

**Governor's Workforce Board RI  
Adult Education & Literacy Committee Meeting  
June 3, 2015**

**Meeting Minutes**

Committee Members present: Chair Susan Rittscher, Suzy Alba, Mario Bueno, Robin Coia, Paul MacDonald, George Nee, Nina Pande

Other Board Members Present: Monica Dzialo, Constance Howes

RIDE Staff present: Dr. Philip Less  
GWB Staff present: Dan Brown, Sherri Carello, David Tremblay, Pat Leduc-Pelletier

Others Present: Malcolm Baxter, BIS; Larry Britt, RIFLI; Jill Holloway, PDC; Tracy Miller, Consultant; Dr. Albert Alba, RIDOC; Brady Dunklee, ILSR; Karisa Tashjian, RIFLI

Location: RIDLT Conference room 73-2

**Call to Order**

Chair Rittscher called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Chair Rittscher had a brief introduction of all new committee members and welcomed them all.

**Meeting Minutes**

Chair Rittscher asked for a review of the meeting minutes of December 4, 2014 Governor's Workforce Board (GWB) Adult Education & Literacy Committee meeting. Chair Rittscher asked if there was a motion to approve the meeting minutes.

**VOTE:** Paul MacDonald moved to approve. George Nee seconded the motion. The motion was passed unanimously.

**Adult Education at a Glance**

Chair Rittscher asked Dr. Philip Less to provide an update on the handout, "Adult Education at a Glance." Dr. Less noted there are 34 local agencies across the state, most of which are community based organizations that offer services to low level adult learners. Dr Less noted that 50% of the adult learners are studying English as a second language. The programs also help prepare the students to pass the GED test and prepare them for college readiness. Funding varies for these programs: Dr. Less stated they received \$2.3 million federal WIA funds, \$1 million from the RI Department of Human Services to serve TANF clients, \$2.5 million from the RI General Revenue and \$3.5 million from Governor's Workforce Board. Dr Less highlighted the

2 grade level advancements in Educational gains. He stated that 51% advancement may seem low, but this is above the national average. They have to count everyone in the numbers including learners who exit before they can take the posttest. The GED credentials awarded during the year 2013 were 2,349 diplomas. Adult education programs also find many jobs for people who are unemployed. Dr. Less noted that 40% of the students are already employed when they entered into the program, so adult education actually helps train employed workers too. Some more good news is that 400 students are going on to post secondary education. We are above the national level and our overall performance is very high. The bad news is that there is still a huge need for adult education services. He noted more than 75,000 working-age adults in RI lack a high school credential. Constance Howes asked what types of evaluation services have been done. Dr. Less stated that using the data management system, they can see program data and what barriers the programs are having. The state office also conducts on-site monitoring visits.

### **Summary Brief: Adult Education in RI, 2004 - 2015**

Chair Rittscher asked Dr. Philip Less to provide a summary of the document, Adult Education in Rhode Island, 2004 – 2015. Dr. Philip Less noted that he was thankful to the United Way and to Brady Dunklee and Alexis Stern since they approached him with this idea of reviewing adult education since 2004. Dr. Less noted that the state's performance is very high; however, as of April 2015, over 1,504 people are on the waiting list and cannot access services, as George Nee has pointed out. Dr. Less noted that our performance on assessments of adult educational functioning level (EFL) gains has improved continually since 2004. He stated that our performance meets and exceeds the national level. Back in 2005 Rhode Island's office of Adult Education at RIDE employed 7.5 staff members, but in 2015, the same office employs 4.5 staff members, including the Administrator of Adult Basic Education, two adult education specialists, one information services technician, and half of a clerk secretary.

Dr. Less noted thanks to Jill Holloway, the director of the Rhode Island Adult Education Professional Development Center. RIAEPDC was established in 2007 as a centralized resource to provide professional development opportunities for the state's adult education professionals and support for statewide program improvement strategies. As of April 2015, estimated annual teacher turnover at the largest twelve RIDE funded adult education programs averaged 20%.

In 2013 and again in 2015, Rhode Island was awarded federal WIA Incentive Grant Awards in recognition of having exceeded state performance targets for adult education and training for adults. On the other hand, Dr. Less noted that Rhode Island's youth (16-24 years of age) attending RIDE- funded adult education programs demonstrate lower literacy and numeracy skills than their peers in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Chair Rittscher asked when the project started with the United Way. Brady Dunklee stated March 2015 through September 2015. Mario Bruno stated that there is a feeling of eagerness to move to the next step. He felt lots of effort has been put into it, but he feels we are now at a stand still. Nina Pande stated we are leaving generations behind and are making excuses. Nina would like to learn more on how we are investing, Chair Rittscher agrees and stated this is something we can discuss at a future meeting.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Outcomes Targets for 2014 - 2015**

Dr. Philip Less provided an update to the group on the \$3.5 million in JDF Funds that RIDE received for Adult Education services. Dr. Less noted that many programs have limited staff during the first quarter in July, August & September so it is a slow time reporting and spending down funds. Dr. Less noted that targets were set last year based on previous year's performance. The goal was 2,533 students served, but now happy with 2,000 students. He noted high school credential is low due to the new, more difficult exam and the cost. We are correcting the cost factor by providing waivers of fees for individuals with limited income. Some GWB targets are high, and some are low; lots of these are new measures. Dr. Less noted there has been a big increase in attending post-secondary education; demographic data shows more females than males overall.

Chair Rittscher asked the expenditure for the fiscal year Quarter 3 is \$2 million to date – Is it expected that adult education programs will spend the balance of the money? If we don't hit 100% of targets, what happens? What is the impact? Dr. Less stated federal funds are rarely reduced based on slightly lower results. As far as expenditures, we are always slow to start, but it ramps up at the end. Nina Pande asked if there is a way to get the demographic data broken down within 25-54 year olds, using program of choice for each 5-year age span. Dr. Less stated he can make that break out.

### **RI High School Equivalency Program Regulations**

Dr. Philip Less provided an update to the group. He stated regulations were passed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education at RIDE. Dr. Less noted the one of the key changes was the removal of all references to GED and replace with High School Equivalency test or High School Equivalency test publisher. The second big change is Section 6.3. This is new for computer-based testing, but an old idea. According to Section 6.3: "The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will assume the testing costs and fees associated with the high school equivalency test for individual with limited income who can prove a financial hardship, who are ineligible for subsidies from other state agencies or departments, and who have received at least a minimum passing score on the high school equivalency practice test, or pertinent section of the test." This will go into effect on Friday, June 5, 2015.

Constance Howes asked whether or not there are any requirements of Immigration status. Dr. Less stated no, and the national GED regulations allow all immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, to take the GED test. Dr. Less noted funds are coming from the Department of Education for waivers to eligible test takers for a total of 4 tests to be taken. Eligibility includes proving financial hardship and passing the practice test for each section for a waiver. Dr. Less noted currently 400 students are in the program and would be eligible for a waiver (\$30) for each test (4 tests in total). However, if they don't pass the test, there is a \$10 cost for re-testing (which the test taker must pay). Nina asked for Income Data on participants. Dr. Less said we do have this data, but it is self-reported. Suzy asked about the 75% pass rate: of the 25% not passing the test, how many are actually re-taking the test. Dr. Less will research this information.

## **Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment**

Chair Rittscher asked Karisa Tashjian, Director of RIFLI and All Access, to provide an update to the group. Karisa noted Northstar is an assessment system of basic skills needed to perform tasks on computer and is a tool for identifying individual areas of strength and areas needing work and can help teachers guide instruction. It aligns to basic computer digital literacy standards and modules in 8 main areas. Northstar standards were developed through a collaborative, community based process in Minnesota. There are no costs to individuals to complete the online assessments. Karisa noted RI Department of Education is requiring all instructors to pass four of the modules. It will take about 20 minutes to do each module.

Constance Howes noted this could be valuable to the GWB Employer Committee. Northstar is currently used in 23 states, and is used in Wisconsin and Minnesota One-Stop Centers. Minnesota also has an online website. There is no cost to individuals to complete the online assessments; however, to receive a certificate, a person must take the modules at an approved proctored site.

### **Adjournment:**

With no further business, Chair Rittscher asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**VOTE:** Constance Howes moved to approve. Nina Pande seconded the motion.  
The motion was passed unanimously

The meeting adjourned at 10:05a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dan Brown