

TO: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs
FROM: The Adult Education and Literacy Network (AELN)
RE: Adult Education and Literacy Statistics
DATE: Tuesday, April 9th, 2024



The Adult Education and Literacy Network (AELN) respectfully submits this memo in follow up to questions that were raised during our testimony on AEL Advocacy Day, February 29th. In particular, the Committee asked for us to share some of the literacy and other statistics we presented. We hope the information included in this memo will help the Committee support adult education in the legislative process.

The Vermont Department of Libraries defines literacy as, “The ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” Through an extensive nationwide study, the [Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\)](#) found that:

- **13% of Vermonters aged 16-74 are at the lowest literacy level, level 1** (“at risk for difficulties using or comprehending print material”).
- **33% are at literacy level 2** (“able to read print and digital texts but still struggling to perform tasks with text-based information”).
- Although Vermont has the 4th highest percent of adults that can read basic prose, **only 54% of adult Vermonters are at or above level 3 literacy** (“proficient”).

Furthermore, the 2022 Community Survey of the US Census estimates that **in Vermont there are 31,000+ out of school adults, age 18+, without high school credentials**. These are the Vermonters we serve. Low literacy and under-education affect the domains of health, employment, poverty, generational literacy, and crime:

- **Employment:** The [National Council for Adult Learning](#) estimates annual costs of \$225 billion associated with nonproductivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment tied to low literacy.
- **Poverty:** The [National Institute of Literacy](#) says that 43% of adults with the lowest literacy levels live in poverty (43% of adults at Level 1 literacy skills live in poverty compared to only 4% of those at Level 5). 70% of adult welfare recipients have low literacy levels, and 90% of welfare recipients are high school dropouts.
- **Generational Literacy:** The [National Bureau of Economic Research](#) reports that children of parents with low literacy skills have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading levels themselves.
- **Crime:** 85% of all juveniles who interface with the juvenile court system are functionally illiterate. More than 60% of all prison inmates are functionally illiterate. Penal institution records show that inmates have a 16% chance of returning to prison if they receive literacy help, as opposed to 70% who receive no help.

Our Work Changes Lives. Vermont’s four non-profit Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) service providers offer a broad range of services that **help people build the assets they need to move out of poverty successfully, as well as the confidence to continue to move toward success throughout their lives**. Vermont’s AEL students are often the most vulnerable and underserved of our communities. The majority of our students live in poverty, have a disability, identify as a person of color, and/or experience homelessness or unemployment.

Labor Credentials. The grants that AEL providers receive from the state fall under the category of Integrated Education and Training (IET) programming. AEL providers are direct partners with the VT Department of Labor, HireAbility and local School Districts and get student referrals from these entities. Some AEL providers also get direct referrals from the Department of Corrections and Community Justice Centers. In addition, AEL providers applied for and received, as a Network, a Bernie Sanders earmark for workforce development programming. This one-time federal grant afforded AEL providers the opportunity to train individuals not associated with AEL state funding in critical occupations. In calendar year 2023, AEL students earned over 147 credentials via the AELN-DOL Education and Training Administration projects, highlights include:

- 30 participants earned OSHA-10
- 44 participants earned First Aid/CPR
- 58 participants earned EPA 608 Core (for Heat Pump Installation training only)
- 5 participants earned Fundamentals for Early Childhood Professionals
- A variety of lesser known credentials: Serve Safe for handling foods, Para-Pro Exam (Paraeducator License), CDL, etc.

English language learners. AEL student numbers have increased significantly each year since the ending of the covid-19 public health emergency. As we've mentioned in testimony, a large share of that growth comes from English Language Learner (ELL) students. During the first six months of FY23, AEL providers served 421 ELL students. Compared to the first six months of FY24, where we are already serving 501 ELL students, this represents our largest growth in a student category, with a **20% increase YTD over YTD.**

- Going back further – From FY22 to FY23, all four AEL providers in Vermont saw a significant increase in their English Language Learning (ELL) student population as immigrants and refugees from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Central and South America and other places from around the world resettled in Vermont. The AELN served a total of **575** ELL students in FY 2023 alone, **representing a 47% increase over fiscal year 2022.**
- Already we have seen a **16% increase in ELL students from FY23 total to FY24 YTD**, with 3 months still to go in FY24. We have rolling enrollment year-round, and expect to see this percentage increase grow by the end of year.
- Your Committee asked about the number of ELL students served as a result of state investment. The AELN had been level funded around \$5.4million for decades. In FY22, the Vermont Legislature appropriated an additional \$350,000 in one-time funding to AEL providers, and we educated 390 ELL students. The Vermont Legislature appropriated an additional \$700,000 in one-time funding in the FY23 state budget, and we were able to educate 575 ELL students. In FY24, we received \$1,000,000 in one-time “bridge funding”, and we have educated **624 ELL students to date this fiscal year.** Please see below for our request regarding the FY25 budget and AEL policy.

Table 1. ELL Student Demographics

	Male	Female
FY 2023 (Total) 575 total students	248 total (43%)	327 total (57%)
FY 2024 (YTD) 624 total students	257 total (41%)	366 total (59%)

Table 2. AELN Student Numbers per program

	High School Completion Program	English Language Learning	Adult Basic Education	Total
Fiscal Year 2022	384	390	925	1,699
Fiscal Year 2023	433	575	844	1,852
YTD (9 months) Fiscal Year 2024	357	624	805	1,787

Our Request: We are asking your Committee to please support the House miscellaneous education bill, H.874, which incorporates the policy recommendations from the recent [Adult Education and Literacy \(AEL\) HSCP Student Access Report](#). In addition, the FY25 budget as passed by the House includes a total base appropriation of \$6,296,888 for Vermont’s AEL providers, \$3,778,133 of which is set to come from the General Fund, and \$2,518,755 from the Education Fund. Together, we believe the Flexible Pathways language in H.874 and the increased base appropriations in the FY25 budget meet our needs and will help stabilize funding for the AELN, so that we can serve our students well into the future. Please see our report memo here for context for how the policy changes included in H.874 help strengthen our AEL system.