



**OVERVIEW OF THE MASSACHUSETTS ADULT BASIC EDUCATION SYSTEM  
FUNDED BY STATE BUDGET LINE ITEM #7035-0002 AND THE  
FEDERAL WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT – TITLE II  
FISCAL YEAR 2013**

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**ABE SERVICES – THE CORNERSTONE OF PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES:**

The Massachusetts Adult Basic Education (ABE) system provides instructional services to adults in basic literacy, adult basic education (reading, writing and math), pre-GED, high school credentialing (GED and Adult Diploma Program/External Diploma Program) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In Fiscal Year 2012, the system served 21,391 adults: 22.46% were enrolled in adult basic education, 17.16% were enrolled in high school credentialing, and 60.38% were enrolled in ESOL services.

In addition to the core instructional offerings noted above, programs also provide a range of educational services such as employment/career readiness, citizenship, transitions to college, computer-assisted instruction, distance learning, family literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, services to the homeless, student leadership and community participation, adult career pathways offering accelerated instruction contextualized to college and career readiness and/or targeted occupations, and workplace education.

In 1993, the Commonwealth, through the Education Reform Act, recognized ABE as an essential component of the state's public education system and charged the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with the lead responsibility for developing and managing an effective ABE service delivery system. After the inclusion of ABE in the landmark Education Reform Act, the Massachusetts Board of Education embraced universal access to adult basic education for adults in the Commonwealth by adopting the following mission<sup>1</sup>:

*To provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy 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.*

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website: <http://doe.mass.edu/acls>.

In acknowledging its responsibility to provide opportunities for basic skills instruction to every adult who needed it, the Massachusetts Board of Education underscored the importance of adult basic education to individuals, families, the quality of life in the community, the development of an educated workforce, and the state's economic prosperity. Clearly, adult basic education is at the cornerstone of many of today's pressing public policy priorities:

- **Poverty:** Families headed by adults without a high school diploma suffer severe economic consequences.<sup>2</sup>
- **Workforce development:** Good-paying jobs for those without college degrees or advanced skills have become considerably harder to find, and more so in our state than in other parts of the nation.<sup>3</sup> More than 1.1 million (1/3) of the state's 3.2 million workers do not have the skills required to perform in the state's rapidly changing economy and need ABE services.<sup>4</sup>
- **School success for children and the success of education reform:** The best indicator of a child's future success in school is the educational level of the mother.<sup>5</sup>
- **Civic engagement:** Civic and community participation suffer when adults do not have sufficient literacy skills.<sup>6</sup>
- **Health care:** Adults suffer adverse health outcomes as a result of low literacy skills.<sup>7</sup>
- **Crime:** Incarceration and recidivism rates are high among adults who do not have sufficient literacy skills.<sup>8</sup>

### **AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM:**

The ABE system is an essential and integral component of the workforce development system. ABE provides adults with the basic skills they need to enroll in job training programs, successfully complete them and take advantage of career advancement opportunities. In Fiscal Year 2010, a new workplace education initiative, Learn at Work, was supported by \$2 million in federal ARRA and Workforce Investment Act funds, and state adult basic education funding. There is no question that the proficiency gained by undereducated adults through the ABE

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<sup>2</sup> *The State of the American Dream in Massachusetts*, MassINC, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> *Mass Economy: The Labor Supply and Our Economic Future*, MassINC, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> *New Skills for a New Economy*, MassINC, 2000

<sup>5</sup> Teach the Mother and Reach the Child: Literacy Across Generations. Literacy Lessons, Sticht, T. G., & McDonald, B.A. (1990).

<sup>6</sup> The National Adult Literacy Survey, Educational Testing Service, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *Literacy and Health Outcomes*, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> The National Adult Literacy Survey, Educational Testing Service, 1993; and The Policy Information Center of Educational Testing Service.

system is a pre-requisite to their qualifying for even the most basic training, further education and better jobs.

### **ONE OF THE NATION’S MOST DIVERSE PROVIDER NETWORKS:**

One of the great strengths of the Massachusetts ABE system is its diverse provider network. ABE services are provided by community-based organizations, local educational agencies, community colleges, higher education, correctional facilities, businesses and labor unions. This diversity provides the best possible access for adults, allowing them multiple points of entry in the community so they can enroll at a program that is geographically accessible, meets their educational needs and may already be a resource with which they are comfortable thereby encouraging enrollment and persistence.

The diverse providers and services designed to meet the needs of the adult students who enroll include:

- **Adult Learning Centers:** 95 programs, many with multiple sites, provide free adult basic education and ESOL services in local communities. Using both federal and state funds, these programs offer instruction from basic literacy through college and career readiness and educational counseling. Support services available at some programs include volunteers trained to provide supplemental instruction, transportation and childcare, all of which help obviate traditional barriers to participation and persistence.
- **ABE Transition to Community College:** Located at 11 community colleges, transition programs partner with community adult learning centers to ensure the successful transition of adult students into postsecondary education by offering both counseling and academic services.
- **Learn at Work Workplace Education Program:** A collaboration between the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Adult and Community Learning Services), Learn at Work funds 11 workplace education programs that provide ABE/ESOL instruction to employees at the workplace through partnerships among businesses, workers, labor unions and education providers.
- **Adult Career Pathways:** A collaboration between the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Adult and Community Learning Services) and the sixteen workforce investment boards across the state, the Adult Career Pathways grant program was created to offer accelerated instruction contextualized to college and career readiness and/or targeted occupations.
- **Primary Instruction by Volunteers:** Throughout the state, Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts and English at Large, both nonprofit organizations, recruit, train, match and supervise volunteer tutors who provide individualized and flexibly scheduled basic literacy

and ESOL instruction to adult learners who are not able to participate in classroom-based services due to past failure, embarrassment, or scheduling, transportation and childcare difficulties.

- **Distance Learning:** Utilizing technology, distance learning programs for both adult basic education and ESOL help increase the intensity of educational programming for adults enrolled in classes, and reach beyond the classroom to those adults who are unable to attend classes for a variety of reasons.
- **Family Literacy:** Pathways to Family Success and Even Start Family Literacy programs support Massachusetts families by integrating early childhood education, adult education, and parenting activities into projects that build on existing community resources.<sup>9</sup>
- **Adult Basic Education for Incarcerated Adults:** Located at 10 County Houses of Correction and 2 Department of Correction sites, basic education and ESOL services are offered to support the successful reintegration of individuals upon their release from correctional facilities.

#### **ABE FUNDING – A LEVERAGED INVESTMENT:**

For Fiscal Year 2013, federal Workforce Investment Act – Title II funds (WIA) to Massachusetts total \$10.2 million; the state ABE line item funding totals \$30.1 million. When adjusted for inflation, the state appropriation for adult basic education declined steadily from Fiscal Year 2003 through Fiscal Year 2011, re-bounded in Fiscal Year 2012 due to a \$3 million supplemental appropriation and maintained \$2.6 million of the \$3 million increase as part of the base appropriation for Fiscal Year 2013.<sup>10</sup>

Both the state and federal sources of funding are administered under a competitive grant process by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS). All ABE instructional services funded by ACLS are provided at no charge to the student.

WIA encourages a diverse provider network and lists eligible providers that include local educational agencies, community-based organizations, volunteer organizations, institutions of higher education, public and private nonprofit organizations, libraries, public housing authorities and consortia that encompass any combination of these categories. Further, WIA stipulates that the grants must:

- be competitive;

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on family literacy activities and initiatives, refer to <http://www.doe.mass.edu/familylit/> and the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/familylit/mflc.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Mass Budget and Policy Center, Budget Browser at [www.massbudget.org](http://www.massbudget.org)

- be awarded on a multi-year basis; and
- ensure “direct and equitable access” so that any eligible provider has equal access to apply for grants and cannot be excluded because of presumptive providers or entitlement funding.

The state budget line item for adult basic education (#7035-0002) continues to enforce those stipulations by specifically stating in the budget language that “in no case shall grants be considered an entitlement to a grant recipient”, and that “grants shall be distributed to a diverse network of organizations which have demonstrated commitment and effectiveness in the provision of such services, and that are selected competitively by the department of elementary and secondary education.”<sup>11</sup>

In order to leverage additional funds into the system and require a tangible demonstration of a state’s financial commitment to providing ABE services, WIA mandates that the state provides a non-federal contribution (i.e., “the match”) and that the match must maintain a required level of investment from year to year (i.e., “the maintenance of effort”). States that do not comply with either or both of these provisions risk a proportionate loss of federal ABE funding. However, states can apply for and receive a one-time waiver under exceptional or uncontrollable circumstances.

In order to meet the federal maintenance of effort requirement and leverage additional resources in Massachusetts for ABE services, ACLS mandates that programs must also provide a match of public or private local dollars as well as an annual maintenance of effort. ACLS can also exercise discretion in granting occasional waivers for programs due to unusual circumstances. The state’s ABE line item and the local program match go towards the state’s maintenance of effort.

WIA mandates that in states that have a statutory designation of a lead agency for adult basic education, federal adult education funds must be awarded to that same agency, in this case, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education – the only state agency with the mandate to educate all students, including adults, to the skill level of a high school credential, and the only state agency mandated under the Education Reform Act to develop and manage a system for delivering ABE services.

### **THE WAIT LIST -- A DEMONSTRATED DEMAND FOR SERVICES:**

In Fiscal Year 2012 (7/1/11 – 6/30/12), the ABE system in Massachusetts served 21,391 adults, each of whom received at least 12 hours of instruction, the federal minimum standard in order to include an individual in the total student count at year-end. As of February 2013, there are 18,495 adults on the wait list (unduplicated count)<sup>12</sup>. Of those on the waiting list, 4,856 (26%) need ABE/GED services and 13,639 (74%) need ESOL services.

<sup>11</sup> Final Fiscal Year 2013 Massachusetts Budget, <http://malegislature.gov/Budget/CurrentBudget>

<sup>12</sup> Source: <http://acls.doemass.org/pAbeDirectoryHome>

This demonstrated demand for services has occurred without advertising or a concerted outreach effort to recruit students. The time on a wait list can vary from 2 to 8 months for ABE services and 6 months to 3 years for ESOL. Some programs maintain a practice of “closing” the wait list when it becomes too long because it is unrealistic to ask an individual to wait years for service. ACLS removes duplicate names from the list and programs are asked to update their list annually by December and, as appropriate, remove anyone who has been on the list for more than 18 months.

According to the report *New Skills for a New Economy*, published by the non-partisan think tank, MassINC, of the more than 1.1 million workers who lack basic skills:<sup>13</sup>

- 667,000 workers have a high school credential but still lack basic math, literacy, language and analytic skills to perform in the typical 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace;
- 280,000 are high school drop-outs who lack necessary skills; and
- 195,000 are immigrants with limited English speaking skills who need to learn to speak English.

Utilizing data from the 2000 U.S. Census provides a picture of the need and potential demand. According to a data analysis by ACLS of the need for ABE services in the state<sup>14</sup>, in 2005, nearly 1 million adults (14.28% of the population) lack a high school diploma and have limited proficiency in conversational English. There are obvious limitations to using U.S. Census data to determine need:

- Information is self-reported and there could be multiple reasons for inaccurate reporting (e.g., adults are too afraid or embarrassed to admit their limited skills, they may overestimate their skills, or they may have difficulty understanding the questions and providing the information).
- The Census typically undercounts individuals.
- The Census determines literacy proficiency solely by the last grade of school completed, which is not an accurate or absolute indicator of skill level.

As of the 2010 U.S. Census, the questionnaire no longer asks individuals to self-report the last grade of school completed. This information is now estimated through the American Community Survey, a random sampling of adults conducted annually by the U.S. Census Bureau with estimates published annually, or every three years or every five years, depending on the size of the population in a geographic area. According to the 2011 American Community Survey estimates of Massachusetts, 11% of the adult population over age 25 does not have a high school diploma.

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<sup>13</sup>*New Skills for a New Economy*, MassINC, 2000

<sup>14</sup> Source: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/rfp/>

As a result, over the years, there have been other attempts to measure the skill level of adults and the need for ABE services via a demonstration of competency by a study sample: the Adult Performance Level Study conducted by the U.S. Office of Education in 1971, the National Adult Literacy Survey conducted by the Educational Testing Service in 1992, and most recently, the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) conducted by the American Institutes for Research in 2003. Under the NAAL auspices, Massachusetts was one of six states in the country, including Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, New York and Oklahoma, who commissioned a more in-depth study of the ABE needs in their respective states.

Information from the Massachusetts State Assessment of Adult Literacy<sup>15</sup> defines a much greater need in the Commonwealth for ABE services than is suggested by either the wait list or the U.S. Census figures alone. According to information from this study, 32% of Massachusetts adults were at the Below Basic and Basic levels in Prose Literacy, the lowest literacy skill level (i.e., the ability to search, comprehend and use information from continuous texts such as newspaper articles or instructional materials).

Further, the majority (53%) of Massachusetts adults with Below Basic literacy levels across the three literacy scales (e.g., Prose, Document and Quantitative Literacy) were not in the labor force, an additional 5% were unemployed, 22% were employed part-time and only 20% were employed full-time.

The wait list is the focus of policymakers and legislators who are justifiably horrified that adults – their constituents – must languish on a long list and wait for desperately needed services. In reality, the wait list has grown as the funding for ABE has increased. As adults in the community learn about more money being made available to add classes or increase services, the news spreads rapidly by word-of-mouth, bringing forward even more people who cannot enroll in programs. It is unlikely the wait list can be totally eliminated. However, additional funding would make it possible to move individuals off the wait list and into programs more quickly so more adults can ultimately be served.

If additional funding is used to increase the intensity of service at a program, it can allow currently enrolled students to advance more quickly, opening up seats as students move up to the next instructional level, achieve their goals and transition out of the program. If additional funding is used to increase the number of classes or programs, more people from the wait list can move off the wait list and enroll. Given the extent of the need, it is unrealistic to assume that even modest to significant increases in funding will totally eliminate the wait list.

The ABE system serves the most educationally disadvantaged adults and accepts students regardless of skill level, income, the amount of instructional time that would be needed to meet stated goals, or age (provided the individual is over age 16 and out-of-school as required by WIA). Despite the wait list, the ABE system still provides the most universal access of any public education or training program for adults.

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<sup>15</sup> *Massachusetts State Assessment of Adult Literacy*, American Institutes for Research, 2003.

## THE ABE SYSTEM INFRASTRUCTURE – ENABLING SYSTEM STRENGTH AND EFFECTIVENESS:

The Massachusetts ABE System infrastructure is designed to provide the necessary foundation on which to build a strong, sustainable and responsive system that provides quality services and can continuously improve. Components of the system<sup>16</sup> include:

- **Adult Curriculum Frameworks:** Adapted from the K-12 curriculum frameworks used to guide teachers in lesson plan development and content, there are frameworks in English Language Arts, Math and Numeracy, ESOL, history and social sciences, and health. The frameworks document the skills and content that adult learners need to know and be able to perform to function successfully in their roles as a parent, family member, worker, citizen, and life-long learner.
- **SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support):** With a national reputation for excellence in program and staff development, SABES consists of five regional support centers located at community colleges and the University of Massachusetts/Boston, and a central resource center at World Education in Boston. SABES provides comprehensive training, technical assistance, the dissemination of research and focused publications for practitioners with a goal to help them equip students to succeed in the economy, contribute more fully to their families and communities, develop leadership skills, and reach personal learning goals.
- **Teacher Licensure:** With standards equivalent to the K-12 teacher certification, the ABE teacher license is a voluntary credential. ABE practitioners seeking a license are required to pass the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL), which consist of the Communication and Literacy Skills Test and the ABE Subject Matter Test, the first of its kind in the nation.
- **Community Planning:** A statewide initiative involving all programs funded by ACLS, community planning was first intended to coordinate services among ABE service providers and has since evolved into community-wide initiatives involving public and private stakeholders with a common goal of coordinating and integrating ABE services with other services utilized by students in the community (e.g., employment and training, health and human services). Community planning strives to foster collaboration, investment, and responsive innovation across the system by working together with entities whose missions intersect with ABE.
- **SMARTT Data Management System:** A proprietary, state-of-the-art, encrypted, online database, SMARTT is the most comprehensive ABE data management system in the country. Used by every program to submit student level data to ACLS on a monthly basis,

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<sup>16</sup> More detail about the components of the infrastructure and the performance standards can be found at the ACLS website: <http://doe.mass.edu/acls>.



SMARTT includes all demographics, assessment, attendance and goal attainment information required by the National Reporting System under WIA in addition to supplemental information required by ACLS. To allow practitioners to utilize data to continuously improve their programs, ACLS incorporated COGNOS, a commercial software reporting package.

- **Standardized Assessments:** All programs funded by ACLS must utilize standardized assessments approved by the U.S. Department of Education. ESOL programs in Massachusetts use the BEST Plus and TABE Clas-E to assess English language conversation and writing skills respectively. ABE students are assessed utilizing the TABE and the MAPT (the Massachusetts Adult Proficiency Test), an assessment developed by the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The MAPT is a web-based, adaptive, computerized assessment aligned with the content of the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks.
- **Learn at Work and Workplace Education Programs:** The workplace education program, funded through ACLS, provides basic skills instruction at the workplace and union halls where access is especially important for low income workers with more than one job. These programs serve the needs of the employers, unions and employees, and represent a private sector investment where some programs continue to operate after the end of the grant period. The Workplace Education program is an ACLS collaboration with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and Commonwealth Corporation.

### **PERFORMANCE STANDARDS – A DRIVE TOWARD EXCELLENCE:**

The ABE system stands out in the Commonwealth as a system with a commitment to rigorous program performance standards driven by an equally strong commitment to providing the high quality services that ABE students deserve. The performance standards, as one part of a larger system of accountability, encourage continuous improvement, effective program administration, and positive student outcomes.

According to ACLS, in FY2012, 80% of the ESE-funded core ABE and ESOL programs met or exceeded the state performance standard for student learning gains. Adults in ESE-funded programs attended, on average, 134.55 hours in FY2012 above the national average of 125 hours per student.

Other components of the performance accountability system include a strong program monitoring tool and Indicators of Program Quality.

### **COLLABORATION WITH THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM:**

The ABE System collaborates extensively with the Workforce Development System in the belief that the adults in need of education and training will best be served when interlocking services

are linked by a common purpose – an easily accessible, easy to understand, easy to navigate system that is student-centered. Neither ABE nor Workforce Development can excel in fully meeting the educational and training needs of the individual student/client or employer alone. The following examples demonstrate how ABE has worked to implement a vision of integrated services, policy implementation and accountability.

***Joint Direct Service Initiatives:***

- ***One-Stop Career Centers:*** Since 2001, ACLS has funded the out-stationing of ABE program personnel at Career Centers and currently supports out-stationing in 15 11 SDA regions for an average of 1 day/week to conduct student intakes, assessments and referrals. Local collaborations also exist between ABE programs and local Career Centers with more in the planning stages.
- ***The BEST Initiative:*** The BEST Initiative followed and built upon the earlier MA Workplace Education Initiative (MWEI), a multi-agency collaboration between 1985 and 1990. One of the first such initiatives in the country, it broke new ground as a public-private partnership, combined a single policy, reporting and RFP, and received a Presidential Award from President Reagan. After the state’s financial crisis eliminated funding, ACLS continued the workplace education initiative. Using MWEI as a model, ACLS helped write the initial RFP for the BEST Initiative, an industry sector initiative, and contributed a significant amount of funding.
- ***BEST Older Youth:*** This project was as a result of the ACLS recommendation to spend \$2.9 million in WIA incentive funding to further integrate ABE and employment/training.
- ***Program Development:*** ACLS has helped craft and implement industry sector initiatives, the Workforce Training Fund, Bay State Works and the Workforce Competitive Trust Fund. The ECCLI initiative in the health care sector has had impact on workers at 25% of the nursing homes in the state.
- ***Workforce Development as ABE Priority:*** The 2012 and 2005 RFP for ABE funding included a workforce development priority, encouraging programs to propose joint ABE/ESOL and occupational training, coordinate with workforce development organizations, and integrate job readiness skills into ABE/ESOL curriculum. Since 2003, ACLS has supported a workforce development priority within SABES to help programs address their students’ workforce development goals, and workforce development staff participates in SABES professional development activities.
- ***Transitions to College:*** ACLS funds 11 college transition programs to prepare ABE program graduates for post-secondary education and training, the potential next step in their career advancement. The MA Office for Community Colleges contributed to the review and development of the project RFP and to the review process for grants.

## JOINT POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

- **Policy Task Forces:** SDAs/WIA administrative entities and REBs/LWIBS served on task forces to restructure ABE policy for RFPs in 1990, 1995 and 2000.
- **ABE Performance Accountability Work Group (PAWG):** A Vice President from Commonwealth Corporation and an LWIB director served on the PAWG in 2001 and 2002, the group being charged with formulating ABE program performance standards.
- **Vision Subcommittee of the WIA Steering Committee:** The ACLS Director served as chair of the Vision Subcommittee of the WIA Steering Committee to implement WIA.
- **LWIBs:** Each of the 16 workforce investment boards has a designated ABE program representative.
- **RFP Reading and Review Teams:** In the open and competitive process conducted during Fiscal Year 2012, the workforce investment boards in each of the state's sixteen regions, made the final decisions regarding the awarding of Career Pathways grants in their respective regions and served on reading teams. ACLS staff has also served as readers/reviewers of workforce development proposals under the Workforce Training Fund. This collaboration is coordinated with DTA as well as other agencies.
- **Program Monitoring:** ACLS includes workforce development representatives on all ABE program monitoring visits during a 5 year funding cycle.
- **ACLS Staffing:** ACLS has a program specialist dedicated solely to workforce development programming and collaborations.
- **National Governor's Association Industry Sector Forum:** ACLS and its workforce development colleagues are invited participants in this ongoing forum focused on industry sector partnerships.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Recognize the ABE System as a valuable partner that should always be included as an indispensable stakeholder and co-investor in education/training policy initiatives and program development.**

The Massachusetts ABE system is a vitally important educational system included in the Education Reform Act and charged by the MA Board of Education with providing "each and every adult with opportunities to develop literacy 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. <sup>17</sup>

As such, the system is diverse and works with a multitude of students with varied educational needs and goals, which often intersect with other parts of the educational continuum: early childhood education, children in the K-12 system, post-secondary and higher education as well as workforce training and development. The ABE System is vital to the success of the entire educational continuum and is an important entity that must connect, collaborate and integrate well with these other systems without being subsumed by any one of them.

Further, the ABE System is at the cornerstone of the debate and search for solutions to the emerging public policy issues that overlap both education and training: immigration and undocumented workers, excessive high school drop-out rates, the state's shrinking workforce, a decline in young adult and teen employment, at-risk youth teetering on a decision to drop out of school but with no marketable work skills, the re-training of older workers, students needing much remediation at the post-secondary level in order to be successful, and the comparative rigor and acceptance of the GED and the MCAS and the implications for high school credentialing programs.

Clearly, because of the extensive reach of the ABE System, ABE is a valuable partner and should always be included as an indispensable stakeholder and co-investor.

**2. *Recognize that a long-term investment is required to ensure universal access and the right to ABE services for all adults across the Commonwealth who need to improve their basic skills.***

Adults with low level basic skills are consigned to a bleak future in Massachusetts and are unable to reach their full potential, depriving them, their families and the Commonwealth of their promise, creativity and talents. As stated by MIT Economist, Lester Thurow in 1982:

*Social-welfare programs are essentially a matter of ethics and generosity, but education and training are not. I am willing to pay for the education of my neighbor's children not because I am generous, but because I cannot afford to live with them uneducated.*

Similarly, the Commonwealth cannot afford to ignore adults who are undereducated, and need ABE services and further education/training. Universal access cannot be achieved or sustained without a long-term commitment and investment.

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<sup>17</sup> MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website: <http://doe.mass.edu/acls>.

**3. Commit to the long-term investment required to provide universal access and strengthen the ABE infrastructure to ensure continuing high quality services and standards as services expand.**

The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) supports a \$35.1 million appropriation for the ABE line item #7035-0002 for Fiscal Year 2014. MCAE's five year budget goals are to secure an additional \$35 million for the ABE line item to invest in the ABE infrastructure to:

- Invest in the ABE infrastructure to maintain and strengthen the quality of service; meet the demands of new content for math, science, technology and high school credentialing tests; and provide the education and career advising required to help students transition to higher education and training programs.
- Invest in the ABE infrastructure to increase educational offers, move adults more quickly off the wait list, and support a stable professional workforce and quality working conditions to decrease the effects of turbulence in the ABE workforce.
- Increase access to ABE services by providing funding to un-served and underserved communities.
- Increase instructional intensity whenever possible given the students' ability to attend varied schedules.

**4. Invest in pilot projects to experiment with promising practices and inform policy decisions, and invest in the replication of successful pilot initiatives.**

Funding should be provided to encourage innovation in response to emerging student and system needs and the replication of successful pilots with promising practices. Some possible areas of study would emanate from the list of emerging issues noted above under Recommendation #1.

Alignments of the ABE System with the Workforce Development System and other educational systems (e.g., K-12, early childhood education, post-secondary and higher education) regarding roles, responsibilities, performance standards, curriculum, assessment, integrated programming and access should be incrementally tested via pilot projects to avoid wide-spread disruption, confusion or wasted resources. Significant system changes need to be predicated on whether or not real benefits will accrue to the students.

*We trained hard but it seemed that every time we were beginning to form up into teams we would be re-organized . . . I was to learn later in life that we tend to meet any new situation by reorganizing; and a wonderful method it can be for creating the illusion of progress while producing confusion, inefficiency and demoralization. – Petronius Arbiter, 210 B.C.*

**QUESTIONS:**

For questions regarding the contents of this document, please contact Roberta Soolman, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) President and Public Policy Co-Chair at 617.367.1313 or [litvolma@aol.com](mailto:litvolma@aol.com).

The Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education is the professional development and public information organization for adult education in the state with more than 600 members. Major activities include sponsoring the annual NETWORK Conference, New England's largest adult education conference, and providing information on adult education to policymakers and funders. For more information, visit [www.mcae.net](http://www.mcae.net).