it say the students or their lives. It’s about the partners and the numbers. I love the partnerships, but playing nice with partners, which you should do, it’s almost like it’s becoming cut-throat for data, so I don’t know how you get the data they’re asking for and the relationships they’re asking for*.”—Teacher

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Teachers did not comment on whether the system aligned with regional workforce needs. While some were aware of the local workforce plans and the associated priority employment areas, teachers tended to focus on their concern about whether the system was aligned with student needs.

##### Advisor Responses

Adult education students faced many challenges that often resulted in instability and uncertainty in their personal and professional lives. Compounding this, many staff worked part-time, taking on a teaching position as a second or third job and were difficult to retain. Because the needs of adult education students were diverse, resources were limited, and many adult educators had little social service training, **advisors said that adult education students faced many challenges that the system was not well equipped to address.** One advisor said, “I think there a lot of issues that our students have that do not get addressed. I spend a lot of time looking for other resources.”

**Advisors said that some of the criteria and standards used to assess the effectiveness of adult education were not well aligned with student and program needs.** Because needs were so pervasive and diverse, advisors said that DESE/ACLS should have a more realistic understanding of those needs and of what could reasonably be achieved by a population of individuals with those needs. One advisor said, “Standards are key. You have to have some form of standards in anything in life, but you also have to have balance…. I don’t know if the system is designed to really be as effective as it should be…. So I think there either needs to be some type of leniency in a way, or maybe more funding for more resources.”

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 2A: What are the ways in which programs determine the educational and workforce needs of individual students and/or their student population as a whole, their own program needs, and regional workforce needs?

##### Introduction

Programs identified students’ educational and workforce needs primarily through relationships with staff. While measures like tests and homework contributed to knowledge of a student’s academic needs, and surveys or focused discussions to a student’s workforce needs, the development of trusting relationships between students and staff contributed the most to identification of students’ overall needs, both individually and as a group. Program needs were determined in part by understanding what was needed for students to succeed; that is, program needs were an extension of students’ needs. No staff reported being involved in determining their regional workforce needs.

##### Director Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Please see Question 1A for director responses associated with determining students’ educational needs. In addition to the previously discussed means of learning about students’ academic needs**, many directors spoke about how their programs utilized simple surveys or focus groups to gain knowledge of workforce and other needs**. One director reported that their program was going to bring back a formal Student Advisory Council that would meet quarterly and help with bringing up student issues to staff and disseminating information that staff wished to convey to students.

Directors reported that **knowledge of students’ non-academic needs usually grew from a relationship with a staff member** (most commonly a teacher or advisor). As a result, knowledge in this area might have lagged behind knowledge of academic needs since the staff member needed to establish a solid relationship with the student before the student would disclose their challenges. In addition, needs in this area often changed or evolved during a student’s tenure in a program so that the existence of **an ongoing relationship was essential to staying in touch with a student’s needs**.

“*People come through the door with academic needs, but they have a lot of barriers they have to work through before they can focus on that. And then, in addition to that, they might have undiagnosed learning disabilities or other academic barriers to learning. We determine that, we interview students when they come through the door, ask about what their past experience has been, what their goals are moving forward. So we’re aware, in a somewhat formal sense, what their academic needs are. But as we develop that relationship with them through advising, we start to learn about the life barriers and other interrupters*.”—Director

**Program Needs**

Program needs were primarily determined through considerations of what was needed to improve student learning. This meant that program needs were implied as part of what students needed to succeed rather than discussed explicitly.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Directors did not discuss how they were involved in determining regional workforce needs.

##### Teacher Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Please see Question 1A for teacher responses associated with determining student educational needs.

**With regard to non-educational student needs, most teachers reported that students self-disclosed** “once you’ve established a good culture and good rapport.” The particular staff member with whom a student might discuss non-educational needs varied from program to program—even within programs—according to whom an individual student felt close. This staff member could be a teacher, an advisor, or a case manager, depending on how a program was organized. What was important was that a trusting, caring relationship existed with somebody in the program.

Another method for determining the non-educational (and sometimes educational) needs of students utilized by teachers was being knowledgeable about, and connected to, issues that were important in the community. For example, if other community organizations were hosting seminars on a particular topic, a teacher might consider how to bring that topic into their class. Another example at the national level concerned messaging about immigrants. Students were aware of the changes in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Compact from the national news and were concerned about how that might affect their potential to become citizens (i.e., that coming to classes would count as accessing public assistance/services in the eyes of the federal government).

“*A lot of adult education programs are very different. Their overall goal is the same, but they function differently. So, you need to assess what is the purpose within your community: Is it for employment? Does it help a person transition to community college or maybe a four-year school? Based on the demographics in that area, is there a need for certain kinds of jobs/training? … Therefore you need to participate in adult basic ed in order to reach the training level. I think it really has to be that specific, that you have to really drill down and look to see what the need is*.”—Teacher

**Program Needs**

The primary method teachers used to identify program needs was to determine students’ needs. Programs needed what would best serve the students.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Teachers did not report being involved in determining their region’s workforce needs. Some knew about the regional workforce plans, and many named the priority employment areas, but no one reported being involved with the development or determination of either.

##### Advisor Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Advisors identified several strategies employed by programs to determine students’ needs. Strategies varied by site. To begin, students were asked about their needs during the program application and intake process. Some programs had developed orientation activities (which were extensive at some sites), and student needs were discussed during these activities. Once regular classroom activities had started**, advisors said they assessed student needs through formal and informal check-ins (initiated by advisors or students), advising questionnaires/surveys, and classroom discussions with students**. In addition, advisors said student needs were identified through observation of classroom activities, discussions at staff meetings, and collaboration with other local service agencies. Advisors noted that some needs were easier to assess than others and that students often waited until some semblance of a trusting relationship had been developed before disclosing some needs. One advisor said, “They have to build the relationships first…. We figure out the career goals and the immediate [academic] goals right away, but as far as what’s going to come up throughout the school year, what other needs are going to arise, you just have to wait for those relationships to build or the crisis to happen.”

“*We have a 3-day orientation before they even go into the classroom. The kinds of things we do besides welcoming them to the program are barriers—what are the barriers they might have and how we can assist them. And address those before they become an issue.*”—Advisor

**Program Needs**

Advisors indicated that program needs fluctuated based on the needs of the students being served, the needs of the current staff, and the various administrative requirements the program was expected to address. Advisors indicated that program needs were discussed at regular staff meetings and through informal conversations among staff.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Advisors mentioned three methods for learning about regional workforce needs. First, advisors worked with representatives from state agencies, programs, and training opportunities (e.g., MassHire, Workforce Investment Boards). Second, advisors worked to establish relationships with local employers to learn about the needs of those employers. Third, advisors talked to their students to better understand their successes and challenges in the workforce, what types of jobs they were able and unable to obtain, and what barriers they were facing.

##### Student Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Students reported that teachers were very proactive and genuine in finding out what their academic, workforce, and personal needs were. According to students, while teachers used measures like tests and homework to determine how a student was performing academically, they openly and frequently asked about how a student was doing. Many students across multiple focus groups shared that they felt like they were at home, that they could tell teachers about anything and everything and not be judged.

“*They make you feel like you are at home. Not like you’re an outsider or that you’re on a different level than them. You’re on the same level as them. They make you very comfortable.*” —Student

**Program Needs**

Students spoke to a very limited extent about program needs, and when they did, their comments were filtered through the lens of what could help their teachers. To students, program needs were determined by what teachers needed to be effective.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Students were not asked how regional workforce needs were determined.

### Research Question 2B: What are adult learners’ educational and workforce needs? What are regional workforce needs? What are program needs?

##### Introduction

Directors, teachers, advisors, and students all saw a wide range of needs for adult learners, ranging from the narrowly academic (the need for more one-on-one teaching) to the widely general (the need to address issues associated with poverty). Adult learners presented as having a long list of needs, some of which could be addressed by programs, but many of which could not. Program needs were viewed in the context of what students needed to succeed, with staffing needs being a priority. While many directors and advisors (and a few teachers) were aware of the workforce priority areas of their region, they did not see their role as filling these needs. Rather, their role was to meet students where they were and help them achieve their desired goals.

##### Director Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

**Directors spoke to the full spectrum of needs (academic, workforce, life/general) faced by their students.** Starting with the most basic, multiple directors mentioned students’ need for reliable transportation, childcare, food, housing, and overall stability in their lives. In addition, directors in one focus group discussed how students had motivational and self-esteem needs that also needed to be met by program staff in order for the students to persist and succeed. **Positive, supportive relationships were seen as necessary for student success.**

In terms of workforce needs, directors who spoke to this issue frequently mentioned students’ need for better jobs; students were caught in low-end jobs and were looking to get their HiSET in order to move into something better. However, some directors noted that not everyone wanted a job or was looking for employment. According to one director:

Many of our students are not actively looking for work and are deeply committed, in fact, to not ever working. So there is a huge culture shift that we have to [acknowledge].… They want us to register everyone for the career center. But if people are not actively looking for work, for whatever reason, it is meaningless to have them register with the career center. It’s kind of a funny thing that we don’t really talk about.

For educational needs, the most frequently mentioned areas by directors were learning disabilities and social-emotional issues. **Learning disabilities were a particularly difficult problem to deal with as most were undiagnosed** (especially among students who had moved from other countries). As a result, teachers had to guess at what accommodations were needed to help a student learn. Learning disabilities greatly affected students’ ability to read, which then affected other areas, including science and social studies. Math, one director reported, was usually the subject students mentioned as having a problem with upon intake. However, math usually ended up being a simple subject to address, and most students ended up liking it. Reading, which students did not think was a problem, was the area where they experienced the most difficulties. Lastly, directors saw among students a need for organizational and study skills, which would help them do homework and process information.

“*We are getting students that are not as employable and we have to spend more time with them, and they need a lot more than just educational care. It’s social-emotional. It’s trauma. It’s full time demands on part-time programs.*”—Director

“*I think when I was in the ABE field—which was just last year—I think their educational needs were a lot of—it was actually more social-emotional and undiagnosed, or even diagnosed learning disabilities. That’s an expertise we don’t have in the field or that we don’t have the capacity for. That was a huge thing.*”—Director

**Program Needs**

Please see Question 1D for director responses associated with additional supports needed for programs. Some of the student needs directors spoke about connected to additional staff needs for the program. Primary among these was the need for teachers to have paid hours for student advising so that they could build the relationships with students they needed for helping students attain their goals. This kind of advising was seen as different from the activities of formal advisors. Directors also spoke somewhat to the personal needs of their staff and the need to support them through personal challenges.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Directors did not discuss regional workforce needs.

##### Teacher Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

**Teachers talked about three general areas of adult learner needs: (1) educational needs, (2) workforce needs, and (3) life needs.** Within the category of educational needs, there were multiple sub-areas, including (a) content needs, (b) pedagogical needs, (c) resource needs, (d) logistical needs, and (e) relationship needs. Regarding to content needs, multiple teachers commented on the need for more developmental education and study-skills instruction for students. One teacher commented that the inclusion of a week-long study-skills-focused set of classes could potentially address a number of problems, including students’ ability to focus while doing individual work during class, students’ ability to do homework, retention (students would see what kind of work went into studying before they started classes), and class/program completion.

“*That sort of explicit, pulling back the curtain on why we are doing things that I find at sort of the evaluation end it helps just as much at this introductory … I’ve been experimenting with the CALM curriculum. The CALM developers had this beautiful scope and sequence, I taped it up on my whiteboard, so this is what we are doing, we are starting here, we are hoping to get to here, and we will see what happens in between. I felt this sort of sigh of collective relief where the students could just so oh, it’s not just this abstract I don’t know what’s happening next, this is the plan. It seems like with adult learners that the more explicit you can make every step along the way, the more relieved and attentive they become*.”—Teacher

In terms of pedagogical needs, **teachers in all of the** **focus groups** **commented that they needed more skills in modifying teaching practices to accommodate students with special learning needs, especially those with learning disabilities**. Teachers in one focus group also discussed the need for adult learners to have clear and explicit assignments, learning objectives, and grading standards. One of these teachers commented directly on the CALM curriculum as being a good example of this.

**Resource needs were probably the second most commonly discussed educational need by teachers, especially with regard to technology.** More money for adult-appropriate materials were mentioned by some, but all of the focus groups touched on the need for better technology in the classroom both in terms of hardware and internet accessibility (this included better access generally in the western region as well as student access to technology at home).

Logistical needs of students focused primarily on flexible class times and perhaps a different way of organizing classes into shorter, more focused units or mini classes where students who already knew certain material could opt out of a unit.

“*I struggle with students who do not have internet access or computer access at home. I always provide students with extra work they can do at home, but my school doesn’t have the budget to always print these extra study materials. I usually email extra work, but some students have no way to use what I send them. They are rightfully frustrated. I find that I purchase my own paper and ink and print at home frequently. It doesn’t seem fair to a student to put a financial barrier on being able to do extra studying*.”—Teacher

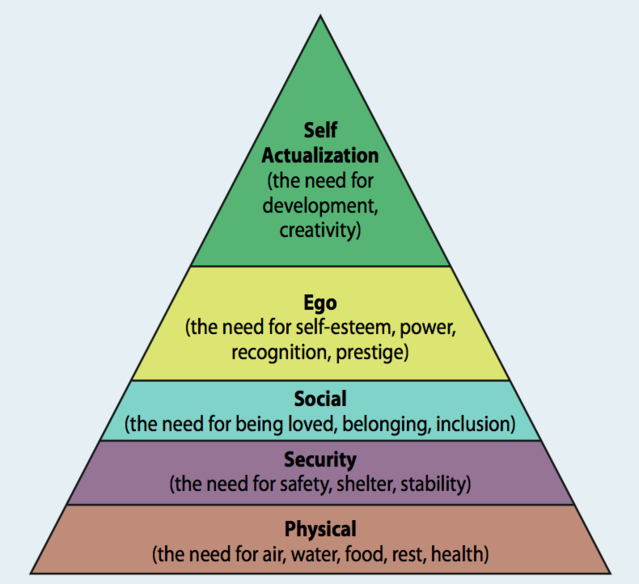
Lastly, relationship needs of various kinds were mentioned the most by teachers, whether they had to do with providing general encouragement and a positive orientation, maintaining a supportive environment for discussing problems, or connecting with students at the individual level.

**Teachers perceived students’ workforce needs as having multiple dimensions.** One teacher focus group discussed how their students needed job stability and sustainable wages, noting that many of their students found work through temp agencies that was not well-paying and did not have reliable hours. Relationships and rapport were brought up in the context of teachers needing to have a relationship with a student in order to find out what their true workforce needs were. Many students, if asked about what their workforce goals were upon intake, either had no idea what they wanted to do or gave a pat response about a job area they had heard was hiring. **The lack of alignment of programs’ workforce goals with students’ workforce goals was mentioned by a number of teachers**. This included a lack of alignment between the job areas students could or wanted to find employment in and the regional economic needs. Furthermore, programs’ having a workforce orientation generally was out of alignment with students who were already retired, were approaching retirement, already had jobs they liked, or simply were not interested in having a job. Lastly, teachers saw a lack of knowledge among students who did have employment goals about the steps it would take for them to attain it. This translated into a need for better employment pathway education.

“*We have a lot of people who are retired. They don’t want to go to college or get another job. But they want to be able to communicate with their kids, or go to the doctor without an interpreter. I feel the same way, like the new system doesn’t welcome those people. What do we do with those people, as far as putting them into the system? They don’t want another job—they’re 76 years old*.”—Teacher

**All teacher focus groups brought up student needs that were beyond the scope of the program.** The list was very long in this area, including (1) reliable transportation, (2) housing security, (3) food security, (4) reliable and affordable childcare, (5) access to healthcare (especially mental and behavioral healthcare), (6) support for sick family members, (7) immigration issues, (8) assistance in working with their children’s schools, (9) help gaining citizenship, (10) more time in the day to take care of everything students needed to do, (11) self-discipline, (12) poverty generally, (13) (among ESOL students) feelings of isolation, and (14) the need to take multiple weeks off to visit family out-of-state or in another country. **Multiple teachers referenced Maslow's hierarchy of needs when discussing these student needs.** **As one teacher said: “We’re asking them to be up here, and they’re there [indicating low with a hand gesture].”**

“*I feel like the other thing that’s really big is case managers have a huge job because increasingly, in my experience, over the years our students come with lots of difficulties outside their academics and those difficulties mostly relate to those difficulties that come with poverty. Lack of childcare. Lack of healthcare. Lack of a home. We have at least one student in the morning that is homeless and at least one in the evening that is homeless that I’m aware of and there’s probably more than that. The case managers do what they can to hook them up with services and be supportive. We teachers do what we can, but it’s not easy. There’s a lot of needs and sometimes the best thing we can do as teachers is to be there to support, to listen, and to hopefully hook them up with services as best we can if we can find them.*”—Teacher



**One Version of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs** (Source: *Psychology Today*)

**Program Needs**

Please see Question 1D for information about guidance and supports that teachers saw as necessary for improved program outcomes.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Teachers only discussed regional workforce needs in response to the focus group leader’s question to the group. In many cases, workforce issues were not handled by teachers. Instead, the program had some form of advisor whose responsibilities included workforce issues. In the few cases where teachers were involved with workforce issues, the focus was on students’ needs rather than regional workforce needs. This was not to say that teachers did not try to guide students toward needed regional workforce areas. Rather, the teachers focused on serving the needs of their students rather than the needs of the regional economy.

##### Advisor Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

Advisors identified myriad needs of adult learners. These needs related to housing and homelessness, food insecurity, health concerns, mental health concerns (particularly trauma and PTSD), childcare, learning disabilities, language barriers, lack of health insurance, lack of transportation and/or ability to obtain a driver’s license, bullying, lack of access to computers and the internet, and lack of documentation of residency or citizenship. **Advisors noted that each student’s needs were unique and that the needs within any group of students could vary widely. Identifying and addressing student needs (both academic and non-academic) was the central component of their job.**

Advisors also noted that for many students there was a direct connection between their level of need and their class attendance. Advisors were very aware that most of their students worked and had other needs and responsibilities outside the classroom. One advisor said, “Adult learners don’t have the time that young learners do…. They just don’t. And students are tired and they’re juggling multiple aspects of life. So the learning requirements, and the curriculum requirements, it’s a lot you need to cover in one year with limited time and exhausted people.”

**Program Needs**

**Several advisors reported that directors and teachers were frustrated and/or overwhelmed with the number of tasks that DESE/ACLS asked them to accomplish in a limited amount of time.** One advisor noted, “It feels like the demands from ACLS have become another obstacle to getting good people, or even keeping good teachers that have done an amazing job and know how to relate to the students.” Similarly, some advisors noted that there were many demands on their time and that there was a need for additional advising capacity. Advisors indicated that a program’s advising capacity impacted the quality of students’ experience in the classroom. They said they received sample lesson plans from a granting agency, and the lesson plans were very extensive. Teachers and advisors wanted to slow the pace of instruction to meet their students’ needs but felt they could not because there was too much material to cover.

**Advisors also felt that, because of the demands, teaching was not the priority.** According to one advisor, “[The teachers] have passion, and they want to guide that passion toward people who need it. They’re feeling held back because they have to do this and that and the other thing…. Class time should be class time.”

Finally, several advisors mentioned **that it was difficult to get approval for testing accommodations for students with learning disabilities taking the HiSET**. The advisors identified two bottlenecks in this process: (1) identifying the resources needed to get a student evaluated/diagnosed, and (2) getting the accommodation approved by ETS or GED once an issue was identified—an overly complicated and time-consuming process. One advisor said, “Accommodations are really in the hands of ETS or GED and unfortunately they can be very difficult. They ask for a lot of documentation, and sometimes doctors don’t provide it. Students end up in kind of limbo…. It stops them from taking the test and getting out of the program.” **These advisors requested that DESE/ACLS work with ETS and GED to streamline/ simplify the accommodation application and approval process.**

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Advisors were less concerned with regional workforce needs than they were with the needs of their students and programs. **Advisors indicated that they appreciated the efforts of partnering programs and organizations (such as MassHire) but often found that efforts to bridge adult education and workforce development programs were difficult and/or not well executed.** While some advisors indicated that they had a general understanding of the workforce needs of their region (as defined by external stakeholder groups), they did not think that these workforce needs were generally well aligned with the needs, preferences, and lived realities of students.

##### Student Responses

**Adult Learner Needs**

**The greatest adult learner academic need addressed by students was the need for more teachers so that students could have more one-on-one attention.** Students recognized that teachers had big workloads and, for that reason, could not meet the individualized needs of all students in a class. Students saw teachers as essential to their success.

Students also viewed teachers as essential to meeting their non-academic needs. According to one student, “They are concerned with things outside of school. How can we get you to come to school? Some people have a hard time coming to school so they go to that person and see what they can do to help them come to school, besides a phone call.” **According to students, teachers recognized the wide range of problems students faced outside the classroom and did what they could to help.** Students identified many of the same non-academic needs as were mentioned by staff—for instance, childcare, transportation, lack of time in the day for competing demands, non-school appointments, work demands, and health issues.

In the specialty focus group for the Mujeres program, students brought up a need not addressed by students in other programs: the importance of being in a women-only environment. Students at Mujeres felt that being in an environment where everyone had similar life experiences contributed greatly to their academic success. While single-sex groups were not on the radar of students from other focus groups, this did relate to other **students’ comments about their classroom being an extension of family**—that it was a place of understanding and support that students did not get elsewhere. Some students even referred to their classes as “their family.”

**Program Needs**

**Students’ primary view of program needs was that more teachers were needed.** One group identified a scheduling issue also discussed by teachers: the need for a different kind of class schedule or arrangement of content such that students who were advanced in one area (but not others) did not have to sit through lessons they already knew. Students in this group described a system of short-term, subject-specific units that would accommodate students at different levels in different subjects.

**Regional Workforce Needs**

Students were not aware of their region’s workforce needs.

### Research Question 2C: Is the adult education system aligned with student educational and workforce, regional workforce, and program needs?

##### Introduction

This research question overlapped significantly with earlier questions. In general, directors, teachers, and advisors described many different areas in which the adult education system was not aligned with student educational and workforce needs. A few program needs were discussed but usually within the context of what was needed for students to succeed. Most staff did not comment on the alignment of the adult education system with regional workforce needs.

##### Director Responses

Please see Question 2 for director comments regarding the alignment of the adult education system with student educational and workforce needs.

**Directors reported multiple times that they saw the program funding scheme as being out of alignment with program needs, both in terms of its gross amount (programs could use more money generally) and allocation formulas (especially for administrative services).** Many directors reported that their programs had difficulty with data entry, and one director explained that the cap on administrative costs meant that data entry was being assigned to teachers and advisors instead of administrative staff, thus taking time away from teachers and advisors for their more central duties.

“*We need more flex money to give more hours to teachers and advisors. There is also an increased emphasis on data, and inputting and analyzing data takes time and resources. Administrative caps prevent us from adding more staff to do this work. We need a structural change that allows us to decide what we need and in which areas. My advisors are not doing much advising right now because we are having to intake, enroll, and assess. Intake, enroll, and assess. It is a constant churning*.”—Director

One focus group also discussed how **the flexible/innovative programming request in the RFP was out of alignment with data collected by LACES and WIOA priorities**. This had led to some confusion about how much innovation is really possible given the strict outcome measures. Programs wanted to develop innovative systems of support, but those largely yielded outcomes that were not counted/valid under the new system.

“*[The question] is not about addressing a set of needs. It is about dealing with the complexity of students’ lives. The last RFP suggested they would reward innovation. Access, innovation, and something were the three guiding principles. They wanted innovation, but when we gave them innovation, the system simply cannot handle it. We try to have classes at different levels of intensity at different times of the day … but there is no way to get credit for that engagement in the current system. When we designed classes specifically to meet student needs, the system approved the plan, but did not understand what they were approving.*”—Director

A few directors also identified open enrollment as a problem; in fact, most saw it as detrimental to their programs. Associated with this was the issue of attendance. One director explained, “[T]he attendance and persistence measures are hard to meet. If we are going to be inclusive and engage with students who have multiple barriers, there is not a lot of forgiveness in the system as it is currently structured.”

Directors did not comment on whether the adult education system was out of alignment with regional workforce needs. Instead, many explained that the regional workforce needs were out of alignment with student needs (both generally and in relation to workforce issues).

##### Teacher Responses

As mentioned under Question 2B, teachers saw many educational and workforce needs among students who were not served by the current system, leading to a lack of alignment between services and needs.

A number of the student educational needs expressed by teachers translated into points where the adult education system was not aligned with program needs. These included such areas as professional development for staff (especially associated with students with learning disabilities), program resources for materials, and technology. However, the items mentioned all had to do with expanding program resources as opposed to reallocating existing funds. In other words, the overall level of program needs was out of alignment with the total funding.

The question of whether the adult education system was aligned with regional workforce needs was not explicitly addressed by teachers. Some teachers commented that the regional workforce needs were not aligned with their students’ needs, implying that regional workforce needs were part of the overarching adult education system. Instead teachers tended to question whether the adult education system should be aligned with regional workforce needs, especially when viewed through the lens of student needs.

##### Advisor Responses

Please see Question 2 for advisor comments regarding the alignment of the adult education system with adult learner, program, and regional workforce needs.

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 2D: What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs?

##### Introduction

Consistent with earlier responses, for directors the most significant area of potential change concerned program funding, both the total amount and allocation formulas. Teachers’ primary suggestions related to having more dedicated time to teaching academic content and to the system rolling out changes at a more reasonable pace. Advisors saw the potential for many improvements to the adult education program-MassHire relationship, including increased alignment with adult learner workforce needs.

##### Director Responses

**The primary change that directors wanted to see in the Massachusetts adult education system was greater total funding and modified funding policies.** Greater funding was tied to hiring and retaining better teachers and advisors, creating more teaching and advising time, addressing certain basic survival needs of students that affected their attendance (e.g., transportation), hiring other staff to handle data entry, and many other investments that would lead to improved instruction and greater student success. Directors also perceived this funding issue as a program-wide need.

Directors did not comment on how the adult education system could be better aligned with regional workforce needs. However, some did mention the opposite—that the workforce issues with which programs were concerned might be better aligned with student workforce needs.

##### Teacher Responses

Teachers discussed a number of potential changes to the adult education system that would promote better alignment with adult learner needs. Primary among these was the need for **more available class time and/or for class time to be more academically focused (as opposed to including workforce training)**. Linked to this was a request for more paid prep time (especially for part-time teachers). Teaching adult learners in the current system required a great deal of intra-class differentiation as students at multiple grade levels and with different content learning needs were grouped together. This differentiation required considerable planning around group and individual learning. Second, teachers wanted more professional development, especially regarding students with learning disabilities. Associated with this was a request for professional staff with expertise in learning disabilities who might be able to do full-fledged testing and referrals.

With regard to the structure of class time, teachers proposed two innovations that might better align the adult education system with student needs. First, they recommended that classes should be on a six-week schedule, with specific topics and a limited drop/add period—similar to how college courses are organized but involving shorter periods of time. Second, they suggested that the requirements for entering a course should increase as a course progresses so that students entering the class were at the same level as students who have been in the class since the beginning (and not at the starting point of the class).

Again, increased support for technology was mentioned as a potential change. Other student needs that teachers believed could be addressed through programs included transportation (through the provision of bus passes or Uber/Lyft vouchers), hunger (through an in-house food pantry), and childcare (through an in-house daycare center).

**At the program level, teachers suggested improved communication around official initiatives and that fewer initiatives be rolled out over a short period.** Many teachers also saw a need for program goals to be aligned more with students’ needs as opposed to regional workforce priorities; these revised program goals might place greater value on outcome indicators such as civic and social involvement or practical improvements to students’ lives.

Teachers did not comment on how the adult education system might be better aligned with regional workforce needs. Rather, they mentioned changes that would make the system less aligned with official regional workforce plans such as widening the range of employment options for which students might be prepared or allowing students to enter jobs that did not require a credential.

##### Advisor Responses

**Advisors indicated that administrative responsibilities (e.g., LACES data submissions, DESE/ACLS reports and site visits) were excessive.** One advisor said, “The criteria that are required for the funding are ridiculous.” These advisors suggested making the requirements for funding more reasonable. Advisors also suggested reducing the administrative burden by eliminating redundancy in the system wherever possible.

One advisor noted that the role of advisors could vary from site to site. This advisor suggested that it would be helpful for DESE/ACLS to “clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the advisor.” The advisor also indicated that having parallel responsibilities across various programs might facilitate collaboration.

More broadly, one advisor suggested (and others agreed) that **it would be helpful for DESE/ACLS to provide a basic curriculum, especially for ESOL students, from which programs could expand**. Advisors noted that every program across the state was creating curriculum and that feedback provided by DESE/ACLS during program quality-review site visits was not great. The advisor requested that DESE/ACLS communicate very transparently about what they wanted to see covered in the classroom over the course of a year.

Two advisors indicated that **it would be helpful for each program to have the resources necessary to support a full-time advisor**. These advisors noted that having several part-time advisors made it more difficult for students and employers to build relationships with the advisors. One advisor said, “We are two part-time advisors, [and] sometimes people are getting confused about who to talk to about what. We’re working that out. If you have one person, you don’t have that problem.” These advisors commented that, ideally, this single advisor would have responsibilities for advising students and for community outreach. They indicated that this type of arrangement would improve communication and facilitate important connections among students, advisors, and employers.

Several advisors indicated that **the relationship between their program and MassHire would benefit from scaffolding and support from DESE/ACLS**. Advisors acknowledged that the relationship between MassHire and their program was not “fully designed,” creating difficulties because they were expected to have an ongoing relationship. Advisors indicated that MassHire offered many services and activities that their students could benefit from, but communication with the MassHire sites was difficult. One advisor said, “It’s like pulling teeth sometimes to get them to tell us what they’re offering.” In another case, an advisor said they had brought students to the MassHire career center to participate in a seminar; however, the content of the seminar was designed for professionals and “way above” the “level” of the participating students. When program personnel asked the presenters to adjust their language, the presenters were not receptive because they also had requirements they were expected to meet.

**Advisors noted that many adult education students were ineligible to participate in some MassHire services because they were either undocumented or did not meet mandated education and/or income requirements.** One advisor said that, for their students, the MassHire program was “designed to not be user friendly.”

Advisors indicated that they needed to improve their relationship with MassHire but that there were many obstacles to overcome. Summarizing these challenges, one advisor said, “They’re siloed into their own separate world, and it’s hard to bridge that world.”

Several advisors indicated that **it would be helpful for the system to recognize that, although each region of the state had needs for employees in various industries, the adult education students in those regions might not be interested in having jobs in those fields.**

*“I know each area has what they need, but you can’t push people into those fields just because that’s what the workforce board says that’s what we need. That doesn’t make sense. They won’t succeed, they won’t last. It would be a waste of time, energy and money.”*—Advisor

Two advisors indicated that it would also be helpful for the system to recognize that **job opportunities and economic climate vary greatly by region**. One advisor from western Massachusetts said, “I think the community does a really great job of connecting MassHire and the Regional Employment Board in giving people the opportunity. [But] we’re kind of in our own little world out here—the economy in this part of the state just isn’t what it is in other parts of the state, and I don’t think that WIOA understands that. The median income we have to report for our students is never going to be like Boston.” A second advisor followed that comment, saying, “We’re these little isolated communities that don’t have the resources that eastern MA, or even central MA, have. We don’t have the mass. We don’t have the employers. We don’t have the transportation.”

##### Student Responses

One focus group participant said it best when asked what change might improve their program: “Not the teachers!” to which the other students said, “Yes!” Students noted that help with transportation or childcare would be beneficial, but otherwise they did not have suggestions.

### Research Question 2E: Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how?

##### Introduction

While directors, teachers, and advisors all saw certain potential benefits to some of the recently implemented changes, in general they felt that not only were those benefits not realized, but also there had been actual negative consequences (either as a result of a change itself or as a result of how the change was rolled out). For example, staff saw LACES as a potential positive tool in support of data-driven decision making. However, the roll-out of the system was problematic, and the increased data collection requirements within programs had a negative effect on time spent in teaching or advising.

##### Director Responses

**The directors agreed that the open enrollment process had an unintended negative impact.** According to one director, “We have really seen an impact on our attendance and enrollment in a negative way. Open enrollment is just a problem. We enroll at the beginning of every month. It is harder to do connected units, deeper units, so the rigor suffers. The students who are able to hang in there are discouraged by the in-and-out of students who aren’t able to stick with it.”

Otherwise, **directors saw multiple pros and cons to the recent changes in the Massachusetts adult education system**, sometimes even presenting conflicting information based on different programs’ experiences. Many directors saw the use of additional data as positive, but a consequence of gathering more data was less time for teachers and advisors to spend on their core duties. Some directors reported being able to make use of the flexibility offered to programs in the latest RFP. However, others found the flexibility offer to be quite limited because, in the end, outcomes had to mesh with the federal WIOA standards or fit into the LACES database categories. The same situation occurred with the PQR visits. Some directors reported them as positive experiences, others as very negative. Yet, whether the PQR visit was positive or negative, directors reported that it had an ongoing effect on staff morale.

##### Teacher Responses

**Changes in the adult education system associated with the new federal WIOA initiative were not seen favorably by most teachers, if they were aware of them at all.** While teachers widely acknowledged the need for and benefits of accountability and data, they reported a number of difficulties with how these were being operationalized under WIOA. Post-exit follow-up regarding employment was widely seen as difficult, if not an actual waste of time. In addition, the revised requirements for a Measurable Skills Gain (MSG)—which counted gains only if a student went up a level—were seen as unfair and as detrimental to serving students who came into the program at the low end of a level. Some teachers also commented that they felt they were only teaching to a test and not providing their students with a true education.

**A number of teachers also reported that site-visit changes caused them stress**. Again, most teachers acknowledged that site visits could be a very positive and useful exercise: They could be a means of gathering information on best practices and then sharing those practices across programs; they could provide teachers and programs feedback on what they were doing well and what they could improve; and, they could be a source of information for DESE/ACLS regarding how their policies were working. However, instead of being seen as a positive experience, site visits were reported by a number of teachers as stressful, negative, and uninformative.

##### Advisor Responses

**All advisors agreed that each of the recent changes made to the adult education system had had some positive effect on programs, but there were negative impacts as well.** Advisors understood and lauded efforts to improve services by supporting data-driven practice; however, they also indicated that efforts to promote data-driven practice, and the way in which those efforts had been rolled out, had had negative effects. Advisors observed that the pace of change over the last two years had been rapid and had created a sense of instability and uncertainty in the system. One advisor said,

So giving us the tool of LACES to collect the data and to evaluate the data I think is important. So they did give us the tools. The training on how to run reports and the initial time it takes to get everything in has to be recognized. You can’t say you need to collect all of this data without recognizing the time that goes into not just collecting the data, but making sure it is accurate data—checking the data, reporting on the data.

Advisors indicated that some long-time—and effective—directors and teachers had left the field because of the challenges associated with the pace of change imposed by DESE/ACLS. **Advisors strongly encouraged DESE/ACLS to consider slowing the pace of change.** Advisors also suggested that some changes had resulted in redundancy in the system. For example, one advisor said,

I would also argue that the state is asking us to write reports that they’re reporting. And while there’s definitely value in directors knowing what they’re seeing, sometimes I wonder if it is more efficient to have someone from the state write that and share it with us if they’re writing it anyways. Efficiency is the question. What is the most efficient way to do that? There’s value in the data—I’m not arguing that at all. It’s finding the most efficient ways to get the data to the people who need to see it. We just had to do this huge desk review report, and what I understand is, we did the desk review and then they did the desk review. So why are multiple people doing the same thing when it’s time consuming? It’s very time consuming.

Some advisors noted that programs were being held to reporting deadlines but that DESE/ACLS had, on occasion, not held themselves to the same standards of professionalism. Advisors noted that there had been occasions when DESE/ACLS had said that important information or resources would be available to the field by a certain date, but then the expected date of delivery of that report or deadline would pass without comment or apparent consequence. One advisor said, “I think we’re often given information—‘Oh, you’re going to have it by this date’—but we get it three months later. However, our deadlines don’t change. So the timeframe within which we have to make the changes is really short, but they have a lot more flexibility to get out what they want to get out to us.”

**As discussed earlier, advisors said that recent changes to the field had resulted in programs being asked to do more—more data collection, more reporting, more training, more content coverage, more outreach—with the same amount of time and resources.**

Lastly, one advisor pointed out a disconnect between a curriculum that was commissioned by ACLS/DESE and students: “For math, our teachers have CALM, which is a great program. They say it will help with the HiSET but haven’t had time to implement it. It has 22 units. It’s designed for like a three-hour math class three times a week, but they have 45 minutes twice a week for math. So they have to get through number operations, algebra, geometry, and data in one year. CALM is a great program, but to turn around and implement it is a bear.”

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 6: Do SABES services reflect the needs of adult education programs?

##### Introduction

Director, teacher, and advisor focus group participants described strengths and opportunities for improving SABES. All three groups thought SABES was generally doing a good job of providing high-quality professional development opportunities that met many program needs. However, participants made many comments about areas of unmet need which might inform the content, format, or location/timing of future SABES offerings. The variety of delivery formats currently used by SABES was seen positively by all participants, although some individuals commented on general pros and cons of different formats (e.g., in-person was best but hard to get to; online training sometimes limited engagement among participants, but was easily accessible). All three groups reported challenges with attending in-person trainings and pointed out that some regions (i.e., eastern Massachusetts) offered more in-person opportunities than others (i.e., western Massachusetts).

There were a few notable differences in the comments offered by directors, teachers, and advisors. Directors brought up the issue of coaching, indicating that it was a strength of SABES. Teachers raised more issues concerning subject-related content and the strengths and challenges associated with those areas. Advisors discussed SABES’ attention to diverse learning styles, both among teachers and students.

##### Director Responses

**Directors reported a number of strengths of the SABES system: coaching services and training for coaches was good; the professional development workshops were of high quality; and workshops were offered through a variety of formats (in-person, online, and blended).** Some directors reported that their teachers embraced SABES training and that they had seen positive impacts from it. While directors commented on the ways SABES was clearly meeting the needs of their teachers and programs, it was less clear how and to what extent they looked to SABES for their own training needs.

“*The coaching provided through SABES is invaluable. I see the effect it has on our program. You can decide what you need help with, and the coach can come to your place and work with your teachers.”—*Administrator

There were some aspects of SABES that were appreciated and of specific relevance from the perspective of the directors. **They noted positively the addition of mental health as a training topic, the excellence of the revamped website and its resources, and the notification to directors when a staff member signed up for an offering. The directors also noted the value of having the opportunity to bring trainings by SABES on-site as a way to integrate the learning into a program and encourage teacher attendance.** This may have been particularly valuable for content related to curriculum development since directors reported it was often difficult to find time for staff-wide meetings related to this type of work. Finally, from their point of view, directors noted positively that SABES was listening to the field (again, the addition of mental health as a training topic) and also, to some extent, filling gaps in communications and training related to recent DESE policy changes and initiatives.

Regarding challenges or needs that were not being met, directors reported several issues. First, **directors indicated that teachers were facing several difficulties with SABES training, including: difficulty getting part-time teachers to in-person trainings at the times they were offered (often Monday-Friday afternoons), lack of advanced trainings for teachers who had already completed what SABES offered, and challenges traveling to trainings that were far away**. Second, they noted the challenge of integrating what teachers learn through professional development into program practice since doing so required time for sharing in-house. To both these points, at least one director would have had one teacher attend an in-person training and then share the content with the others as a way to address the problem of limited teacher availability for attending sessions. Lastly, they expressed that they would like more content offerings related to ABE, IT support, advisor support, Integrated Education and Training (IET), and transitions to college.

##### Teacher Responses

*“I love SABES. I go to their workshops. I use their templates. I talk with them about everything. They’re unbelievable. I think they are an excellent resource in that I think teachers should use them on a regular basis.”*—Teacher

Teachers expressed a variety of opinions concerning SABES, ranging from unconditionally enthusiastic to generally satisfied. The views expressed by individuals were related to their teaching circumstances, including such factors as content area, years of experience, program size, program resources, and program geographical location. Participation in workshops varied from *frequent* to *not yet* (for individuals new to their role) and covered the spectrum of workshop formats and timing (i.e., in-person, online, and blended; day, evening, Saturday).

**The teachers involved with ELA instruction reported that the ELA content offered by SABES met their needs. However, some involved with math and social studies expressed a desire for more professional development in those areas.** One teacher reported that she had a graduate degree in education, so she felt confident with pedagogy and teaching methods; she just needed more development in math but did not find that through SABES. Instead, she had been taking math classes at the local community college. With regard to social studies, one teacher expressed specifically that workshops integrating social studies into the ELA curriculum would be useful.

**Other aspects of SABES services that teachers considered to be strengths included lesson plan templates, staff availability for advice, and the quality of trainers.** In addition, SABES’ coverage of assessment certification and teaching methods were mentioned as useful and well done.

Issues associated with unmet teacher needs included: lack of in-person trainings within a one-hour commute, inaccurate assumptions concerning the technology available for student use (especially given limited web access), and insufficient advanced trainings. In addition, part-time teachers expressed concern that attending SABES trainings was a burden when they were already spending “many, many hours above” what they were paid to do.

##### Advisor Responses

**All advisor focus group participants agreed that SABES services generally reflected their needs.** Some indicated that they had participated frequently in SABES training, while others indicated that they participated less frequently.

*“I went to one last year on a Saturday, and it was worth my Saturday. It was all day. It was great.”*—Advisor

Advisors appreciated that trainings were offered in varied formats (e.g., in-person and online) and at various times. Participants noted that advisors, like students, had varied learning styles and that some benefited more from in-person trainings while others benefitted from online training. Participants noted that SABES personnel were generally very knowledgeable and also were aware of, and responsive to, diverse learning styles. Advisors also noted that they were able to reach out to SABES representatives to request training and—to some extent—customize their training experience. One participant noted that they had established a relationship with someone at SABES who would refer her to various training links. **Participants noted that most trainings were of high quality** and that only on rare occasions did they question the quality or value of a SABES professional development offering. One participant noted that they attended a training session on a Saturday and that the training was worth their time.

Some participants noted that **the location of in-person offerings was a primary challenge**. One advisor noted that it was not unusual for trainings to be offered in eastern portions of the state with early start times (9:00 a.m.), but it was not realistic to expect individuals from western portions of the state to attend such trainings. This was particularly frustrating to some participants because they noted that in-person trainings were offered less frequently in western Massachusetts (i.e., west of Worcester) and that trainings were canceled if they did not reach minimum enrollment thresholds. On a related note, one advisor said that there was no funding available to reimburse hotel expenses, making it more difficult to attend some distant trainings. Participants requested that additional in-person trainings be offered locally (i.e., within an hour of their location).

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 7D: What changes in the SABES system would help to improve instructional practices and teaching behavior?

##### Introduction

Director, teacher, and advisor focus group participants commented on the need for improving professional development delivery, whether through the expansion of online offerings, the provision of more local offerings in geographies with fewer programs, the scheduling of trainings so that they were accessible for both full- and part-time staff (some of whom may have other jobs), or expanding the content provided. As noted earlier, differences in the comments among groups included directors discussing the need for more IT support, including trainings associated with LACES; teachers looking for trainings that would integrate ELA with other content areas (such as social studies); and advisors reporting that they would like to have the option of completing training evaluations online (after events).

##### Director Responses

**Most of the potential improvements for SABES mentioned by directors were directly related to issues they saw as gaps or unmet needs discussed in the previous section**—for example, varying the timing and accessibility of trainings so that more staff (including part-time staff) could attend more easily.

Additional areas of improvement noted by directors included the provision of more IT support, more frequent offerings for essential trainings on BEST Plus and LACES (with particular support for onboarding new directors), increasing professional development offerings and support for advisors, developing trainings associated with ACLS requirements, and expanding the registration window for online offerings.

Again, in these discussions, directors responded more clearly about staff and program needs rather than their own.

##### Teacher Responses

*“More examples of things that someone who’s been doing this for a while or a well-seasoned teacher could take away and use them in a classroom without a lot of work. So like, formative assessments, something like a take-away. Like I said, there’s not enough prep time. Stuff you can take away, use in your classroom right away—that you may not know as a veteran teacher.”­*—Teacher

Similar to directors, **most of the teachers’ responses related to what might be improved about SABES were either previously relayed in their description of unmet needs or related to additional opportunities SABES might provide**. With regard to content, one participant felt that adding trainings focused on the integration of social studies into ELA was important, while another thought that adding more math training was important (although other participants were enthusiastic about the math training as currently offered). A third participant related a need for more advanced workshops that would provide materials and meet the needs of veteran teachers.

##### Advisor Responses

One participant noted that evaluation forms were passed out at events, with the expectation that they would be completed immediately. This participant requested that forms be made available online for a period of time after the event, to allow more time for reflection.

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

### Research Question 7F: How have changes to SABES affected the MA AE field? (teachers, advisors, administrators)

##### Introduction

Directors were generally more likely to be aware of the changes that had occurred with SABES (especially the shift from regional centers to content centers) and subsequently more likely to report how those changes had affected the field. All focus group participants who had been actively involved in the field under the regional center model were aware of the shift to content centers and had varying opinions as to whether that change was positive or negative. Participants expressed varied views as to whether recent changes in the professional development provision had resulted in increased quality or frequency of training for advisors.

##### Director Responses

**Directors saw many positive results from the recent SABES system changes**, including: improved responsiveness by SABES, increased availability of onsite training, addition of mental health as a training topic area, more focused resource centers, and a greatly improved website. Challenges reported by directors that were associated with SABES system changes included decreased support with the data system (LACES), the narrow sign-up window for online trainings, and perhaps limited communication between SABES and ACLS regarding what kinds of professional development should be prioritized. One director noted that involving UMass with the assessment trainings was a strength.

*“It is good that they have gone to the specialty of the center, which makes them a lot more focused and a better resource for whatever you are looking for. Good to have dedicated training centers for English, math, etc.”*—Director

##### Teacher Responses

**Most teachers expressed that they were unaware of the changes to SABES.** Experienced teachers knew that there had been a shift from regional-based to content-based centers, but that was the extent of their knowledge about recent changes to SABES. For those who did have experience under both the regional and content delivery models, some acknowledged the benefits of content-specific training centers, while others spoke about the benefits of their local, regional center, where they could more easily engage in in-person training. Teachers reported that they found current offerings to be high-quality, which reflected positively on the manner in which SABES was choosing trainers, and that staff were helpful.

*“I liked it better when it was regional rather than subject based but they do a great job and are responsive and helpful and supportive.”* —Teacher

##### Advisor Responses

Advisors said that changes to SABES had not yet had a substantial impact on their experience or practice in the field. Advisors noted that they and their colleagues had roles such as teacher or program administrator in addition to advising, and that observed changes to SABES had been more relevant to their non-advising role. They noted, for example, that SABES had had some impact on teachers (related to curriculum) and administrators (related to program management), and that similar changes had not yet impacted their advising practice.

Focus group participants said that they thought SABES had realized that they needed to provide more training to advisors and that—over the past few years—the training calendar had reflected an increased emphasis on serving advisors. Participants commended these efforts. For example, several participants noted that they were aware that SABES had offered trainings related to student mental health issues and that they had appreciated and valued those trainings. Two participants noted that they were aware that SABES was offering a training titled “The Art of Advising,” but only one focus group participant had had an opportunity to participate in that training.

##### Student Responses

Students were not asked questions associated with this item.

# Reflections and Considerations

The previous “Results” section summarized responses to the research questions as formulated in the focus group protocols. However, the discussions that occurred during the focus groups sometimes addressed topics that crossed research questions, and sometimes addressed topics beyond those raised in the protocols.

Additionally, UMDI and DESE/ACLS agreed that UMDI would consider issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the analysis of focus group data. While no questions in the protocols specifically addressed these issues, certain themes arose that were relevant.

##### Diversity

Focus group participants indicated that the population of adult education students was very diverse—and included individuals of varied ability, background, work status, geography, legal status, parental status, or any number of other potential characteristics students might use to identify themselves. Focus group participants indicated that programs did their best to welcome everyone. Teachers and advisors indicated that they were very invested in helping students overcome barriers to education.

Program staff said that it was challenging to meet the breadth of needs presented by students participating in adult education programs. Staff indicated that the number and diversity of needs presented by students stretched the limits of program budgets and resources. Some focus group participants acknowledged that programs sought to serve all individuals who came through their doors, regardless of how they might “count” in terms of official outcomes.

Focus group participants also expressed some concern about potential students who were not being served by the system. Some wondered if changes in the availability of resources like transportation or childcare, as discussed in the “Results” section, might make program attendance feasible for additional individuals in need. Learning more about those not being served was considered important to many focus group participants.

##### Equity

Program staff acknowledged the importance—and challenge—of working toward equity. Focus group participants said that staff sought to provide all students with opportunities for success. However, staff felt that they were being put in a position to choose between meeting their students’ needs and retaining funding for their programs (because some students were more likely to achieve outcomes that would reflect favorably on the program). Staff also lamented that some of the outcomes they and their students valued (e.g., registering to vote, achieving citizenship) were not recognized by the system.

Focus group participants did identify one point of inequity. Support resources for English-speaking students were more readily available than support service for Spanish-speaking students. More specifically, participants said that programs could use the MAPT assessment to help guide the learning of English-speakers, but that there was not an equivalent assessment available to help guide the learning of Spanish-speaking students. In addition, participants noted that the HiSET was counted for certain official outcomes, but the Spanish HSE was not. This confused some participants, who noted that the Spanish HSE was accepted by many colleges and employers as equivalent to the HiSET.

##### Inclusion

Staff in adult education programs were universally concerned with the inclusion of students with learning disabilities or challenges in their classes. All focus groups reported that more support was needed in order for programs to properly serve students with learning disabilities—in terms of professional development of teachers, appropriate curriculum materials, and helping students obtain official documentation of their disabilities in order to secure accommodations on the HiSET or GED.

Increased professional development around learning disabilities, provision of appropriate curriculum and learning materials, and serving as a liaison between programs and ETS and GED all represent potential opportunities for DESE/ACLS to increase inclusion of students with learning disabilities within programs.

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##### Serving as an ongoing resource

Multiple staff representatives spoke about how they encouraged students to return to the adult education program if they needed support. For these individuals, their service to students did not end with graduation or program completion. Rather, they served as an ongoing, stable resource that students could utilize if they ran into difficulties. Much as K-12 schooling has served as a formative experience for children that connected them with mentors and role models who might continue supporting them into adulthood, so too was the adult education system a significant influence for adult learners. Many students were in the adult education system precisely because they had not had supportive, ongoing, educational relationships within the traditional K-12 system that they could draw upon for advice or encouragement. As a result—focus group participants noted—adult education programs fulfilled a role of ongoing support that adult learners did not find elsewhere.

Participants acknowledged that adult education programs did not have the resources necessary to serve as an ongoing resources for all students. So being, this might represent an opportunity for DESE/ACLS to work with other state agencies (e.g., Department of Transitional Assistance, Department of Child and Family Services, etc.) or non-profit organizations (e.g., United Way, the network of community action councils, etc.) to develop innovative transfer/transitional initiatives that could help maintain supportive networks for current and former adult education students.

##### The importance of family literacy

Program staff—and students themselves—said that some people participate in adult education programs so that they can better support their children’s learning. Whether their goal was to read to an infant, or to understand the homework of school-age children, or to more effectively interact with teachers or other school personnel, or to serve as a role model for educational attainment, these adult learners were looking for direct connections to their children’s learning.

This group of learners might benefit from programming that not only teaches adult students content relevant to ESOL or the HiSET, but also teaches them about how their children learn and how they might be more effective teachers of, or educational advocates for, their children.

##### Knowledge of and access to materials and resources

Access to supplemental materials and resources was closely related to the specific experience and background of each teacher. Several teachers said that they frequently accessed free materials through various websites. One focus group participant—who was taking a graduate course—noted that they accessed peer-reviewed journals. Gathering this information into widely available resource lists could be very helpful not only for new teachers, but also for veteran educators. Some focus group participants suggested that it would be helpful for DESE/ACLS to offer/suggest more a more standardized set of materials, and also materials that are appropriate for adult learners in terms of diversity, learning needs, and content.

##### Purpose of education

Focus group participants acknowledged that program staff had widely varying views on the purpose of adult education. The variation in these views underlay many of the discussions about whether the Massachusetts adult education system was aligned with student, program, and/or regional workforce needs. Many teachers commented that some students were only interested in passing the HiSET and had no interest in any other aspect of education. Other teachers, however, commented that they did not like the atmosphere of “teaching to the test” and wanted to expose their students to a wider base of knowledge. Almost universally, teachers did not express that the purpose of education was employment/job-related. Instead, they saw a wide range of real-life applications underlying students’ motivations to learn, such as being able to read to younger children or help older children with their homework; being able to read and respond to letters and paperwork associated with healthcare, social services, or public assistance; being able to go to a doctor or other appointment without the aid of a friend or translator; and being able to participate more fully in civic and social life. While teachers did acknowledge that getting a (new) job was important for some of their students, they reported that students generally expressed interest in employment areas that were outside the recommended regional employment needs. Directing students only toward specific kinds of jobs and credentialing was not seen favorably by teachers. Further clarification regarding the purpose of adult education may be a starting point for increasing the alignment between policy and practice.

##### Professionalization of the field

Many of the challenges discussed in this document were associated with a single overarching theme: professionalization of the field of adult education. Adult education teachers are not paid as well as their public K-12 or higher education colleagues, are more frequently part-time, and do not have access to benefits. Many staff focus group participants commented that they felt the field was shifting toward having expectations and requirements similar to those of K-12 educators, without having the same level of training or support. Communication in what ways and to what extent DESE/ACLS supports the professionalization of the adult education field could help with policy implementation and ultimately student outcomes.

# Appendix A: Research Questions Tied to Focus Groups

A table that indicates which project evaluation questions apply to which focus groups (teachers, directors, advisors, and/or students).

# Appendix B: Director Focus Group Protocol

**DESE Adult Ed Project**

**Focus Group Protocol Documents - Directors**

Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to conduct a research evaluation of the Adult Education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as an Adult Education Director.

Study Purpose

As we introduced to you in the invitation to this discussion, ACLS/DESE would like to deepen its understanding of current processes in the field and the range of program needs, including program challenges and possible suggestions for improvements. We at UMDI are helping collect this information to help ACLS/DESE provide the best support possible for programs and improve the overall system. ACLS/DESE is also interested in conducting this research following recent system-wide changes designed, for example, to promote program flexibility and innovation, and bring in national experts for high quality professional development through SABES.

For this project, UMDI is conducting these focus groups, in addition to interviews and surveys, with program Directors, Advisors, Teachers, and Students. Your input in the conversation today about your experiences as Directors will help inform ACLS/DESE as it assesses the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for Adult Education in Massachusetts going forward.

Confidentiality

All of the information we obtain will be kept confidential and will be used only by members of the research team for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name, will not attribute any quotes to individuals, and will not identify the positions of the individuals interviewed. We will identify locations of our focus group meetings, but will make every effort to ensure information shared does not identify individuals.

Permission to Record

The focus group will take about 75 minutes. If you do not mind, I would like to record our conversation simply for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for transcribers of the material; these recordings are for the research team only. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. May I have your permission to record this conversation? Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the focus group.

**Pre-Discussion Survey – Directors (to be filled out on paper)**

(1) About how long have you been a Program Director, for your current program or any others? (Please check one.)

[ ] Less than two years

[ ] Two to five years

[ ] Six to ten years

[ ] More than ten years

(2) About how long have you worked in the Adult Education field (ABE, ESOL, etc.)? (Please check one.)

[ ] Less than two years

[ ] Two to five years

[ ] Six to ten years

[ ] More than ten years

(3) Feel free to answer one of these questions:

(A) What are the top three challenges for Adult Education programs? OR

(B) What are the top three impacts you hope Adult Education programs will have on students?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Focus Group Questions**

**We’re interested in hearing about the processes you use to shape the program and specifically to oversee teaching [quality] and monitor student progress. [15 minutes]**

First we’d like to understand your role in developing or offering support for teachers on the instructional content and teaching methods needed to best meet student needs.

1. [5 minutes] How do you help teachers to determine the instructional content they use and teaching methods?

o Prompt: Do you use whole staff meetings or trainings for this?

o Prompt: Do you use individual teacher meetings for this?

o Prompt: What other methods do you use, such as classroom observations, shared readings, memos, anything else?

o Prompt: Do you work with teachers on content?

o Prompt: Do you work with teachers on their teaching methods?

Next we’d like to understand your role in knowing whether students are making progress in their academic and workforce skills, as well as knowing whether and how students need additional support.

2. [5 minutes] What role do you play as Program Director, in monitoring students’ academic and workforce progress?

o Prompt: How do you communicate with teachers and advisors about the progress of individual students?

o Prompt: How and when do you know if students are not making academic or workforce progress?

o Prompt: What might you do, in your role, in response to a student’s lack of academic or workforce progress?

o Prompt: When students are not making academic or workforce progress, do you work directly with the teachers, the advisors, or the students?

3. [5 minutes] What support do teachers, advisors, programs and directors need in order to increase student learning and workforce skills?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for your program as whole?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for teachers in your program?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for advisors in your program?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for Directors at this point?

**The full Adult Education “system” includes DESE, ACLS and SABES, as a combination, in addition to all of the programs such as yours in the field. We’d like to talk about your view of the needs of the ABE system at different levels, and specifically how you try to gain knowledge or understanding of the student needs it’s designed to serve. [15 minutes]**

4. [5 minutes] How do you determine the needs of your students?

o Prompt: What methods do you use? Conversations, surveys, group discussions?

o Prompt: What student needs do you feel you are able to gather information about?

o Prompt: What student needs are you concerned about, but have difficulty gathering information?

5. [5 minutes] What are the most pressing needs of your current students?

o Prompt: Please include educational, workforce, and other needs.

o Prompt: Which of these needs do you feel your program can address?

6. [5 minutes] Beyond their needs, students may have long-term goals in coming to your program. How well do you feel you know the long-term goals for participating students?

o Prompt: What are the long-term goals you have heard students express?

o Prompt: What hurdles do you see to students achieving their goals?

o Prompt: What hurdles do you see in your helping them achieve their goals?

**Again, the full Adult Education “system” includes DESE, ACLS and SABES, as a combination, in addition to all of the programs such as yours in the field. We’re interested in your perspective on how well the Adult Education system overall meets the needs of students and of AE professionals, and how the system could be better aligned with those needs. [30 minutes]**

7. [5 minutes] How does the overall Adult Education system reflect an understanding of, and meet the needs of, adult learners?

8. [5 minutes] What adult learner needs does the Adult Education system not meet well? Along the same lines, which adult learner needs pose the most challenges for the system?

9. [5 minutes] Thinking about the needs you see, what changes would you suggest, at any level (the larger system, or your program), to help better address the needs of adult learners and programs?

The Adult Education system is also intended to help regions meet their workforce needs, as it prepares people to enter jobs in needed fields and to succeed in those jobs.

10. [5 minutes] What suggestions do you have for what the Adult Education system or programs might do differently to better help regions meet their workforce needs?

o Prompt: How much are these needs part of your program planning?

o Prompt: Is there something the system could do differently to help meet these needs?

11. [5 minutes] What is your view of the current working relationship between ACLS and the programs in the field?

o Prompt: What would you say is going well?

o Prompt: What could be improved?

o Prompt: What, if anything, is missing?

**The adult education system is changing and some of these changes may be impacting you in your role. The changes were in several areas including [READ FROM LIST SELECTIVELY – 5 minutes]:**

**o New requirements for providers based on WIOA legislation)**

**o Process and policies related to Program Quality and Site Visits**

**o Student Assessment policy and process, including for data collection (MSG, PoPs)**

**o The Data Collection Platform, from SMARTT to LACES**

**o Program design options (to encourage flexibility and innovation)**

**o Newly designed process for programs to apply for ACLS funding**

**o Changes to the Application Submission process (WiseHive, EdGrants)**

12. [5 minutes] In your experience, how have these changes impacted Adult Education programs, positively or negatively, if at all?

o Prompt: Have you noticed any recent changes in the field, related to student enrollment or staff retention?

o Prompt: Do you think any of the recent changes you’ve seen in the field are related to the system changes in the MA ABE system?

o Prompt: What changes in your program did the new flexibilities support? Do you think you have enough flexibility now?

**We’re interested in talking about your experience with, and perspective on, professional development opportunities, including those offered by SABES. [15 minutes]**

13. [5 minutes] Based on your experience, how well do SABES services and workshops match your needs, your program’s needs, and the needs of teachers and advisors for professional development in order to help meet the needs of students in your programs?

o Prompt: What workshops would you like SABES to offer for directors, teachers, or advisors?

o Prompt: Which SABES workshops have met your professional development needs as a director?

o Follow-up: If you or others on your staff do NOT participate in SABES, why not?

14. [5 minutes] Overall, what are the strengths and limitations of SABES in serving your program staff’s professional development needs? Please consider in particular how SABES might help improve instructional practices and teaching behaviors.

o Prompt: What are the benefits/strengths/positives of working with SABES, from your view as a program director?

o Prompt: What suggestions do you have for improving SABES services for the needs of your program, teachers, advisors, and directors?

o Prompt: What types of communications do you receive from SABES, about workshops or opportunities?

Introduction to the next question: SABES has also recently made some changes. One specific change is moving from regional centers to statewide content centers that feature PD from national experts.

15. [5 minutes] To the extent that you’ve been aware of these changes to SABES, how have they affected teachers, advisors, directors and programs in the MA AE field, if at all?

o Prompt: What have been any positive impacts? Please consider the positive impacts for teachers, advisors, directors, and programs.

o Prompt: What have been any negative impacts? Please consider the negative impacts for teachers, advisors, directors, and programs.

**Wrap-Up Question [3-5 minutes]**

16. To conclude, we’re having this conversation in order to inform the ACLS office about your perspective as directors on working in these AE programs for students and meeting student needs. Is there anything else you would like to add that we didn't cover about your work in this field? [Have we missed anything in our conversation that you’d like to add?] WRAP-UP

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your thoughts.

# Appendix C: Teacher Focus Group Protocols (English & Spanish)

**DESE Adult Ed Project**

**Focus Group Protocol Documents – Teachers @ Mujeres**

Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to conduct a research evaluation of the Adult Education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as an Adult Education Teacher.

DESE is the Massachusetts state department that oversees K-12 education, including ABE and ESOL education for adults. ACLS is the division within DESE that specifically funds and coordinates ABE and ESOL instruction across the state.

Study Purpose

As we introduced to you in the invitation to this discussion, ACLS/DESE would like to deepen its understanding of current processes in the field and the range of program needs, including program challenges and possible suggestions for improvements. We at UMDI are helping collect this information to help ACLS/DESE provide the best support possible for programs and improve the overall system. ACLS/DESE is also interested in conducting this research following recent system-wide changes designed, for example, to promote program flexibility and innovation, and bring in national experts for high quality professional development through SABES.

For this project, UMDI is conducting these focus groups, in addition to interviews and surveys, with program Directors, Advisors, Teachers, and Students. Your input in the conversation today about your experiences as Teachers will help inform ACLS/DESE as it assesses the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for Adult Education in Massachusetts going forward.

Confidentiality

All of the information we obtain will be kept confidential and will be used only by members of the research team for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name, will not attribute any quotes to individuals, and will not identify the positions of the individuals interviewed. We will identify locations of our focus group meetings, but will make every effort to ensure information shared does not identify individuals.

Permission to Record

The focus group will take about 60 minutes. If you do not mind, I would like to record our conversation simply for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for transcribers of the material; these recordings are for the research team only. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. May I have your permission to record this conversation? Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the focus group.

**Pre-Discussion Survey – Teachers (to be filled out on paper)**

(1) About how long have you worked as a teacher with this program specifically? (Please check one.)

[ ] Less than two years

[ ] Two to five years

[ ] Six to ten years

[ ] More than ten years

(2) About how long have you worked in the Adult Education field (ABE, ESOL, etc.)? (Please check one.)

[ ] Less than two years

[ ] Two to five years

[ ] Six to ten years

[ ] More than ten years

(3) Which of the following types of classes do you teach? (Please check all that apply.)

[ ] ABE classes

[ ] ESOL/ESL classes

(4) Feel free to answer one of these questions:

(A) What are the top three challenges for Adult Education programs? OR

(B) What are the top three impacts you hope Adult Education programs will have on students?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Group Questions**

**We’re interested in hearing about how you shape teaching content and monitor student progress. [10 minutes]**

1. [5 minutes] What do you take into account when developing teaching content and the teaching methods you use?

o Prompt: Are there particular resources you use to develop content for students?

o Prompt: How do you make decisions about what content to teach?

o Prompt: What teaching methods do you use and why?

2. [5 minutes] How do you determine students’ learning needs and monitor their progress?

o Prompt: How do you find out what a student needs to learn? A pre-test?

o Prompt: How would you know if students were not progressing?

o Prompt: If a student isn’t progressing, or is having trouble, what action might you take?

o Prompt: What additional support is available to students who are not progressing?

**QUESTIONS A – SPECIAL FOR Mujeres [5 minutes]**

A. Are there special challenges your students face that students in other programs do not? Are there services that your program offers that help overcome those challenges?

**The full Adult Education “system” includes DESE, ACLS and SABES, as a combination, in addition to all of the programs such as yours in the field. We’d like to talk about needs at all levels of the system related to Adult Education, from programs to teachers to students, and how you gain knowledge specifically of student needs. [26 minutes]**

3. [5 minutes] How do you determine the needs of your students?

o Prompt: What methods do you use? Conversations, surveys, group discussions?

o Prompt: What student needs do you feel you are able to gather information about?

o Prompt: What student needs are you concerned about, but have difficulty gathering information?

4. [5 minutes] What are the most pressing needs of your current students?

o Prompt: Please include educational, workforce, and other needs.

o Prompt: Which of these needs do you feel your program can address?

5. [5 minutes] Beyond their needs, students may have long-term goals in coming to your program. How well do you feel you know the long-term goals for participating students?

o Prompt: What are the long-term goals you have heard students express?

o Prompt: What hurdles do you see to students achieving their goals?

o Prompt: What hurdles do you see in your helping them achieve their goals?

6. [5 minutes] What support do teachers in your program need in order to increase student learning and workforce skills?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for teachers in your program?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for your program as whole?

7. [3 minutes] Thinking about the needs you see, what changes would you suggest for your program, to help better address the needs of adult learners and programs?

8. [3 minutes] What suggestions do you have about what the Adult Education system (ACLS/DESE/programs generally) might do differently to better address the needs of the students in your program?

**The adult education system is changing and some of these changes may be impacting you in your role. The changes were in several areas including [READ FROM LIST SELECTIVELY – 3 minutes]:**

**o New requirements for providers based on WIOA legislation)**

**o Process and policies related to Program Quality and Site Visits**

**o Student Assessment policy and process, including for data collection (MSG, PoPs)**

**o The Data Collection Platform, from SMARTT to LACES**

**o Standards and curriculum requirements**

9. [3 minutes] To the extent that you’ve been aware of these changes, how have they impacted your programs, positively or negatively, if at all?

**o** Prompt: Have you noticed any recent changes in the field, related to student enrollment or staff retention?

**o** Prompt: Do you think any of the recent changes you’ve seen in the field are related to the system changes in the MA ABE system?

**We’re interested in talking about your experience with and perspective on SABES. [5 minutes]**

10. [5 minutes] What could be improved about the SABES system to better support teachers who speak languages other than English?

o Prompt: What suggestions do you have for improving SABES services? Networking? Resource lists? PD? Other kinds of services?

Wrap-Up Question [3-5 min]

11. To conclude, we’re having this conversation in order to inform the ACLS office about your perspective as teachers on working in these AE programs for students and meeting student needs. Is there anything else you would like to add that we didn't cover about your work in this field? [Have we missed anything in our conversation that you’d like to add?] WRAP-UP

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your thoughts.

**Maestro FG Protocolo 9-27-19 JS 1**

**Proyecto de Educación de Adultos DESE**

**Documentos del protocolo del grupo focal - Teachers @ Mujeres**

Introducción

Mi nombre es \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, y trabajo con UMass Donahue Institute, una organización de investigación independiente que ha sido contratada por la división de Servicios de Aprendizaje para Adultos y Comunidad (ACLS) del Departamento de Educación Primaria y Secundaria de Massachusetts (DESE) para llevar a cabo una evaluación de investigación de El sistema de educación de adultos en Massachusetts. Gracias por tomarse este tiempo para hablar conmigo sobre su experiencia desde su perspectiva como maestro de educación de adultos .

DESE es el departamento de estado de Massachusetts que supervisa la educación K-12, incluida la educación ABE y ESOL para adultos. ACLS es la división dentro de DESE que financia y coordina específicamente la instrucción ABE y ESOL en todo el estado.

Propósito del estudio

Como le presentamos en la invitación a esta discusión , ACLS / DESE desea profundizar su comprensión de los procesos actuales en el campo y la gama de necesidades del programa , incluidos los desafíos del programa y las posibles sugerencias de mejoras. En UMDI estamos ayudando a recopilar esta información para ayudar a ACLS / DESE a proporcionar el mejor soporte posible para los programas y mejorar el sistema en general. ACL S / DESE también está interesado en realizar esta investigación luego de los recientes cambios en todo el sistema diseñados, por ejemplo, para promover la flexibilidad y la innovación del programa, y atraer expertos nacionales para el desarrollo profesional de alta calidad a través de SABES.

Para este proyecto, UMDI está llevando a cabo estos grupos focales, además de entrevistas y encuestas, con directores de programas, asesores, maestros y estudiantes. Su aporte en la conversación de hoy sobre sus experiencias como maestros ayudará a informar a ACLS / DESE a medida que evalúa las fortalezas, desafíos y oportunidades para la educación de adultos en Massachusetts en el futuro.

Confidencialidad

Toda la información que obtengamos se mantendrá confidencial y será utilizada solo por los miembros del equipo de investigación para los fines de este estudio. No utilizaremos su nombre, no atribuiremos ninguna cita a las personas y no identificaremos las posiciones de las personas entrevistadas. Identificaremos las ubicaciones de nuestras reuniones de grupos focales, pero haremos todo lo posible para garantizar que la información compartida no identifique a las personas .

Permiso para grabar

El grupo focal tomará aproximadamente 60 minutos. Si no le importa, me gustaría grabar nuestra conversación simplemente para tomar notas. Nadie fuera de nuestro equipo de recopilación de datos escuchará o tendrá acceso a la grabación, excepto los transcriptores del material; Estas grabaciones son solo para el equipo de investigación. Si desea que apague la grabadora en cualquier momento, hágamelo saber. ¿Puedo tener su permiso para grabar esta conversación? Antes de comenzar, ¿tiene alguna pregunta para mí? Ok, estoy encendiendo la grabadora y comenzaremos el grupo focal.

**Encuesta previa a la discusión - Maestros (para completar en papel)**

(1) ¿Aproximadamente cuánto tiempo ha trabajado como profesor en este programa específicamente ? (Por favor marque uno)

[] Menos de dos años

[] T wo a cinco años

[] Seis a diez años

[] Más de diez años

(2) ¿Aproximadamente cuánto tiempo ha trabajado en el campo de la educación de adultos ( ABE , ES O L, etc.)? (Por favor marque uno)

[] Menos de dos años

[] T wo a cinco años

[] Seis a diez años

[] Más de diez años

(3) ¿Cuál de los siguientes tipos de clases enseña ? (Por favor marque todos los que apliquen.)

[] Clases de ABE

[] Clases de ESOL / ESL

(4) No dude en responder una de estas preguntas :

(A) ¿Cuáles son los tres desafíos principales para los programas de educación de adultos? O

(B) ¿Cuáles son los tres principales impactos que espera que los programas de Educación de Adultos tengan en los estudiantes?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Preguntas del grupo focal**

**Nos interesa saber cómo da forma al contenido de la enseñanza y supervisa el progreso de los estudiantes. [10 minutos ]**

1. [5 minutos] ¿Qué tiene en cuenta al desarrollar contenido de enseñanza y los métodos de enseñanza que utiliza?

o Aviso: ¿Existen recursos particulares que use para desarrollar contenido para los estudiantes?

o Aviso: ¿Cómo tomas decisiones sobre qué contenido enseñar?

o Aviso: ¿Qué métodos de enseñanza utiliza y por qué ?

2. [5 minutos] ¿Cómo determina las necesidades de aprendizaje de los estudiantes y monitorea su progreso?

o Aviso: ¿Cómo saber qué necesita aprender un estudiante? ¿Una prueba previa?

o Aviso: ¿Cómo saber si los estudiantes no progresan?

o Aviso: si un estudiante no progresa o tiene problemas , ¿qué medidas podría tomar?

o Aviso: ¿Qué apoyo adicional está disponible para los estudiantes que no están progresando?

**PREGUNTAS A - ESPECIAL PARA Mujeres [5 minutos]**

Una . ¿Existen desafíos especiales a los que se enfrentan sus alumnos que los alumnos de otros programas no? ¿Hay servicios que ofrece su programa que ayuden a superar esos desafíos?

**El "sistema" completo de educación para adultos incluye DESE, ACLS y SABES, como una combinación, además de todos los programas como el suyo en el campo. Nos gustaría hablar de las necesidades en todos los niveles del sistema relacionados con la educación de adultos , de los programas a los maestros a los estudiantes, un nd cómo ganancia sabe cornisa sp ecifically de las necesidades del estudiante. [26 minutos ]**

3. [5 minutos] ¿Cómo determina las necesidades de sus alumnos?

o Aviso: ¿Qué métodos utilizas? Conversaciones, encuestas, discusiones grupales?

o Aviso: ¿Qué necesidades de los estudiantes cree que puede reunir información?

o Aviso: ¿Qué necesidades de los estudiantes le preocupan, pero tienen dificultades para recopilar información?

4. [5 minutos] ¿Cuáles son las necesidades más apremiantes de sus estudiantes actuales?

o Aviso: incluya las necesidades educativas, laborales y de otro tipo.

o Aviso: ¿Cuáles de estas necesidades cree que su programa puede abordar?

5. [5 minutos] Más allá de sus necesidades, los estudiantes pueden tener objetivos a largo plazo para asistir a su programa. ¿Qué tan bien cree que conoce los objetivos a largo plazo para los estudiantes participantes?

o Aviso: ¿Cuáles son los objetivos a largo plazo que ha escuchado a los estudiantes expresar?

o Aviso: ¿Qué obstáculos ve para los estudiantes que logran sus objetivos?

o Aviso: ¿Qué obstáculos ve en ayudarlos a alcanzar sus objetivos?

6. [5 minutos] ¿Qué apoyo necesitan los maestros en su programa para aumentar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes y las habilidades de la fuerza laboral ?

o Aviso : ¿Cuáles son las principales necesidades o apoyo necesario para los maestros en su programa?

o Preguntar: ¿Cuáles son las principales necesidades , o apoyo que necesitan, para su p rograma en su conjunto ?

7. [3 minutos] Pensando en las necesidades que ve, ¿qué cambios sugeriría para su programa , para ayudar a abordar mejor las necesidades de los estudiantes y programas adultos?

8. [3 minutos] ¿Qué sugerencias tiene sobre lo que el sistema de Educación de Adultos (ACLS / DESE / programas en general) podría hacer de manera diferente para abordar mejor las necesidades de los estudiantes en su programa ?

**El sistema de educación de adultos está cambiando y algunos de estos cambios pueden estar impactando en su papel. Los cambios fueron en varias áreas, incluyendo [LEER DE LA LISTA SELECTIVAMENTE - 3 minutos]:**

**o Nuevos requisitos para proveedores basados en la legislación WIOA)**

**o Proceso y políticas relacionadas con la calidad del programa y las visitas al sitio**

**o Política y proceso de evaluación del estudiante, incluso para la recopilación de datos (MSG, PoP )**

**o La plataforma de recopilación de datos, de SMARTT a LACES**

**o Estándares y requisitos curriculares**

9. [3 minutos] En la medida en que haya estado al tanto de estos cambios , ¿cómo han impactado sus programas, positiva o negativamente, si es que lo han hecho?

o Aviso: ¿Ha notado algún cambio reciente en el campo, relacionado con la inscripción de estudiantes o la retención de personal?

o Aviso: ¿Cree que alguno de los cambios recientes que ha visto en el campo están relacionados con los cambios del sistema en el sistema MA ABE?

**Estamos interesados en hablar acerca de su experiencia con y perspectiva sobre el SABES. [ 5 minutos ]**

10. [5 minutos] ¿Qué podría mejorarse del sistema SABES para apoyar mejor a los maestros que hablan otros idiomas además del inglés ?

o Aviso: ¿Qué sugerencias tiene para mejorar los servicios de SABES? ¿Redes? Listas de recursos? PD? ¿Otros tipos de servicios?

**Pregunta de cierre [3-5 min]**

11. T o concluir, estamos teniendo esta conversación con el fin de informar a la oficina de ACLS acerca de su perspectiva como t eachers en trabajar en estos AE programas para los estudiantes y la satisfacción de las necesidades del estudiante . ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría agregar que no cubrimos sobre su trabajo en este campo? [ ¿Nos hemos perdido algo en nuestra conversación que le gustaría agregar?] RESUMEN

**Muchas gracias por su tiempo y por compartir sus pensamientos.**

# Appendix D: Advisor Focus Group Protocol

**DESE Adult Ed Project**

**Focus Group Protocol Documents – Advisors**

Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to conduct a research evaluation of the Adult Education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as an Adult Education Advisor.

DESE is the Massachusetts state department that oversees K-12 education, including ABE and ESOL education for adults. ACLS is the division within DESE that specifically funds and coordinates ABE and ESOL instruction across the state.

Study Purpose

As we introduced to you in the invitation to this discussion, ACLS/DESE would like to deepen its understanding of current processes in the field and the range of program needs, including program challenges and possible suggestions for improvements. We at UMDI are helping collect this information to help ACLS/DESE provide the best support possible for programs and improve the overall system. ACLS/DESE is also interested in conducting this research following recent system-wide changes designed, for example, to promote program flexibility and innovation, and bring in national experts for high quality professional development through SABES.

For this project, UMDI is conducting these focus groups, in addition to interviews and surveys, with program Directors, Advisors, Teachers, and Students. Your input in the conversation today about your experiences as Advisors will help inform ACLS/DESE as it assesses the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for Adult Education in Massachusetts going forward.

Confidentiality

All of the information we obtain will be kept confidential and will be used only by members of the research team for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name, will not attribute any quotes to individuals, and will not identify the positions of the individuals interviewed. We will identify locations of our focus group meetings, but will make every effort to ensure information shared does not identify individuals.

Permission to Record

The focus group will take about 60 minutes. If you do not mind, I would like to record our conversation simply for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for transcribers of the material; these recordings are for the research team only. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. May I have your permission to record this conversation? Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the focus group.

**Pre-Discussion Survey – Advisors (to be filled out on paper)**

(1) About how long have you worked as an advisor with this program specifically? (Please check one.)

[ ] Less than two years

[ ] Two to five years

[ ] Six to ten years

[ ] More than ten years

(2) About how long have you worked in the Adult Education field (ABE, ESOL, etc.)? (Please check one.)

[ ] Less than two years

[ ] Two to five years

[ ] Six to ten years

[ ] More than ten years

(3) What would you say are the top three responsibilities you have as a program advisor? You may consider the responsibilities that take the most time, or those that are the most central to your role in some other way.

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(4) Feel free to answer one of these questions:

(A) What are the top three challenges for Adult Education programs? OR

(B) What are the top three impacts you hope Adult Education programs will have on students?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Focus Group Questions**

**We’re interested in hearing about how you are involved as advisors in the program. [6 minutes]**

1. [3 minutes] We’re interested in how you contribute to shaping teaching content and teaching methods, if at all. First, do any of you work with teachers on teaching content and methods used? [If anyone says yes:] Can you describe your role in these areas?

o Prompt: How, if at all, do you work with teachers on academic content?

o Prompt: How, if at all, do you work with teachers on workforce skills content?

o Prompt: How, if at all, do you work with teachers on pedagogy/teaching methods?

2. [3 minutes] Similarly, we’re interested in how you work with teachers or your director to monitor student progress, if at all. Can you describe your role in this area?

o Prompt: How if at all do you monitor the students’ workforce skills development, in your role as Advisor?

o Prompt: How if at all do you monitor the students’ learning gains, in your role as Advisor?

o Prompt: How, if at all, would you know if a student isn’t progressing, is having trouble, or is not attending, and what might you do in your role as Advisor to address that situation?

**The full Adult Education “system” includes DESE, ACLS, and SABES, as a combination, in addition to all of the programs such as yours in the field. We’d like to talk about your view of the needs of the ABE system at different levels, and specifically how you try to gain knowledge or understanding of the student needs it’s designed to serve. [20 minutes]**

3. [5 minutes] How do you determine the needs of your students?

o Prompt: What methods do you use? Conversations, surveys, group discussions?

o Follow-up: What student needs do you feel you are able to gather information about?

o Prompt: What student needs are you concerned about, but have difficulty gathering information?

4. [5 minutes] What are the most pressing needs of your current students?

o Prompt: Please include educational, workforce, and other needs.

o Prompt: Which of these needs do you feel your program can address?

5. [5 minutes] Beyond their needs, students may have long-term goals in coming to your program. How well do you feel you know the long-term goals for participating students?

o Prompt: What are the long-term goals you have heard students express?

o Prompt: What hurdles do you see to students achieving their goals?

o Prompt: What hurdles do you see in your helping them achieve their goals?

6. [5 minutes] What support do advisors and programs need in order to increase student learning and workforce skills?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for your program as a whole?

o Prompt: What are the top needs, or support needed, for advisors in your program?

**Again, the full Adult Education “system” includes DESE, ACLS and SABES, as a combination, in addition to all of the programs such as yours in the field. We’re interested in your perspective on how well the Adult Education system overall meets the needs of students and of AE professionals, and how the system could be better aligned with those needs. [12 minutes]**

7. [3 minutes] How does the overall Adult Education system, as it is now, reflect an understanding of, and meet the needs of, adult learners?

8. [3 minutes] What adult learner needs does the Adult Education system not meet well now? Along the same lines, which adult learner needs pose the most challenges for the system?

9. [3 minutes] Thinking about the needs you see, what changes would you suggest, at any level (the larger system, or your program), to help better address the needs of adult learners and programs?

10. [3 minutes] What suggestions do you have about what the Adult Education system, programs or advisors might do differently to better help the regions meet their workforce needs?

**The adult education system is changing and some of these changes may be impacting you in your role. The changes were in several areas including [READ FROM LIST SELECTIVELY – 3 minutes]:**

**o New requirements for providers based on WIOA legislation)**

**o Process and policies related to Program Quality and Site Visits**

**o Student Assessment policy and process, including for data collection (MSG, PoPs)**

**o The Data Collection Platform, from SMARTT to LACES**

**o Standards and curriculum requirements**

11. [3 minutes] To the extent that you’ve been aware of these changes, how have they impacted Adult Education programs, positively or negatively, if at all?

o Prompt: Have you noticed any recent changes in the field, related to student enrollment or staff retention?

o Prompt: Do you think any of the recent changes you’ve seen in the field are related to the system changes in the MA ABE system?

**We’re interested in talking about your experience with and perspective on SABES. [20 minutes]**

12. [5 minutes] How well do SABES services and workshops match what advisors need for professional development and to help meet the needs of students in your programs?

o Prompt: What workshops would you like SABES to offer, that they currently do not offer?

o Prompt: Which SABES workshops have met your professional development needs?

13. [5 minutes] What works well about how SABES provides services to Advisors?

o Prompt: What are the benefits/positives of working with SABES?

o Prompt: What do you believe SABES provides that is of value to you?

14. [5 minutes] What could be improved about the SABES system to better meet Advisors’ professional development needs?

o Prompt: What suggestions do you have for improving SABES services?

o Prompt: How good (or not good) is the communication you receive from SABES, about workshops or opportunities?

SABES has also recently made some changes. One specific change is moving from regional centers to statewide content centers that feature PD from national experts.

15. [5 minutes] To the extent that you’ve been aware of these changes to SABES, how have they affected you as an advisor in the MA AE field, if at all?

o Prompt: What have been any positive impacts? Please consider the positive impacts for teachers or advisors.

o Prompt: What have been any negative impacts? Please consider the negative impacts for teachers or advisors.

**Wrap-Up Question [3-5 min]**

16. To conclude, we’re having this conversation in order to inform the ACLS office about your perspective as advisors on working in these AE programs for students and meeting student needs. Is there anything else you would like to add that we didn't cover about your work in this field? [Have we missed anything in our conversation that you’d like to add?] WRAP-UP

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your thoughts.

# Appendix E: Student Focus Group Protocols (English & Spanish)

**DESE Adult Ed Project**

**Focus Group Protocol Documents - Students**

Introduction

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute (UMDI), an independent research organization that has been contracted by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to do some research on Adult Education in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience and opinions as a student in this program.

Study Purpose

ACLS/DESE provides funding for these programs, and they would like to know more about what is working well, and what could be improved. We are talking to you to help ACLS/DESE provide the best support possible for programs like this one you attend.

We are also going to talk with the Directors, Advisors and Teachers. This conversation today will help tell ACLS/DESE learn more about how they can help programs like these, and students like you, in the future.

What is a Focus Group?

A focus group is a way for researchers like me to collect information on specific questions from a small group of people who are part of a larger group. The answers you personally give to questions are put together with answers from other people in the group (which are then put together with the answers from other groups) to come up with a picture of the program.

Confidentiality

All of the information we obtain will be kept confidential and will be used only by members of the research team for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name, will not attribute any quotes to individuals, and will not identify the positions of the individuals interviewed. We will identify locations of our focus group meetings, but will make every effort to ensure information shared does not identify individuals.

Permission to Record

The focus group will take about 60 minutes. If you do not mind, I would like to record our conversation simply for note-taking purposes. These recordings are for me and the other people doing the research; no one here at the program or at DESE will hear this recording. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. May I have your permission to record this conversation? Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the focus group.

**Focus Group Pre-Discussion Survey – Students (We will ask these questions orally and request a show of hands for response – this will not be a paper survey)**

(1) What Adult Education program(s) are you enrolled in right now? Choices:

[ ] ABE classes

[ ] ESOL/ESL classes

(2) When did you first come to this program? Choices:

[ ] Less than two months ago

[ ] Between two and six months ago

[ ] More than six months ago

(3) What subjects have you studied here so far? Choices:

[ ] Reading and writing

[ ] Learning to speak English

[ ] Math

[ ] Another subject

**Focus Group Questions**

**I’d like to ask how you found this program and what you hope to get out of it. [20 minutes]**

1. [5 minutes] Why did you come to this program? Why are you attending class?

o Prompt: What do you want to accomplish? What are your goals?

o Prompt: How do you want this program to help you?

2. [5 minutes] Thinking back, how did you first hear about this program?

o Prompt: How difficult was it for you to find the program and sign up?

o Prompt: How difficult was it for you to start the program?

3. [5 minutes] What has helped you make progress toward achieving your goals, in taking Adult Education classes?

o Prompt: What has helped you to attend your classes?

o Prompt: What has helped you to learn new material?

o Prompt: What has helped you to make progress toward completing your credential?

4. [5 minutes] What has made it hard for you to make progress in taking Adult Education classes? Achieve your goals?

o Prompt: What has made it hard for you to attend your classes?

o Prompt: What has made it hard for you to learn new material?

o Prompt: What has made it hard for you to make progress toward completing your credential?

**I’d like to hear how helpful [valuable] you think your programs are. [10 min]**

5. [5 minutes] What have been the most helpful [valuable] parts of the program for you?

o Prompt: Have you gained skills [learned things you’ll use]?

o Prompt: What information or school [academic] skills have been the most helpful?

o Prompt: Have you learned anything that can/will help you on the job?

6. [5 minutes] How is your participation in the program or achieving your goals (GED, English proficiency, etc.) important for your future?

o Prompt: Do you think your participation will affect your job plans? How? Could it affect getting a job in the health field, or hospitality, or maybe technology, if that is what you want to do?

o Prompt: What benefits do you anticipate … think you will see when you have achieved your goal?

o Prompt: What are your plans after you complete your ABE or ESOL classes?

**I’m interested in hearing about your experience with the program, including the staff and teachers here. [12 minutes]**

7. [3 minutes] How do the staff find out what you need from your class/course?

o Prompt: Do staff ask you what you need?

o Prompt: Do you fill out a form, take a test, or do a survey that asks what you need?

o Prompt: Do you informally tell staff what you need?

o Prompt: How could staff get better information about what you need from this program?

8. [3 minutes] Some of you may have worked with an advisor here. Can you tell us how the advisor helped you?

9. [3 minutes] What do you find really helpful about the program – that you wouldn’t want to see changed?

10. [3 minutes] How could the program be changed to better meet your needs?

o Prompt: What else could the program do to help you?

o Prompt: What [logistical] changes, like class schedules or location, would help you come to class more often?

o Prompt: What changes would help you achieve your learning goals?

o Prompt: What changes would help you achieve your job goals?

o Prompt: Would using a mobile app or online class help you achieve your goals?

o Prompt: How could teachers or advisors be more helpful?

11. If you could change one thing about the program, what would you change?

**I’m also interested in hearing how you think students feel when they come to Adult Education programs. [8 minutes]**

12. [4 minutes] Some people might come to the program, and then decide not to take classes. What do you think might stop some people from taking classes or enrolling here?

o Prompt: Do you feel welcome? Do you think others feel welcome? Why or why not?

o Prompt: How many of you know someone who has thought about coming to a class, but hasn’t come yet? Why do you think these people don’t come? What could make the program or classes be better for them? Examples: class schedules, location, different way of teaching, teach different subjects, they have goals the program/class/course cannot meet? More classes so people won’t be on a long wait list?

13. [4 minutes] What do you think might cause some people to leave the program/class/course?

o Prompt: Do you feel welcome? Do you think others feel welcome?

o Prompt: How many of you know someone who has left a program/class/course? Do you know why they left? How do you think the program or classes could be better for students who left? Examples: class schedules, location, different way of teaching, teach different subjects, childcare, they have goals the program/class/course cannot meet?

Wrap-Up Question [3-5 min]

14. Before we end, we want to make sure you have a chance to tell us everything you think is helpful. The information from this conversation will help the state agency funding these programs better understand your experience coming to classes here. They want to know how the programs or classes could be better for you and other students. Have we missed anything about your experience that you’d like to add? [Is there anything else you’d like to tell us about?] WRAP-UP

Thank you so much for your time and sharing your thoughts.

**Proyecto de Educación de Adultos DESE**

**Documentos del protocolo del grupo focal - Estudiantes**

Introducción

Mi nombre es \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, y trabajo con el Instituto UMass Donahue (UMDI), una organización de investigación independiente que ha sido contratada por la división de Servicios de Aprendizaje para Adultos y la Comunidad (ACLS) del Departamento de Educación Primaria y Secundaria de Massachusetts (DESE) para hacer algunos investigación sobre educación de adultos en Massachusetts. Gracias por tomarse este tiempo para hablar conmigo sobre su experiencia y opiniones como estudiante en este programa.

Propósito del estudio

ACLS / DESE proporciona fondos para estos programas, y les gustaría saber más sobre lo que funciona bien y lo que podría mejorarse. Estamos hablando con usted para ayudar a ACLS / DESE a proporcionar el mejor apoyo posible para programas como este al que asiste.

También vamos a hablar con los directores, asesores y maestros. Esta conversación de hoy ayudará a decirle a ACLS / DESE que aprenda más sobre cómo pueden ayudar a programas como estos , y a estudiantes como usted, en el futuro.

¿Qué es un grupo focal?

Un grupo focal es una forma para que investigadores como yo recopilemos información sobre preguntas específicas de un pequeño grupo de personas que forman parte de un grupo más grande. Las respuestas que da personalmente a las preguntas se juntan con las respuestas de otras personas en el grupo (que luego se juntan con las respuestas de otros grupos) para obtener una imagen del programa.

Confidencialidad

Toda la información que obtengamos se mantendrá confidencial y será utilizada solo por los miembros del equipo de investigación para los fines de este estudio. No utilizaremos su nombre, no atribuiremos ninguna cita a las personas y no identificaremos las posiciones de las personas entrevistadas. Identificaremos las ubicaciones de nuestras reuniones de grupos focales, pero haremos todo lo posible para garantizar que la información compartida no identifique a las personas .

Permiso para grabar

El grupo focal tomará aproximadamente 60 minutos. Si no le importa, me gustaría grabar nuestra conversación simplemente para tomar notas. Estas grabaciones son para mí y para las otras personas que realizan la investigación; nadie aquí en el programa o en DESE escuchará esta grabación. Si desea que apague la grabadora en cualquier momento, hágamelo saber. ¿Puedo tener su permiso para grabar esta conversación? Antes de comenzar, ¿tiene alguna pregunta para mí? Ok, estoy encendiendo la grabadora y comenzaremos el grupo focal.

**Encuesta previa al debate del grupo de enfoque - Estudiantes (Haremos estas preguntas oralmente y solicitaremos una muestra de manos para responder, esta no será una encuesta en papel)**

(1) ¿En qué programa (s) de educación para adultos está inscrito en este momento? Opciones:

[] Clases de ABE

[] Clases de ESOL / ESL

(2) ¿ Cuándo vino por primera vez a este programa? Opciones:

[] Hace menos de dos meses

[] Hace entre dos y seis meses

[] Hace más de seis meses

(3) ¿Qué materias has estudiado aquí hasta ahora? Opciones:

[ ] Leyendo y escribiendo

[] Aprender a hablar inglés

[ ] Matemáticas

[] Otro tema

**Preguntas del grupo focal**

**Me gustaría preguntarle cómo encontró este programa y qué espera obtener de él . [20 minutos ]**

1. [5 minutos] ¿Por qué viniste a este programa? ¿Por qué asistes a clase?

o Aviso: ¿Qué quieres lograr? ¿Cuáles son tus metas?

o Aviso: ¿Cómo desea que este programa lo ayude?

2. [5 minutos] Recordando, ¿cómo se enteró de este programa ?

o Aviso: ¿Qué tan difícil fue para usted encontrar el programa e inscribirse?

o Aviso: ¿Qué tan difícil fue para usted iniciar el programa?

3. [5 minutos] ¿Qué le ha ayudado a progresar hacia el logro de sus objetivos , al tomar clases de Educación para adultos?

o Aviso: ¿Qué te ha ayudado a asistir a tus clases?

o Aviso: ¿Qué te ha ayudado a aprender nuevo material?

o Aviso: ¿Qué te ha ayudado a progresar para completar tu credencial?

4. [5 minutos] ¿Qué le ha dificultado progresar en las clases de educación para adultos? ¿A alcanzar tus metas?

o Aviso: ¿Qué te ha dificultado asistir a tus clases?

o Aviso: ¿Qué te ha dificultado aprender nuevo material?

o Aviso: ¿Qué le ha dificultado progresar para completar su credencial?

**Me gustaría saber cómo útil [ Valu poder] que piensa que sus programas son . [10 minutos]**

5. [5 minutos] W sombrero han sido los más útiles [] valiosos par ts del programa para usted?

o Aviso: ¿Has adquirido habilidades [cosas aprendidas que usarás] ?

o Aviso: ¿Qué información o habilidades escolares [académicas] han sido las más útiles?

o Aviso : ¿Has aprendido algo que pueda / te ayudará en el trabajo?

6. [5 minutos] ¿Cómo es importante su participación en el programa o el logro de sus objetivos (GED, dominio del inglés, etc.) para su futuro?

o Preguntar: ¿Cree que su participación va a afectar a sus planes de trabajo? ¿Cómo? ¿Podría afectar a conseguir un trabajo en el campo de la salud, la hospitalidad o la tecnología , si eso es lo que quieres hacer ?

o Aviso: ¿Qué beneficios anticipa ... cree que verá cuando haya alcanzado su objetivo?

o Prom pt: ¿Cuáles son sus planes después de completar sus clases de ABE o ESOL ?

**Estoy interesado en conocer su experiencia con el programa, incluido el personal y los maestros aquí. [12 minutos]**

7. [3 minutos] ¿Cómo descubre el personal lo que necesita de su clase / curso ?

o Aviso: ¿El personal le pregunta qué necesita ?

o Aviso: ¿completa un formulario, realiza una prueba o realiza una encuesta que le pregunta qué necesita?

o Aviso: ¿Informa informalmente al personal lo que necesita?

o Aviso: ¿Cómo podría el personal obtener mejor información sobre lo que necesita de este programa ?

8. [3 minutos] Algunos de y ou pueden han trabajado con un dvisor aquí. ¿Puedes decirnos cómo te ayudó el asesor?

9. [3 minutos] ¿Qué le parece realmente útil sobre el programa, que no le gustaría ver cambiado?

10. [3 minutos] ¿Cómo podría modificarse el programa para satisfacer mejor sus necesidades?

o Aviso: ¿Qué más podría hacer el programa para ayudarlo?

o Aviso: ¿Qué cambios [ logísticos ], como los horarios de clase o la ubicación, lo ayudarían a venir a clase más a menudo ?

o Aviso: ¿Qué cambios lo ayudarían a alcanzar sus objetivos de aprendizaje?

o Aviso: ¿Qué cambios lo ayudarían a alcanzar sus objetivos laborales?

o Aviso: ¿Usar una aplicación móvil o una clase en línea lo ayudaría a alcanzar sus objetivos?

o Aviso: ¿Cómo podrían ser más útiles los maestros o asesores ?

11. Si pudieras cambiar una cosa del programa, ¿qué cambiarías?

**También me interesa saber cómo cree que se sienten los estudiantes cuando vienen a los programas de educación para adultos. [8 minutos]**

12. [4 minutos] Algunas personas pueden venir al programa y luego decidir no tomar clases. ¿Qué crees que podría impedir que algunas personas tomen clases o se matriculen aquí?

o Aviso: ¿Te sientes bienvenido? D o piensa que otras personas se sientan bienvenidos? ¿Por qué o r por qué no?

o P rompt: ¿Cuántos de ustedes conocen a alguien que haya pensado en asistir a una clase, pero que aún no ha venido? WH y hacer que piensa que estas personas no vienen? ¿Qué podría hacer que el programa o las clases sean mejores para ellos? Ejemplos: horarios de clases , ubicación, diferentes formas de enseñanza, enseñar diferentes materias, ¿tienen objetivos que el programa / clase / curso no puede cumplir? ¿Más clases para que la gente no esté en una larga lista de espera?

13. [4 minutos] ¿Qué crees que podría hacer que algunas personas abandonen el programa / clase / curso?

o Aviso: ¿Te sientes bienvenido? ¿Crees que los demás se sienten bienvenidos?

o Aviso: ¿Cuántos de ustedes conocen a alguien que ha dejado un programa / clase / curso ? ¿Sabes por qué se fueron? ¿Cómo cree que el prog ram o clases podrían ser mejores para los estudiantes que se fueron? Ejemplos: horarios de clases, ubicación, diferentes formas de enseñanza, enseñar diferentes materias, cuidado de niños, ¿tienen objetivos que el programa / clase / curso no puede cumplir?

**Pregunta de cierre [3-5 min]**

14. Antes de terminar, queremos asegurarnos de que tenga la oportunidad de contarnos todo lo que considere útil. La información de esta conversación ayudará a la agencia estatal que financia estos programas a comprender mejor su experiencia al asistir a clases aquí. Quieren saber cómo los programas o clases podrían ser mejores para usted y otros estudiantes. ¿Nos hemos perdido algo de tu experiencia que te gustaría agregar? [¿Hay algo más que nos gustaría contarnos?] RESUMEN

Muchas gracias por su tiempo y por compartir sus pensamientos.

# Appendix F: Focus Group Administration Schedule

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Focus Group Scheduling** | | | |
|  |  | **Focus Group 1 Information** | **Focus Group 2 Information** |
| October | 21 | JJ @ Holyoke CC DFG from 10-11:30 | JS @ Holyoke CC TFG from 1-2:30 |
|  | 22 |  |  |
|  | 23 | JS @ Brockton PS 1p (1:00-2:30) (T) - SH Ob. |  |
|  | 24 |  |  |
|  | 25 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | 28 | SH @ Amherst/TLP 10:30-11:30 (S) |  |
|  | 29 |  |  |
|  | 30 | SH @ Brockton PS 1p (1:00-2:30) (D) |  |
|  | 31 |  |  |
| November | 1 |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | 4 | ~~SH @ QCC/Worc 10:00-11:30 window (T)~~ |  |
|  | 5 |  |  |
|  | 6 |  |  |
|  | 7 |  | SH Boston 2-3:30 (D) |
|  | 8 | JS @ Pittsfield 1:00 - 2:30 (A) |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | 11 |  |  |
|  | 12 | SH @ Mujeres TFG 10:30 - 11:30 | SH @ Mujeres SFG 1:00 – 2:00 |
|  | 13 | SH @ Mt Wachustt CC 11:00-noon (S) |  |
|  | 14 | JS Boston 2-3:30 (A) |  |
|  | 15 | SH @ Lawrence PS 12:30-2:00 window (T) |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | 18 |  | SH @ Lawrence - Students - 11:30-12:30 |
|  | 19 | (D x 2) Director's Council Meeting (SH & JS) 2:30-4 |  |
|  | 20 |  |  |
|  | 21 | JJ & JS @ Online TFG 4:30 – 5:30 |  |
|  | 22 |  |  |

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| Adult Education System Evaluation Interview Summary Report 2020  Part of the UMDI Adult Education Project |
| December 2, 2020 |

Adult Education System Evaluation Interview Summary Report 2020

*Part of the UMDI Adult Education Project*

Prepared by the UMass Donahue Institute’s  
Applied Research & Program Evaluation Group

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| --- | --- | --- |
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# Executive Summary

#### Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of 39 interviews conducted with adult education program teachers, program directors, ACLS staff, System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) staff, and staff from the University of Massachusetts’ Center for Educational Assessment (CEA).[[4]](#footnote-4) All interviews were conducted during the spring of 2020. These interviews are part of a yearlong sequence of data collection for an evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system conducted by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI). Focus groups for the project were conducted in fall 2019, and a summary report on those focus groups was submitted in January 2020. A comprehensive final report—that also includes survey results and analysis of secondary data—will be presented to the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in December 2020.

The report begins with “Introduction” and “Methodology” sections. The interviews covered a range of topics, which are discussed in the “Findings” section. The Findings section includes successes, challenges, and recommendations related to each topic. In the introduction to the Findings section, three overarching themes (resources, communication, and partnerships) that connect all of the topic areas are described. The Findings section is followed by a “Key Findings and Recommendations” section, which summarizes important issues raised through the interview analysis. This Executive Summary provides an overview of the Key Findings and Recommendations.

#### Key Findings

1. **Interviewees from ACLS reported that they promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout the adult education system. Directors and teachers confirmed and affirmed that they share this value and support ACLS’ efforts to consider these values in guiding decisions.**
2. **Adult education programs and program staff have limited resources available to meet the diverse needs of their students, and many interviewees reported that program staff were working at full capacity.** While ACLS has instituted policies intended to balance flexibility and accountability, many interviewees requested that ACLS recognize that changes to existing policies/practices (e.g., revisions to the performance measurement system, new data collection system) required them to further stretch already scarce resources, which in some cases had a detrimental impact on programs’ ability to provide services to students (at least in the short term).
3. **Many interviewees recognized differentiation of curriculum and instruction as an effective tool for promoting positive student outcomes.** Interviewees also noted that most program staff would benefit from additional time, training, and resources dedicated to differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all learners—especially for students with learning disabilities.
4. **All interviewees agreed that the professional development provided by SABES had a positive impact on the practice of directors, teachers, and advisors; and directors and teachers frequently noted that additional professional development would be beneficial.** Topics for training suggested by several interviewees included: strategies for working with students with learning disabilities; differentiation; digital literacy (for staff and students); best practices for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; and, culturally responsive instruction.
5. **Many interviewees expressed some level of concern regarding ACLS policies that linked continued program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.** Some interviewees explained that this link decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, and increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff.
6. **Many adult education professionals—program directors and teachers—believe programs are under-resourced by the state and under-supported by local communities.**
7. **Interviewees from well-resourced programs typically reported fewer challenges when responding to new ACLS policy demands than interviewees from less-resourced programs.**

**Recommendations**

1. **Expand ACLS engagement with the field around the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.** For example, ACLS could communicate more transparently how current ACLS policies, practices, and resources are intended to support DEI.
2. **Slow the rate of change to—and prioritize fewer—policies and practices, particularly policies and practices implemented and evaluated at the level of individual ABE/ESOL programs.** Slowing the rate of change would reduce demands on program resources and help programs better understand what works.
3. **Provide programs with additional assistance with curriculum development, including suggestions for differentiation, professional development, technical assistance, and sample lessons to support the needs of diverse learners.** For example, ACLS could facilitate and/or promote an online portal through which program staff share materials and best practices with their colleagues around the state.
4. **Develop strategies to gather more information about effective professional development activities.** This process could inform decisions about the content, format, and topics of future professional development activities.
5. **Consider strategies to address the unintended consequences of linking program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.** While interviewees identified some unintended consequences of such linking (i.e., decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff), it is not clear how pervasive these consequences are in the field. As a first step, ACLS could work with the field to better understand the facets and pervasiveness of these concerns.
6. **Weigh the tradeoffs between encouraging program/policy flexibility and unintended consequences.** Policies that encourage flexibility, adaptation, and/or customization of adult education programs at the local level may require significant resources to implement—resources that some programs simply do not have.
7. **ACLS should work with programs so that both ACLS and programs better understand the relationship between available resources, program costs, and service provision. It is important to promote a shared understanding of how to price services so that funding can be used to serve students well.**

# Introduction

This interview summary is the second part of a yearlong data-collection series that also includes focus groups, surveys, and analysis of secondary data. Collection of the interview data was part of the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute’s (UMDI’s) evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system that was commissioned by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The mission of ACLS is “to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy, math and numeracy, and other skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.”[1](file:///\\umdi-files.campus.ads.umass.edu\hadley5-data\ARPE\RESEARCH\ESE%20Initiatives\DESE%20Adult%20Education\Deliverables\Interview%20Summary\Final%20ACLS%20KW%20Interview%20Summary%20Report%20Comments%20092920.docx#_2et92p0) In Fiscal Year 2018, ACLS provided learning opportunities to almost 12,000 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and about 7,000 adult basic education (ABE) and high school equivalency (HSE) students.[[5]](#footnote-5)

ACLS has implemented a number of changes over the past few years that have potentially affected programs, staff, and students. The evaluation commissioned by DESE/ACLS was multi-purpose. Full evaluation results will be available in December 2020 and include:

* 1. Data on how ACLS’ changes to the adult education system may have affected the field;
  2. Data on student, staff, and program needs;
  3. Details related to how quality curricula and pedagogy were chosen and implemented;
  4. Details related to how the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) professional development system fulfilled staff and program needs; and,
  5. Suggestions for adult education system improvements.

The interviews included questions related to all of these topics, as well as others, which are described in the [Methodology](#_Methodology) section.

This report summarizes the responses gathered through 39 interviews conducted with a total of 44 program directors, teachers, ACLS staff, SABES staff, and a staff member from the Center for Educational Assessment (CEA) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The results are organized by topic area. Within each topic area, we present successes, challenges, and recommendations described by interviewees. The [Methodology](#_Methodology) section provides details about interview protocol development and the implementation of the interviews. The last section, [Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations](#_Key_Findings_and), discusses issues that emerged from the interview data which could help inform system improvement.

# Methods

UMDI conducted a total of 39 interviews with 44 individuals in March–May of 2020. We interviewed:

* 15 program directors;
* 15 teachers;
* Eight ACLS staff members (six total interviews; two interviews included two participants);
* Five SABES staff members (two interviews; one interview included three participants, and the other included two participants); and,
* One staff member from CEA.

Beginning in January 2020, UMDI worked with DESE/ACLS to develop five interview protocols—one for each of the stakeholder groups listed above. UMDI and DESE/ACLS identified topic areas to be addressed with each group by reviewing our original evaluation questions, and identifying a set of high-priority topic areas. [Appendix A](#_Appendix_A) includes copies of all of the interview protocols. To describe the alignment of interview questions with research questions and priority topic areas, [Appendix B](#_Appendix_B) contains two maps: (1) interview topic areas mapped to research questions, and (2) individual interview questions mapped to research questions.

UMDI also worked with DESE/ACLS to formulate a strategy for identifying and selecting interviewees. The final strategy combined convenience and purposeful sampling, as follows:

* All MA ABE/ESOL program directors were invited via email to be interviewed. Volunteers signed up as potential interviewees through a short online survey that included questions about their background (e.g., years of experience, race/ethnicity). A total of 22 directors volunteered to be interviewed. From this group, UMDI selected 15 interviewees to create a sample with as much variety in program location, experience, and racial/ethnic background as possible. All of the selected interviewees participated.
* To recruit teachers, all MA ABE/ESOL directors were asked to distribute an invitation provided by the UMDI team to all teachers which included a link to a short online survey. If a teacher was interested in volunteering to be interviewed, they completed the online survey. As with the directors, more teachers volunteered to be interviewed than could be interviewed. A purposeful sampling strategy was applied to the volunteer pool to balance variety in program location, class type (i.e., ABE or ESOL), level of experience, and racial/ethnic background of teachers represented in the sample. All of the selected interviewees participated.
* ACLS staff were selected by the state director of ACLS to participate in interviews. Interviewees were selected to ensure that the perspectives of those familiar with a variety of facets of the work would be included. Selected interviewees included ACLS staff members familiar with a range of ACLS activities, including ACLS management, program and data collection, program supervision and support professional development, the program quality review process, and correctional institutions. In total, eight ACLS staff members participated in six interviews (two of the interviews included two people). All of the selected interviewees participated.
* The individuals who participated in the SABES interviews represented the leadership of two professional development centers. One interview comprised three staff members from the curriculum and instruction professional development centers, and the other interview comprised two staff members from the program support professional development center. All of the selected interviewees participated.
* The CEA interview was with the director of that group.

All interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom (as planned prior to the travel and meeting restrictions brought on by COVID-19 pandemic). There were no incentives for participation for directors, teachers, DESE ACLS staff or the CEA director.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts of the interviews were then reviewed to explore the content of the responses. A coding system based on a combination of the research questions, topic areas, interview protocol questions, and additional themes was developed and applied to all of the transcripts using NVivo software. The coded responses were then analyzed using grounded theory to identify thematic groupings and patterns, and subsequently to identify key findings. Frequency counts of comments relevant to particular topics or themes were not calculated and are not reported. Some findings included in this report may be at odds with other findings as different participants, understandably, varied in their responses and/or offered complex or nuanced responses.

# Findings

### Introduction

Findings are presented by topic. A summary of successes, challenges, and recommendations identified through analysis of interview data is presented for each topic area. Topics are ordered as follows:

1. [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#_Diversity,_Equity,_and)
2. [ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources](#_ACLS_Policies,_Practices,)
3. [Curriculum and Instruction](#_Curriculum_and_Instruction)
4. [Differentiation](#_Differentiation)
5. [SABES](#_System_for_Adult)
6. [Student Enrollment and Retention](#_Student_Enrollment_and)
7. [Workforce and Career Pathways for Students](#_Student_Workforce_and)
8. [Correctional Institutions](#_Correctional_Institutions)
9. [Center for Educational Assessment](#_Center_for_Educational)

The topic area of “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” is presented first because it is of special interest to DESE, ACLS, the field, and UMDI. Findings relevant to “ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources” are presented second because they are relevant to each of the topics that follow. “Curriculum and Instruction” is presented third because of its importance to the field; and “Differentiation” is presented fourth for the same reason. The remaining topics are ordered according to their perceived utility to ACLS.

Comments made by interviewees were generally consistent across the stakeholder groups (e.g., teachers, directors, ACLS). For two topics, there were important differences between responses provided by teachers and directors and those differences are noted in the introductions to the relevant topic areas.

In addition to reporting successes, challenges, and recommendations within each topic area, UMDI identified three overarching themes that connected many of the topic areas. These three themes are:

* ***Resources*:** All 44 interviewees commented that programs, ACLS, and SABES have limited resources (e.g., funding, staffing, capacity/expertise, curricular materials) to support adult education in Massachusetts. Interviewees also noted that there are a multitude of demands on those resources. The focus of teachers and directors in the field was to provide the best services possible for their students, and they found it frustrating when ACLS policies and practices required programs to expend limited resources which—in some cases—later impeded the provision of program services. Interviewees stressed that there is more to be done to serve adult education students than can be accomplished with the current level of resources available across the system. That is, there is an inherent mismatch between requirements/expectations for program performance and the resources available for programs to meet those requirements/expectations. When new demands were placed on programs, staff were forced to make hard decisions about how to allocate limited resources and hence what student services and/or staff training to forego that directly and negatively impacted service provision. Ideally, the field would like to have additional funding and access to training/expertise. Absent additional resources, some directors and teachers encouraged ACLS to (1) communicate clearly what programs should prioritize given limited resources, and (2) work with programs to determine how resources might be (re)allocated.
* ***Communication*:** Frequent, high-quality communication among stakeholders (i.e., students, program staff, ACLS and SABES staff, external partners, etc.) is critical for the success of students, as well as for effective implementation of components of the adult education system. Many directors, teachers, and SABES interviewees encouraged ACLS to continue their efforts to communicate clearly with the field, and to facilitate frequent and high-quality communication among stakeholders. For example, interviewees identified the “state as partner” webinar series as a successful communication strategy.
* ***Partnerships*:** Many interviewees saw partnerships as a means of increasing resources or student access to services. These interviewees also noted that successful partnerships are the result of strategic, high-quality communication and effective collaboration and coordination among multiple stakeholders. Several interviewees encouraged ACLS to consider their role in facilitating partnerships, especially those with large or statewide organizations who may be more responsive to a state-level partner—one focused on impacting outcomes at the state level.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

#### Introduction

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are central to adult education in Massachusetts: Local programs engage a highly diverse set of students; the goal of adult education is to help the Commonwealth promote equity among residents; and programs seek to include students who face many barriers to learning, including both documented and undocumented learning difficulties. Interview protocols included several questions relevant to DEI. Primarily, interview protocols addressed DEI by asking interviewees how all students were involved in, or affected by, various issues. For example, we asked directors, “Please tell us about the processes and partnerships your program has in place to provide ALL students with workforce and training opportunities?” and we asked teachers, “What additional curriculum or instructional supports would help you to differentiate your instruction for ALL students effectively?”

Comments made by interviewees that were relevant to DEI were generally linked to—or a part of—comments about differentiation of curriculum and instruction. This is likely due in part to how the topics of DEI were embedded in questions about curriculum and instruction or workforce and training. Interviewees expressed general awareness of the importance of attending to multiple facets of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, age), but most comments on differentiation focused specifically on students’ varied levels of academic ability (or learning disability).

#### Current DEI Practices

Interviewees shared several practices related to DEI. Multiple respondents reported that academic outcomes (e.g., Measurable Skills Gains, HiSET attainment) were more equitable across student groups when teachers, advisors, and directors routinely differentiated (i.e., customized) teaching and advising practices to ensure that each student was receiving appropriate services. Interviewees mentioned strategies for supporting differentiation including: developing and implementing learning plans focused on each individual student’s needs (e.g., emphasizing writing skills for one student while emphasizing reading skills for another), providing advising aligned with students’ educational and career goals, and using resources—such as teacher time, texts and written materials, and computer time and software—strategically to support students with learning disabilities. Interviewees identified differentiation as the strategy most frequently used by staff and programs to address the diverse needs of their students.

Interviewees reported that teachers and advisors were better able to differentiate instruction and advising when they received specific professional development related to differentiation strategies. One teacher reported, “Differentiation is probably one of the hardest parts of teaching at the ABE level because of the resources that we don’t have, similar to what you would have in a public school setting, like teams dedicated to students working at different [academic] levels.” This comment is reflective of other interviewees’ statements that interpreted differentiation as primarily an academic concern. That is, when discussing differentiation, interviewees frequently discussed the importance of modifying instruction to match students’ academic performance level, and rarely mentioned other facets related to differentiation (e.g., learning goals, learning styles).

Several interviewees said that professional development helped staff better understand how to address students’ varying academic and workforce needs, as well as the relevance of staffs’ own identity/positionality. For example, one director said staff were better able to differentiate instruction and advising after participating in trainings (e.g., workshops, coaching) focused on best practices for supporting diverse students (i.e., students whose backgrounds and demographics are different from those of program staff) as well as understanding their—staff members’—own identities and implicit biases as teachers and advisors.

Some interviewees also noted that hiring staff who reflected the racial/ethnic and cultural diversity of the students served by the program was a successful strategy for increasing awareness of, and success with, challenges related to DEI. For example, one director said that having staff who openly identified as LGBTQ+, and having all staff be intentional about the use of pronouns and names, increased their LGBTQ+ students’ feelings of safety and comfort while participating in the program.

A fourth successful strategy for attending to issues of DEI involved teachers and directors encouraging others to view diversity—in identities and abilities—as a strength rather than a challenge to overcome or weakness to accommodate, particularly with regard to ESOL students. Some teachers and directors saw the students coming to their program not only as being in need of services, but also as having a useful set of skills, knowledge, and experiences. An example of this asset-based approach was one program that enrolled students with varying levels of English proficiency and partnered students with similar cultural and language backgrounds who were more proficient in English with students who were less proficient. Both students benefited from this relationship as one gained experience teaching/tutoring and both increased their English skills. Another program with many English language learners placed students at collaborating organizations—including health clinics, local schools, and other companies—as volunteer translators. Their lack of “perfect” English did not prevent them from making a valuable contribution. Some of the volunteer translators were ultimately employed by these organizations.

A final successful strategy for promoting DEI mentioned by interviewees was hiring staff who were—or training staff to be—knowledgeable about federal and state policies, regulations, and programs that affect students; such as immigration policy, access to health care, and access to public services such as food stamps. Some programs hired staff with this knowledge. Some other programs provided their staff with in-house professional development associated with these topics. Being knowledgeable about issues, policies, and programs that might improve students’ outcomes or quality of life (i.e., their ability to receive an education, earn an income, or secure other social supports) enabled educators to better advise and support students in their efforts to come to class, provide for their families, and address other challenges.

#### Challenges

Challenges relevant to DEI shared by teachers and directors reflected a variety of barriers students face to education, employment, and personal stability. These barriers included, for example: (un)employment, lack of transportation, immigration status, family obligations (e.g., childcare, elder care), housing insecurity/homelessness, addiction, and gang or criminal activity. These barriers affected students’ ability to attend class and complete classwork. Interviewees mentioned other barriers including: (1) Many staff members did not have the skills or access to professional services to assess a student’s potential learning disability or mental illness in order to provide the best support, and (2) undocumented immigrant students have limited learning, employment, volunteer, and other opportunities.

Teachers and directors reported that insufficient time, funding, technology, materials, and staffing prevent adult education staff from addressing the barriers their students faced. Interviewees noted that additional resources—such as more technology (e.g., specialized software for students with learning disabilities), teaching materials (e.g., a wider variety of differentiated materials), training associated with differentiation, and increases in staff time and/or staffing (e.g., teaching assistants)—would help them better address these barriers.

ACLS interviewees expressed one primary concern about DEI and the field: that program staff did not reflect the diversity of the students they served. ACLS staff wondered how ACLS might assist programs in hiring more diverse staff.

#### Recommendations

Interviewees’ primary recommendation related to DEI centered on addressing barriers to students’ employment, education, and general wellbeing. While interviewees frequently requested financial resources, they also suggested other kinds of resources that ACLS could provide to support programs’ DEI efforts. For example, interviewees suggested that ACLS could increase professional development related to supporting diverse students, including how to address barriers that affect students’ learning. Interviewees also suggested that ACLS could help programs by assisting with the development of partnerships with other organizations that either represent diverse populations or focus on reducing various barriers to education and employment, especially partnerships with other statewide organizations (e.g., MASSCAP—the state association for community action programs).

[Return to topic areas list.](#_Findings)

### ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources

#### Introduction

A set of questions included in each interview protocol focused on issues associated with ACLS policies, practices, and resources. The successes, challenges, and recommendations described here are subdivided to cover each of these areas. In discussing successes, challenges, and recommendations, interviewees brought up a number of topics, including curriculum, communication and collaboration, and program management. Interviewees also made several comments about SABES and professional development; these comments are included in the SABES section of this report.

It should be noted that different stakeholders tended to view the same issues from different perspectives, based on their role or agency. More specifically, teachers viewed issues through the lens of student needs; directors applied a lens focusing on program-wide policies and staff needs; and ACLS centered on policies and practices at the state-system level. Also, in their comments, many teachers and directors did not separate ACLS policies from federal policies. The extent to which teachers and directors could disambiguate ACLS policies from federal policies was unclear.

#### Successes

Two of the policy successes mentioned by interviewees were associated with curriculum. Interviewees indicated that ACLS policies allowing for flexibility in curriculum design facilitated differentiation of content and pedagogy for diverse students and that the focus on Measurable Skills Gains contributed to academic focus.

Interviewees reported several successes related to communication and collaboration. The most common communication success mentioned by interviewees was that ACLS listened carefully to feedback from the field. According to one individual:

I’ve seen a very positive change in ACLS, between programs and ACLS itself. I think they [ACLS] have put a lot of effort into getting down and listening to the directors, listening to the instructors. I think they’re very invested in it. I feel as if we are more partners than I observed in the past. I didn’t observe it before when I was an admin, so I see positive things happening at ACLS in terms of really listening. Even this year when they really listened to people saying that the working conditions are horrible—talking about the salary and stuff—and when there was a little extra money, they gave programs some money.

Multiple interviewees reported that communication from ACLS to program staff was most effective when it was honest, objective, and based on an understanding of a particular program’s circumstances. One director described ACLS as being more transparent concerning policy changes: “I feel that they’re being more transparent and better at keeping us in the loop, especially in regards as to why they are setting this policy or where they are going.“

Many program directors described the communication and collaboration between program directors and ACLS program specialists as a success. Several directors reported that they were able to communicate effectively and productively with their ACLS program specialist. (Some directors did report challenges, as described later.) When the relationship between directors and ACLS program specialists was positive, directors reported that their ACLS program specialists were “very hands on,” frequently sent out useful information, and available for anything with which the director needed help. In addition, when the relationship was positive, directors expressed empathy with the restrictions placed on their ACLS program specialists—that the ACLS program specialists did what they could in light of federal regulations.

Program directors characterized quarterly conference calls related to workforce issues as a success. One director reported that calls among directors who were on workforce boards were very supportive and helped strengthen programs’ connections to regional workforce resources.[[6]](#footnote-6) Directors also reported that the State as Partner webinars comprised an effective communication tool led by ACLS. Some interviewees reported that the webinars represented an effective venue for sharing information with programs. These interviewees noted that by hosting several webinars over the course of the year—as opposed to a single annual meeting—policy updates were announced on a rolling basis rather than all at once.

Directors and teachers also said they appreciated working with ACLS staff members who had prior experience as adult education teachers, directors, or advisors because ACLS staff with those experiences were more grounded in programs’ day-to-day realities.

Interviewees indicated that ACLS provided some helpful curriculum resources (e.g., customizable curricula and scope, sequence, and unit templates). Interviewees reported that information concerning, for example, scaffolding and differentiation of instruction, alignment of curriculum to standards, and a focus on key instructional shifts for ELA and math were all very beneficial. Interviewees also said that ACLS did a good job of disseminating resources associated with promising practices to directors (who then shared them with staff).

#### Challenges

Interviewees reported several general communication and program management challenges related to ACLS policies. The challenge most frequently described by interviewees was that ACLS either did not adequately understand—or did not consistently act as though they had an adequate understanding of—the barriers to education and employment faced by many students, and the challenges that programs faced in supporting those students. For instance, interviewees noted that ACLS did not fully understand the challenges that programs faced in helping students with very low levels of literacy gain those skills, and helping students with very low levels of English proficiency achieve career pathway objectives. One director explained:

[I want ACLS] to understand that a lot of our students are low level. It’s going to take a long time for them to get through to more training or better jobs. I would say 70% of [the students in] my program aren’t there yet. We try to incorporate college and career skills in our curriculum. However, to be talking to them about what kind of training they want in the future and diving into it when they can’t communicate with us is difficult. I don’t know if there’s a way ACLS can support us on that end.

Other interviewees described barriers associated with transportation and childcare. One teacher explained that even when cities/towns were adjacent, traveling from one to the other could be very difficult for students—either involving a great deal of time on public transportation or requiring access to a car.

A second challenge noted by many interviewees was the difficulty of tracking student outcomes after students had exited the program. Because federal regulations emphasize employment outcomes, programs were very concerned when former students did not update their contact information or respond when contacted by program staff. One director explained:

I think there’s a lot of frustration regarding the idea of the work-related outcomes and monitoring students after they’ve left our program. Sometimes we cannot possibly reach them. There’s a lot of anxiety around that because I can tell you how my students are doing right now in the program, but to follow up after exit is very difficult. We do it, but we’re not always getting them. Their phone numbers change on a weekly basis, so being able to contact them is sometimes out of our hands. We can’t follow up if they don’t have the social security number, which a lot of our students do not. So I understand why we have those policies in place and that it’s based on federal regulations, but in the past few years, that is new and we are being held accountable for what happens to our students after they leave our program. That’s a tricky path to go down.

Several interviewees also commented that the volume of information generated by ACLS, including information concerning policy changes, was overwhelming—and a clear communication challenge. Multiple interviewees expressed a desire for ACLS to decrease the frequency of policy changes and, as a result, the amount of information programs had to process with limited resources. According to one ACLS interviewee:

I think there is this information overload kind of syndrome. So, it’s very hard to sometimes alert programs to what is new information versus old versus what is important versus what is super-important. Those are hard to communicate when information is constantly flowing.

Another ACLS interviewee connected the issue of rapid policy changes to staff retention:

There’s just pressure to keep doing, keep doing […] and change, and it’s a lot. Generally our field is not well paid and we lose people, because they burn out.

As noted in the successes, most interviewees felt that spacing out policy changes—and communication concerning their implementation—was greatly preferred.

A few teachers and directors spoke in detail about the difficulties presented by the new enrollment targets. One teacher explained how the enrollment targets impacted student outcomes:

I don’t think [ACLS] understands the challenges we face daily. We can keep the seats full, but it’s open enrollment, so people are coming and going like a revolving door. Going through the intake, 12 hours of instruction, and pretest, maybe we can do that. But then getting the outcome and posttest is really difficult. Those who pretest may blow off the posttest because they are getting out the next week anyways. They impose policies on our programs and make some exceptions, but it doesn’t always help.

In addition, one director detailed how open enrollment had affected their program, namely how the requirement to keep seats filled sometimes led to challenges with retention:

Turning away from managed enrollment and back to open enrollment has been terrible. We used to have five periods of enrollment spaced out. The teachers could teach longer units, we could do CALM curriculum for math, which requires cohorts of people that stay together for longer periods. If we have to fill seats right away as they open up, it interrupts the group. We try to start them during the first week of the month, but it doesn’t always work that way, so there is a constant churning of students coming in and going out. We are losing students because it feels too chaotic. New students come in and need to be caught up, but it slows down the students who are ready to move on. Teachers aren’t sure who is in their classes from one month to the next. It is not good, and there has to be a way for [ACLS] to reconsider this.

ACLS staff members’ views on the topics of enrollment and retention differed from those expressed by teachers and directors. Namely, ACLS interviewees indicated that they did not see much tension currently between funding and enrollment/retention issues. One ACLS interviewee explained that there had been a tension between funding and enrollment/retention issues in the past, but that it was now “more resolved.”

A few interviewees noted that a program’s costs associated with running a class section were relatively consistent, regardless of the number of students in the class (within reason): The teacher’s salary was fixed, the time spent preparing lessons was similar, the time spent in class was fixed, and the cost of software was similar. These interviewees noted that, with the requirement to fill seats, they were being asked to make a difficult choice. Either they could limit disruptions for their current students (thereby increasing the likelihood that current students would be retained), or they could bring in new students (thereby lowering the quality of service provided to current students and decreasing the likelihood that current students would be retained, but increasing the likelihood that program funding would be maintained).

Several interviewees said that connecting enrollment to funding was problematic. A few interviewees suggested that tying funding to enrollment meant their programs were put in the position of choosing between (1) accepting all students, but overenrolling to compensate for those likely to drop out, or (2) establishing enrollment policies that favored students who were more likely to succeed.

Interviewees reported both general and specific program management challenges associated with ACLS practices. Interviewees frequently reported not having enough staff time and program resources to complete required administrative duties, develop staff, or improve student outcomes. These interviewees said that program staff hours were insufficient to meet various ACLS requirements (e.g., LACES data input); program budgets were insufficient to cover substitute teachers when staff wished to attend professional development opportunities; and both staff time and program budgets were insufficient to support students’ instruction and advising in all the ways students needed in order to achieve target outcomes.

Several interviewees acknowledged that ACLS encourages programs to try new things, but some interviewees hesitated to do so for fear of being penalized (e.g., having funding cut or not having a contract renewed). These interviewees said that teachers and directors were hesitant to try new instructional, advising, or other support practices, even if those practices were successful at other programs or were evidence-based. A few interviewees said that their program had considered implementing innovative practices related to class scheduling, students’ class assignments, instructional, advising, or wrap-around services (e.g., immigration support, transportation support, childcare support), but ultimately chose not to change their current practices. A few interviewees explained that implementing program- or system-level change (or innovation) is a multi-year process: It takes more than a single year for students, teachers, and advisors to become comfortable with new practices, and for those practices to contribute to improved student outcomes.

Two additional challenges that some interviewees described included (1) ACLS’ expectations for testing of incoming students (i.e., that students were required to do a lot of placement testing in a short period of time which led to some feeling frustrated or intimidated), and (2) completing LACES data reporting requirements (both regarding the time required to do the data entry and the skill needed to navigate the system). A few interviewees described the LACES requirements as sometimes overwhelming and neither practical nor realistic.

Interviewees also reported challenges related to Program Quality Review (PQR) visits. Some teachers and directors reported that PQR visits were very intimidating and stressful, that the visits seemed focused on identifying what was wrong with their program, and that the time allotted for PQR visits did not seem adequate to accurately assess a program. For example, both teachers and directors described classroom observations as only taking 15 minutes. Interviewees said that unless this observation period was timed exactly right, and the class ran in an ideal fashion, an observer might not see in-depth, effective, evidence-based instruction in practice (and, consequently, be penalized in the PQR). An observation scheduled for the first 15 minutes of class might be taken up by settling down and setting up procedures. An observation scheduled for the middle of class might involve the teacher needing to attend to a student having anxiety issues rather than leading the whole group in a student-led discussion. Many interviewees were frustrated that they were unable to show what they do well during a PQR visit. ACLS staff acknowledged that PQR visits could be difficult for program staff. One interviewee from ACLS commented:

I think the most negative […] pushback or blowback has definitely come from the PQR process, and I don’t know if that was so much unintended. A lot of it was anticipated, but it has been intense at times.

In addition to the challenges with PQR visits, some interviewees had difficulties with communications from ACLS program specialists. For example, some interviewees reported that different program specialists would give different answers to the same policy question, or offer different levels of support to a program. A few interviewees also reported that communications received from their ACLS program specialists were not helpful.

Interviewees described two communication and curriculum challenges related to ACLS resources. First, some program staff members’ level of digital literacy was low enough that they were unable to access or use electronic resources; these program staff were not proficient or comfortable with technology. Both teachers and directors reported that there were staff in their programs who had limited digital literacy. In a few cases, even basic tasks (e.g., finding templates on the ACLS website) were difficult. Low levels of digital literacy affected teachers and advisors in all aspects of their job. They were limited in the ways they could reach out to students outside of class or advising, they were limited in the resources they might use to assist students with instruction or job skills during class or advising sessions, they were limited in utilizing reporting systems to record students’ progress or outcomes, and they were limited in their ability to participate in professional development through which they might improve their skills.

Second, although ACLS had provided some resources related to curriculum and lesson planning (e.g., scope, sequence, and unit templates), some staff requested additional resources, particularly resources related to differentiation. Relatedly, lesson planning frequently took more time than program staff were paid for, especially in terms of differentiating content and instructional methods to meet the wide variety of student needs.

#### Recommendations

Interviewees made several recommendations regarding ACLS policies and practices related to communication and collaboration. Regarding ACLS policies, interviewees recommended that ACLS work to further highlight and explain policy changes when issued and to increase transparency, including more clarity on what the changes are and why they are occurring. Regarding changes to practice, interviewees recommended that ACLS (1) streamline and standardize communications between ACLS and programs, including ensuring that all ACLS program specialists provide the same information (some directors mentioned that sometimes different ACLS program specialists gave different answers to the same question); (2) work with SABES—and possibly other training organizations—to develop additional evening offerings for staff professional development; (3) encourage innovation and flexibility to address student problems rather than continuing policies and practices that may not work well for all programs or students (e.g., connecting funding to enrollment and retention); (4) develop regional advisory groups—similar to the one at the state level—with 12 to 15 members; and (5) redress the “adversarial” nature of ACLS’s relationship with some programs. It should be noted regarding recommendation #3 (flexibility) that ACLS staff commented that allowing flexibility without guidance could be problematic, and that there was a role for ACLS to play in offering guidance:

We’re giving programs flexibility, but very little guidelines. Like, if you are a program director before the [more recent series of] changes were made, you would use policies that we used to have as guidelines right now to, like, guide you. For example, we used to mandate a certain number of professional development hours for teachers. We no longer do that. We don’t offer a guideline. What would be a good number? I’m not saying that we should impose a number, but I’m saying that we should say, here’s what research has shown a number that makes a difference.

Interviewees also made several recommendations regarding ACLS improvements to program management policies and practices. Interviewees recommended that ACLS (1) change the program funding structure and increase funding to adequately meet the needs of their students, especially in cases where programs were not hosted by larger organizations (e.g., community colleges) that could supplement their resources; (2) restrict policies to only those that are absolutely necessary—interviewees reported that policy changes occurred so frequently that they often had to manage newer changes before older, but also relatively recent, changes could be effectively implemented and that they needed assistance with prioritization as a result; (3) elevate the prioritization of students’ goals to match the current prioritization of educational and employment outcomes so that the wide variety of successes that student achieve can be included in a program’s assessment and that all students’ successes be counted; and (4) recognize that small programs have limited capacity—in terms of staffing and resources— and are not able to benefit from any economies of scale that larger programs might benefit from and might need additional support to achieve the same level of results that larger programs (or programs embedded within larger organizations) are able to achieve.

Interviewees also suggested that it would be helpful for ACLS to develop and/or recommend a curriculum for ESOL for all levels of ability. A few interviewees noted that some prospective student employers were more likely to work with ACLS directly rather than with individual programs, and requested ACLS assistance in connecting with such employers. Likewise, a few interviewees also suggested that ACLS might help programs identify “CORI-friendly” businesses where formerly incarcerated individuals might find employment. ) A couple of interviewees commented that ACLS might require more comprehensive orientation for new ACLS staff.

Lastly, a few interviewees suggested that ACLS might coordinate or facilitate partnerships with other community partners (e.g., the YMCA) to provide outside services such as childcare. For example, partnerships between adult education programs and early childhood centers (or home care providers) could benefit students by providing them with an option for reliable childcare.

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### Curriculum and Instruction

#### Introduction

A number of interview questions focused on curriculum and instruction. This section summarizes the successes, challenges, and recommendations that interviewees discussed in relation to those topics. It should be noted that differentiation, a key aspect of curriculum and instruction, is discussed in the Differentiation section.

#### Successes

Interviewees reported several successes associated with high-quality curriculum and instruction in their programs and classrooms. Successful practices implemented in classrooms included (1) scaffolding and differentiating instruction according to the learning needs of individual students such as providing unique reading assignments for students who are advanced; (2) homogeneously and/or heterogeneously grouping students based on their learning levels or individual needs such as pairing a lower level student with a higher level student with a similar language background; (3) engaging students in peer review of classwork such as exchanging homework assignments; (4) aligning curricula to college- and career-readiness standards such as using different workplace examples to model mathematics problems; and (5) integrating academic and job skills training for specific career pathways (e.g., CNA-RNA-LPN)—which encouraged students to think about longer term planning.

Interviewees also reported that ACLS provided helpful curriculum resources, including (1) certain recommended curricula (e.g., CALM and STAR) with room for customization as needed for a program; (2) templates for scope, sequence, and unit plans; (3) a variety of resources that were easy to understand and realistic to implement; and (4) recommending that teachers focus on particular content areas so that students interact with various teachers throughout the week. Finally, interviewees reflected that technology was an important instructional tool —especially for differentiating instruction—and benefited low-income students in multiple ways (e.g., increasing their digital literacy when they did not have a computer at home).

#### Challenges

Interviewees discussed several challenges associated with curriculum, including the following: (1) difficulty developing and updating curricula to be aligned with several sets of standards; (2) difficulty implementing centrally developed curricula (e.g., CALM) because programs were unable to do the activities (because of lack of class time), lacked the materials (e.g., activities required manipulatives that programs could not afford), or the frequent turnover of enrolled students (so there were frequently students who needed to be caught up before the whole class could do an activity together); (3) lack of curriculum (and skills and resources) to teach digital literacy; (4) overly theoretical curriculum guides that were not practical to implement (though no specific guides were named); and (5) lack of program resources for implementing standards-based curriculum.

In addition, interviewees described general challenges related to instruction. By far the most common challenge interviewees discussed was working with students who had learning disabilities. Interviewees reported needing additional assistance with diagnosing learning disabilities and identifying appropriate curriculum supports for those students. Interviewees described other instructional challenges, such as implementing group study—which was challenging for many students with anxiety or other mental health issues; differentiating instruction with a large group of students; and finding time to “run with something that is successful for a student.” Some teachers and directors commented that ACLS seemed to assume that instruction always ran smoothly—that classroom circumstances were always conducive to implementing ideal instructional practices. To the contrary, these interviewees explained that this was more often the exception than the rule, that there was a consistent flow of challenges that frequently interfered with classroom instruction. Lastly, in addition to being a success, technology was a challenge: Teachers and directors reported that technology resources were limited—that is some programs did not have adequate internet access or enough technology for students—resulting in an inability of programs to adequately prepare students for the digital world. Furthermore, some interviewees described colleagues who did not possess the knowledge or skills needed to teach digital literacy or use certain software or other resources. Issues with technology were also acknowledged by ACLS interviewees. They recognized that the level of facility with technology differed by program and that some programs used technology well while others did not.

#### Recommendations

Interviewees had numerous recommendations for improving curriculum and instruction. Many of these recommendations focused on the development of additional resources by ACLS. Examples of potentially useful resources mentioned by interviewees included (1) the creation of a centralized curriculum that was also flexible enough for programs to adapt it to the needs of their particular students (a request expressed by many, but not all, interviewees); (2) the creation/identification of an appropriate diagnostic tool for mathematics; (3) the provision of class materials in more languages; (4) the creation of a professional development sequence on curriculum development and best practices for student digital literacy; (5) the facilitation of resource sharing among programs; (6) the development and coordination of teacher mentorships; and (7) assistance with the development of volunteer tutoring/teaching agreements with colleges. Many interviewees recommended an infusion of financial resources to support curriculum and instruction, including funding for improved technology (e.g., hardware, software, Internet access), support for information technology specialists, and support for additional in-class time and instructional preparation.

Interviewees made several other recommendations for ACLS and other programs to consider. For ACLS, these included the following: increasing the number of program directors with adult education teaching experience; describing and supporting the “I do, we do, you do” model across all programs; encouraging programs to support the development and assessment of SMART goals for program staff (e.g., more strongly aligning professional development with staff goals); and generating and maintaining an online resource bank of extra materials available for students who are advanced or bored. For other programs, interviewees suggested they strategically partner students with each other during instruction to help with learning and establish a regular meeting during which teachers can share plans and discuss issues.

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### Differentiation

#### Introduction

Interviewees widely acknowledged that differentiation—of curriculum and instruction—was an effective practice that facilitated improved learning experiences and positive academic outcomes for students. Interviewees provided examples of both program practices and teacher practices that supported differentiation. Support for, and availability of, resources that facilitate differentiation featured prominently among the successes and recommendations noted by interviewees.

#### Successes

Interviewees described helpful resources and successful strategies that support differentiation. Helpful resources noted by interviewees included: (1) online resources and programs (e.g., Khan Academy); (2) part-time teaching assistance from local colleges (who might help with individuals or small groups); (3) published instructional materials that included information for facilitating differentiation (e.g., teacher versions of workbooks which described options for differentiating lessons); and (4) resources and practices shared by other programs (usually as a result of networking at professional development events). Successful practices mentioned by interviewees included allowing students with emotional or other mental health issues to work on their own (instead of in a group), using different examples with different students (e.g., examples that were aligned with a student’s professional goals), and creating student learning pairs that benefited both participating students (e.g., having more advanced students work with less advanced students).

#### Challenges

Interviewees mentioned few challenges associated with differentiation, but the challenges that were mentioned were significant. Primary among the challenges noted by interviewees was that many teachers were not adequately equipped—or, in some cases, qualified—to identify learning disabilities, differentiate instruction based on learning disabilities, provide accommodations, or generally support students with learning disabilities (whether formally diagnosed or undiagnosed). Above and beyond teachers’ skills, interviewees commented that differentiation based on learning disabilities frequently required resources (e.g., time, money, assessment tools) that, in many cases, programs did not have. It is important to note that there is no structure for systematically identifying learning disabilities in adults at either the state or national level—the problems that Massachusetts adult education programs are having are a widespread concern that has not yet been addressed.

The primary challenge ACLS staff noted regarding differentiation was that differentiation was more difficult to do with large classes.

#### Recommendations

Interviewees made no overt recommendations concerning differentiation. However, several recommendations for supporting differentiation were implied in the successes and challenges described earlier. For example, ACLS might consider (1) supporting programs’ efforts to differentiate curriculum and instruction by identifying helpful online resources and/or contracting with vendors to provide resources to the field—including developing resource guides that collected these sites and materials; (2) working with colleges to formalize assistant teaching arrangements (as a means of expanding staff time in a class); (3) creating an online portal through which ACLS and program staff might share resources; and (4) providing additional support and funding focused on improving services for students with learning disabilities (e.g., increased teacher training, hiring of specialists, funding of assessments).

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### System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES)

#### Introduction

Each interview protocol included questions about professional development in general and SABES in particular. In addition, these topics arose repeatedly during the discussion of other topics. Overall, interviewees provided very positive comments about SABES and professional development, and saw professional development as the primary mechanism for supporting systematic improvement in areas such as curriculum and instruction (including both academic and workforce skills), and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

#### Successes

Generally, interviewees’ comments about SABES and professional development were very positive. Interviewees reported finding SABES—and professional development more generally—to be productive, useful, and a good investment of time and funding.

Interviewees noted several effective strategies adopted by SABES that supported effective professional development, including (1) offering onsite, in-person professional development; (2) using videos to showcase examples of best practices; (3) having blended delivery of professional development as a compromise to accommodate those who might need to travel long distances to trainings; and (4) providing the means and opportunities to network and share resources.

Interviewees reported that professional development was most beneficial when it was aligned with standards, was mandatory (i.e., required either by ACLS or the program), introduced new resources, was embedded in the self-assessment of staff, and was responsive to staff, student, and program needs. Interviewees who had experienced the transition of SABES from regional to statewide centers commented that this change had improved the quality of SABES professional development through its use of subject-matter experts.

#### Challenges

While interviewees saw numerous benefits to SABES and professional development, they still raised several challenges and concerns regarding access to, and the content of, professional development. Regarding access, interviewees commented that program staff had limited availability, regardless of the delivery format—even online trainings were difficult for many staff to attend unless they were truly available 24/7; that travel to in-person trainings was a barrier for many staff because of distances and lack of transportation; that finding coverage for staff who wished to attend trainings was difficult; and that it was very difficult for staff to make time for professional development follow-up activities such as chat rooms. Regarding the content of professional development offerings, interviewees commented that professional development was sometimes too theoretical in that it did not provide actionable best practices; that it was sometimes out of touch with staff needs; that it did not focus enough on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and that SABES did not commit to in-depth training in one area but rather constantly shifted its focus.

#### Recommendations

Interviewees had many suggestions about SABES and professional development more generally. These included (1) recording and distributing online professional development; (2) creating asynchronous online modules (e.g., modules that could be completed at any time); (3) holding webinars in the evenings; (4) providing more funding for substitute teachers; (5) incorporating question-and-answer time into trainings; (6) surveying programs and staff to determine their professional development needs; (7) developing trainings related to regional workforce needs; (8) increasing access to “in the field” (or onsite) support; (9) creating lesson plans based on best practices and distributing them to the field; (10) increasing funding for professional development; (11) increasing the integration of professional development with individual staff goals; (12) increasing training associated with identity and bias; (13) making professional development more data-driven; (14) extending professional development trainings so they occur over time with regular reviews, discussions, or modules; and (15) emphasizing the practical over the theoretical. It should be noted that SABES does do some of these activities already. Interviewees who raised activities that are already being implemented as recommendations could be new to the field, may not have experienced the activity, or did not know the activity was taking place—suggesting a possible communication challenge.

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### Student Enrollment and Retention

#### Introduction

All interviewees described student enrollment and retention as very important topics. Due to time constraints, interviewees were asked different questions about these topics. Directors were asked questions about student enrollment, and teachers were asked questions about student retention. However, a number of interviewees commented on both topics. Interviewees were generally concerned that ACLS’ current enrollment policies and practices did not meet many students “where they are at” in their ability to attend classes. Interviewees expressed concern about policies that linked enrollment and retention to program funding, and that the current mismatch between these policies and programs’ lived experiences could have unintended consequences for students, programs, and the adult education system as a whole. For example, some interviewees reported that policies linking enrollment to program funding required their programs to choose between enrolling students who were most in need of services but difficult to retain—high need students—and students who were more likely to complete the program but were not as high need—high-achieving students).

#### Successes

Interviewees noted a few successes related to student enrollment and retention. Some interviewees noted that their programs’ student-intake process was generally efficient and straightforward. These interviewees noted that the intake process was enhanced by having students participate in a well-planned orientation focused on what to expect in the classroom, program requirements, and general academic preparation. Interviewees also reported that providing students with resources while they were on a waitlist contributed positively to student enrollment.

Some interviewees noted that efforts to create a support system for students within the program was a key factor supporting student retention. Programs’ ability to accurately assess students’ academic achievement level and level of English proficiency was also described as contributing to student retention because it helped programs place students appropriately.

#### Challenges

Interviewees described many challenges to student enrollment and retention. These fell into four categories: barriers students experience in attaining education and employment, conflicts for students associated with time and priorities generally (e.g., conflicting demands between home and classes such as needing to care for family versus attending class), resources and program capacity, and ACLS policies and priorities.

Interviewees described the barriers to education and employment faced by students as the most significant challenge to maintaining student enrollment and retention. Interviewees reported barriers faced by students were wide ranging and included, for example, the need for childcare, mental health problems, and very low levels of literacy. In many cases, teachers and program staff felt they had no means to help a student with issues outside of the classroom. These barriers affected students’ ability to communicate with, enroll in, and consistently attend adult education programs.

Interviewees commented that the time of year greatly affected the availability of students who relied on seasonal labor (e.g., holiday retail or summer landscaping), and student employment generally affected student enrollment and retention since students needed to prioritize making a living. Additionally, earning a credential was not a priority for some students; they enrolled in adult education programs for other reasons. For instance, some students focused simply on learning English and better understanding the culture of the United States. Lastly, programs did not have enough resources to effectively support—and subsequently retain—students with learning disabilities.

Students were disappointed when they were put on a waitlist to enter an adult education program, and many of these students lost contact with the program after being placed on the waitlist. Also, some interviewees reported that program staff did not have enough time to conduct student outreach, even if their program was under-enrolled.

Interviewees reported that some ACLS policies and priorities presented challenges to student enrollment and retention. Interviewees described an inherent conflict between enrolling high-need students (of which there were many) and students who were more likely to achieve official outcome targets (of which there were fewer). Interviewees reported that prioritizing either population could result in reduced funding; either students were less likely to achieve outcomes or the program was more likely to have open seats. Program staff also reported that their program’s attendance policies were, in some cases, too strict (with program staff’s reactions to student absenteeism sometimes being patronizing or not helpful).

#### Recommendations

Interviewees had many recommendations for increasing student enrollment and retention. Several Interviewees reported a significant need for ACLS to provide increased resources to support increased enrollment and retention. More specifically, these interviewees suggested that ACLS (1) provide funding to support additional staff time, particularly for teachers with a high number of students with learning disabilities; (2) support childcare and transportation assistance for students; and (3) provide professional development focused on topics such as enrollment and retention, instructional differentiation, and cultural responsiveness. While all of these activities could be implemented at the program level, interviewees saw ACLS as the mechanism for funding/supporting/prioritizing them: that the current program funding formula was not enough to cover these added services.

With regard to classes and curriculum, teachers and directors identified the following as best practices for programs to retain students: (1) allow students who test well to advance to more difficult content; (2) allow students whose educational progress had plateaued to try learning with a different teacher and/or new materials; (3) design curriculum flexibly—for example, to work well for students who have seasonal time limitations; (4) whenever possible, use real-life scenarios as the basis for ESOL learning; (5) provide more class-time options and the ability to change class times as needed; (6) switch from a linear to a circular sequence of learning to facilitate the integration of students who join classes later in the term; and (7) maximize peer bonding and assistance in the classroom. Interviewees implied that ACLS could have role in facilitating or disseminating these practices, whether through funding assistance, designing applicable resources, or providing professional development through SABES.

Interviewees also recommended that programs increase the amount of time staff spend communicating with students—to more effectively encourage and engage them (e.g., send text messages to everyone in class such as “I’m looking forward to seeing you in the morning!”)—and use mobile apps (e.g., WhatsApp) to link students within a classroom so they can connect with each other outside of class.

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### Workforce and Career Pathways for Students

#### Introduction

The adult education service providers supported by ACLS strive to connect adult learners to employment, training, and higher education opportunities so that students might become employed in jobs with family-sustaining wages—ideally within regional high-need industries. Successes and challenges that interviewees described in relation to this goal were largely tied to (1) staff support, (2) resources from partnerships, and (3) the incorporation of workforce and career pathways information into the classroom.

#### Successes

Several interviewees agreed that advisors played a key role in implementing activities that supported student workforce and career pathway objectives. For example, interviewees noted that advisors regularly worked with students to develop career plans, introduce and explain important online career resources, connect students to partner organizations and their programs, and inform students of local job opportunities. Additionally, interviewees noted that advisors worked to guide students through different skills tests and interest inventories, help students define the skills they possessed (including transferable skills), and counsel students about next steps for college and career training. Advisors carried out these activities with students one on one and in group settings—frequently with entire classes of students. One interviewee described how their program’s advisor had helped students transfer educational and professional credentials from other countries to the United States.

Interviewees frequently mentioned that the online resources O\*NET and MassCIS were important for helping students identify and reach their workforce and career pathway objectives.

#### Challenges

Interviewees noted many challenges to helping students access employment, training, and higher education opportunities. Challenges presented by many students included a lack of transportation, lack of childcare, and, in some cases, an individual’s status as an undocumented immigrant. These challenges directly affected students’ ability to pursue numerous trainings or job opportunities.

Interviewees also reported a number of more specific challenges to supporting students around employment, training, and higher education opportunities. Multiple interviewees noted that many training opportunities were based in Boston and that attending these trainings was impractical or impossible for their students. Multiple interviewees reported that even when distances did not seem that large (e.g., going from a neighboring town into Boston), lack of transportation could make attending trainings very difficult. Interviewees also reported that it was challenging to get students to consider employment opportunities that were more sustainable than their current job because for some students, doing something different was very difficult to imagine, while for others, making a change to more sustainable employment would require a decrease in income.

Interviewees who were teachers described the challenges associated with addressing workforce and career pathways objectives through their lessons. While a number noted the potential benefits of implementing thematic units, they reported that bringing thematic units into subject-based classes was very difficult, especially for high school equivalency classes and subjects such as science.

Teachers also reported that it was difficult to present workforce and training resources and opportunities in classes where most students were unable to access those resources or opportunities (either because of low literacy levels or because of their undocumented immigrant status). Several teachers reported that many immigrant students were not interested in college. Rather, they were focused on surviving in a new country and obtaining immediate employment.

#### Recommendations

Interviewees offered several recommendations for optimizing the effectiveness of programs’ efforts to help students meet their workforce and career pathway objectives.

Multiple interviewees suggested that it might be helpful for programs to regularly offer a “next steps” event for students prepared to advance toward college or career. These interviewees noted that, ideally, this event would occur several months before the students completed the program so they would have ample time to prepare for their pending transition. ACLS could facilitate such events by developing a toolkit for programs that provides directions for implementation. Several interviewees also recommended that programs work to establish or improve partnerships with other organizations—including organizations that might hire entry-level workers (e.g., Goodwill), organizations that might assist with employment (e.g., MassHire), or organizations that offer training programs (e.g., culinary training at a community college). Interviewees noted that ACLS could assist with these efforts by helping programs connect to relevant organizations, especially those that work statewide.

A few teachers recommended inviting presenters who were supportive of college and career learning objectives—including local employers—and providing students with multiple opportunities to gain experience with technology. Teachers noted that both of these efforts required additional time and resources. ACLS could help by maintaining a list of potential speakers who were available to visit programs. One teacher suggested that it would be helpful for each student to be assigned to a case manager, someone who could track each student’s specific goals and needs, and offer multiple kinds of support to help them gain employment, additional training, or entrance to college. However, offering such hands-on support through specialized staff would require additional financial resources.

[Return to topic areas list.](#_Findings)

### Correctional Institutions

#### Introduction

UMDI interviewed two directors and two teachers who worked with adult education programs that were based in correctional institutions. The findings presented in this section highlight the successes, challenges, and recommendations surfaced through these four interviews that are particularly relevant to this context.

Most notably, interviewees commented that all adult education students in correctional institutions face a unique challenge: functioning within an administrative (and physical) structure that prioritizes safety over education. This resulted in teaching and learning that occurred within the context of mandated attendance, regulation of student activities, and lockdowns of individuals or groups, for instance.

Because the context was so unique, and because the population of students being served was uniquely vulnerable, interviewees encouraged ACLS to consider alternative approaches to managing adult education programs based in correctional institutions.

#### Successes

Interview analysis identified two successes particularly relevant to correctional institutions. First, program staff saw themselves as successful when they were able to adjust their approach—within the strict confines of the behaviors and resources allowed within correctional institutions—to meet the needs presented by their students. Multiple interviewees stated that increased flexibility led to increased student success. Second, program staff considered it a success when they were able to access resources through partnerships to support their students as they transitioned from a correctional institution to the community. For example, one interviewee noted that their correctional institution had partnered with a local community college, and through that partnership students participated in the college’s culinary program both during and after their period of incarceration.

#### Challenges

Several challenges unique to correctional institutions were mentioned by interviewees. One major challenge noted by interviewees was that access to technology was limited and restricted within correctional institutions (i.e., technology was frequently inadequate, and use of available technology was restricted). For example, one interviewee said staff did not have access to a computer in the classroom, and they were not allowed to use cellphones as instructional tools. Interviewees noted that it was also a challenge—though an understandable one—that student safety was prioritized over education (including attending class). More specifically, programs in correctional institutions were at the mercy of institution staff regarding student attendance. One interviewee noted that students were less motivated to attend class when their attendance was mandated. Interviewees also noted that it was more difficult to onboard new staff to teach or advise in a correctional institution, and that the population of students being served changed frequently—both circumstances that could result in significant disruptions to student learning.

#### Recommendations

Three recommendations for improving adult education in correctional institutions were implied by the successes and challenges described earlier. First, it would be useful to provide teachers with flexible curriculum that can be readily adapted to meet the needs of individual students and situations. Second, establishing partnerships in the community to assist students with transitioning from the correctional institution to the community could be prioritized. Finally, creating onboarding materials for new staff who work in correctional institutions may help smooth their transition into that context.

[Return to topic areas list.](#_Findings)

### Center for Educational Assessment

#### Introduction

UMDI conducted one interview with a staff member from the University of Massachusetts Center for Educational Assessment (CEA). The interviewee commented on assessment administration and testing related to the Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Tests (MAPT), the assessment their group had developed. While comments focused on this single assessment, the successes, challenges, and recommendations mentioned by the interviewee also apply to other assessments.

#### Successes

The interviewee described several successes related to test administration. The interviewee reported that they had a positive working relationship with ACLS; that communication with ACLS was two-way and very smooth; and that ACLS respected CEA opinions.

The interviewee described Massachusetts state standards as being aligned with best practices for assessment and noted that the state emphasized doing things well. The interviewee saw online assessment trainings as being helpful and successful. The interviewee noted that online trainings were available for participants to access whenever needed, and hosting the trainings online also eliminated the need for (sometimes extensive) travel. Lastly, the interviewee reported that they saw their development of “Good to Know guides for students and teachers as a productive response to programs’ difficulties with communicating assessment information to students. The level of success of these guides, however, has yet to be fully determined as the COVID-19 pandemic affected their rollout.

#### Challenges

The interviewee also reported several challenges. The primary challenge reported by the interviewee related to the nature of their work, that is, the nature of assessment. The interviewee noted that programs have multiple concerns—such as instruction and retention—that are prioritized above assessment. In addition, many concepts central to assessment (e.g., statistics, psychometrics) are not transparent to lay individuals.

Another challenge described by the interviewee was that the tests themselves were difficult to administer, requiring administrative skill, high-level listening skills, and an understanding of different domains of language. Also, the interviewee noted that students’ level of digital literacy could affect their ability to convey the knowledge they had gained. Two other challenges stated by the interviewee were that (1) programs underutilized CEA’s online resources, in particular their two-pagers called “CEA Answers,” and (2) CEA could not change the assessment administration of the tests they themselves had not developed (e.g., BEST+)—for these, CEA can only implement the test administration practices established by the publisher.

#### Recommendations

The interviewee described two recommendations for improvement around assessment administration and training. The first was to change program perceptions of assessment from thinking about it as only related to instruction to a tool that is useful for program improvement generally. The second recommendation was to improve the system used to track who has been trained and who needs training so that in-person trainings might be better organized and accessible.

Other recommendations related to assessment administration and training that were implied by the challenges noted by the interviewee included: (1) improving the culture of assessment at the program level such that it is more familiar and useful; (2) improving communication about (and accessibility to) CEA’s online information resources; and (3) working with the publishing companies of other tests to improve their assessment administration and training.

[Return to topic areas list.](#_Findings)

# Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

## Key Findings

1. **Interviewees from ACLS reported that they promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout the adult education system. Directors and teachers confirmed and affirmed that they share this value and support ACLS’ efforts to consider these values in guiding decisions.** Many interviewees—including directors, teachers, advisors, and ACLS staff—also acknowledged that understanding how best to recognize diversity, support equitable outcomes, and include all students—especially those with disabilities—is a challenge that demands ongoing attention and commitment.
2. **Adult education programs and program staff have limited resources available to meet the diverse needs of their students, and many interviewees reported that program staff were working at full capacity.** While ACLS has instituted policies intended to balance flexibility and accountability, many interviewees requested that ACLS recognize that changes to existing policies/practices (e.g., revisions to the performance measurement system, new data collection system, new WIOA-aligned indicators of program quality, reorganization of professional development offerings and supports, new program review process) required them to further stretch already insufficient resources, which in some cases had a detrimental impact (e.g., decreased rate of staff retention, reduction in number of classroom instructional hours) on programs’ ability to provide services to students (at least in the short term). Some interviewees reported that the rate and volume of change in the adult education system has been a challenge—in part, because the reason(s) for each change were not always clear to program staff—and that more time between changes was needed to determine what works.
3. **Many interviewees recognized differentiation of curriculum and instruction as an effective tool for promoting positive student outcomes.** Interviewees also noted that most program staff would benefit from additional time, training, and resources dedicated to differentiation of curriculum and instruction for all learners—especially for students with learning disabilities.
4. **All interviewees agreed that the professional development provided by SABES had a positive impact on the practice of directors, teachers, and advisors; and directors and teachers frequently noted that additional professional development would be beneficial.** Interviewees also frequently suggested that ACLS and SABES consider expanding the breadth and depth of professional development offerings. Topics for training suggested by several interviewees included: strategies for working with students with learning disabilities; differentiation; digital literacy (for staff and students); best practices for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion; and, culturally responsive instruction. Directors and teachers suggested evening classes and online offerings may be more accessible to part-time teachers.
5. **Many interviewees expressed some level of concern regarding ACLS policies that linked continued program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.** Some interviewees explained that this link decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, and increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff.

Some interviewees described how policies that link funding to student enrollment and performance led to an inherent tension between enrolling (and subsequently supporting) high-need students (i.e., those less likely to achieve positive outcomes) and students with relatively low levels of need (i.e., those more likely to achieve positive outcomes). Interviewees noted that funding policies pushed programs to prioritize student outcomes over considerations for equity or inclusion.

Interviewees noted that tying funding to student enrollment and performance increased competition among programs to provide services to students at the lowest possible cost per student. Over time, this competition could serve to drive down the quality of adult education services because programs that underestimate the cost of their services are more likely to be funded and less likely to have the resources necessary to support high-quality instruction for all students. While more students might be reached in this manner, a lower proportion of students are likely to achieve positive outcomes.

Interviewees also noted that linking funding to student enrollment and retention made it more difficult for adult education centers to function as educational institutions. Interviewees reflected that uncertainty around program funding made it more difficult to develop local support, promote staff comradery, or provide assurance of long-term organizational stability for individuals seeking their services. The result is increased levels of uncertainty and anxiety among directors, teachers, and advisors.

1. **Many adult education professionals—program directors and teachers—believe programs are under-resourced by the state and under-supported by local communities.** Interviewees were both proud of and humbled by the opportunity to be a part of the adult education system—a system that provides essential services to vulnerable populations with varied and complex needs. Interviewees noted that many programs struggled because staff worked part-time, worked too few hours to qualify for benefits, and—in many cases—were not paid family-sustaining wages. These interviewees noted that it was common for programs to struggle with staff turnover and to adequately train their staff.
2. **Interviewees from well-resourced programs typically reported fewer challenges when responding to new ACLS policy demands than interviewees from less-resourced programs.** Resource ecosystems are multi-dimensional: The partnerships and relationships that emerge from them have both breadth and depth. For example, programs that are embedded in community colleges exist in resource ecosystems that are quite different from those that surround small stand-alone programs. The former reside within an ecosystem of services that are generally well connected to one another and that provide in-depth support across a broad range of issues. The latter, however—especially if it is a newer program—may not even be aware of what supports its ecosystem holds, much less be connected to those supports in a way that can benefit the program or its students. Programs in well-resourced ecosystems typically have lower levels of need and greater capacity to respond to new demands.

## Recommendations

Many recommendations from interviewees are discussed in the relevant topic area sections of this report. A few of these previously reported recommendations are presented here, because they may have broader implications for the work being done by ACLS or the field. Based on interview findings, UMDI suggests:

1. **Expand ACLS engagement with the field around the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.** For example, ACLS could communicate more transparently how current ACLS policies, practices, and resources are intended to support DEI. ACLS could also engage the field in conversations regarding policies, practices, and resources that would most benefit students or further involve program representatives in the development of DEI initiatives that are intended to be implemented at the program level.
2. **Slow the rate of change to—and prioritize fewer—policies and practices, particularly policies and practices implemented and evaluated at the level of individual ABE/ESOL programs.** Slowing the rate of change would reduce demands on program resources and help programs better understand what works. Each change creates disruptions in programming that may have far-reaching effects in multiple areas. New policies and practices are not always implemented smoothly during their first year, and program staff need time to add new skills, reconfigure program policies, and reallocate budgets and resources appropriately. Therefore, ACLS could consider focusing on supporting and addressing the fidelity of implementation of new programs/policies during their first year of implementation and begin to monitor efficacy in later years.
3. **Provide programs with additional assistance with curriculum development, including suggestions for differentiation, professional development, technical assistance, and sample lessons to support the needs of diverse learners.** For example, ACLS could facilitate and/or promote an online portal through which program staff share materials and best practices with their colleagues around the state. Alternatively, ACLS could facilitate other opportunities for programs to share key curricular resources.
4. **4. Develop strategies to gather more information about effective professional development activities.** The original (pre-COVID-19) plan for this evaluation included an investigation into which professional development activities were most effective, and that plan was changed because of data limitations. Engaging in this research when student outcomes are once again available could inform decisions about the content, format, and topics of future professional development activities. Completing a needs assessment focused on professional development could also be helpful.
5. **Consider strategies to address the unintended consequences of linking program funding to student enrollment and outcomes.** While interviewees identified some unintended consequences of such linking (i.e., decreased equitable and inclusive enrollment practices, increased competition among programs, increased levels of anxiety and uncertainty among program staff), it is not clear how pervasive these consequences are in the field. As a first step, ACLS could work with the field to better understand the facets and pervasiveness of these concerns.
6. **Weigh the tradeoffs between encouraging program/policy flexibility and unintended consequences.** While Massachusetts K–12 schools have a strong tradition of local control (and local support), applying the principles of local control and local support has been a challenge for some adult education programs. Policies that encourage flexibility, adaptation, and/or customization of adult education programs at the local level may require significant resources to implement—resources that some programs simply do not have. Providing strategic guidance and/or targeted recommendations regarding key decisions (e.g., curriculum selection, developing organizational partnerships, deploying recruitment resources) could help some programs maintain and/or improve the quality of services offered to students.
7. **ACLS should work with programs so that both ACLS and programs better understand the relationship between available resources, program costs, and service provision. It is important to promote a shared understanding of how to price services so that funding can be used to serve students well.** That means being realistic about how many students can be served and the costs associated with providing services to those students (e.g., cost of staff time, cost of recruitment, cost of classroom supports). Through the next competitive RFP, ACLS should also communicate how budgets will be used to evaluate proposals—if at all. ACLS could work with programs to share guidance or best practices for balancing the price of service against the total amount of service they plan to deliver.

# Appendix A

**Topics & Questions for Adult Ed Teacher & Director Interviews**

**3-18-20**

**Introduction**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to conduct an evaluation of the adult education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as an Adult Education teacher [*or director*].

**Study Purpose**

DESE has contracted this study to deepen its understanding of current practices and needs in the field, including challenges and suggestions for improvements. Your input today about your experiences as a teacher [*or director*] will inform DESE’s work to improve adult education in Massachusetts. The interview will include questions about your experience and needs related to Adult Education teaching [*or program management*].

**Confidentiality**

All interviews are confidential and will be used only by members of the research team. Your name and program will not be identified. No quotes will be attributed to any individuals.

**Permission to Record**

The interview will take about 45 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation to ensure your comments are accurately documented. No one outside of the UMDI research team will have access to the recording. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. **May I have your permission to record this conversation?** Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the interview.

**Preface to Interview Questions:**

The questions in this interview will cover the following topics: Career Pathways and Collaborations; Curriculum and Instruction; Support for Staff Growth and Development; ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources; and Access and Equity. Primary considerations within these topics are issues associated with quality programming and outcomes. When you respond, we ask that you be mindful of the wide variety of students you serve when answering the interview questions and consider populations that are, for example, low income, low skilled, out-of-school youth, persons who are English language learners, people with disabilities, older workers, returning citizens, racial/ethnic minorities, Veterans, unemployment claimants, etc.

**Career Pathways and Collaboration Section:**

| **Directors** | **Teachers** |
| --- | --- |
| **13 minutes** | **10 minutes** |
| **1) We heard about a wide range of student interests and goals through our fall focus groups. What information does your program gather and use to learn about the college and career interests and goals of ALL students?**  **2) What are the ways in which your program exposes students to information about college and career options?**  **Prompt:** Can you provide us with an example of how your program exposes students to college and career options? (optional)  **Prompt:** How can ACLS better support your collection and use of information about student college and career interests and goals? What kinds of information would be more helpful to you? (optional) | **1) We heard about a wide range of student interests and goals through our fall focus groups. How do you learn about the college and career interests and goals of ALL of your students?**  **Prompt:** What information do you get from advisors? What information do you get from other sources?  **2) What are the ways in which your program exposes students to information about college and career options? As a teacher, what specifically do you do to expose students to college and career options?**  **3) How can your program better provide more or ALL students with workforce and training information and opportunities?** |
| **3) Please tell us about the processes and partnerships your program has in place to provide ALL students with workforce and training opportunities?**  **Prompt:** What challenges and successes has your program had in establishing processes and partnerships that provide ALL students with workforce and training opportunities?  **4) What are the ways in which your program supports students who choose to pursue college or career options?** |  |
| **5) How can ACLS better support your program to provide ALL students with workforce and training opportunities?**  **Prompt:** How can ACLS better support your program to provide workforce and training exposure and opportunities particularly for students who may be unaware of options? (e.g., a student from a rural area who recently arrived in the U.S. and has no knowledge of the range of potential jobs in the U.S.) |  |

**Curriculum and Instruction Section:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Directors** | **Teachers** |
| **13 minutes** | **10 minutes** |
| **6) What are the ways in which you personally as a director support your teachers’ development and implementation of high quality curriculum and instructional methods?**  **7) What processes and procedures does your program have in place to support your teachers’ development and implementation of high-quality curriculum and instructional methods?**  **8) How do you support new instructors who have no adult education experience to develop and implement high-quality curriculum and instructional methods?**  **Prompt:** What challenges do you have? | **4) What support do you need to develop, access, and implement high-quality curriculum and instructional supports?**  **Prompts:** From your program?  From ACLS?  From professional development / SABES? |
| **9) How can ACLS better support programs and teachers to develop, access, and implement high-quality curriculum and instructional methods?** | **5) How do you ensure you differentiate your instruction so that ALL students are taught effectively, regardless of their background, abilities, and challenges?**  **Prompt:** Can you provide us with examples of strategies you use to differentiate instruction to students based on their background, abilities, and challenges?  **Prompt:** How do you ensure ALL students are engaged in their learning? |
| **10) How do you or your program differentiate to ensure ALL students are taught effectively, regardless of their background, abilities, and challenges?**  **11) How do you support teachers to differentiate their instruction for students with learning challenges, with little previous educational experience, etc…?** | **6) What additional curriculum or instructional supports would help you to differentiate your instruction for ALL students effectively?** |
| **12) How can ACLS better support programs and teachers in differentiating their instruction so ALL students regardless of background, abilities, and challenges are taught effectively?** |  |

**Staff Growth and Development Section:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Directors** | **Teachers** |
| **9 minutes** | **10 minutes** |
| **13) How do you support your own professional growth and development? And that of your staff?**  **Prompt:** In what ways, if at all, have you benefitted from SABES onsite coaching? If you have participated, what might be improved? If not, why not?  **14) What kinds of professional development activities outside of SABES do you and your staff participate in? Who provides that PD? What was the impact on program quality?** | **7) What affects your ability to participate in and complete SABES PD?**  **Prompt:** Outside of SABES, what kinds of professional development activities do you participate in?  **Prompt:** What changes could improve SABES professional development participation and completion, in particular completion of SABES PD follow-up activities?  **Prompt:** What would better support your participation in and completion of SABES PD?  **Prompt:** What PD other than SABES, if any, do you participate in and find useful? |
| **15) How can ACLS better support you and your staff with professional growth and development?**  **Prompt:** What changes could improve SABES professional development participation and completion, in particular completion of SABES PD follow-up activities? | **8) What effects has SABES PD had on your instructional practice?**  Prompts/Probes:  **Prompt:** What specifically have you learned that affected your practice? And how?  **Prompt:** What additional SABES PD would you like to participate in to improve your practice and in what format? |
| **16) What effects has SABES PD had on your practices as a director and the practice of your staff? What about the impacts of PD outside of SABES?**  **Prompt:** What changes have you seen in teaching practices?  **Prompt:** What changes have you seen in advising practices?  **Prompt:** What additional SABES PD would improve your own practice? In what format would you like to receive SABES PD?  **Prompt:** What additional SABES PD would improve your staff’s practice? |  |

**ACLS Policies, Practices, and Resources Section:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Directors** | **Teachers** |
| **6 minutes** | **10 minutes** |
| **17) How do ACLS policies or practices help or hinder your program in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes? Can you give an example?**  **Prompt:** How do PQRs or Site Visits help or hinder your program in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes?  **Prompt:** What changes, if any, have you made as a result of a PQR or Site Visit?  **Prompt:** What specific recommendations do you have to improve ACLS PQRs and Site Visits? | **9) On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being ‘extremely familiar’ and 1 being ‘not at all familiar’, how familiar are you with the ACLS policies outlined in their policy manual?**  **If 3-5…**  **Which ACLS policies or practices help or hinder you in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes?**  **If 1-2…**  **Which policies or practices in the AE program you work in help or hinder you in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes?**  **Prompt:** How do PQRs or Site Visits help or hinder you in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes?  **Prompt:** What changes, if any, have you made as a result of a PQR or Site Visit?  **Prompt:** How could PQRs and Site Visits be improved? |
| **18) ACLS provides resources on their website (e.g.,** Educator Growth and Effectiveness System, Professional Standards, Proficiency Guides, Scope and Sequence Templates, Unit Templates, Lesson Plan Templates)**. How useful are they in supporting your work with students? If not, why not?**  **Prompt:** Are there particular resources you find useful? Why?  **Prompt:** Are there particular resources which are not useful? Why?  **Prompt:** What additional resources would you or your staff find useful in supporting ALL students? | **10) ACLS provides numerous resources on their website (e.g.,** Educator Growth and Effectiveness System, Professional Standards, Proficiency Guides, Scope and Sequence Templates, Unit Templates, Lesson Plan Templates)**. How useful are they in supporting your work with students? If not, why not?**  **Prompt:** Are there particular resources you find useful? Why?  **Prompt:** Are there particular resources which are not useful? Why?  **Prompt:** What additional resources would you find useful in supporting ALL students? |

**Access and Equity:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Directors** | **Teachers** |
| **4 minutes** | **5 minutes** |
| **If fully enrolled…**  **19a) What methods and resources have you used to increase program enrollment?**  **20) Is there additional unmet need in your community? If yes, what are the barriers to serving them?**  **If underenrolled…**  **19b) What reasons or causes do you see for underenrollment in your program?**  **Both:**  **Prompt:** How can ACLS better support your program’s efforts to improve student enrollment?  **Prompt:** What other instructional modalities (e.g., workplace education, satellite sites, distance education, apps for learning) would you be open to employing? | **11) What do you do to promote student retention in your classes?**  **Prompt:** Of the students you serve, who needs the most support for retention?  **Prompt:** How can ACLS better support your program with student retention? |

**Concluding Question (if time):**

To conclude, we’re having these conversations with teachers [*or directors*] to inform ACLS about your perspective on working in an adult education program. Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't cover? [Have we missed anything in our conversation that you’d like to add?]

**ACLS Interview Protocol 4-29-20**

**Introduction**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by DESE to conduct an evaluation of the adult education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as a member of the ACLS team.

**Study Purpose**

DESE has contracted this study to deepen its understanding of current practices and needs in the field, including challenges and suggestions for improvements. Your input today about your experiences as a member of the ACLS team will inform DESE’s work to improve adult education in Massachusetts.

**Confidentiality**

All interviews are confidential and will be used only by members of the research team. Your name will not be identified and no quotes will be attributed to any individuals.

**Permission to Record**

The interview will take about 45 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation to ensure your comments are accurately documented. No one outside of the UMDI research team will have access to the recording. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. **May I have your permission to record this conversation?** Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the interview.

**ACLS Interview Protocol 4-29-20**

**Section I: Changes to the Massachusetts Adult Education System**

A number of changes have been made to the Massachusetts adult education system. Here are a few examples:

* Having flexible program design as part of the RFP
* Tying funding to filled seats
* Implementation of the LACES database system
* Implementation of an open enrollment system
* Implementation of the educator evaluation model
* Changes to the monitoring processes (e.g., PQRs, site visits)

Please note this is not a comprehensive list—you may talk about a change that is not offered as an example.

**1) What changes do you believe have had the greatest positive impact on high quality instruction? How?**

**2) What changes do you believe have had the greatest positive impact on student outcomes? How?**

**3) Which change has had the most unintended negative consequences? How?**

**o**  **Prompt:** How do you think this change might be modified to minimize the unintended negative consequences?

**Section II: Identification of Promising Practices and Their Dissemination**

**4) What specific promising practices have you seen at the program level that address barriers to providing high quality adult education services?**

**o**  **Prompt:** What program practices support improvements in educational outcomes (e.g., Measurable Skills Gains, test results)?

**o**  **Prompt:** What program practices support improved workforce indicators (e.g., new or better employment, completion of post-secondary workforce training)?

**5) How could ACLS better identify programs’ promising practices?**

**o Prompt:** How might ACLS better identify programs’ promising practices to select and develop curriculum?

**o Prompt:** How might ACLS better identify programs’ promising practices that support high quality instruction (i.e., instruction that is rigorous, uses evidence-based practices, and sets high expectations for students)?

**6) How could ACLS better disseminate programs’ promising practices?**

**Section III: Support of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion among Programs and Their Staff**

**ACLS has identified several priority student populations (for example: out-of-school youth, parents, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals, and individuals with disabilities):**

**7) What successes have you seen among programs in serving diverse students?**

**o Prompt:** How are programs meeting the unique needs of different diverse populations? (Maybe follow up at the end of the prompt by asking about any groups that the respondent didn’t address? Did you have anything else you wanted to add about ….?)

**8) What challenges have you seen programs experience in serving diverse students?**

**o Prompt:** Do you have any thoughts about how programs might address these challenges?

**9) How well is the adult education system meeting the unique needs of diverse students?**

**o Prompt:** Are there populations that the system is failing to serve? How**?**

**10) How can ACLS better support programs to serve diverse students well?**

**o Prompt:** How can ACLS better support programs in achieving the goal of students attaining jobs with family sustaining wages?

**IV. Increasing SABES Participation and Completion**

**11) What suggestions do you have for increasing participation in, and completion of, SABES PD by teachers, advisors, and/or administrators?**

**o Prompt:** What improvements to communications and outreach could be made?

**o Prompt:** What changes in schedule, logistics, or format could be made?

**o Prompt:** What changes in content could be made?

**12) What suggestions do you have for increasing the application of SABES PD to practice and behavior by teachers, advisors, and/or administrators?**

**o Prompt:** How can SABES and ACLS better support implementation?

**Section V: Conclusion**

**13) To conclude, we’re having this conversation to gain your perspective as an ACLS staff member on working with programs and serving students better. Is there anything you would like to add?**

**SABES Interview Protocol 4-29-20**

**Introduction**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by DESE to conduct an evaluation of the adult education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as a member of the SABES team.

**Study Purpose**

DESE has contracted this study to deepen its understanding of current practices and needs in the field, including challenges and suggestions for improvements. Your input today about your experiences as a member of the SABES team will inform DESE’s work to improve adult education in Massachusetts.

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All interviews are confidential and will be used only by members of the research team. Your name will not be identified and no quotes will be attributed to any individuals.

**Permission to Record**

The interview will take about 45 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation to ensure your comments are accurately documented. No one outside of the UMDI research team will have access to the recording. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. **May I have your permission to record this conversation?** Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the interview.

**Section I: Impact of SABES Changes and Communication**

**Since 2015, there have been significant changes to how SABES provides professional development for Adult Education programs and staff.**

**1. What are the most important ways these changes have benefitted adult education programs and program staff?**

**2. What have been the greatest drawbacks of the recent changes for adult education programs and program staff?**

**o Prompt:** What do you see as potential solutions to these drawbacks?

**3. What additional changes would you recommend to improve the SABES system?**

**O Prompt:** What system design changes might be made?

**O Prompt:** What additional content might be offered?

**4. What can SABES and ACLS do to better communicate with each other?**

**5. What can SABES do to better communicate with programs and program staff?**

**Section II: Increasing SABES Participation and Completion**

**6. What are the biggest barriers to participation in SABES PD?**

**7. What suggestions do you have for increasing participation in SABES professional development?**

**8. What suggestions do you have for increasing program staff completion of SABES professional development offerings?**

**Section III: Increasing Application of SABES Learning**

**9. From your perspective, which SABES services offer the most benefit for programs and program staff?**

**o Prompt:** Which SABES services have most improved instructional practices?

**o Prompt:** Which SABES services have most improved advising practices?

**o Prompt:** Which SABES services have most improved administrative practices?

**10. What does SABES do to ensure that practitioners implement the strategies they learn through your professional development?**

**o Prompt:** Do you conduct post-training follow-up? With what percentage of professional development participants?

**11. What changes in services might increase the positive impact of SABES services?**

**o Prompt:** On teachers?

**o Prompt:** On advisors?

**o Prompt:** On directors and administrative staff?

**Section IV: SABES Services**

**12. What do you think are the most pressing professional development needs of programs and program staff?**

**o Prompt:** How do you determine those needs? How do you then alter programming to address those identified needs?

**13. How well do you think SABES services address the needs of adult education programs and program staff?**

**o Prompt:** What might be changed to better align SABES services with the needs of programs and program staff?

**14. What do you think is the ideal configuration of SABES professional development for teachers? For advisors? For directors and administrators?**

**o Prompt:** What has worked best?

**o Prompt:** What are the tradeoffs of different professional development delivery options and formats?

**15. Thinking about the range of ethnicities, perspectives, and life experiences of adult education students, what are the ways in which SABES specifically supports staff in the success of this diverse group of students?**

**o Prompt:** What, if any, specific offerings does SABES provide that support diversity, equity, and inclusion?

**o Prompt:** What, if any, specific pedagogies are taught that support diversity, equity, and inclusion?

**o Prompt:** What are ways in which SABES can improve its ability to ensure students (and staff) with different backgrounds are reflected in SABES’s work?

**Section V: Conclusion**

**16. To conclude, we’re having this conversation to inform ACLS about your perspective as a SABES staff member working with adult education programs. Is there anything else about your work that you would like to add?**

**CEA Interview Protocol 4-29-20**

**Introduction**

My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I work with UMass Donahue Institute, an independent research organization that has been contracted by DESE to conduct an evaluation of the adult education system in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking this time to speak with me about your experience from your perspective as a member of the UMass CEA team.

**Study Purpose**

DESE has contracted this study to deepen its understanding of current practices and needs in the field, including challenges and suggestions for improvements. Your input today about your experiences as a member of the UMass CEA team will inform DESE’s work to improve adult education in Massachusetts.

**Confidentiality**

All interviews are confidential and will be used only by members of the research team. Your name will not be identified and no quotes will be attributed to any individuals.

**Permission to Record**

The interview will take about 45 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record our conversation to ensure your comments are accurately documented. No one outside of the UMDI research team will have access to the recording. If you want me to turn off the recorder at any point, please just let me know. **May I have your permission to record this conversation?** Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? Ok, I am turning on the recorder, and we will begin the interview.

**Section I: Relationships and Communication**

**1. What successes have you had in your work with adult education programs and program staff? Please provide examples.**

**2. What challenges have you had in your work with adult education programs and program staff? Please provide examples.**

**3. In what ways could the UMass CEA-ACLS partnership be improved?**

**o Prompt:** What could UMass CEA potentially do differently?

**o Prompt:** What could ACLS potentially do differently?

**4. What are the primary ways that UMass CEA communicates with adult education programs and program staff?**

**o Prompt (will be asked):** To what extent do you think these communication methods are clear and effective?

**o Prompt (will be asked):** How might UMass CEA, in partnership with ACLS, improve communication about assessment with adult education programs and program staff?

**Section II: Assessment Administration and Scoring**

**5. What best practices have you observed in adult education programs related to student assessment administration and scoring?**

**o Prompt:** Could you please provide examples?

**6. What challenges have you observed in adult education programs related to student assessment administration and scoring?**

**o Prompt:** Could you please provide examples?

**7. What effect do you think the recent changes in assessment training, including the initial certification and recertification processes, are having on standardized assessment administration and scoring?**

**o Prompt:** What changes stand out for you as important?

**8. What changes would you suggest to help improve assessment administration practices by programs and program staff?**

**9. What changes would you suggest to help improve the assessment scoring practices by programs and program staff?**

**10. What could ACLS and UMass CEA do to further support programs in using assessment data?**

**o Prompt:** What can UMass CEA and ACLS do to support programs in communicating assessment scores to students?

**Section III: Training and Support**

**11. How might UMass CEA and ACLS work with programs to determine the assessment training needs of programs’ staff?**

**o Prompt:** What is working well for assessment trainings?

**o Prompt:** What suggestions do you have, if any, for improving assessment training?

**12. How might UMass CEA and ACLS work with programs so that programs’ staff are better prepared to participate in assessment trainings?**

**13. How well do you think UMass CEA assessment trainings reflect the needs of adult education programs?**

**o Prompt:** In what ways, if any, are the assessment training needs of programs not being met?

**o Prompt:** What suggestions do you have for addressing the issues you have identified?

**Section IV: Conclusion**

**14. To conclude, we’re having this conversation in order to inform ACLS about your perspective as an UMass CEA staff member on working with AE programs and meeting test administrators’ needs. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

# Appendix B

**Interview Topics Mapped to Evaluation Questions**

| **Topic Area** | **Evaluation Questions** |
| --- | --- |
| ACLS Policies, Practices, & Resources | 2e. Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how? • Are changes in the AE system associated with difficulties programs are experiencing with student enrollment? • Are changes in the AE system associated with difficulties programs are experiencing with retention of staff (teachers, advisors, directors, and possibly others)? |
| 3c. Which aspects of support (e.g.,), (), or combinations of supports are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes?  i. Which ACLS supports (the revised open and competitive application process, Program Quality Reviews) are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes? ii. Which SABES supports (specific PD, on-site coaching, practitioner sharing groups) are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes? iii. Which intra-program supports (strong educational leader, peer mentoring/support, professional learning communities) are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes? |
| 3d. What changes in the AE system would help to improve student services and outcomes? |
| ACLS Policies, Practices, & Resources  SABES & PD | 4. How do ACLS and SABES communicate with program directors and educators about PD opportunities, and what kinds of information do ACLS and SABES share? What changes in communication and information could result in greater awareness and understanding of ACLS policies and resources, and increase participation in SABES PD? |
| Differentiation | 1a. What are the ways in which programs determine the instructional content and pedagogy that best meet their students’ needs? |
| HQ Curriculum & Instruction | 1. What criteria and processes do programs use to determine the quality of curriculum and instruction? |
| 1c. What systems do programs have in place (e.g., continuous improvement process, needs assessment, needs-based planning, classroom observations, teacher professional development, and the Educator Growth & Evaluation system) to monitor the quality and impact of instruction? |
| 3b. How do teachers, advisors, and directors choose instructional practices and what program practices do they associate with notable improvements in instruction? |
| HQ Curriculum & Instruction  Differentiation | 1d. What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction? |
| HQ Curriculum & Instruction  Differentiation  Student Workforce & Career Pathways | 1b. How do programs determine whether students are making progress in their academic and workforce skills and abilities, as well as whether and how students need additional support? |
| SABES & PD | 5. What factors positively or negatively affect educators’ engagement in and completion of different formats of SABES PD? What changes by programs, ACLS, or SABES would help to increase participation in SABES? |
| 6. Do SABES services reflect the needs of adult education programs? |
| 7. What effect is SABES having on teaching practices and learning outcomes? |
| 7a. How is the learning from SABES PD being used? How has the learning from SABES PD affected instructional practices and teacher/director/advisor teaching behavior? |
| 7c. Which PD characteristics (e.g., frequency, intensity, total dosage, format including online/face-to-face/hybrid) are most associated with changes in instructional practices and teaching behavior? |
| 7d. What changes in the SABES system would help to improve instructional practices and teaching behavior? |
| 7f. How have changes to SABES affected the MA AE field? (teachers, advisors, administrators) |
| CEA & Assessment | **Topics covered that were outside of research questions** |
| DEI |
| Student Enrollment & Retention |
| Student Workforce & Career Pathways |
| **Research questions that were deprioritized** | 2c. Is the adult education system aligned with student educational and workforce, regional workforce, and program needs? |
| 2d. What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs? |
| 3. What types of programs are most successful as defined by highest average student performance, by greatest improvement in student outcomes (MSG), and by mandated workforce indicators? |
| 3a. What characteristics of programs are associated with improvements in student outcomes? i. type of program, (e.g., ABE only, ESOL only, or ABE/ESOL combination) ii. alignment of curriculum and instruction with college- and career-readiness standards and regional employment plan iii. staff (e.g., the educational background of directors and educators)  iv. staff PD (e.g., strategies to match educators with PD, the amount of PD educators engage in) v. students (e.g., percentage no/low literacy, percentage ESOL) |
| 7b. How do changes in instructional practices and teaching behavior vary by PD center, content area, and mode of delivery? |
| 7e. What would you edit, add, or expand in terms of content or questions to improve the SABES RfP? |

**Interview Protocol Questions Mapped to Topic Areas**

| **Evaluation Questions** | **Topic Area** | **Director Interview Questions** | **Teacher Interview Questions** | **ACLS Interview Questions** | **SABES Interview Questions** | **CEA Interview Questions** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. What criteria and processes do programs use to determine the quality of curriculum and instruction? | HQ Curriculum & Instruction |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1a. What are the ways in which programs determine the instructional content and pedagogy that best meet their students’ needs? | Differentiation | 10. How do you or your program differentiate to ensure ALL students are taught effectively, regardless of their background, abilities, and challenges?  11. How do you support teachers to differentiate their instruction for students with learning challenges, with little previous educational experience, etc…? | 5. How do you ensure you differentiate your instruction so that ALL students are taught effectively, regardless of their background, abilities, and challenges? |  |  |  |
| 1b. How do programs determine whether students are making progress in their academic and workforce skills and abilities, as well as whether and how students need additional support? | HQ Curriculum & Instruction  Differentiation  Student Workforce & Career Pathways |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1c. What systems do programs have in place (e.g., continuous improvement process, needs assessment, needs-based planning, classroom observations, teacher professional development, and the Educator Growth & Evaluation system) to monitor the quality and impact of instruction? | HQ Curriculum & Instruction | 6. What are the ways in which you personally as a director support your teachers’ development and implementation of high quality curriculum and instructional methods?7. What processes and procedures does your program have in place to support your teachers’ development and implementation of high-quality curriculum and instructional methods?8. How do you support new instructors who have no adult education experience to develop and implement high-quality curriculum and instructional methods? |  | 1. What changes do you believe have had the greatest positive impact on high quality instruction? How? |  |  |
| 1d. What additional support or guidance do programs need in order to improve student outcomes and classroom instruction? | HQ Curriculum & InstructionDifferentiation | 9. How can ACLS better support programs and teachers to develop, access, and implement high-quality curriculum and instructional methods?12. How can ACLS better support programs and teachers in differentiating their instruction so ALL students regardless of background, abilities, and challenges are taught effectively? | 4. What support do you need to develop, access, and implement high-quality curriculum and instructional supports?6. What additional curriculum or instructional supports would help you to differentiate your instruction for ALL students effectively? |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2c. Is the adult education system aligned with student educational and workforce, regional workforce, and program needs? |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2d. What changes in the AE system would promote better alignment with adult learner, regional workforce, and AE program needs? |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2e. Have changes in the AE system had any negative effects on programs? If so, how?• Are changes in the AE system associated with difficulties programs are experiencing with student enrollment?• Are changes in the AE system associated with difficulties programs are experiencing with retention of staff (teachers, advisors, directors, and possibly others)? | ACLS Policies, Practices, & Resources |  |  | 3. Which change has had the most unintended negative consequences? How? |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. What types of programs are most successful as defined by highest average student performance, by greatest improvement in student outcomes (MSG), and by mandated workforce indicators? |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3a. What characteristics of programs are associated with improvements in student outcomes?i. type of program, (e.g., ABE only, ESOL only, or ABE/ESOL combination)ii. alignment of curriculum and instruction with college- and career-readiness standards and regional employment planiii. staff (e.g., the educational background of directors and educators) iv. staff PD (e.g., strategies to match educators with PD, the amount of PD educators engage in)v. students (e.g., percentage no/low literacy, percentage ESOL) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3b. How do teachers, advisors, and directors choose instructional practices and what program practices do they associate with notable improvements in instruction? | HQ Curriculum & Instruction |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3c. Which aspects of support (e.g.,), (), or combinations of supports are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes? i. Which ACLS supports (the revised open and competitive application process, Program Quality Reviews) are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes?ii. Which SABES supports (specific PD, on-site coaching, practitioner sharing groups) are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes?iii. Which intra-program supports (strong educational leader, peer mentoring/support, professional learning communities) are making the greatest contribution to improvements in student outcomes? | ACLS Policies, Practices, & Resources | 17. How do ACLS policies or practices help or hinder your program in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes? Can you give an example?18. ACLS provides resources on their website (e.g., Educator Growth and Effectiveness System, Professional Standards, Proficiency Guides, Scope and Sequence Templates, Unit Templates, Lesson Plan Templates). How useful are they in supporting your work with students? If not, why not? | On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being ‘extremely familiar’ and 1 being ‘not at all familiar’, how familiar are you with the ACLS policies outlined in their policy manual?If 3-5…Which ACLS policies or practices help or hinder you in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes?If 1-2…9. Which policies or practices in the AE program you work in help or hinder you in supporting ALL students and improving their workforce and learning outcomes?10. ACLS provides numerous resources on their website (e.g., Educator Growth and Effectiveness System, Professional Standards, Proficiency Guides, Scope and Sequence Templates, Unit Templates, Lesson Plan Templates). How useful are they in supporting your work with students? If not, why not? | 2.What changes do you believe have had the greatest positive impact on student outcomes? How?4. What specific promising practices have you seen at the program level that address barriers to providing high quality adult education services? |  |  |
| 3d. What changes in the AE system would help to improve student services and outcomes? | ACLS Policies, Practices, & Resources |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4. How do ACLS and SABES communicate with program directors and educators about PD opportunities, and what kinds of information do ACLS and SABES share? What changes in communication and information could result in greater awareness and understanding of ACLS policies and resources, and increase participation in SABES PD? | ACLS Policies, Practices, & Resources  SABES & PD |  |  |  | 4. What can SABES and ACLS do to better communicate with each other?  5. What can SABES do to better communicate with programs and program staff? |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 5. What factors positively or negatively affect educators’ engagement in and completion of different formats of SABES PD? What changes by programs, ACLS, or SABES would help to increase participation in SABES? | SABES & PD |  | 7. What affects your ability to participate in and complete SABES PD? | 11. What suggestions do you have for increasing participation in, and completion of, SABES PD by teachers, advisors, and/or administrators? | 6. What are the biggest barriers to participation in SABES PD? 7. What suggestions do you have for increasing participation in SABES professional development?8. What suggestions do you have for increasing program staff completion of SABES professional development offerings? |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 6. Do SABES services reflect the needs of adult education programs? | SABES & PD |  |  |  | 12. What do you think are the most pressing professional development needs of programs and program staff?  13. How well do you think SABES services address the needs of adult education programs and program staff? |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7. What effect is SABES having on teaching practices and learning outcomes? | SABES & PD | 16. What effects has SABES PD had on your practices as a director and the practice of your staff? What about the impacts of PD outside of SABES? | 8. What effects has SABES PD had on your instructional practice? |  | 9. From your perspective, which SABES services offer the most benefit for programs and program staff? |  |
| 7a. How is the learning from SABES PD being used? How has the learning from SABES PD affected instructional practices and teacher/director/advisor teaching behavior? | SABES & PD | 16. What effects has SABES PD had on your practices as a director and the practice of your staff? What about the impacts of PD outside of SABES? |  |  | 10. What does SABES do to ensure that practitioners implement the strategies they learn through your professional development? |  |
| 7b. How do changes in instructional practices and teaching behavior vary by PD center, content area, and mode of delivery? |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7c. Which PD characteristics (e.g., frequency, intensity, total dosage, format including online/face-to-face/hybrid) are most associated with changes in instructional practices and teaching behavior? | SABES & PD |  |  |  | 14. What do you think is the ideal configuration of SABES professional development for teachers? For advisors? For directors and administrators? |  |
| 7d. What changes in the SABES system would help to improve instructional practices and teaching behavior? | SABES & PD | 15. How can ACLS better support you and your staff with professional growth and development? |  | 12. What suggestions do you have for increasing the application of SABES PD to practice and behavior by teachers, advisors, and/or administrators? | 3. What additional changes would you recommend to improve the SABES system?11. What changes in services might increase the positive impact of SABES services? |  |
| 7e. What would you edit, add, or expand in terms of content or questions to improve the SABES RfP? |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 7f. How have changes to SABES affected the MA AE field? (teachers, advisors, administrators) | SABES & PD |  |  |  | 1. What are the most important ways these changes have benefitted adult education programs and program staff?  2. What have been the greatest drawbacks of the recent changes for adult education programs and program staff? |  |
|  | Student Workforce & Career Pathways | 1. We heard about a wide range of student interests and goals through our fall focus groups. What information does your program gather and use to learn about the college and career interests and goals of ALL students? | 1. We heard about a wide range of student interests and goals through our fall focus groups. How do you learn about the college and career interests and goals of ALL of your students? |  |  |  |
|  | Student Workforce & Career Pathways | 2. What are the ways in which your program exposes students to information about college and career options? | 2. What are the ways in which your program exposes students to information about college and career options? As a teacher, what specifically do you do to expose students to college and career options? |  |  |  |
|  | Student Workforce & Career Pathways | 3. Please tell us about the processes and partnerships your program has in place to provide ALL students with workforce and training opportunities? |  |  |  |  |
|  | Student Workforce & Career Pathways | 4. What are the ways in which your program supports students who choose to pursue college or career options? |  |  |  |  |
|  | Student Workforce & Career Pathways | 5. How can ACLS better support your program to provide ALL students with workforce and training opportunities? | 3. How can your program better provide more or ALL students with workforce and training information and opportunities? |  |  |  |
|  | SABES & PD | 13. How do you support your own professional growth and development? And that of your staff? |  |  |  |  |
|  | SABES & PD | 14. What kinds of professional development activities outside of SABES do you and your staff participate in? Who provides that PD? What was the impact on program quality? |  |  |  |  |
|  | Student Enrollment & Retention | 19a. What methods and resources have you used to increase program enrollment? | 11. What do you do to promote student retention in your classes? |  |  |  |
|  | Student Enrollment & Retention | 19b. What reasons or causes do you see for underenrollment in your program? |  |  |  |  |
|  | Student Enrollment & Retention | 20. Is there additional unmet need in your community? If yes, what are the barriers to serving them? |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 5. How could ACLS better identify programs’ promising practices? |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | 6. How could ACLS better disseminate programs’ promising practices? |  |  |
|  | DEI |  |  | 7. What successes have you seen among programs in serving diverse students? | 15. Thinking about the range of ethnicities, perspectives, and life experiences of adult education students, what are the ways in which SABES specifically supports staff in the success of this diverse group of students? |  |
|  | DEI |  |  | 8. What challenges have you seen programs experience in serving diverse students? |  |  |
|  | DEI |  |  | 9. How well is the adult education system meeting the unique needs of diverse students? |  |  |
|  | DEI |  |  | 10. How can ACLS better support programs to serve diverse students well? |  |  |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 1. What successes have you had in your work with adult education programs and program staff? Please provide examples. |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 2. What challenges have you had in your work with adult education programs and program staff? Please provide examples. |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 3. In what ways could the UMass CEA-ACLS partnership be improved? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 4. What are the primary ways that UMass CEA communicates with adult education programs and program staff? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 5. What best practices have you observed in adult education programs related to student assessment administration and scoring? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 6. What challenges have you observed in adult education programs related to student assessment administration and scoring? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 7. What effect do you think the recent changes in assessment training, including the initial certification and recertification processes, are having on standardized assessment administration and scoring? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 8. What changes would you suggest to help improve assessment administration practices by programs and program staff? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 9. What changes would you suggest to help improve the assessment scoring practices by programs and program staff? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 10. What could ACLS and UMass CEA do to further support programs in using assessment data? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 11. How might UMass CEA and ACLS work with programs to determine the assessment training needs of programs’ staff? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 12. How might UMass CEA and ACLS work with programs so that programs’ staff are better prepared to participate in assessment trainings? |
|  | CEA & Assessment |  |  |  |  | 13. How well do you think UMass CEA assessment trainings reflect the needs of adult education programs? |

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| Adult Education System Evaluation Survey Summary Report 2020 |
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December 23, 2020

Adult Education System Evaluation Survey Summary Report 2020

Prepared by the UMass Donahue Institute’s  
Applied Research & Program Evaluation Group

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Project Leader**  Jeremiah Johnson, Ph.D.  Senior Research Manager  **Project Staff**  Jean Supel, Ed.D.  Research Manager |  | |
| The University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute is an outreach and economic development arm of the University of Massachusetts. Established in 1971, the Institute strives to connect its clients with the resources of the University, bridging theory and innovation with real world public and private sector applications. For more information: [www.donahue.umass.edu](http://www.donahue.umass.edu).  The Institute’s Applied Research & Program Evaluation (ARPE) group enables education, public health, and human service organizations to make data-driven decisions to enhance program quality and capacity.  Specializing in rigorous and innovative social science research methods, ARPE works closely with federal, state, and local agencies, quasi-public agencies, and both non-profit and for-profit organizations to support programmatic and system-wide decision making. | |

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# Executive Summary

#### Introduction

This survey summary is part of a yearlong data-collection series that also included focus groups, interviews, and analysis of secondary data. Collection of the survey data was part of the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute’s (UMDI’s) evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system that was commissioned by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

In April–May 2020, UMDI administered surveys to all directors, teachers, and advisors in ACLS supported adult education programs using Qualtrics. A total of 404 responses were analyzed: 56 directors, 276 teachers, and 72 advisors. This document summarizes the responses gathered through those surveys. The [Results](#_Results) section provides an overview with detailed findings, and the [Key Findings](#_Key_Findings) section concludes the report by highlighting issues that emerged from the survey data that could help inform system improvement.

#### Summary of Results

##### Priorities from the Field

* When asked what changes or additional supports could most improve student outcomes in their programs and advisors both most frequently selected childcare assistance for students, transportation assistance for students, and improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways. Teachers also frequently selected childcare assistance for students, and also frequently selected more time to prepare for classes and more class time for students.
* Among a list of potential priorities for ACLS to improve adult education in Massachusetts, the facilitation of networking and/or collaboration across programs was selected first or second most frequently by directors, teachers, and advisors. Both directors and teachers commented that improving cross-program communication could help to encourage the sharing of expertise and best practices. Integrating career pathways into adult education curriculum was selected second or third most frequently by directors, teachers, and advisors as a potential priority or ACLS. This point aligned with a finding from a separate question where both directors and advisors frequently selected improving the alignment of instruction with regional career pathways as being among the top changes that could improve student outcomes.
* In response to the open-ended question at the end of the survey, a dozen directors and teachers articulated their concern that mandated enrollment targets and polices that linked program funding to student were detrimental to quality programming.

##### ACLS Policies

* Overall, for each policy listed, over 70% of directors indicated it was ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ in supporting student outcomes. Over half identified desk review (51%) and minimum salary requirements (51%) as ‘very helpful.’ The three policies identified as the least helpful (between 23% and 25% of directors reporting ‘not at all helpful’) were those that connected funding with achievement (i.e., funding based on meeting enrollment and MSGs) and waitlist maintenance requirements.

##### ACLS Supports and Resources

* Most directors reported that almost all general supports provided by SABES and ACLS were ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful,’ particularly the State as Partner webinar and SABES professional development workshops and website. Among the least used supports were SABES onsite coaching and SABES Sharing Groups.

##### Additional Learning Opportunities for Learners

* Most directors and teachers ‘somewhat agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that there is a demand for additional learning opportunities among their students. When asked which expanded learning opportunity they would most want to implement, more directors and teachers chose distance education and integrated education and training than any of the other options provided.

##### Professional Development

* Teachers reported that the location and timing of in-person professional development were the two factors that most impeded their ability to participate in SABES offerings. To improve their participation, teachers recommended more specialized and easy-to-access training such as advanced content for experienced teachers, more content to address specific program needs, and increased on-site professional development.

##### Enrollment and Retention of Students

* Most directors (between 74% and 80%) and most teachers (between 69% and 79%) reported that their programs served ‘very well’ the needs of individuals without a high school credential, English language learners, and individuals who receive public assistance. Comparatively, between 15% and 33% of directors and teachers reported serving ‘very well' the needs of individuals with learning disabilities, individuals with mental/emotional health issues, and individuals with physical challenges. Teachers further indicated that the needs of homeless individuals, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals, and out-of-school youth were not served very well by their programs.
* Forty-five percent (45%) of directors and 41% of teachers reported having under-enrolled classes. Both groups reported instability in the lives of students and potential students, as well as the lack of childcare, as reasons for under-enrollment. Additional reasons articulated under the ‘other’ category included learning challenges associated with COVID-19 (e.g., remote learning, Wi-Fi access) and instructional practices not meeting needs of particular students (e.g., students who are incarcerated).
* When asked about which recruiting strategies would most increase the enrollment of new students in their programs, directors most frequently selected public advertising (40%), coordinated outreach to social service agencies (40%), and providing on-site childcare (38%). Between 20% and 40% of the teachers selected social service agencies (40%), social media (38%), and providing on-site childcare (38%).
* Fifty percent (50%) to 80% of both directors and teachers rated increasing students’ awareness of their own progress and improving partnerships with organizations that could help students with non-school issues as ‘very helpful’ for retaining students. In addition, 72% of directors rated increased student access to advisors, social workers, or counselors as ‘very helpful’ while 45% of teachers rated more paid time for staff outside of class as ‘very helpful.’

##### Instructional Quality

* Between 43% and 53% of teachers reported they would like at least some support in multiple instructional areas, particularly for using technology to support student learning and for supporting students with learning disabilities. In addition, teachers reported wanting ‘a great deal of support’ for using technology to support student learning (38%) and for supporting students with learning disabilities (33%).

##### Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Requirements

* Over one-third of advisors (38%) reported that contacting former students regarding post-program employment or education was the most challenging WIOA requirement to implement.
* Advisors ‘strongly agreed’ that they frequently coordinated with teachers (99%), were included in regular staff meetings (88%), and that teachers communicated with them (81%). In comparison, 56% ‘somewhat agreed’ and 24% ‘somewhat disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that WIOA partners communicated with them.

##### Teacher Retention

* A majority of teachers (81%) did not think retaining teachers was a challenge for their programs. Among those who did, the top reasons why were inadequate pay (59%), limited opportunity for advancement (39%), stress (39%), and insufficient benefits (37%).

# Introduction

This survey summary is part of a yearlong data-collection series that also includes focus groups, interviews, and analysis of secondary data. Collection of the survey data was part of the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute’s (UMDI’s) evaluation of the Massachusetts adult education system that was commissioned by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

The mission of ACLS is “to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy, math and numeracy, and other skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, and better employment, and to reach his/her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.”[[7]](#footnote-7)In 2018, ACLS provided learning opportunities to almost 12,000 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students and about 7,000 adult basic education (ABE) and high school equivalency (HSE) students.[[8]](#footnote-8)

ACLS has implemented a number of changes over the past few years that have affected programs, staff, and students. The evaluation commissioned by DESE/ACLS was multi-purpose. Full evaluation results will be available in December 2020 and include:

* 1. Data on how ACLS’ changes to the adult education system may have affected the field;
  2. Data on student, staff, and program needs;
  3. Details related to how quality curricula and pedagogy were chosen and implemented;
  4. Details related to how the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) professional development system fulfilled staff and program needs; and,
  5. Suggestions for adult education system improvements.

The surveys included questions related to all of these topics, as well as others, which are described in the [Methodology](#_Methodology) section.

This report summarizes the responses gathered through surveys conducted with a total of 404 program directors, teachers, and advisors. The results are organized by topic area. Within each topic area, we present results for each respondent group. The three surveys had two sections of questions that were common to all three groups. The other sections were answered only by one or two groups. The [Methodology](#_Methodology) section provides details about survey development and the implementation of the surveys. The last section, [Key Findings](#_Key_Findings_and), discusses issues that emerged from the survey data which could help inform system improvement.

# Methods

UMDI worked with DESE/ACLS to develop surveys—one each for directors, teachers, and advisors. UMDI and DESE/ACLS jointly identified topic areas to be addressed through each survey by reviewing the original evaluation questions and identifying a set of high-priority topic areas. To cover all priority topic areas, it was agreed by DESE/ACLS and UMDI that the surveys would be complementary and largely related to role-specific issues. As a result, only two topic areas were common to all three surveys: respondent background characteristics and ACLS priorities. Appendices A–C includes final copies of all of the surveys. The topic areas addressed through questions presented to each respondent group are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Topic Areas Covered in Each Survey by Respondent Group**

| **Priority Area** | **Teacher Survey** | **Director Survey** | **Advisor Survey** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Background | X | X | X |
| ACLS Priorities | X | X | X |
| ACLS Policies |  | X |  |
| ACLS Supports and Resources |  | X |  |
| Additional Learning Opportunities for Students | X | X |  |
| Professional Development | X |  |  |
| Enrollment & Retention of Students | X | X |  |
| Instructional Quality | X |  |  |
| Federal Requirements |  |  | X |
| Communication and Integration |  |  | X |
| Retention of Teachers | X |  |  |

The target populations for the surveys included all current directors, teachers, and advisors at ACLS/DESE funded adult education programs. However, the only population for which ACLS had email addresses was directors. As a result, program directors were emailed flyers with links to the online surveys and asked to distribute the information to all of their relevant staff. Directors, teachers and advisors were offered an incentive to participate. Individuals who completed a survey could enter a drawing for one of 10, $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid). Multiple reminders were sent to directors to forward the survey invitations to their staff.

The surveys were administered online in April–May 2020, using Qualtrics. A total of 404 responses were gathered: 56 from directors, 276 from teachers, and 72 from advisors.

The exact size of the director population was known (88 total directors at the time of survey administration). The size of the teacher and advisor populations were estimated from data provide by programs though the Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) database. From those data it was estimated that in May 2020 there were 986 teachers and 168 advisors working in adult education programs. Staff members were asked to choose a single survey to respond to if they held more than one position (e.g., teacher and advisor). Estimated response rates for each survey are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Estimated Response Rates for UMDI/ACLS Surveys to Program Directors, Teachers, and Advisors.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Population | Number of Respondents | Population | Response Rate |
| Directors | 62 | 88 | 70% |
| Teachers | 321 | 986\* | 33%\* |
| Advisors | 81 | 168\* | 48%\* |
| Total | 464 | 1,242\* | 37%\* |

\* Estimate.

Data from each survey were exported from Qualtrics to Excel. Each survey file was examined for individuals who started, but did not complete, the survey. UMDI decided that individuals who did not complete all of the initial background questions, and did not respond to any later questions, would be excluded from the survey analysis. The final number of respondents included in the analysis—and adjusted response rates—are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Final Number of Respondents Included in Survey Analysis and Associated Response Rates.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Population | Final Number of Respondents Included | Estimated Population | Estimated Response Rate |
| Directors | 56 | 88 | 63% |
| Teachers | 276 | 986\* | 28%\* |
| Advisors | 72 | 168\* | 43%\* |
| Total | 404 | 1,242\* | 33%\* |

\* Estimate.

Data were analyzed in Excel. Basic descriptive statistics (total counts and percentages) were generated for all close-ended questions. Open-ended questions, and ‘Other’ options within close-ended questions were analyzed to identify patterns and themes across responses. While some close-ended questions were limited to a single answer, other questions gave respondents the opportunity to choose their top three, or to choose all that apply. Consequently, reported response rates for some questions may appear to be greater than 100%. Also, not all respondents answered all questions. As a result, the total number of respondents (N) is indicated for each question.

The data for two break-out groupings of directors, teachers, and advisors were also analyzed: (1) whether the respondent taught ABE or ESOL classes (teachers), or belonged to an ABE or ESOL program (advisors and directors); and (2) a respondent’s years of experience in their role. Important differences found in these analyses are discussed as part of the Results section of this document. Data from these breakouts are included in an Excel workbook that is a supplement to this report.

Results for items with fewer than 10 respondents are not reported.

# Findings

Findings from surveys distributed to adult education directors, teachers, and advisors are presented in this section. The findings are organized by topic:

1. [Survey Participants’ Background Information](#_Survey_Participants’_Background)
2. [Priorities from the Field](#_Priorities_from_the)
3. [ACLS Policies](#_ACLS_Policies)
4. [ACLS Supports and Resources](#_ACLS_Supports_and)
5. [Additional Learning Opportunities for Students](#_Additional_Learning_Opportunities)
6. [Professional Development](#_Professional_Development)
7. [Enrollment and Retention of Students](#_Enrollment_and_Retention)
8. [Instructional Quality](#_Instructional_Quality)
9. [Federal Requirements](#_Federal_Requirements)
10. [Communication and Integration](#_Communication_and_Integration)
11. [Retention of Teachers](#_Retention_of_Teachers)

Each of these sub-sections includes a summary of highlighted findings. Selected data are presented as figures within the narrative. Figures summarizing responses to all other close-ended survey questions are presented in [Appendix D](#_Appendix_D:_Figures). Not all survey questions were presented to all three respondent groups (directors, teachers, and advisors). For each section, the relevant respondent group(s) is identified.

UMDI also analyzed the survey data by the variables *years of experience* and *program focus (ABE or ESOL)* to identify patterns of influence these factors may have had on respondent insights. Data from these breakouts are included in an Excel workbook that is a supplement to this report.

## Findings by Topic

### Survey Participants’ Background Information

**Directors, teachers and advisors** provided background information that included years of experience in their respective roles, the type of students they served, the additional roles they played at their programs, and their full-time employment status. Teachers and advisors also provided information concerning their previous relevant experience.

Overall, teachers reported more years of experience compared with directors and advisors. Forty-one percent (41%) of teachers reported having more than 10 years of experience compared with 32% of directors and 14% of advisors. Ninety-three percent (93%) of teachers indicated they had relevant previous teaching experience whereas only 61% of advisors reported relevant previous advising or counseling experience. Directors were not asked whether they had prior experience as a director.

The survey results indicated that ACLS programs had a largely part-time staff. While most directors (84%) reported that they worked full-time, most teachers (71%) and half of the advisors (51%) reported that they worked part-time*.* Many directors and advisors reported that they held multiple roles in their program. Nearly half of directors reported holding other roles beyond their own, including advisor or teacher. Over half of advisors held other roles within their programs, including teacher, director, or assistant director. Only 30% of teachers reported having a role in addition to being a teacher.

Details of the director, teacher, and advisor backgrounds are below.

#### Directors’ Background Information

Directors’ years of experience as adult education directors varied across the group (see [Figure A1.](#figureA1) in Appendix D). Nearly one-third of directors (30%) reported one to five years of experience, one quarter (23%) reported six to 10 years, and another third (32%) reported more than 10 years of experience. Only 14% of director respondents reported having less than one year of experience. Similar proportions of director respondents oversaw programs that offered ABE classes (70%) and ESOL classes (77%), and nearly half (49%) oversaw programs that offered both. Other classes directors reported overseeing included—in order from most to least frequent—computer skills/IT training, workforce training, college readiness, and citizenship. Most directors worked full-time (84%) and reported working 30 to 40 hours a week in their capacity as directors.

Many directors reported wearing multiple hats beyond their director role. Nearly half (45%) of the directors held other positions in their program beside director, including advisor (21%), and teacher (9%). Other roles mentioned by directors included workforce development director, testing coordinator, program developer, grant writer, and business director.

#### Teachers’ Background Information

Among the 276 teachers who responded to the survey, 41% had worked as an adult education teacher for over 10 years, 18% for six to 10 years, and about one-third were early in their careers (one to five years of experience). Only 10% were new to the field (less than one year of experience in the role). For a majority of the teachers (61%), prior experience included K–12 pre-service practicum, in-school teaching, or out-of-school teaching; a third had experience as an adult educator volunteer or tutor; and a quarter had college teaching experience. Only 7% indicated no past teaching experience. More teachers reported teaching ESOL classes (63%) than ABE classes (41%), and 9% taught both. Unlike the directors, most of the teachers (71%) worked part-time and had no other paid position in the program besides teaching (73%).

#### Advisors’ Background Information

Compared with teachers and directors, advisors reported fewer years of experience in their respective role (see Figure A3. in Appendix A). Over half (57%) had one to five years of experience as an adult education advisor, while only 14% had more than 10 years of experience. The majority of advisors supported ABE students (75%) or ESOL students (74%) and nearly half (47%) advised both. Over half of advisors (54%) held other roles within their programs, including teacher, director, and assistant director. The most frequently mentioned ‘other’ role held by advisors was program coordinator. Half of the advisors reported working part-time schedules. However, when advisors were broken out by the kind of students they served, a higher percentage of those who worked in programs with only ESOL students reported working full-time than those who worked in ABE only programs. Compared with teachers, a larger proportion of advisors (39%) reported no prior relevant advising or counseling experience in their respective roles. Those with prior experience reported getting it as an adult education volunteer or tutor, through college advising or counseling, through pre-service practicum, or through some other advising/counseling position.

[Return to topic list.](#_Results)

### Priorities from the Field

The survey posed two identical questions to all three groups (**directors, teachers, and advisors**) regarding what changes or additional supports respondents thought could most improve student outcomes, and what respondents thought should be ACLS’ top priorities for improving adult education in Massachusetts. The groups also shared additional, open-ended comments regarding what they thought would be helpful for ACLS to know.

When asked what changes or additional supports could most improve student outcomes in their programs and advisors both most frequently selected childcare assistance for students, transportation assistance for students, and improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways. Teachers also frequently selected childcare assistance for students, and also frequently selected more time to prepare for classes and more class time for students.

Among a list of potential priorities for ACLS to improve adult education in Massachusetts, the facilitation of networking and/or collaboration across programs was selected first or second most frequently by directors, teachers, and advisors. Both directors and teachers commented that improving cross-program communication could help to encourage the sharing of expertise and best practices. Integrating career pathways into adult education curriculum was selected second or third most frequently by directors, teachers, and advisors as a potential priority or ACLS. This point aligned with a finding from a separate question where both directors and advisors frequently selected improving the alignment of instruction with regional career pathways as being among the top changes that could improve student outcomes.

Many of the directors, teachers, and advisors provided additional comments they thought would be helpful to ACLS. Comments from many directors and teachers reflected their concern that mandated enrollment targets and polices linking funding to student outcomes were detrimental to quality programming, citing pressure to reach outcomes that may be incompatible with their learners, time consuming paperwork and data collection, and overall demands that detracted from student-focused learning. Directors and teachers also recommended improving communication among programs to facilitate sharing of expertise and best practices. Comments from all groups advocated for more support services to address the challenges students face in their lives that impact learning (e.g., social-emotional health, poverty, homelessness, limited internet) that impacted learner success in the classroom or workforce. Directors offered appreciation for ACLS, and the guidance ACLS provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers frequently commented on the importance of improving compensation, including wages and health insurance, to improve teacher retention.

Details of the director, teacher, and advisor responses are below.

#### Directors

When asked what changes or additional supports could most improve student outcomes in their programs, directors most frequently cited supports that were external to their programs (Figure 1.). Forty-six percent (46%) of the directors reported childcare assistance and 40% reported transportation assistance for students would help improve outcomes. These were followed by program-related supports, such as improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways (32%) and more time for teachers to prepare for classes (30%). Five directors offered other suggestions to improve student outcomes, including using funding as an incentive (e.g., student payment for each HiSET section passed, flexible funding to meet students’ needs), benefits to retain full time teachers, and a more hands-off approach from ACLS.

When directors were asked what they thought should e ACLS’ top priorities for improving adult education in Massachusetts, their responses varied (Figure 2.). The most frequently cited priority was support for collaborating with WIOA partners (42%). Just under one-third of directors identified each of the following also as priorities: integrating career pathways (32%), facilitating networking/collaboration across programs (32%), disseminating promising practices (30%), and effective teaching (30%).

Figure 1. Directors: What are the changes or additional supports that you think could most improve student outcomes in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=50)

Figure 2. Directors: What do you think ACLS' top priorities should be for improving adult education in Massachusetts? (Please select up to 3.) (N=56)

Fourteen (14) directors responded to the opportunity to share additional comments they thought would be helpful for ACLS. Some of these responses were quite extensive and touched on multiple issues. Themes that emerged from these comments were:

##### Pressure to Meet Targets Impacts Quality

Directors commented that a strong focus on outcomes does not necessarily lead to improved quality. Some directors, for example, stated that Measurable Skills Gains (MSGs) and their link to funding put enormous pressure on program staff, and that WIOA mandates tied to employment outcomes and post-secondary education were incompatible with the needs of those learners not seeking further education. Programs serving incarcerated students were also challenged to meet the MSG targets as their students’ outcomes were impacted by other significant concerns such as court cases, lack of motivation, mental health issues, and relationship/family issues.

##### Positive Feedback

Directors reported appreciation for ACLS’ leadership throughout the COVID-19 shutdown, the open communication and receptiveness from the current ACLS leadership (particularly the “State as Partner” webinars), and the quality of SABES PD offerings.

##### Assistance to Meet the Challenges of COVID-19

Citing logistical challenges that COVID-19 raised for their programs, in concert with the barriers of low digital literacy and limited remote access among students, some directors called for more training in remote learning for practitioners and students. In addition, these directors suggested applying flexibility and innovation in using technology to improve service delivery, incorporating remote learning information into recruitment activities, and accelerating the progress of remote assessment and testing.

##### Improve Efficiency for Communicating Best Practices

A few directors saw a wealth of expertise across programs and suggested increasing communication among programs to share best practices regarding lesson plans, unit plans, teaching videos, teacher evaluations, etc. These directors also recommended improving the onboarding of new staff through sequenced or structured curriculum for positions.

#### Teachers

Like directors, teachers most frequently reported childcare was the support they thought could most improve student outcomes in their program (46%) (Figure 3.). Teachers’ second and third most frequently chosen supports were more role-specific: 36% reported more time for teachers to prepare for classes as a support to improve student outcomes and 35% chose more class time for students. The fourth most frequently reported support was transportation assistance (29%). Over 30 teachers selected the ‘other’ category and offered more additional supports including:

* **Improve access to technology,** particularly for remote learning (e.g., chrome books, remote learning apps such as Zoom and GotoMeeting, internet access).
* **Policy and administration changes** such as student and program expectations management, better attendance policy, removal of bureaucratic standards, and paid preparation time for teachers.
* **“Less rigor more vigor,”** suggesting course content include more opportunities to engage and elicit buy-in from learners through relevant content (e.g., job training that goes from classroom to paycheck in short order), mentoring, increased wraparound supports for students in their communities, and more one-on-one teaching.
* Promote more **community representation and diversity** among practices and educators.
* **Provide more flexible course hours** to accommodate student needs.
* **Teacher training** in differentiating instruction, remote learning and social-emotional learning.
* **Additional support for** **remote learning** (including hardware and software well as digital literacy skills for students)**.**

Not surprisingly, 41% of the teachers recommended that effective teaching be a top priority for ACLS to improve adult education in Massachusetts (Figure 4.). Like directors, teachers reported facilitating networking and/or collaboration across programs (32%) and integrating career pathways (32%) among the top three most frequently reported priorities. About 12% of the teachers offered additional ideas for ACLS priorities which fell under the following themes:

* **Supports to reduce student needs** (e.g., childcare, health care, housing, learning disabilities).
* **Remote learning,** particularly in response to changes caused by COVID-19, including distance learning workshops for teachers, more online platforms used in-class with student chrome books, coherent online learning policies, laptops for students, and remote learning technology training and software.
* **Cross program collaboration** through which teachers share materials and expertise, learn from facilitated monthly study groups (similar to World Ed coffee hours and Let’s Get Real classes), and provide opportunities for students to interact with students from other communities.
* **Improved cultural diversity and expertise of educators** through recruiting staff representing the communities of learners being served, offering professional development in social justice and critical multiculturalism, and hiring more qualified teachers and professional development trainers.
* **Better compensation for teachers** including higher wages and health insurance.

Figure 3. Teachers: What are the changes or additional supports that you think could most improve student outcomes in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=241)

Figure 4. Teachers: What do you think ACLS' top priorities should be for improving adult education in Massachusetts? (Please select up to 3.) (N=242)

When asked comments on what they thought would be helpful for ACLS to know, over 30 teachers shared comments which related to the following themes:

##### ACLS Mandated Targets and Polices Impeded upon Student-focused Teaching

Teachers commented that mandated enrollment targets, as well as documentation and data collection requirements detracted from quality, student-focused teaching. Comments included that the demands of mandated documentation were too time-consuming, the data collection load limited their capacity to develop and design meaningful instructional practices, and that certain students, such as those with learning disabilities, mental health issues, or who didn’t have clear college and career goals, were being left behind. Curriculum, it was suggested, should allow teachers to tailor learning to student needs, including integration of community support services, while also being standards-based.

##### Improve Professional Working Conditions for Teachers

Teachers would like to see more improvement to their compensation and general working conditions. Changes suggested by teachers included the allowance of more prep time, increased compensation (i.e., wages and benefits—equivalent to rates and benefits of public school teachers), more paid time for professional development, and the establishment of leadership roles for experienced teachers (e.g., lead teachers, instructional coaches).

##### Customization for Incarcerated Learners

Incarcerated learners posed different challenges for adult educators. Teachers commented that students in this population often had significant learning disabilities, mental health issues, and/or social concerns that needed to be addressed before they could prioritize learning. Programs that could address these issues and then follow-up with support and mentoring may be more successful. One teacher commented that the prisons were also challenged to keep up with incorporating technology into classrooms.

##### Communication among ACLS and Adult Education Teachers

Three comments suggested building a better relationship among ACLS and the programs to clarify expectations, goals, and outcomes, to build trust, and to encourage teacher-to-teacher communication (such as the orientation done by English for New Bostonians[[9]](#footnote-9)) to share best practices and build a learning community.

##### Other Comments

* Several teachers requested increased support for technology and training related to remote learning.
* A few teachers commented that quality and expertise of the trainers could be improved. Teachers learning from other teachers was offered as a suggestion.

#### Advisors

Like both directors and teachers, advisors most frequently selected childcare assistance as the support that could most improve student outcomes (66%) (Figure 5.). Over half of advisors (58%) selected transportation assistance as a support that could most improve student outcomes. The third most frequently selected by advisors for improving student outcomes was improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways (31%). Additional supports to improve outcomes that advisors mentioned under ‘other’ included more assistance for managing social-emotional conditions caused by trauma, poverty, and homelessness, and more financial support for people trying to make their way into living wage jobs.

Half of advisors (50%) reported that facilitating networking and/or collaboration across programs should be a top priority for ACLS. Forty-one percent (41%) of advisors reported that students with mental/emotional health challenges should be a top priority for ACLS, and integrating career pathways was selected by (39%) of advisors as a top priority for ACLS (Figure 6.). Advisors working with ABE learners were more likely to prioritize students with learning disabilities (37%) compared with those working with ESOL learners (11%). Additional suggested top priorities advisors listed under ‘other’ included comprehensive support for changes due to COVID-19; assistance in alleviating other barriers such as transportation, childcare, internet access, and housing; recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff; and to modify the requirement of a full classroom as it can lead to teacher and advisor burnout.

Figure 5. Advisors: What are the changes or additional supports that you think could most improve student outcomes in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=64)

Figure 6. Advisors: What do you think ACLS' top priorities should be for improving adult education in Massachusetts? (Please select up to 3.) (N=66)

Nine advisors provided comments in the final open-ended question for ACLS.

* Advisors highlighted the importance of **supporting high-need students,** in and out of the classroom, particularly for those with learning disabilities or mental health issues. Suggestions included offering support services equivalent to occupational and speech therapy offered in public K–12 schools or therapy outreach, and part-time work and job coaching or supported work opportunities. Advisors also highlighted the needs students have outside of the program such as access to stable housing, efficient transportation, childcare and affording basic needs, all of which made it difficult to participate in workforce development training opportunities provide by the programs.
* With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, advisors recommended **increased technology support for students and staff,** such as training on how to use online platforms and assistance acquiring internet access and laptops.
* **Modify standardized assessments** so that they better match students’ learning objectives and more appropriately evaluate learning gains.

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### ACLS Policies

ACLS grantees operate within a set of federal and state policies that set standards for performance, staff qualifications, salary-level, enrollment, match-funding, and incentives. Questions were posed to the **directors** regarding how helpful ACLS policies were in supporting student outcomes in their programs (see Figure A4. in Appendix A).

Overall, for each policy listed, over 70% of directors either indicated it was ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ in supporting student outcomes. Over half identified desk review (51%) and minimum salary requirements (51%) as ‘very helpful.’ The three policies identified as the least helpful (between 23% and 25% of directors reporting ‘not at all helpful’) were those that connected funding with achievement (i.e., funding based on meeting enrollment and MSGs) and waitlist maintenance requirements.

When broken out by program type, more directors of ESOL programs reported that performance policies that based funding on achievement of enrollment targets (63%) and MSG target completion (69%) were very helpful compared with the ABE directors who more frequently reported that these policies were ‘somewhat helpful’ (58%) or ‘not at all helpful’ (42%). More directors of ESOL students (69%) also reported that the waitlist maintenance requirements were ‘very helpful,’ whereas 42% ABE directors reported waitlist maintenance requirements were ‘not at all helpful.’

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### ACLS Supports and Resources

ACLS, with help from SABES, offers a series of resources to support educator effectiveness. These include general supports (such as informational guides, personal development, and performance indicators), curriculum and instruction standards, and assessment and testing standards. **Directors** answered survey questions about this topic, providing insight to the overall value of these supports.

#### General Supports

Directors provided positive feedback regarding ACLS general supports. Over 90% of directors reported that each of the following supports was ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’: ACLS Directors’ Meetings, Indicators of Program Quality, Program Specialists, mailings, and website. The State as Partner webinars were particularly well-regarded with 75% of directors rating them as ‘very helpful.’ Over 60% of the directors rated each of the SABES general support types as ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful.’ The most helpful (rated ‘very helpful’) were the SABES PD workshops (75%) and the SABES website (63%).

On the other end of the scale, more directors rated ACLS site visits (18%) and Program Quality Reviews (PQRs) (14%) as ‘not at all helpful’ compared with other supports. The least used supports (reported as ‘have not used’) were SABES onsite coaching (42%), ACLS PQRs[[10]](#footnote-10) (24%), and SABES Sharing Groups (18%).

When data were broken out by years of experience, the majority of respondents with fewer years of experience (one to five years) as directors reported the general supports as ‘very helpful’ while a majority of respondents in groups with other levels of experience rated these supports as ‘somewhat helpful.’[[11]](#footnote-11)

#### ACLS Curriculum & Instruction Supports

Overall, over 60% of the directors reported that each of the curriculum and instruction supports listed in the survey were ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful.’ A larger proportion of the directors rated English Language Proficiency Standards (53%) and College and Career Readiness Standards (43%) as ‘very helpful’ compared with other supports.

Several curriculum and instruction supports were not used as frequently as the others. Approximately one-third of the directors reported that they had not used each of the following supports: the Mathematics Proficiency Guide, Curriculum for Adults Learning Math, Educator Growth and Evaluation Model, and Lesson Plan Templates.

Not surprisingly, certain curriculum supports were more beneficial for ABE or ESOL staff. For example, 63% of directors of ESOL programs reported that Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education were ‘very helpful’ compared with just 17% for ABE directors because their curriculum focuses on learning English. And 42% of ABE directors reported the Curriculum for Adults Learning Math (CALM) as ‘very helpful’ (versus 19% of ESOL directors) was math is an integral part of the ABE curriculum.

#### Assessment Supports:

Overall, between 29% and 68% of directors reported not using assessment supports (see Figure A8. in Appendix A). The supports which had the highest rates of ‘have not used’ were the ACLS Test Help Blog (68%), the UMass Center for Educational Assessment Test Help Blog (65%), the UMass Center for Education Assessment Answer Guides (61%), and Video Introduction to MAPT-CCR Score Reports (45%). While 43% of directors did not use the technical assistance provided by Center for Education Assessment (43%), one-third of directors gave it the highest ‘very helpful’ rating (33%).

Only two assessment support types were rated as ‘somewhat’ or ‘very helpful’ by over 60% of the directors, compared with all general and curriculum and instruction support types. These were related to the MAPT-CCR: MAPT-CCT Score Reports (61%) and MAPT-CCR Score Reports Interpretive Guides (61%). Fifty-nine percent (59%) of directors rated the MAPT-CCR Practice Tests as ‘somewhat’ or ‘very helpful.’

#### Directors’ Suggestions for Additional Supports

Sixteen directors responded to the open-ended question “what additional supports would it be helpful for ACLS to provide?” Their suggestions fell under four themes:

##### Increased (Specific) Resources

Directors asked for a variety of resources: guidance on understanding MAPT-CCR test scores and how to help students raise their scores; guidance on partnerships between ABE and workforce development; toolkits for distance and blended learning; funds to support purchase of technology; and more in-depth workshops in general.

##### Improved Communication across Directors

As a solution to managing the influx of information associated with directing an ACLS program, particularly when directors are new, respondents proposed that ACLS facilitate sharing across programs so that directors could learn from each other. Respondents suggested that this could entail matching up directors in similar programs and geographic areas or developing a type of “program director academy.”

##### Simplify Processes

Related to improving communication across directors, several directors expressed that the amount of information they receive from ACLS is overwhelming and sometimes inconsistent, and that processes should be simplified.

##### Administrative or Program Content Change

Finally, several directors called for program content change such as using HiSET/GED tests instead of MAPT which students find less relevant, and providing options for students to earn an alternate diploma. One director recommended an earlier notification of grant funding amounts and providing more time to close up one year while writing a continuation grant for the following year.

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### Additional Learning Opportunities for Students

Both **directors** and **teachers** answered two questions concerning demand for additional student learning opportunities and programs’ capacity to support those opportunities. A strong majority of respondents in both groups reported that there was demand among the students in their programs for additional learning opportunities (88% and 80% ‘somewhat agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed,’ respectively), and that their programs had the capacity to support these activities, though teachers were less likely to report this (65% of teachers versus 80% for directors). The learning opportunities that both directors and teachers were most interested in implementing were distance education and integrated education and training.

#### Directors

Most directors (87%) ‘somewhat agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that there is a demand among their students for additional learning opportunities, and 80% agreed that their programs have the capacity to support these opportunities (Figure 7. Directors: Most adult learners could benefit from additional learning opportunities that help them make progress more quickly. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Don’t know/  Not sure | Strongly  disagree | Somewhat disagree | Somewhat  agree | Strongly  agree |

). From a list of learning opportunities, directors were asked to select the option their programs would be most interested in implementing (Figure 8). The top three choices were distance education (30%), integrated education and training (24%), and mobile device apps (16%). A larger proportion of ABE directors were interested in implementing integrated education and training and mobile device applications compared with ESOL directors who reported more interest in distance education.

Figure 7. Directors: Most adult learners could benefit from additional learning opportunities that help them make progress more quickly. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Don’t know/  Not sure | Strongly  disagree | Somewhat disagree | Somewhat  agree | Strongly  agree |

0%

There is a demand for additional learning opportunities among students in my program (N=49)

My program has the capacity to support additional learning opportunities for students (N=49)

Figure 8. Directors: Which of the following options for additional learning would your program be most interested in implementing? (N=50)

#### Teachers

Most teachers (80%) ‘somewhat agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that there is a demand among their students for additional learning opportunities, and 65% ‘somewhat agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that their programs have the capacity to support these opportunities (Figure 7. Directors: Most adult learners could benefit from additional learning opportunities that help them make progress more quickly. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Don’t know/  Not sure | Strongly  disagree | Somewhat disagree | Somewhat  agree | Strongly  agree |

) Teachers reported some interest in all of the listed additional learning opportunities, particularly integrated education and training (24%) and distance education (23%) (Figure 10.).

Figure 9. Teachers: Most adult learners could benefit from additional learning opportunities that help them make progress more quickly. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Don’t know/  Not sure | Strongly  disagree | Somewhat  disagree | Somewhat  agree | Strongly  agree |

My program has the capacity to support additional learning opportunities for

students (N=252)

There is a demand for additional learning opportunities (N=251)

Figure 10. Teachers: Which of the following options for additional learning would your program be most interested in implementing? (N=243)

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### Professional Development

The SABES professional development system aims to provide effective professional development and support to ABE and ESOL programs across the state. This section covers feedback from **teachers** about challenges to participation, completion, and retention in professional development activities and ways to overcome these challenges.

Of the seven potential challenges listed, teachers most commonly reported location and timing as the factors that most impeding participation in professional development (Figure A9.). Seventy-one percent (71%) reported that location was a barrier to their participation ‘to some extent’ or ‘to a great extent.’ Similarly, 76% reported was a barrier to participation in professional development ‘to some extent’ or ‘to a great extent. Also reported as a barrier, but by fewer teachers, were the format of professional development and the length of the session, with 54% and 49% of teachers, respectively, reporting that these factors impeded their ability to participate in professional development at least ‘to some extent.’

The factors that were most commonly reported as ‘not at all’ an imposition to participation were the ability to be paid for professional development time (71%), the ability to get a substitute teacher (67%), and the ability to navigate online learning technology (66%).

Over 20 teachers offered ‘other’ challenges to their participation. The most frequently mentioned challenge was access (e.g., limited number of slots for online courses, sessions quickly fill up before approval could be gained from administrators, no access to online training) and scheduling issues (inability to take time off and overall busy schedules). Additional challenges reported by teachers related to the relevance or quality of the professional development offerings (e.g., sessions were ‘boring,’ ‘redundant,’ ‘not relevant to correctional settings’) and that a teacher’s professional development needs and choices were limited by a requirement for director approval.

When asked what changes might increase their participation in SABES professional development, at least one-third of teachers reported that several of the potential changes listed as possibilities would increase their participation (Figure 11.). Nearly half (49%) reported increased on-site professional development would increase their participation, and over 40% reported that advanced content for experienced teachers (42%) and more content to address specific program needs (41%) would incrase their participation. In addition, about one-third of the teachers reported increasing online professional development (37%), adding more content concerning best practices (36%) or specific needs of students (33%) would increase their participation. Few teachers (7%) reported that post-training support would increase their participation in SABES professional development.

Under the ‘other’ category, 15% of the teachers offered additional changes. The most frequently reported change related to adjusting content, particularly to develop skills-based training associated with specific subjects and needs (e.g., science, low ESOL-level students, incarcerated students) and more online teaching tools and tips. Another theme reflected the need for more flexibility in scheduling (e.g., early morning offerings, more online options, options outside of regular work hours). Finally, teachers also reported that more input be sought from teachers and students to identify professional development needs, that more compensation be provided for professional development time, that course quality and trainer expertise be improved, and that the amount of homework time or professional development time in general be reduced.

Figure 11. Teachers: What changes could increase your participation in SABES professional development offerings? (Please select up to 3.) (N=247)

Less than a third of the teachers (29%) reported starting but not completing a SABES training (see Figure A10. in Appendix D). Of those who reported not completing a training, the most frequently reported reason (25%) was that the training took longer than anticipated (see Figure A11. in Appendix D). The second most frequently reported reason for not completing a training was the ‘other’ category which included reasons that overlapped with the given categories (e.g., ran out of time, personal reasons, the follow-up activity was not relevant to the teacher’s practice), and also included technology related reasons such as online technical issues and lack of access to online content. The least frequently reported reason for not completing a training was not having enough paid hours to complete the follow-up.

About a quarter of teachers (27%) reported not completing the follow-up activities associated with a SABES PD offering (see Figure A12. in Appendix D). Of those teachers, over 50 provided open-ended comments as to what kinds of changes could improve their completion of follow-up activities. These comments fell under four general themes.

##### Change the Time or Amount of Work Necessary to Complete Follow-up Activities

Many of the teachers reported that the follow-up activities were too time consuming and that allowing more time to complete activities would facilitate completion, either by extending deadlines, making the modules asynchronous online, reducing the amount of work, or eliminating follow-up activities in general.

##### Follow-up Activities Not Relevant

Many of the teachers stated that teachers would be more likely to complete activities if those activities had more immediate applicability to their lessons; the follow-up activities felt more like homework, ‘busy work,’ or an evaluative exercise. They recommended activities such as developing actual lesson plans, engaging students to identify activities, and follow-up engagement or trouble-shooting with the workshop facilitator.

##### Improve Quality of Follow-up Activities

A variety of suggestions addressed improving the quality of follow-up activities, such as clearer course descriptions, offering courses leveled by competency, providing more structured activities, and more engaging and inspiring activities.

##### Follow-up Support

Teachers also recommended follow-up activities that are structured more like support rather than assignments. That is, a face-to-face or online follow-up session with facilitators for questions and feedback. Finally, many teachers recommended more reminder messages!

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### Enrollment and Retention of Students

The enrollment and retention section of the survey allowed both **directors** and **teachers** to describe how well they thought their programs served particular groups of students; to what extent their classes were under-enrolled and for what reasons; and which student recruitment and retention strategies would be most helpful.

Overall, directors reported their programs were doing a good job serving multiple student populations (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Directors most frequently reported serving ‘very well’ individuals without a high school credential (80%), English language learners (77%), and individuals who receive public assistance (74%). The groups lest frequently reported by directors as being served ‘very well’ were individuals with learning disabilities (15%), individuals with mental/emotional health challenges (21%), and individuals with physical challenges (30%).

Consistent with directors, teachers most frequently rated that they were serving ‘very well’ English language learners (79%), individuals without a high school credential (73%), and individuals who receive public assistance (69%) (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Compared with directors, teachers reported more frequently not serving some groups well. These included individuals with learning disabilities (21% not served ‘very well’), individuals with mental/emotional health challenges (18%), and individuals with physical challenges (18%). Teachers further indicated that homeless individuals, incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals, and out-of-school youth were not being served well (14%, 13% and 13% not served ‘very well’ respectively).

Figure 12. Directors: Generally, how well does your program serve the needs of students from the following populations?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not well | Somewhat well | Very well |

Individuals without a high school credential (N=50)

English language learners (N=48)

Individuals who receive public assistance (N=43)

Individuals with barriers to employment (N=50)

Out-of-school youth (N=36)

Individuals with physical challenges (N=47)

Individuals with mental/emotional health challenges (N=47)

Individuals who are parents or caregivers (N=44)

Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals (N=32)

Veterans (N=31)

Other (Please describe) (N=1)

Individuals who are homeless

(N=36)

Individuals with limited or interrupted formal education

(N=51)

Individuals who are shared customers with partner agencies (N=43)

Individuals with learning disabilities (N=48)

Figure 13. Teachers: Generally, how well does your program serve the needs of students from the following populations?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not well | Somewhat well | Very well |

English language learners (N=248)

Individuals who are parents or caregivers (N=229)

Individuals without a high school credential (N=249)

Individuals with limited or interrupted formal education (N=254)

Out-of-school youth (N=143)

Individuals with physical challenges (N=186)

Individuals with mental/emotional health challenges (N=203)

Individuals with learning disabilities (N=226)

Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals (N=119)

Individuals with barriers to employment (N=229)

Individuals who receive public assistance (N=221)

Individuals who are homeless (N=147)

Other (Please describe.) (N=9)

Individuals who are shared customers with partner agencies (N=171)

Veterans (N=126)

#### Enrollment

Forty-five percent of directors (45%) reported that there were under-enrolled classes in their program. The most frequently cited reason for under-enrollment was instability in the lives of students (57%) (see (Figure A13. in Appendix D). Directors also reported instability in the lives *of potential students* (39%), and lack of childcare (35%) as factors contributing to under-enrollment. Few directors thought that factors such as difficulty providing information to potential students (4%), hesitancy of some groups of potential students to access public services (9%), and challenges with potential students’ work schedules (9%) contributed to under-enrollment. Eight directors suggested additional reasons, including that formal instructional practices were not meeting the needs of particular students (e.g., incarcerated students who may be dealing with psychological and emotional stresses), lack of evening public transportation, COVID-19, and conflicts with other required class time.

A similar yet slightly lower percentage of teachers (41%) reported that one or more of their classes was under-enrolled. Like directors, teachers most frequently reported that instability in the lives of students was a primary reason (57%) for under-enrollment (see Figure A14. in Appendix D). Between one-third and one-half of teachers reported challenges with students’ work schedules (50%), lack of childcare (44%) and instability in the lives of potential students (36%) contributed to under-enrollment. The least frequently reported reasons included difficulty providing information to potential students (4%), hesitancy of some groups of potential students to access public services (6%), and classes offered do not align with student needs (6%). Over 20 teachers offered additional reasons for under-enrollment. Many pointed to the challenges related to COVID-19, particularly learning remotely without a computer, limited Wi-Fi access, and children at home. A few teachers reported conditions specific to the corrections environment, access to public transportation, the lack of establishment of their new programs, and unqualified staff contributed to under-enrollment. Other reasons related to insufficient resources, time constraints due to work obligations, changing community demographics, concern over immigration status, incompatibility with needs of students, increased competition with other programs, and impact of previous negative education experiences.

#### Recruitment Strategies

When asked about which recruiting strategies would most increase the enrollment of new students in their programs, directors most frequently selected public advertising (40%), coordinated outreach to social service agencies (40%), and providing on-site childcare (38%) (see Figure A15. in Appendix D). The least frequently selected recruitment strategies were holding classes at sites other than program location (13%), more specialized classes (13%), and recruiting materials in more languages (17%). Those directors selecting ‘other’ commented that public transportation to their program location, intensive relationship-building, and a larger facility would improve recruitment. One commented that the incarcerated population shouldn’t be required to meet targets and MSGs as their numbers were low, and also recommended a corrections facility requirement for all inmates to participate.

Between 20% and 40% of the teachers selected each of the listed recruiting strategies. Social service agencies (40%), social media (38%), and providing on-site childcare (38%) were most frequently selected as strategies that would increase enrollment of new students (see Figure A16. in Appendix D). Over two dozen teachers suggested additional recruiting strategies. Many of the comments highlighted that the strategies listed do not apply to the incarcerated population and suggested that increasing the number of college credit courses, adding career counseling and mentorship, providing more wraparound support services for students released into the community, and applying attendance- or completion-based incentives would be helpful for recruiting incarcerated individuals. Others suggested increased outreach and advertising to K–12 schools, places of worship, and cultural organizations; more flexible class schedules; more tech support; more culturally responsive instruction; allowing students in other cities to join; expanding facility space; and hiring more teachers.

#### Retention Strategies

Between 84% and 98% of directors reported that each of the retention strategies listed as options as ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ (see Figure A17. in Appendix D). Among those most frequently reported as ‘very helpful’ were increased student awareness of their own progress (78%), improved partnerships with organizations that could help students with non-school issues (76%), increased student access to advisors, social workers, or counselors (72%), and more professional development related to mental/emotional health (70%).

Between 66% and 93% of teachers rated each of the retention strategies as ‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’ (see Figure A18. in Appendix D). The strategies most frequently reported as ‘very helpful’ included increased student awareness of their own progress (56%), improved partnerships with organizations that could help students with non-school issues (52%), and more paid time for staff outside of class (45%). Notably, 28% of teachers also reported that more consistently rigorous instruction across classes was ‘not at all helpful.’

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### Instructional Quality

The **teacher** survey included questions regarding the extent to which they wanted particular instructional supports and the utility of state professional standards for classroom instruction.

Between 43% and 53% of teachers reported wanting at least ‘some support’ in all of the instructional areas listed (Figure 14.). Teachers most frequently reported wanting ‘a great deal of support’ for using technology to support student learning (38%) and for supporting students with learning disabilities (33%). Teachers least frequently reported wanting support with setting clear learning objectives and developing effective lesson plans (45% and 44% reported needing ‘no additional support’, respectively).

For each set of standards (Massachusetts College and Career Readiness, Massachusetts English Language Proficiency, Massachusetts Adult Education and ESOL Professional Standards), at least 90% of teachers reported they used the standards ‘some of the time’ or ‘all of the time’ (see Figure 15.). The standards most often informed lesson planning and curriculum planning (58% and 56% reported using that standards for these purposes ‘all of the time’, respectively). Conversely, 10% of teachers reported the state standards ‘never’ informed their student summative assessment practice, and 8% reported the same for student formative assessment.

Figure 14. Teachers: To what extent would you like additional support with each of the following?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | No additional support | Some support | A great deal of support |

Setting clear learning objectives

(N=260)

Developing standards-aligned curriculum

(N=261)

Developing effective lesson plans

(N=260)

Integrating students’ college and career goals into instruction

(N=263)

Using formative assessment to inform instruction

(N=261)

Supporting students with learning disabilities

(N=262)

Using technology to support student learning

(N=263)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=53)

Using instructional materials that reflect the diversity of my students

(N=262)

Figure 15. Teachers: How often do Massachusetts College and Career Readiness Standards, Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Standards, Massachusetts Adult Education Professional Standards, or ESOL Professional Standards inform the following for you?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Never | Some of the time | All of the time |

Curriculum Development

(N=263)

Lesson planning

(N=264)

Classroom instruction

(N=264)

Student formative assessment

(N=263)

Student summative assessment

(N=262)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=6)

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### Federal Requirements

This section presents **advisors’** responses to questions regarding WIOA requirements.

Advisors reported that programs are using multiple approaches to inform students about college and career opportunities (Figure 16). Advisors most frequently reported showing students how to research jobs and careers online (81%), having student develop individual education and career plans (77%), giving students reading material about different jobs and careers (75%); and talking about jobs at companies advisors knew are hiring (72%). Advisors least frequently reported connecting students with the regional outstationing coordinator (33%) and having local employers visit the program (42%).

Reviewing a list of six WIOA requirements (Figure 17.), advisors (38%) identified contacting former students regarding post-program employment or education as the most challenging requirement to implement. Between 6% and 14% identified the other requirements as challenging, with the least challenging being supporting students in achieving Measurable Skills Gains. Advisors offered insight into how these challenges can be addressed. They recommended using incentives for students; improving outreach through social media, mailings, and postings; and partnering with community organizations and social service organizations.

Figure 16. Advisors: How do you inform students about college and career opportunities? (Please select all that apply.) (N=69)

Figure 17. Advisors: Of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements listed below, which is the most challenging to implement? (N=69)

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### Communication and Integration

ACLS **advisors** answered questions about their level of communication with teachers and other staff and WIOA/other partner organizations, as well as about the impact outstationing has had on the number of adult education students and MassHire Career Center clients.

Most advisors ‘strongly agreed’ that they frequently coordinated with teachers (99%), were included in regular staff meetings (88%), and that teachers communicated with them (81%) (see Figure A19. in Appendix A). In comparison, 56% ‘somewhat agreed’ and 24% ‘somewhat disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ that WIOA partners communicate with them.

Advisors were asked about the impact outstationing had on the number of adult education students and MassHire Career Center clients (see Figure A20. and Figure A21. in Appendix D). Advisors indicated that oustationing was slightly more effective at increasing the number of students accessing career center services than the other way around. Fifty-two percent (52%) of advisors reported that the number of adult education students accessing career center services increased ‘to some’ or ‘to a great extent’ compared with 45% who reported that outstationing increased the number of career center clients accessing adult education services. Notably, a third (34%) did not know or were unsure if there was an increase in adult education students who accessed career centers or, conversely, if there was increase in career center clients accessing adult education services (40%).

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### Retention of Teachers

Two survey questions asked **teachers** to report whether or not teacher retention was a challenge and to provide their top reasons why teachers may leave programs. A majority of teachers (81%) reported that retaining teachers was not a challenge for their program. But among those 49 teachers who did, the top reason why was inadequate pay (59%) (Figure 18.). Over a third cited limited opportunity for advancement (39%), as well as stress (39%), and insufficient benefits (37%) as reasons teachers leave. The challenges least frequently mentioned were those related to support. Only four percent teachers reported lack of support for professional development, six percent reported lack of resources for professional development, and 10% reported lack of actionable feedback for instructional improvement as reasons teachers may leave a program. Additional challenges offered through the ‘other’ option included schedule and availability challenges, and unclear expectations of teachers.

Figure 18. Teachers: What do you think are the top reasons teachers leave your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=49)

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# Summary of Key Findings

Through surveys, program directors, teachers, and advisors across the state provided insight into the strengths and needs of Massachusetts adult education programs. This section highlights noteworthy findings and themes from the survey results.

Among a list of potential priorities for ACLS to improve adult education in Massachusetts, **the facilitation of networking and/or collaboration across programs** was selected first or second most frequently by directors, teachers, and advisors. Both directors and teachers commented that improving cross-program communication could help to encourage the sharing of expertise and best practices. **Integrating career pathways into adult education curriculum** was selected second or third most frequently by directors, teachers, and advisors as a potential priority or ACLS. This point aligned with a finding from a separate question where both directors and advisors frequently selected improving the alignment of instruction with regional career pathways as being among the top changes that could improve student outcomes.

A theme that surfaced across the survey findings was that **students’ life needs impacted their ability to learn.** When asked to identify changes or additional supports needed to improve student outcomes in their programs, nearly half of directors and teachers and two-thirds of advisors selected assistance with childcare. Directors and advisors selected transportation assistance second most frequently as a needed additional support. Fifty-seven percent (57%) of both directors and teachers cited instability in the lives of students as the top reason for under-enrollment in their programs. Instability in the lives of potential students and lack of childcare were also identified in both groups’ top four reasons for under-enrollment. Not surprisingly, coordinated outreach to social service agencies and providing on-site childcare were among the top three most frequently identified recruiting strategies to increase enrollment of new students. Furthermore, three-quarters of directors and just over half of teachers reported that improved partnerships with organizations that could help students with non-school issues was a helpful strategy for retaining students in their programs.

While directors and teachers reported serving ‘very well’ individuals without a high school credential, English language learners, and individuals who receive public assistance, **both groups more frequently reported serving ‘somewhat well’ or ‘not at all well’ individuals with learning disabilities, mental/emotional health challenges, and physical challenges.** Teachers more frequently reported not serving these groups well than directors. Teachers reported that their second most wanted instructional support was additional help to increase the quality of instruction for students with learning disabilities. Advisors reported that students with mental and emotional health challenges should be an ACLS priority for adult education in Massachusetts.

When asked “What would be helpful for ACLS to know?” some directors and teachers expressed that **mandated enrollment targets and policies linking funding to enrollment and student outcomes can be detrimental to quality programming**. Some directors and teachers commented that linking student enrollment and outcomes to funding created significant pressures on programs, and that these policies were often incompatible with students’ needs. Teachers also reported that the level of current data tracking and data entry requirements detracted from quality, student-focused teaching. Similarly, directors reported the least helpful ACLS policies were those connecting funding with achievement: between 23% and 25% of directors reported that funding based on MSG target completion, funding based on achievement of enrollment targets, and waitlist requirements were not at all helpful.

**There were notable differences between ABE and ESOL program directors’ reported experiences.** Findings indicate that under-enrollment was more of a challenge for ABE programs than it was for ESOL programs.Similarly, over 60% of ESOL directors reported that policies that based funding on achievement of enrollment targets were ‘very helpful’ compared with 58% of ABE directors who reported them ‘somewhat helpful.’ More ESOL directors (69%) reported that the waitlist maintenance requirements very helpful, while 42% ABE directors reported that they were not at all helpful.

**A majority of teachers and directors reported that most instructional supports offered by ACLS and SABES are very helpful.** Most teachers reported frequently using the state standards (MA College and Career Readiness, MA English Language Proficiency, MA Adult Education and ESOL Professional Standards) to inform their teaching practice. Separately, most directors—particularly those with fewer years of experience in their director role (one to five years)—reported that SABES and ACLS general supports were very helpful (particularly SABES PD workshops, the SABES website, and the State as Partner webinar series). ACLS curriculum and instruction supports were also frequently reported as helpful, but supports regarding assessment and testing were often reported to have been unused.

About half of teachers wanted at least some additional support in multiple instructional areas. **Teachers most frequently reported wanting supports for using technology to facilitate student learning and increasing the quality of instruction for students with learning disabilities.** Teachers also reported wanting more student-focused content. Some teachers commented in an open-ended response question that they would more likely complete SABES follow-up activities if the activities had more immediate applicability to their lessons.

**Access to training was an issue for teachers.** Three-quarters of teachers reported that the timing of the professional development activities impeded their ability to participate to ‘some extent’ or ‘to a great extent,’ while over 70% reported that location of professional development activities was an impediment to participation. Correspondingly, nearly half of teachers reported that increased on-site professional development would increase their participation, and one-third reported that additional online training would also increase their participation.

Findings indicate that there is a general **desire for improved support for online learning**. In open-ended comments, directors expressed their appreciation for the ACLS leadership through the COVID-19 shutdown. However, other findings showed that more support is needed to support teachers and improve student learning. When asked what type of additional learning opportunities for adult learners they would be most interested in implementing at their programs, directors’ first choice and teachers’ second choice was distance education. Similarly, teachers most frequently reported wanting ‘a great deal of support’ in using technology to support student learning (38%) in order to improve quality of instruction. Teacher comments also linked COVID-19 related challenges, such as limited Wi-Fi access and lack of computers, to student under-enrollment. Teachers’ responses also indicate that they would like ACLS to prioritize remote learning—including improved access to technology for students.

**ACLS programs operate with a largely part-time staff.** While most directors (84%) reported working full-time, 71% of teachers and 51% of advisors reported working part-time. This finding may have implications for programs’ capacity to plan meetings, scheduling trainings, and implementing certain policies.

**A majority of teachers (81%) did not think retention of teachers was a challenge for their programs**. Among those who did, however, the top reason why was inadequate pay. Similarly, some teachers in advocated for higher wages, health insurance, more paid time for PD, and more preparation time. The last item was supported elsewhere in the findings: the fourth most frequently selected additional support that teachers thought could most improve student outcomes was more time for teachers to prepare for classes. Separately, 72% of directors and 45% of teachers suggested that more paid, out-of-class time for staff would help with student retention.

**Directors most frequently selected support for collaborating with WIOA partners as their top priority for ACLS.** Aligned with this finding was that the advisors, while reporting a high level of communication and integration within their programs, reported less connection with external partner organizations. In addition, advisors reported the most challenging WIOA requirement to implement was contacting former students regarding post-program employment or education.

# Appendix A: Survey Protocol for Directors

**AE Director Survey 5-7-20 Final**

Thank you for participating in the adult education (AE) director survey. The intent of this survey is to collect information that will inform changes to the AE system, improvements for students, and supports for program staff.

This survey is being conducted by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) as part of a third-party, independent evaluation contracted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE) Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit. All responses to the survey will be confidential and only UMDI will have access to the data. Aggregated responses will be reported to DESE and ACLS. This survey is voluntary and should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Note: Several survey items have multiple response options. If you are taking the survey on your phone, you may have to scroll down to see all of the options. When finished, click the arrow that points to the right at the bottom of the final page to record your responses. You are free to move throughout the survey and change responses until you reach the final page.

**Once you submit the survey by clicking on the final arrow, you will be redirected to another survey and will have the option of signing up to win one of ten $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid). The drawing questions will ask for personal information (so we can contact the winners), but this information is in no way tied to the previous survey responses. As described above, these responses will also be confidential. If you do not wish to enter the drawing, you may exit without responding to any questions on this second survey.**

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Jean Supel, Research Manager, at UMDI by email: jsupel@donahue.umassp.edu. **Section I: Background**

**1) How long have you worked as an adult education director?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Less than 1 year

Radio button for multiple choice question 1 to 5 years

Radio button for multiple choice question 6 to 10 years

Radio button for multiple choice question More than 10 years

**2) What kind of students attend your program? (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question ABE (including GED or HiSET preparation classes)

Radio button for multiple choice question ESL/ESOL

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (e.g., citizenship, computer skills) (Please describe.)

**3) In addition to being a director, please indicate which paid positions you currently hold in your program, if any. (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Advisor

Radio button for multiple choice question Teacher

Radio button for multiple choice question I do not have a position in addition to being a director

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**4) Do you work full time or part time as an adult education director?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Full time

Radio button for multiple choice question Part time

**5) How many hours per week are you paid to work as an adult education director?**

*Drop-down menu 1-40 hours.*

**Section II: ACLS Policies**

**6)** **To what extent do the following DESE policies help your program support student outcomes?**

Very Somewhat Not at all

helpful helpful helpful

Funding based on achievement of enrollment targets Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Match and maintenance of effort requirement Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Incentive funding based on Measurable Skills Gains Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

target completion

Staff qualifications requirements Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Minimum salary requirements Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Wait list maintenance requirement Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Desk Review requirement Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**Section III: ACLS Supports and Resources**

**7) To what extent do you find the following general supports to be helpful?**

Very Somewhat Not at all Have not

helpful helpful helpful used

SABES professional development workshops Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

SABES onsite coaching Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

SABES sharing groups Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

SABES newsletter Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

SABES website Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS website Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Directors’ Meeting Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Program Specialists Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Site Visits Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

State as Partner Webinars Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Program Quality Reviews Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Indicators of Program Quality Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Indicators of Effective Advising Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS mailings Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**8) To what extent do you find each of the following ACLS curriculum and instruction supports to be helpful?**

Very Somewhat Not at all Have not

helpful helpful helpful used

Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Standards for Adult Education

Massachusetts Professional Standards for Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Teachers of Adult Education

Massachusetts Professional Standards for Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Teachers of Adult Speakers of Other Languages

College and Career Readiness Standards for Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Adult Education

Lesson plan templates Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Instructional unit templates Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Scope and sequence templates Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Curriculum for Adults Learning Math (CALM) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

The Educator Growth and Evaluation Model Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Mathematics Proficiency Guide for Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Teachers of Adult Education

English Language Arts Proficiency Guide for Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Teachers of Adult Education

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**9) To what extent do you find each of the following ACLS assessment supports to be helpful?**

Very Somewhat Not at all Have not

helpful helpful helpful used

Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test – College Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

and Career Readiness (MAPT-CCR) Score

Reports

MAPT-CCR Score Reports Interpretive Guides Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

MAPT-CCR Practice Tests Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Video Introduction to MAPT-CCR Score Reports Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

ACLS Test Help Blog Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

UMass Center for Educational Assessment Test Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Help Blog

UMass Center for Educational Assessment Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Answer Guides

Assessment-related technical assistance provided Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

by the Center for Educational Assessment staff

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**10) What additional supports would it be helpful for ACLS to provide?**

**Section IV – Enrollment and Retention of Students and Teachers**

**11) Generally, how well does your program serve the needs of students from the following populations? If you do not have any students from a group, please select "Not applicable."**

Very Somewhat Not Not

well well well applicable

English language learners Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who are parents or caregivers Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with limited or interrupted formal education Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals without a high school credential Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Out-of-school youth Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with physical challenges Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with mental/emotional health challenges Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with learning disabilities Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with barriers to employment Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who are homeless Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Veterans Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who receive public assistance Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who are shared customers with partner agencies Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**12) Are any classes in your program underenrolled?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Yes

Radio button for multiple choice question No

**If yes 12a) What do you think are the primary reasons for underenrollment in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Classes offered do not align with student needs

Radio button for multiple choice question Difficulty providing information to potential students

Radio button for multiple choice question Limited public transportation access to program

Radio button for multiple choice question Lack of child care

Radio button for multiple choice question Hesitancy of some groups of potential students to access public services

Radio button for multiple choice question Classes not scheduled at times that work for potential students

Radio button for multiple choice question Instability in the lives of students

Radio button for multiple choice question Instability in the lives of potential students

Radio button for multiple choice question Challenges with students’ work schedules

Radio button for multiple choice question Challenges with potential students’ work schedules

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**13) Which recruiting strategies do you think could most increase the enrollment of new students in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Public advertising (e.g., billboards, signs on public transportation)

Radio button for multiple choice question Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

Radio button for multiple choice question Coordinated outreach to social service agencies

Radio button for multiple choice question Recruiting materials in more languages

Radio button for multiple choice question More specialized classes (e.g., classes more focused on certain types of students or certain content)

Radio button for multiple choice question Increased funding for transportation (e.g., MBTA passes)

Radio button for multiple choice question Providing on-site child care

Radio button for multiple choice question More online learning options

Radio button for multiple choice question Holding classes at sites other than program location (e.g., workplaces, local community organizations)

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**14) How helpful do you think each of the following would be for improving student retention in your program?**

Very Somewhat Not

helpful helpful helpful

More consistently rigorous instruction across classes Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Increased student awareness of their own progress Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

More paid time for staff outside of class (e.g., to help students, Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

to develop lessons, to differentiate instruction)

More professional development for staff related to learning disabilities Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

More professional development for staff related to mental/emotional Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

health

Increased student access to advisors, social workers, or Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

counselors

Improved partnerships with organizations that can help students Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

with non-school issues

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**Section V – Additional Learning Opportunities for Students**

**15) Most adult learners could benefit from additional learning opportunities that help them make progress more quickly. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements.**

Strongly Somewhat Somewhat Strongly Don’t Know/

Agree Agree Disagree Disagree Not Sure

There is a demand for additional learning Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

opportunities among students in my

program

My program has the capacity to support Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

additional learning opportunities for

students

**16) Which of the following options for additional learning would your program be most interested in implementing?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Workplace education

Radio button for multiple choice question Mobile device apps (e.g., Babble, Cell-Ed, Amrita Learning, Codex: Lost Words of Atlantis, Learning Upgrade)

Radio button for multiple choice question Distance education

Radio button for multiple choice question Drop-in study groups

Radio button for multiple choice question More intensive instructional services (e.g., more classroom hours per week)

Radio button for multiple choice question Integrated education and training

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**Section VI – Conclusion**

**17) What are the changes or additional supports that you think could most improve student outcomes in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question More class time for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Child care assistance for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Transportation assistance for students

Radio button for multiple choice question More rigorous instruction for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Improving alignment of instruction with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education and/or MA English Language Proficiency Standards

Radio button for multiple choice question Improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways

Radio button for multiple choice question More time for teachers to prepare for classes

Radio button for multiple choice question More professional development for teachers

Radio button for multiple choice question More professional development for advisors

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**18) What do you think ACLS’ top priorities should be for improving adult education in Massachusetts? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Disseminate promising practices

Radio button for multiple choice question Facilitate networking and/or collaboration across programs

Radio button for multiple choice question Standards-aligned curriculum

Radio button for multiple choice question Effective teaching

Radio button for multiple choice question Integrating career pathways

Radio button for multiple choice question Students with learning disabilities

Radio button for multiple choice question Students with mental/emotional health challenges

Radio button for multiple choice question Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) data technical assistance (e.g., collection, input, analysis, use)

Radio button for multiple choice question Professional development

Radio button for multiple choice question Support for collaborating with WIOA partners

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**19) Please share any additional information or comments with us that you think it would be helpful for ACLS to know.**

Open-ended

**This is the last page of the survey. If you wish to review or change any of your responses, please do so now. Once you click on the arrow pointed to the right, you will no longer be able to make any changes.**

**End of Survey Message:**

Thank you again for taking this survey. Your responses have been recorded.

If you wish to enter the drawing to win one of ten $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid) please click on the following link:

https://umassp.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\_bBAxMLbVd6szKPH

The drawing questions will ask for personal information (so we can contact the winners), but this information is in no way tied to the survey responses. As described above, these responses will also be confidential.

If you do not wish to enter the drawing, you may simply close your browser.

# Appendix B: Survey Protocol for Teachers

**AE Teacher Survey 5-7-20 Final**

Thank you for participating in the adult education (AE) teacher survey. The intent of this survey is to collect information that will inform changes to the AE system, improvements for students, and supports for program staff.

This survey is being conducted by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) as part of a third-party, independent evaluation contracted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE) Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit. All responses to the survey will be confidential and only UMDI will have access to the data. Aggregated responses will be reported to DESE and ACLS. This survey is voluntary and should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Note: Several survey items have multiple response options. If you are taking the survey on your phone, you may have to scroll down to see all of the options. When finished, click the arrow that points to the right at the bottom of the final page to record your responses. You are free to move throughout the survey and change responses until you reach the final page.

**Once you submit the survey by clicking on the final arrow, you will be redirected to another survey and will have the option of signing up to win one of ten $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid). The drawing questions will ask for personal information (so we can contact the winners), but this information is in no way tied to the previous survey responses. As described above, these responses will also be confidential. If you do not wish to enter the drawing, you may exit without responding to any questions on this second survey.**

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Jean Supel, Research Manager, at UMDI by email: jsupel@donahue.umassp.edu.

**Section I: Background**

**1) How long have you worked as an adult education teacher?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Less than 1 year

Radio button for multiple choice question 1 to 5 years

Radio button for multiple choice question 6 to 10 years

Radio button for multiple choice question More than 10 years

**2) What kind of classes do you teach? (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question ABE (including GED or HiSET preparation classes)

Radio button for multiple choice question ESL/ESOL

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (e.g., citizenship, computer skills) (Please describe.)

**3) In addition to being a teacher, please indicate which paid positions you currently hold in your program, if any. (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Advisor

Radio button for multiple choice question Director

Radio button for multiple choice question Assistant Director

Radio button for multiple choice question I do not have a position in addition to being a teacher

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**4) Do you work full time or part time as an adult education teacher?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Full time

Radio button for multiple choice question Part time

**5) How many hours per week are you paid to work as an adult education teacher?**

*(Drop-down menu 1-40 hours.)*

**6) What prior teaching experience did you have before becoming an adult education teacher?** **(Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question K-12 pre-service practicum, teaching, or out-of-school teaching

Radio button for multiple choice question College teaching

Radio button for multiple choice question Adult education volunteer or tutor

Radio button for multiple choice question I did not have any prior teaching experience

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**Section II – Instructional Quality**

**7) To what extent would you like additional support with each of the following?**

A great deal Some No additional

of support support support

Setting clear learning objectives Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Using instructional materials that reflect the diversity Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

of my students

Developing standards-aligned curriculum Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Developing effective lesson plans Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Integrating students’ college and/or career goals Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

into instruction

Using formative assessment to inform instruction Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Supporting students with learning disabilities Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Using technology to support student learning Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**8) How often do Massachusetts College and Career Readiness Standards, Massachusetts English Language Proficiency Standards, Massachusetts Adult Education Professional Standards, or ESOL Professional Standards inform the following for you?**

All of the Some of Never

time the time

Curriculum development Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Lesson planning Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Classroom instruction Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Student formative assessment Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Student summative assessment Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**Section III: Retention of Students and Teachers**

**9) Generally, how well does your program serve the needs of students from the following populations? If you do not have any students from a group, please select "Not applicable."**

Very Somewhat Not Not

well well well applicable

English language learners Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who are parents or caregivers Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with limited or interrupted formal education Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals without a high school credential Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Out-of-school youth Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with physical challenges Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with mental/emotional health challenges Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with learning disabilities Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Incarcerated or formerly incarcerated individuals Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals with barriers to employment Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who are homeless Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Veterans Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who receive public assistance Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Individuals who are shared customers with partner agencies Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**10) Are any of the classes in your program underenrolled?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Yes

Radio button for multiple choice question No

**If yes 10a) What do you think are the primary reasons for underenrollment in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Classes offered do not align with student needs

Radio button for multiple choice question Difficulty providing information to potential students

Radio button for multiple choice question Limited public transportation access to program

Radio button for multiple choice question Lack of child care

Radio button for multiple choice question Hesitancy of some groups of potential students to access public services

Radio button for multiple choice question Classes not scheduled at times that work for potential students

Radio button for multiple choice question Instability in the lives of students

Radio button for multiple choice question Instability in the lives of potential students

Radio button for multiple choice question Challenges with students’ work schedules

Radio button for multiple choice question Challenges with potential students’ work schedules

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**11) Which recruiting strategies do you think could most increase the enrollment of new students in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Public advertising (e.g., billboards, signs on public transportation)

Radio button for multiple choice question Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

Radio button for multiple choice question Coordinated outreach to social service agencies

Radio button for multiple choice question Recruiting materials in more languages

Radio button for multiple choice question More specialized classes (e.g., classes more focused on certain types of students or certain content)

Radio button for multiple choice question Increased funding for transportation (e.g., MBTA passes)

Radio button for multiple choice question Providing on-site child care

Radio button for multiple choice question More online learning options

Radio button for multiple choice question Holding classes at sites other than program location (e.g., workplaces, local community organizations)

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**12) How helpful do you think each of the following would be for improving student retention in your program?**

Very Somewhat Not

helpful helpful helpful

More consistently rigorous instruction across classes Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Increased student awareness of their own progress Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

More paid time outside of class (e.g., to help students, Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

to develop lessons, to differentiate instruction)

More professional development related to learning disabilities Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

More professional development related to mental/emotional Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

health

Increased student access to advisors, social workers, or Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

counselors

Improved partnerships with organizations that can help students Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

with non-school issues

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**13) Is retention of teachers a challenge for your program?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Yes

Radio button for multiple choice question No

**If yes 13a) What do you think are the top reasons teachers leave your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Inadequate pay

Radio button for multiple choice question Insufficient benefits (e.g., health insurance)

Radio button for multiple choice question Few opportunities for advancement

Radio button for multiple choice question Too much stress

Radio button for multiple choice question Lack of actionable feedback for instructional improvement

Radio button for multiple choice question Lack of support for professional development

Radio button for multiple choice question Lack of resources for professional development

Radio button for multiple choice question Not enough time to complete job duties

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**Section IV – Professional Development**

**14) To what extent do each of the following impede your ability to participate in SABES professional development?**

To a great To some Not at all

extent extent

Location of in-person professional development Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Timing of professional development Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Length of professional development session(s) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Format of professional development (online, in-person, Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

blended)

Ability to navigate online learning technology Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Ability to get a substitute teacher Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Ability to be paid for professional development time Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Other (Please describe.) Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

**15) What changes could increase your participation in SABES professional development offerings? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Increased onsite professional development at my program

Radio button for multiple choice question Increased online professional development

Radio button for multiple choice question Post training support

Radio button for multiple choice question More content that highlights best practices

Radio button for multiple choice question More advanced content for experienced teachers

Radio button for multiple choice question More content that addresses specific needs of students (e.g., learning disabilities, mental/emotional health)

Radio button for multiple choice question More content that addresses specific program needs (e.g., teaching English language learners in ABE classes, teaching civics content to ESOL students)

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**16) Have you ever started the instructional component of a SABES professional development offering, but not completed it?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Yes

Radio button for multiple choice question No

**If yes 16a) What was the primary reason you did not complete the instructional component of the professional development?**

Radio button for multiple choice question The professional development offering was not what I expected it to be

Radio button for multiple choice question The quality of the professional development offering did not meet my expectations

Radio button for multiple choice question The trainer/presenter was not effective

Radio button for multiple choice question The professional development offering took more time than I anticipated

Radio button for multiple choice question I did not have enough paid hours to complete it

Radio button for multiple choice question I dropped out for personal reasons

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**17) Have you ever completed the instructional component of a SABES professional development offering, but not completed the follow-up activities?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Yes

Radio button for multiple choice question No

**If yes 17a) What changes could improve your completion of SABES professional development follow-up activities?**

*Open-ended*

**Section V – Additional Learning Opportunities for Students**

**18) Most adult learners could benefit from additional learning opportunities that help them make progress more quickly. Please indicate your degree of agreement with each of the following statements.**

Strongly Somewhat Somewhat Strongly Don’t Know/

Agree Agree Disagree Disagree Not Sure

There is a demand for additional learning Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

opportunities among students in my

program

My program has the capacity to support Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

additional learning opportunities for

students

**19) Which of the following options for additional learning would your program be most interested in implementing?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Workplace education

Radio button for multiple choice question Mobile device apps (e.g., Babble, Cell-Ed, Amrita Learning, Codex: Lost Words of Atlantis, Learning Upgrade)

Radio button for multiple choice question Distance education

Radio button for multiple choice question Drop-in study groups

Radio button for multiple choice question More intensive instructional services (e.g., more classroom hours per week)

Radio button for multiple choice question Integrated education and training

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**Section VI – Conclusion**

**20) What are the changes or additional supports that you think could most improve student outcomes in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question More class time for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Child care assistance for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Transportation assistance for students

Radio button for multiple choice question More rigorous instruction for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Improving alignment of instruction with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education and/or MA English Language Proficiency Standards

Radio button for multiple choice question Improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways

Radio button for multiple choice question More time for teachers to prepare for classes

Radio button for multiple choice question More professional development for teachers

Radio button for multiple choice question More professional development for advisors

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**21) What do you think ACLS’ top priorities should be for improving adult education in Massachusetts? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Disseminate promising practices

Radio button for multiple choice question Facilitate networking and/or collaboration across programs

Radio button for multiple choice question Standards-aligned curriculum

Radio button for multiple choice question Effective teaching

Radio button for multiple choice question Integrating career pathways

Radio button for multiple choice question Students with learning disabilities

Radio button for multiple choice question Students with mental/emotional health challenges

Radio button for multiple choice question Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) data technical assistance (e.g., collection, input, analysis, use)

Radio button for multiple choice question Professional development

Radio button for multiple choice question Support for collaborating with WIOA partners

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**22) Please share any additional information or comments with us that you think it would be helpful for ACLS to know.**

Open-ended

**This is the last page of the survey. If you wish to review or change any of your responses, please do so now. Once you click on the arrow pointed to the right, you will no longer be able to make any changes.**

**End of Survey Message:**

Thank you again for taking this survey. Your responses have been recorded.

If you wish to enter the drawing to win one of ten $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid) please click on the following link:

https://umassp.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\_bBAxMLbVd6szKPH

The drawing questions will ask for personal information (so we can contact the winners), but this information is in no way tied to the survey responses. As described above, these responses will also be confidential.

If you do not wish to enter the drawing, you may simply close your browser.

# Appendix C: Survey Protocol for Advisors

**AE Advisor Survey 5-7-20 Final**

Thank you for participating in the adult education (AE) advisor survey. The intent of this survey is to collect information that will inform changes to the AE system, improvements for students, and supports for program staff.

This survey is being conducted by the University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute (UMDI) as part of a third-party, independent evaluation contracted by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (DESE) Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit. All responses to the survey will be confidential and only UMDI will have access to the data. Aggregated responses will be reported to DESE and ACLS. This survey is voluntary and should take about 20 minutes to complete.

Note: Several survey items have multiple response options. If you are taking the survey on your phone, you may have to scroll down to see all of the options. When finished, click the arrow that points to the right at the bottom of the final page to record your responses. You are free to move throughout the survey and change responses until you reach the final page.

**Once you submit the survey by clicking on the final arrow, you will be redirected to another survey and will have the option of signing up to win one of ten $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid). The drawing questions will ask for personal information (so we can contact the winners), but this information is in no way tied to the previous survey responses. As described above, these responses will also be confidential. If you do not wish to enter the drawing, you may exit without responding to any questions on this second survey.**

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Jean Supel, Research Manager, at UMDI by email: jsupel@donahue.umassp.edu.

**Section I – Background**

**1) How long have you worked as an adult education advisor?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Less than 1 year

Radio button for multiple choice question 1 to 5 years

Radio button for multiple choice question 6 to 10 years

Radio button for multiple choice question More than 10 years

**2) What kind of students attend your program? (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question ABE (including GED or HiSET preparation classes)

Radio button for multiple choice question ESL/ESOL

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (e.g., citizenship, computer skills) (Please describe.)

**3) In addition to being an advisor, please indicate which paid positions you currently hold in your program, if any. (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Teacher

Radio button for multiple choice question Director

Radio button for multiple choice question Assistant Director

Radio button for multiple choice question I do not have a position in addition to being an advisor

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**4) Do you work full time or part time as an adult education advisor?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Full time

Radio button for multiple choice question Part time

**5) How many hours per week are you paid to work as an adult education advisor?**

*Drop-down menu 1-40 hours.*

**6) What prior advising or counseling experience did you have before becoming an adult education advisor?** **(Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question K-12 pre-service practicum, advising or counseling, or out-of-school advising or counseling

Radio button for multiple choice question College advising or counseling

Radio button for multiple choice question Adult education volunteer or tutor

Radio button for multiple choice question I did not have any prior advising or counseling experience

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**Section II – Federal Requirements**

**7) How do you inform students about college and career opportunities? (Please select all that apply.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question We take students to visit staff at the regional MassHire Career Center

Radio button for multiple choice question We have MassHire Career Center staff visit the program

Radio button for multiple choice question We talk about jobs at companies we know are hiring

Radio button for multiple choice question We give students reading material about different jobs and careers

Radio button for multiple choice question We connect students with the regional outstationing coordinator

Radio button for multiple choice question We have students develop individual education and career plans

Radio button for multiple choice question We have college admissions staff visit the program

Radio button for multiple choice question We show students how to research jobs and careers online

Radio button for multiple choice question We show students how to research colleges online

Radio button for multiple choice question We have local employers visit the program

Radio button for multiple choice question We have former students come speak to current students

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**8) Of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements listed below, which is the most challenging to implement?**

Radio button for multiple choice question Supporting students in achieving Measurable Skills Gains

Radio button for multiple choice question Contacting former students regarding post-program employment or education

Radio button for multiple choice question Informing students of regional job and career opportunities in priority industries

Radio button for multiple choice question Supporting students in obtaining jobs

Radio button for multiple choice question Partnering with the local MassHire Career Center

Radio button for multiple choice question Sharing customers with partner organizations

Radio button for multiple choice question I do not find any of the requirements to be challenging

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**8a) How can this challenge be addressed?**

Open-ended

**Section III – Communication and Integration**

**9) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

Strongly Somewhat Somewhat Strongly

agree agree disagree disagree

I frequently coordinate with teachers Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

I am included in regular staff meetings Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

Teachers in my program communicate Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

with me

WIOA partner organizations communicate Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

with me

Other community partner organizations Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question Radio button for multiple choice question

communicate with me

**10) To what extent has outstationing increased the number of adult education students who access MassHire Career Center services?**

Radio button for multiple choice question To a great extent

Radio button for multiple choice question To some extent

Radio button for multiple choice question Not at all

Radio button for multiple choice question Don’t know/Not sure

**11) To what extent has outstationing increased the number of MassHire Career Center clients who access adult education services?**

Radio button for multiple choice question To a great extent

Radio button for multiple choice question To some extent

Radio button for multiple choice question Not at all

Radio button for multiple choice question Don’t know/Not sure

**Section IV – Conclusion**

**12) What are the changes or additional supports that you think could most improve student outcomes in your program? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question More class time for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Child care assistance for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Transportation assistance for students

Radio button for multiple choice question More rigorous instruction for students

Radio button for multiple choice question Improving alignment of instruction with the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education and/or MA English Language Proficiency Standards

Radio button for multiple choice question Improving alignment of instruction with regional career pathways

Radio button for multiple choice question More time for teachers to prepare for classes

Radio button for multiple choice question More professional development for teachers

Radio button for multiple choice question More professional development for advisors

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.)

**13) What do you think ACLS’ top priorities should be for improving adult education in Massachusetts? (Please select up to 3.)**

Radio button for multiple choice question Disseminate promising practices

Radio button for multiple choice question Facilitate networking and/or collaboration across programs

Radio button for multiple choice question Standards-aligned curriculum

Radio button for multiple choice question Effective teaching

Radio button for multiple choice question Integrating career pathways

Radio button for multiple choice question Students with learning disabilities

Radio button for multiple choice question Students with mental/emotional health challenges

Radio button for multiple choice question Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES) data technical assistance (e.g., collection, input, analysis, use)

Radio button for multiple choice question Professional development

Radio button for multiple choice question Support for collaborating with WIOA partners

Radio button for multiple choice question Other (Please describe.) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**14) Please share any additional information or comments with us that you think it would be helpful for ACLS to know.**

Open-ended

**This is the last page of the survey. If you wish to review or change any of your responses, please do so now. Once you click on the arrow pointed to the right, you will no longer be able to make any changes.**

**End of Survey Message:**

Thank you again for taking this survey. Your responses have been recorded.

If you wish to enter the drawing to win one of ten $47 Visa gift cards (with the activation fee pre-paid) please click on the following link:

https://umassp.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\_bBAxMLbVd6szKPH

The drawing questions will ask for personal information (so we can contact the winners), but this information is in no way tied to the survey responses. As described above, these responses will also be confidential.

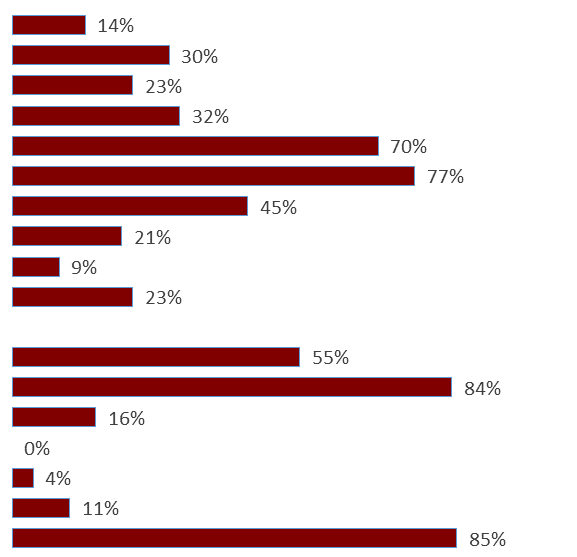
If you do not wish to enter the drawing, you may simply close your browser.

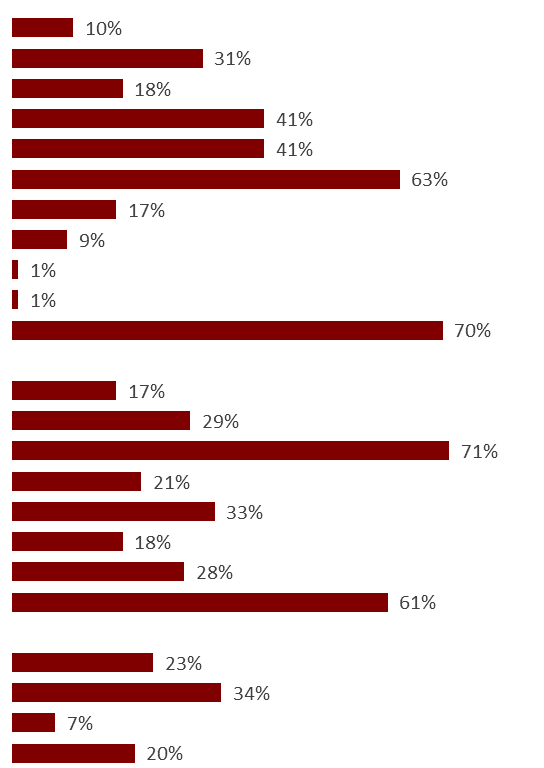
# Appendix D: Figures

## Respondents Background Characteristics

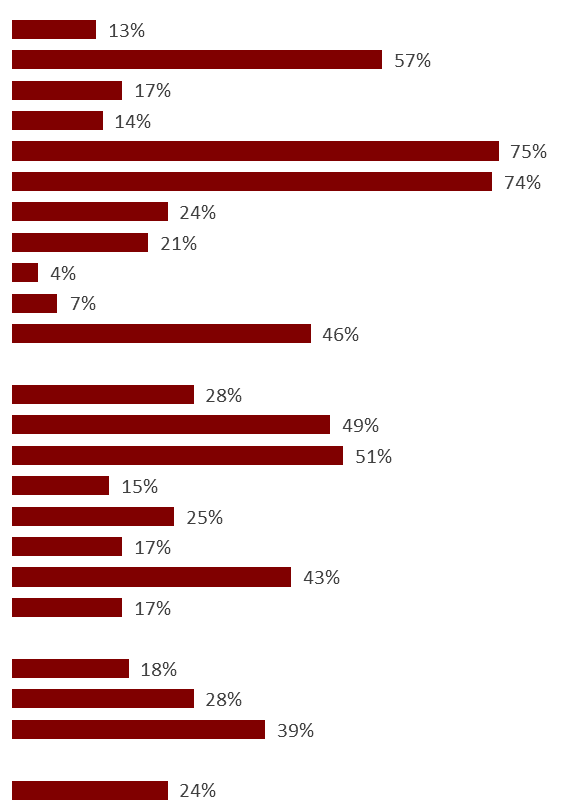
Figure A1. Directors' Background Characteristics

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Years of Experience** | Less than 1 year |  |
| (N=56) | 1 to 5 years |  |
|  | 6 to 10 years |  |
|  | More than 10 years |  |
| **Type of Classes offered** | ABE |  |
| **at Program** | ESOL |  |
| (N=56) | Other |  |
| **Additional Roles** | Advisor |  |
| (N=56) | Assistant Director |  |
|  | No other position in |  |
|  | addition to teaching |  |
|  | Other |  |
| **Work Schedule** | Full time |  |
| (N=56) | Part time |  |
| **Hours per Week** | 0-9 |  |
| (N=56) | 0-10 |  |
|  | 20-29 |  |
|  | 30-40 |  |



Figure A2. Teachers’ Background Characteristics

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Years of Experience** | Less than 1 year |  |
| (N=276) | 1 to 5 years |  |
|  | 6 to 10 years |  |
|  | More than 10 years |  |
| **Type of Classes Offered** | ABE |  |
| **at Program** | ESOL |  |
| (N=275) | Other |  |
| **Additional Roles** | Advisor |  |
| (N=263) | Director |  |
|  | Assistant Director |  |
|  | No other position in |  |
|  | addition to teaching |  |
|  | Other |  |
| **Work Schedule** | Full time |  |
| (N=274) | Part time |  |
| **Hours per Week** | 0-9 |  |
| (N=274) | 0-10 |  |
|  | 20-29 |  |
|  | 30-40 |  |
| **Relevant Prior** | K-12 pre-service practicum/ |  |
| **Experience** | teaching/out-of-school teaching |  |
| (n=275) | College teaching |  |
|  | AE volunteer or tutor |  |
|  | No prior teaching experience |  |
|  | Other |  |
|  |  |  |

Figure A3. Advisors’ Background Characteristics

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Years of Experience** | Less than 1 year |  |
| (n=72) | 1 to 5 years |  |
|  | 6 to 10 years |  |
|  | More than 10 years |  |
| **Type of Classes Offered** | ABE |  |
| **at Program** | ESOL |  |
| (n=72) | Other |  |
| **Additional Roles** | Teacher |  |
| (n=71) | Director |  |
|  | Assistant Director |  |
|  | No other position in addition |  |
|  | to advising |  |
|  | Other |  |
| **Work Schedule** | Full time |  |
| (n=72) | Part time |  |
| **Hours per Week** | 0-9 |  |
| (n=72) | 10-19 |  |
|  | 20-29 |  |
|  | 30-40 |  |
| **Relevant Prior** | K-12 pre-service practicum/out- |  |
| **Experience** | of-school advising or counseling |  |
| (n=72) | College advising or counseling |  |
|  | AE volunteer or tutor |  |
|  | No prior advising or |  |
|  | counseling experience |  |
|  | Other |  |
|  |  |  |

## ACLS Policies: Directors

Figure A4. Directors: To what extent do the following DESE policies help your program support student outcomes?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

Funding based on achievement of enrollment targets

(N=53)

Match and maintenance of effort requirement

(N=52)

Incentive funding based on Measurable Skills Gains target completion

(N=53)

Staff qualifications requirements

(N=53)

Minimum salary requirements

(N=53)

Wait list maintenance requirement

(N=53)

Desk Review requirement

(N=53)

## ACLS Supports and Resources – Directors

Figure A5. Directors: To what extent do you find the following general supports to be helpful?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Have not used | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

SABES professional development workshops

(N=51)

SABES onsite coaching

(N=50)

SABES sharing groups

(N=51)

SABES newsletter

(N=50)

SABES website

(N=51)

0%

0%

Figure A6. Directors: To what extent do you find the following general supports to be helpful?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Have not used | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

ACLS website

(N=50)

ACLS Program Specialists

(N=50)

ACLS Directors’ Meetings

N=51)

ACLS Site Visits

(N=51)

State as Partner Webinars

(N=51)

ACLS Program Quality Reviews

(N=51)

ACLS Indicators of Program Quality

(N=51)

ACLS Indicators of Effective Advising

(N=51)

ACLS mailings

(N=51)

0%

Figure A7. Directors: To what extent do you find each of the following ACLS curriculum and instruction supports to be helpful?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Have not used | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

English Language Proficiency Standards

(n=51)

Standards for Teachers ABE

(N=51)

Standards for Teachers ESOL

(N=51)

College and Career Readiness Standards

(N=51)

Lesson plan templates

(N=51)

Curriculum for Adults Learning Math

(N=51)

Educator Growth and Evaluation Model

(N=51)

Mathematics Proficiency Guide

(N=51)

English Language Arts Proficiency Guide

(N=51)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=1)

Instructional unit templates

(N=51)

Scope and sequence templates

(N=51)

0%

0%

Figure A8. Directors: To what extent do you find each of the following ACLS assessment supports to be helpful?

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Have not used | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

UMass Center for Education Assessment Answer Guides

(N=51)

MAPT-CCR Practice Tests

(N=51)

Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Tests MAPT-CCR Score Reports

(N=51)

MAPT-CCR Score Reports Interpretive Guides

(N=51)

Video Introduction to MAPT-CCR Score Reports

(N=51)

ACLS Test Help Blog

(N=51)

UMass Center for Educational Assessment Test Help Blog

(N=51)

Technical assistance provided by Center for Education Assessment

(N=51)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=5)

0%

## Professional Development – Teachers

Figure A9. Teachers: To what extent do each of the following impede your ability to participate in SABES professional development?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all | To some extent | To a great extent |

Location of in-person PD

(N=249)

Timing of PD

(N=247)

Length of PD session(s)

(N=245)

Format of PD (online, in-person, blended)

(N=248)

Ability to navigate online learning technology

(N=248)

Ability to get a substitute teacher

(N=245)

Ability to be paid for PD time

(N=244)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=45)

Figure A10. Teachers: Have you ever started the instructional component of a SABES professional development offering, but not completed it? (N=252)

Figure A11. Teachers: What was the primary reason you did not complete the instructional component of the professional development? (N=72)

Figure A12. Teachers: Have you ever completed the instructional component of a SABES professional development offering, but not completed the follow-up activities? (N=252)

## Enrollment, Recruitment, and Retention – Directors and Teachers

Figure A13. Directors: What do you think are the primary reasons for under-enrollment in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=23)

Figure A14. Teachers: If yes, what do you think are the primary reasons for under-enrollment in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=107)

Figure A15. Directors: Which recruiting strategies do you think could most increase the enrollment of new students in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=56)

Figure A16. Teachers: Which recruiting strategies do you think could most increase the enrollment of new students in your program? (Please select up to 3.) (N=249)

Figure A17. Directors: How helpful do you think each of the following would be for improving student retention in your program?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

More consistently rigorous instruction across classes

(N=48)

Increased student awareness of own progress

(N=51)

More PD related to learning disabilities

(N=51)

More PD related to mental/emotional health

(N=51)

Increased student access to advisors, social workers, and counselors

(N=50)

Improved partnerships with organizations

(N=51)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=13)

More paid time outside of class

(N=50)

Figure A18. Teachers: How helpful do you think each of the following would be for improving student retention in your program?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not at all helpful | Somewhat helpful | Very helpful |

More consistently rigorous instruction across classes

(N=242)

Increased student awareness of their own progress

(N=245)

More paid time outside of class

(N=242)

More PD related to learning disabilities

(N=245)

More PD related to mental/emotional health

(N=245)

Increased student access to advisors, social workers, or counselors

(N=242)

Improved partnerships with organizations that help students

(N=243)

Other (Please describe.)

(N=38)

## Communication and Integration - Advisors

Figure A19. Advisors: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |

I frequently coordinate with teachers

(N=68)

I am included in regular staff meetings

(N=68)

Teachers in my program communicate with me

(N=68)

WIOA partner organizations communicate with me

(N=68)

Other community partner organizations communicate with me

(N=68)

0%

0%

0%

Figure A20. Advisors: To what extent has outstationing increased the number of adult education students who access MassHire Career Center services? (N=68)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Don’t know/Not sure | Not at all | To some extent | To a great extent |

Figure A21. Advisors: To what extent has outstationing increased the number of MassHire Career Center clients who access adult education services? (N=68)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Don’t know/Not sure | Not at all | To some extent | To a great extent |

1. All ACLS programs have connections to regional workforce employment boards. These boards define priority employment areas for their region. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. WIOA requires programs to work with their regional one-stop partner organizations. In addition ACLS’ indicators of program quality include working with “local education and workforce systems.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We recognize that the formal term for adult education is andragogy. However, as pedagogy is what is commonly used in the field, we have used it in this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adult education advisors were included in the focus group and survey data collection activities, but were not interviewed for this study. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 1 <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/>

   2018 is the most recent year for which data were available. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Please note that the the workforce system recently underwent a rebranding process. For more information, please see <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/connect-with-your-local-masshire-workforce-board> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 2018 is the most recent year for which data were available. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The teacher respondent used the acronym ‘ENB’ which very likely was referring to the organization English for New Bostonians. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Only one-third of ACLS programs receive a program quality review (PQR) each year, which may explain why it is one of the most underused general support. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Data for ABE/ESOL and years of experience breakouts are included in a separate Excel workbook which is a supplement to this report. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)