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To: Adult Education Consortium Providers

# From: Gulf Coast Workforce Board

Subject: Implementing Programs, Activities, and Services for English Language Learners

##### Purpose

To provide Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Consortium Providers with information, guidance, and capacity-building support related to implementing programs, activities, and services for English language learners (ELLs).

##### Background

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title II, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), expands and clarifies the variety of programs, activities, and services available to ELLs. AEFLA includes four English as a Second Language (ESL) program requirements and provides the flexibility necessary for ESL programs to support ELL attainment of secondary completion and transition into postsecondary education, training, or employment, including through career pathways. These requirements expand the ESL program from its traditional focus on developing basic communication skills to enable ELLs to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life and family literacy, to a program that maintains these aspects but intensifies requirements for increased rigor to support credential attainment and employment outcomes. The expanded program objectives are supported by more rigorous ESL content standards and provisions for educational and career counseling services, and align with WIOA modifications to the Integrated English Literacy and Civics (Integrated EL Civics) program.

To provide added flexibility in accomplishing the revised objectives and to support Texas’ large Spanish speaking population, state law supports bilingual instruction and Spanish high school equivalency instruction.

This issuance provides initial guidance to support enhanced program services for ELLs.

Expanded Program Objectives—AEFLA §203(6) includes a statutory requirement that ESL programs under the act be designed to help ELLs achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of English. In addition to these competencies, the AEFLA statement of purpose for services to immigrants and other ELLs includes instruction in mathematics. The new federal English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education (ELP Standards) emphasize these requirements through skills development well beyond basic life skills, and outline the specific language and content skills needed to promote college and career readiness for ELLs at all levels.

AEFLA also clarifies a new requirement that the instructional program must lead to the attainment of a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, and to a transition into postsecondary education or training, or lead to employment. While these outcomes might not be realized initially by students at lower levels, the full instructional program across ESL levels is required to support and provide an interconnected sequence toward these outcomes and be reflected in program objectives, curriculum, and services. Starting at low levels, programs should begin to include career-directed provisions, such as contextualizing curriculum around high-demand job clusters in the local workforce development area, integrating workforce preparation activities and supporting career awareness, planning, and employment services through Local Workforce Development Board (Board) services.

Recognizing that capacity building is necessary to support expanded service options for ESL, revisions of the Texas content standards for AEL and associated curriculum development and professional development have been made.

ESL Content Standards—The Texas AEL Content Standards for English language arts and literacy, mathematics, and ESL were updated and aligned with academic and college readiness standards, as well as with federal ELP Standards, to provide a resource for developing curricula, instructional strategies, professional development, and enhanced program designs. The standards reflect WIOA’s expanded and more rigorous requirements for ESL. AEL practitioners, workforce development professionals, and employers now have a common resource that describes the knowledge, skills, and abilities of adults up to college readiness levels.

Available professional development services require significant enhancements to adequately support ESL instructors and providers. To provide immediate support, Region VI Education Service Center was funded Focus on the Basics, a special project to implement curriculum and professional development efforts that expand research-based best practices for teaching, reading, and math to AEL students, including ELLs. In 2017, these services are being deployed in coordination with the Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning.

Educational and Career Counseling Services—WIOA provides AEL Consortium Providers flexibility to support students seeking to attain a secondary credential and transition into postsecondary education, training, or employment by offering educational and career counseling services. WIOA Title II educational and career counseling services align to the WIOA Title I career services. These services include referrals to and coordination of activities with other programs and services, developing employment and training plans, career counseling, mentoring, and comprehensive and specialized assessments of students’ skill levels, aptitudes, abilities, and service needs, including:

* diagnostic testing and use of other assessment tools; and
* in-depth interviewing and evaluation to identify employment barriers and appropriate employment goals.

In support of WIOA’s vision for integrated services, AEL Consortium Providers should align, where appropriate, Title I career services and Title II educational and career counseling services to support customer transition into postsecondary education or training or employment. Where possible, AEL Consortium Providers should also document and build on ELLs’ previous education, credentials, experience, and skills, including education and employment experience from native countries. WIOA Title II specifically underscores the importance of serving professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries.

Internationally trained ELL professionals in Integrated EL Civics can benefit from educational and career counseling services that include more comprehensive and specialized assessments, such as credential evaluation and authentication of international degrees and professional credentials and licenses. Such services support a more articulated identification of employment assets and barriers and the development of appropriate employment goals, and, with related counseling support, can accelerate educational and career advancement. Credential validation can facilitate the attainment of U.S. employer-recognized credentials by documenting progress within a career pathway in specific occupations or occupational clusters. Credential validation also can leverage the technical skills and bilingual and bicultural assets of ELLs. Services also can include tests to determine readiness for postsecondary transition as part of a student’s career pathway.

Bilingual Instruction and Spanish High School Equivalency—Bilingual education can often meet the needs of customers and facilitate English language acquisition by providing opportunities for low-level learners to develop their skills in their native languages, which better supports cognitive development and the essential components of literacy. Native language and literacy development allows students to transfer a framework of knowledge and skills related to literacy in their native language to learning English. For example, foundational literacy concepts and principles learned in Spanish do not have to be retaught in English. Skills can be transferred, applied, modified, and modeled to support English language development.

Spanish speakers with high native language literacy levels can benefit from bilingual education. Programs can offer instruction that has separate components—one for ESL and another to prepare for high school equivalency tests offered in Spanish. Assessments for the Texas Certificate of High School Equivalency (TxCHSE) are available in English, Spanish, or a combination of the two languages across test subjects. Similarly, research on bilingual instructional models for workforce education have concluded that combining a contextualized ESL program with workforce training content delivered in the native language can speed the development of technical skills and considerably accelerate learning and credential attainment.

Family Literacy—While the increased emphasis on employment, secondary credential attainment, postsecondary education, and training transition present new objectives for local ESL program models, these objectives do not contradict or supplant established ESL program objectives related to family literacy.

Students participate in ESL for a variety of reasons, not all of which pertain to credential attainment, transition to postsecondary education and training, or employment. HGAC aims to incrementally increase the proportion of students who exit AEL work-ready, enrolled, or co-enrolled in workforce training. However, this does not preclude programs from serving eligible individuals whose primary motivation for participation is to become full partners in the educational development of their children and improve the economic opportunities for their families. Providing services to support adults to be the primary teachers for their children and full partners in their children’s education is an important component of the AEL system and is required of AEL Consortium Providers. These services benefit parents, their children, and the family as a whole. Parents who enter into and complete career training and higher education greatly increase their potential earnings and become important role models for their children.

##### Action

Bilingual Instruction—Approaches in the AEL or workforce training classroom that use the native languages of ELLs as a support for content instruction. ESL programs that incorporate bilingual instruction must:

* ensure that English language acquisition is the primary objective of instruction and customers are assessed appropriately as ELLs according to the Texas AEL Assessment Guide;
* use a curriculum based on relevant research for dual-language or bilingual instruction, including models for workforce training;
* be designed to consider customers’ learning experiences and incorporate cultural aspects of customers’ backgrounds;
* be used only when all participants share the same language; and
* support state and programmatic performance objectives.

Career Pathway—A combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that:

* align with the skills needs of industries in the state or regional economy involved;
* prepare an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937 (commonly known as the National Apprenticeship Act or the Fitzgerald Act);
* include counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;
* include, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as Workforce Preparation Activities and Workforce Training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
* are organized to meet the particular needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;
* enable an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and
* help an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

Credential Evaluation, Authentication, and Verification Services— Professional review and expert assistance in the interpretation of international academic credentials in terms of their degree, credential, and license equivalents in the United States, to support Internationally Trained ELL professionals participating in career pathways.

Note: AEL Consortium Providers may consider credential evaluation, authentication, and verification services as part of educational and career counseling on a case-by-case basis according to an ELL’s individual needs, as well as the extent to which the associated employment, reemployment, or higher education activities use Title II funds. Providing such services across the board for all ELLs is not consistent with program intent.

Educational and Career Counseling—Services that enable an individual to access additional assistance, including counseling, to support the individual in achieving education and career goals, such as attaining a secondary school diploma or its equivalent and transitioning to postsecondary education or employment. Career pathway navigators contribute significantly to these objectives by supporting participant access to Board services, enrollment and retention in community and technical colleges, and identifying employment opportunities with local employers in high-demand occupations.

English as a Second Language (ESL)—An instructional program designed to help eligible ELLs achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending English. The ESL program also may include instruction in mathematics. Its design must consider customers’ learning experiences, incorporate cultural aspects of customers’ backgrounds, lead to attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition customers to postsecondary education and training or employment.

Note: Federal guidance and WIOA refer to ESL as English Language Acquisition (ELA), while the National Reporting System for AEFLA reporting guidelines retains “ESL.” HGAC will continue to use “ESL” to reference services to ELLs in policy, guidance, and communications to avoid confusion with English Language Arts, which is referred to as ELA in state documents and policies.

English language learner (ELL)—An eligible individual who has limited ability in reading, writing, speaking, or comprehending English and whose native language is a language other than English or who lives in a family or community environment where a language other than English is the dominant language.

Internationally trained English language learner professional

(internationally trained ELL professional)—An ELL who is a professional with a degree or credential from his or her native country.

Individual Training, Education, and Career Plan (ITEC Plan)—The ITEC Plan documents actions that a student must take to meet educational and career goals, and is designed to promote a discussion and set forth a strategy. The plan delineates short- and long-term goals with the necessary implementation steps.

Workforce Preparation Activities—Activities, programs, or services designed to help an individual acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self-management skills, including competencies in the following:

* Using resources and information;
* Working with others;
* Understanding systems;
* Skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education, training, or employment; and
* Other employability skills that increase an individual’s preparation for the workforce.

##### Questions

Staff should first ask questions of their managers or supervisors. Direct questions to the Gulf Coast Consortium Lead Agency Staff through the Submit a question link.