



# **INTEGRATED ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING SYSTEM STUDY**

**Report to the Vermont General Assembly**

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**Submitted by**

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## Statement from the Agency of Education

The Agency of Education (AOE) thanks Thomas P. Miller and Associates, LLC (TPMA) who was contracted by the AOE, Pursuant to [Act 74 of 2021](#), H.3 amending 2019 Acts and Resolves No. 80, Section 6, to conduct a comprehensive study and make recommendations on creating an integrated adult basic education, adult secondary education, and postsecondary career technical education system. This foreword is intended to provide the reader of this report with additional context of concurrent activities and initiatives that should be considered in concert with the findings and recommendations outlined in this report authored by TPMA.

The following categories of observations from the AOE are meant to further contextualize the report for the reader and offer some guardrails for any action proposed as a result of the report:

1. Alignment with [the concurrent study on the funding and governance structures of career technical education \(CTE\) in Vermont, authorized by Act 127 of 2022, Section 17](#);
2. Vermont-specific factors pertaining to related federal requirements and funding from [Perkins V](#) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act ([WIOA](#));
3. AOE efforts to support report development; and
4. overall observations on thematic inconsistencies in this final version of the report.

### Alignment with the study on the funding and governance structures of career technical education (CTE) in Vermont, authorized by [Act 127 of 2022, Section 17](#)

On March 31, 2023, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc. (APA) submitted a report and provided a presentation to select committees of the Vermont Legislature. Their report analysis offered 10 recommendations for CTE in Vermont in four areas: (1) funding, (2) policy, (3) state capacity, and (4) larger systems change. While there was some overlap, the legislative timeline for this study and report was not aligned with TPMA's legislatively defined timeline for a comprehensive study to create an integrated adult education system authorized by Act 74. The following summary provides a brief snapshot of where the two legislative initiatives had overlap in content focus and timing:

**Research Area:** Both TPMA's report and APA's study included analysis of Vermont's career technical education system.

**Development Timeframe:** TPMA's engagement period to develop its report initially ran from December 19, 2022 – July 31, 2023. APA's development period for its report was determined by a contract with the Joint Fiscal Office and the final report was presented to Legislature on March 31, 2023.

Since APA's study findings were published in spring 2023, the AOE sent TPMA a copy of that final report on April 18, 2023. AOE shared with TPMA additional information

related to ACT 127 and connected TPMA with APA on May 8, 2023, to support coordination efforts.

## **Vermont-specific Factors Related to Federal Requirements and Funding from [Perkins V](#) and [WIOA Title II](#)**

It is important to note that both [Vermont's Perkins V State Plan](#) and [WIOA Combined State Plan](#) are undergoing revision in accordance with federal timelines and requirements. Any legislative action based on recommendations from this report should not be divorced from or in conflict with these federally required plans, including required public comment periods. Additionally, this report, and the findings and recommendations contained therein, may have some discrepancies or misalignment with current legislation, policy or practice that should be further explored before taking any action. Some of these issues are outlined further below in the Thematic Inconsistencies section.

**Perkins V in Vermont:** Federal regulations for Perkins V dictate how funds can be distributed within a state. In Vermont, most Perkins V funds are distributed to CTE centers or technical center districts and post-secondary partners. The Community College of Vermont receives all the Perkins V post-secondary funds in Vermont.

15% of Vermont's \$5.8 million Perkins V allocation remains at the Agency of Education to support administration of the grant program and provide statewide leadership activities and technical assistance. The remaining 85% must be directly granted to eligible secondary and postsecondary recipients. 78% of these funds are granted to regional secondary CTE centers; the remaining 22% of funds are granted to the Community College of Vermont for postsecondary CTE programs leading to a certificate or associate's degree. Perkins V funds must be spent by grant recipients on activities that ensure meaningful student progress on core secondary and postsecondary indicators. Given Vermont's small Perkins allocation and the federally required Perkins indicators, funds are not available to support adult CTE programs.

Revisions to Vermont's Perkins V State Plan are currently underway and will be posted for public comment in January and close March 1, 2024.

**WIOA Title II in Vermont:** The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) authorizes the State's workforce development system's programs under the governance of the Department of Labor (Titles I and III), Agency of Education (Title II), and Vocational Rehabilitation (HireAbility in Vermont) (Title IV). As part of the Act, a 4-year state plan must be developed by these core programs, open to public comment, and approved by the State Workforce Development Board. The state plan for FY25 through FY28 is currently under development and must be submitted to the Federal government for review and approval in March, 2024.

Specifically, under the Title II (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act), Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs assist those 16 years of age and older to become literate

and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and/or postsecondary education. To meet this mandate, Federal and State grant funds are awarded through a competitive process. Currently, four non-profit organizations hold the grants to implement AEL activities in Vermont. In FY23, grant funds totaled \$5,054,235 and served 1,912 students, who participated in AEL and workforce preparation activities which include contextualized instruction in academic content, digital literacy, and job readiness. Twenty-nine percent, or 558 adult learners in FY23 were multilingual learners (also known as English language learners (ELL) in WIOA) seeking to increase their English language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Adult participants can also earn a secondary credential such as a GED or a high school diploma, including through the High School Completion Program, a flexible pathway supported by Vermont public school districts under the [Flexible Pathways Initiative](#).

Note: Since the submission of the TPMA report, pursuant to Act 78 (2023) Sec. E504 an Adult Education and Literacy HSCP Student Access Committee, established to “*provide recommendations in its report to the Joint Fiscal Committee and the House and Senate Committees on Education on how to increase equity and education access to Adult Education Programs*” completed its work and the Access Committee’s report should also be considered in conjunction with this report’s findings and recommendations.

### Efforts to Support Report Development

TPMA submitted a first draft of the report on June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023. The AOE review team provided iterative feedback to support the submission of a fourth and final version of the report on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Feedback was sent to TPMA via email on August 14<sup>th</sup>, August 31<sup>st</sup>, September 18<sup>th</sup>, and September 26<sup>th</sup>. Additionally, the AOE and TPMA met to discuss report development and feedback on July 12<sup>th</sup>, September 19<sup>th</sup>, September 26<sup>th</sup>, and September 29<sup>th</sup>.

The original contract was amended twice (in July and October of 2023) to support TPMA in finalizing and submitting the report that follows. The first extension changed the end date from July 31<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### Overall Observations on Thematic Inconsistencies in Final Version of the Report

While the final version of this report offers some recommendations for consideration that align well with current adult and technical education regulation, AOE initiatives and oversight functions, it lacks sufficient detail to accurately portray the Vermont-specific landscape as it pertains to adult education. The report contains comparisons to other states that offer food for thought, but they lack necessary context or analysis for how application might differ (in some instances significantly) in Vermont that would make these recommendations actionable or viable. Subsequently, the proposed recommendations in this report for an integrated adult education and training system in Vermont require further detail and development to support the development and implementation of an integrated, comprehensive solution for adult learning.

Finally, in a review of the final report, the AOE has noted the following areas for clarification or correction:

- [Key Finding and Barriers](#): Reference to “tuition” without specifying that AEL is free to students. This may be a point of confusion. Adult CTE tuition is relatively low, and there is financial assistance from DOL, HireAbility, VSAC, etc. An issue is that adult CTE programs run primarily on tuition revenue.
- [Recommendations, 2](#): Definition of “local mandates” needed.
- [Recommendations 1](#): This recommendation requires more framing to understand the complexity of the challenges in the current system and an implementable solution.
- [Recommendations in general](#): References to other states require more detail to connect specific features or characteristics and rationale for adoption in Vermont.
- [Execution & Methodology](#): Mistakenly refers to Virginia, instead of Vermont.
- [Evaluation of Assets, Gaps, Barriers, and Needs](#):
  - Does not include postsecondary system.
  - More detail required to determine actual count of how many centers provide viable adult CTE programs, and to understand for those that do not the specific challenges they face.
  - More details are required to understand how programming is distributed around the state.
  - Further exploration is needed to identify which courses and certifications are needed due to lack of an integrated system with VSC.
  - Further exploration needed to understand any contention in overlapping adult CTE and the college systems in VT.
  - More background required on Perkins funding allocation to Vermont with national benchmarks on proportion. Perkins funds – in any state—cannot be spent on capital expenditures.
  - Budgets, income, and revenue reports from CTE centers for Adult CTE are required for a full analysis

## **Integrated Adult Education and Training System Study**

**Prepared by Thomas P. Miller and Associates (TPMA)  
for the Vermont Agency of Education**

## Legislative Mandate

Pursuant to [Act 74, Section H.3 Section 6](#), the Vermont State Legislature directed the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) to commission a comprehensive study on creating an integrated adult basic education, adult secondary education, and postsecondary career and technical education system. The legislation specifies that the Agency of Education and other relevant bodies must "consider and report to the General Assembly on the design, implementation, and costs of an integrated and coherent adult basic education, adult secondary education, and postsecondary career and technical education system." The study is directed to "conduct a broad-based stakeholder engagement process to solicit input from interested parties." It's also essential for state departments and agencies to "provide necessary information and assistance within their relative areas of expertise." The main objective of this study is a thorough analysis of the current system, identifying its strengths, gaps, barriers, and requirements. It emphasizes consistency, integration, and coherence, ensuring equal access for all adult learners. The study will also explore various governance and funding models.

## Contract and Methodology

To address this mandate, the Agency of Education (AOE) engaged TPMA, a renowned research firm, to conduct an in-depth study. TPMA employed a multi-faceted approach, combining quantitative data analysis with qualitative insights from expansive stakeholder engagement. This methodology ensured a holistic understanding of the current landscape, directly aligning with the legislative directive.

## Key Findings

The study illuminated several critical aspects of Vermont's adult education system:

- **Assets:** The existing Adult CTE and AEL systems have been instrumental in providing essential skills to advance adult learners, with dedicated staff offering practical solutions to barriers.
- **Gaps:** Despite the assets, there's a lack of cohesion between the AEL and Adult CTE systems, leading to disparities in access and outcomes for learners. The lack of a cohesive system, coupled with insufficient funding for Adult CTE and static allocations for AEL, has led to disjointed services, variable program quality, and disparate opportunities throughout different regions.
- **Barriers:** Key obstacles include geographical challenges, cultural norms, and logistical issues like transportation. However, the most pressing barrier is the chronic underfunding of programs. This financial shortfall restricts their capacity to offer comprehensive support services, hinders program expansion, and limits the reach to potential learners. Affordability of tuition remains a significant concern, with many potential students deterred by the high costs associated with further education.



- **Needs:** There's a pressing need for an integrated system, increased funding, and improved coordination among education providers and stakeholders. The current funding, although consistent, is insufficient to scale vital services to genuinely meet the diverse needs of the adult student populations. This situation amplifies the need for increased state investment in AEL programs to ensure both the removal of logistical barriers and the provision of educational support that could significantly benefit adult learners in Vermont.

## **Governance and Funding Research**

TPMA found that the current governance and funding for AEL and Adult CTE is not sufficient to address the needs of Vermont adult learners. Because these entities are disjointed and underfunded, the opportunity for sustained programming to meet the education needs of Vermonters is not meeting its potential. The research completed for this report provides examples of ways other states are addressing governance that Vermont could adapt. The integrated approach that allows for AEL and Adult CTE to be housed together by region/locale and governed by one entity provides a great opportunity for shared resources and integrated programming. Research on funding adult education and technical training revealed that adequate funding for these entities can be accomplished through various mechanisms. Some potential sources of funding would include an increase in the state budget allocation, the state applying for federal grants, private partnerships with business and industry, and other sources named later in this report.

It's important to note that the availability and effectiveness of funding sources may vary depending on Vermont's economic situation and the political climate. Therefore, it's crucial to consider a combination of funding mechanisms to ensure sustainable support for adult education and training.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, three primary recommendations are presented to the State of Vermont legislature:

1. **Integration of AEL and Adult CTE Programs:** Establish a unified office under AOE control to oversee the integration of AEL, Adult CTE, and community college programming, ensuring efficient fund distribution and coordination with the Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees. Integrated systems such as those in Ohio and Maine should be used as best practice examples.
2. **Implementation of a Statewide Integration Plan:** Drawing inspiration from models like Louisiana's SB 216, Washington's IBEST approach, and Ohio system of CTE and community college alignment, Vermont should develop a cohesive plan that removes local mandates on AEL and CTE centers and establishes connected pathways for adult learners.
3. **Increasing Funding Options:** Explore diverse funding avenues, including general revenue increases with inflationary adjusters, models like South



Carolina's HB 3144 and Michigan's SB 268, or an array of options from California's Legislative Analyst's Office to ensure the sustainability and expansion of adult education programs.

This report underscores the immense potential of Vermont's adult education system and offers a roadmap to harness this potential for the benefit of all Vermonters. By implementing these recommendations, the legislature can pave the way for a brighter educational future for the state.

### **Legislative Directive and Objective**

Pursuant to Act 74, Section H.3 Section 6, the Vermont State Legislature directed the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) to commission a comprehensive study on creating an integrated adult basic education, adult secondary education, and postsecondary career and technical education system. The legislation specifies that the Agency of Education and other relevant bodies must "consider and report to the General Assembly on the design, implementation, and costs of an integrated and coherent adult basic education, adult secondary education, and postsecondary career and technical education system."

The study is directed to "conduct a broad-based stakeholder engagement process to solicit input from interested parties." It's also essential for state departments and agencies to "provide necessary information and assistance within their relative areas of expertise." The main objective of this study is a thorough analysis of the current system, identifying its strengths, gaps, barriers, and requirements. It emphasizes consistency, integration, and coherence, ensuring equal access for all adult learners. The study will also explore various governance and funding models.

The directive emphasizes the significance of engaging stakeholders to gather diverse insights. It also expects contributions from state departments and agencies, leveraging their specific expertise. The study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the current system, focusing on its assets, challenges, and areas of improvement. The overarching goal is to ensure clarity, integration, and consistent access for all adult learners, while also examining potential governance structures and funding mechanisms.

### **Execution and Methodology**

To actualize this legislative directive, the Vermont Agency of Education collaborated with Thomas P. Miller & Associates (TPMA), a renowned workforce consultancy, to undertake this mandated analysis and craft recommendations for a cohesive Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) and adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE) framework. This endeavor commenced in December 2022 and reached its culmination in July 2023.

In adherence to Act 74's stipulations, TPMA orchestrated a comprehensive stakeholder engagement initiative, encompassing dialogues with representatives from Adult CTE,

AEL, the Community College of Virginia, and the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE). This endeavor was further enriched by a detailed survey involving 127 students from Vermont's adult education cohort. The survey revealed that 47% (60 students) were engaged in English language programs, 30% (38 students) in high school equivalency/completion courses, and 23% (29 students) in Adult CTE programs.

Additionally, a meticulous review of existing literature was undertaken. The AOE, AEL, and Adult CTE contributed invaluable resources, including reports, white papers, and data, to enrich this analysis.

Subsequent sections of this study discuss the assets, gaps, barriers, and needs of Vermont's existing adult education landscape. They also offer insights and recommendations for the creation of the envisioned integrated adult educational system.

## **Evaluation of Vermont's Adult Education Assets, Gaps, Barriers, and Needs**

Currently, Adult Education in Vermont is separated into two systems: Adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE), which provides workforce training programming, and Adult Education and Literacy (AEL), which provides programming to help adults earn their high school equivalency diploma, traditionally aged high school students complete their high school diploma requirements, and English fluency courses for English Language Learners (ELLs). This study utilized desktop research, literature and data analysis, and an extensive stakeholder engagement process to determine the assets, gaps, and barriers of this current split system to identify the design and implementation of a switch to an integrated and coherent adult basic education, adult secondary education, and postsecondary career and technical education system.

Below is a summary of the key findings of this current split system and an overview of the recommendations for moving towards an integrated and coherent system. These findings are explored in depth throughout the full report.

### **Adult Education Programming Assets**

Vermont boasts 17 regional Adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE) centers. While all cater to high school CTE participants, a majority also offer programs specifically for adult learners. The Vermont Adult CTE Association reported student participation in courses span nine key sectors in 2022: Culinary Arts, Health Sciences, Computer & Office Technology, Manufacturing, Skilled Trades, Transportation & Heavy Equipment, Agriculture & Natural Resources, Professional Skills, and Life Enrichment. In total, centers served 2,599 participants in Adult CTE programming, earning 820 credentials, a 42% increase in participants from 2021 .

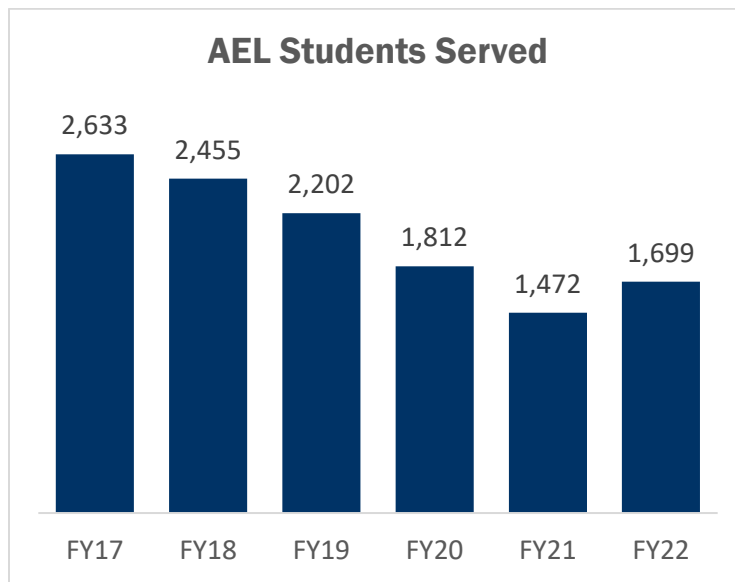
Sector	Participants 2022	Participants 2021
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Culinary Arts	96	85
Health Science	454	626
Computer & Office Technology	104	113
Manufacturing	5	21
Skilled Trades	634	508
Transportation & Heavy Equipment	227	229
Agriculture & Natural Resources	--	3
Professional Skills	870	194
Life Enrichment	209	50
Total	2,599	1,827

### *Vermont Adult Career Technical Education Association Records*

Additionally, Vermont is home to four Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) providers, operating across 19 learning centers statewide. Their curriculum encompasses courses assisting adults in obtaining high school equivalency diplomas, aiding traditionally aged high school students in meeting diploma criteria, and supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) in enhancing numeracy and English proficiency. AEL's primary focus is on high school completion and equivalent programs, which are predominantly sought after. ELLs, often facing challenges in job-seeking and other educational pursuits, receive dedicated support from AEL, irrespective of their educational background. Through AEL, ELLs enhance their English, math, computer, and other essential skills, fostering their roles as parents, workers, and citizens. Notably, AEL's course structure and offerings exhibit more consistency across locations compared to CTE, a result of its centralized governance, as opposed to the diverse governing structures of CTE.



*Vermont Agency of Education*

Stakeholders underscored the significance of AEL's ELL programs. External entities, like local employers, frequently leverage these programs to boost English proficiency among workforce trainees or those pursuing employment permits. AEL programs are also key in providing educational opportunities to learners with disabilities, and those who face additional barriers to accessing traditional education pipelines.

The stakeholders also highlighted the value of creating educational pathways for individuals without high school diplomas, emphasizing the role of referrals to AEL. AEL leadership noted feedback from employers with registered apprenticeship programs, indicating the importance of such referrals in refining the academic skills crucial for successful apprenticeships.

Stakeholders also commended the efficacy of support structures within AEL programs. For instance, the individual case management model, where educators closely collaborate with students to track and support their academic journey, received praise for its tangible outcomes, such as improved retention rates and seamless transitions to employment.

A notable achievement of the Agency of Education (AOE) is its strides in professional development, especially within AEL. This advancement stems from an augmented staff capacity and the enriched professional growth of the existing AEL team. The inclusion of an additional staff member has notably enhanced the agency's capability to offer technical support for AEL providers in the Integrated Education and Training (IET) initiatives. Concurrently, the AOE team has pursued specialized professional training to devise and roll out new curricula, sharpening educators' essential skills. Beyond curriculum enhancements, AOE stands out in its data collection and analysis related to adult education, aiding providers in database management and ensuring the availability of precise and pertinent data.

## Gaps in Adult Education Programming

In Vermont, the 17 regional Adult CTE centers offer a diverse range of programs. However, not every center provides courses in every sector. Instead, they prioritize sectors that are in high demand within their respective regions. While many Adult CTE programs mirror those at the secondary level, notable gaps exist. Specifically, there are no adult pathways for sectors such as engineering, human services and education, business, cosmetology, digital and visual art, and law, public safety, and emergency services. This discrepancy restricts adult access to training in these sectors and hinders high school students from continuing their training post-graduation. Although some community-based organizations offer training in these areas, it results in a fragmented workforce training system and competition for Adult CTE students.

AEL plays a pivotal role in equipping students with foundational skills before they transition to Adult CTE or community colleges. However, a gap exists as AEL doesn't offer remediation for current community college students. This limitation prevents community colleges from utilizing student loan funds for such purposes. One stakeholder highlighted that addressing this would require a significant shift, noting that the AOE lacks the authority to initiate such a change.

Stakeholder discussions revealed both opportunities and challenges in Vermont's adult education landscape. For instance, while there's a recognized gap in trade education at local colleges, Adult CTE could potentially bridge this. However, the current system's insularity hinders its effectiveness. Despite its robust offerings, such as industry-specific labs, the credentials from Adult CTE often go unrecognized by other educational entities in Vermont. This isolation underscores the need for an integrated system that fosters collaboration with institutions like the Community College of Vermont (CCV) and Vermont Technical College (VTC). The potential of AEL to offer academic remediation, a service that Adult CTE students often require but isn't currently provided, further emphasizes the benefits of integration.

AEL's programs for English Language Learners (ELLs) are invaluable, especially for local employers seeking to enhance workforce English fluency. Yet, challenges persist, such as the need for material translation for refugees and inconvenient class timings and locations. Stakeholders identified cities like Rutland and Burlington as resettlement hubs, suggesting that integrating ELL support services into local systems would benefit ELLs, their families, and potential employers.

Lastly, stakeholders raised concerns about the uneven distribution of Adult CTE programs across the state. Many centers feel bound by state regulations under Title 16 mandating them to offer Adult CTE programs without adequate financial backing. While adults can, under Title 16, participate in CTE programming that is targeted at secondary students, most adults do not have schedules compatible with daytime course offerings. To provide opportunities for these adults, separate courses that cater to such schedules are necessary. But without dedicated funding, which will be established in the following sections, CTE centers are not able to meet the need. This situation has led to the perception of these regulations as "unfunded mandates," placing undue financial strain

on the centers. The AOE clarified that the challenge isn't a misinterpretation of these statutes but their underfunded nature.

## **Adult Education Funding Assets**

The funding structures for AEL are clear and consistently relayed to the state. These centers derive their financial support from a blend of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds, state contributions, and general funding allocations. These allocations are determined using a uniform formula, which factors in the demographic and socio-economic profiles of adults in each county that a learning center serves. On the other hand, Adult CTE centers rely on a combination of state funding for salary assistance, independent grants, intermittent funding from the Department of Labor, and most substantially, student tuition fees. Tuition makes up the majority of funding for adult specific CTE programming, the majority of which covers instructor fees and materials. Students are encouraged to apply for state or privately funded scholarships to cover the cost of tuition, which are advertised both through state postings and often via the center's website or in person .

## **Significant Gaps in Adult Education Funding**

The CTE centers in Vermont receive direct state funding through salary assistance for five unique roles: a director of technical education; a person whose primary role is to provide guidance services for technical students; a person whose primary role is to find job training opportunities for students enrolled at the center; an assistant director for adult education; an assistant director of technical education . Additional state funding, such as transportation assistance, is provided to school districts to allocate as needed, and thus is rarely funneled to Adult CTE programs.

Federal funding through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) functions as the largest source of federal funding for CTE programs in the nation to support programming, equipment, and resources. However, during focus group discussions and data-sharing sessions, these centers highlighted a significant shortfall in this funding. Perkins funding cannot go directly to Adult CTE courses offered at the CTE centers, as per state mandate. Instead, Perkins funding for post-secondary CTE is funneled to Vermont's community colleges. Where Perkins funding is available, further limitations are still present. The Perkins allocation does not encompass certain critical expenses, notably capital costs. Consequently, centers are compelled to seek supplementary funds, such as grants.

While some grants are sporadically available from the Department of Labor, the primary funding sources are often employer partnerships and student tuition. Relying on tuition fees poses a challenge, as they often fail to cover the entire cost of a course unless a specific participant threshold is met. This financial constraint not only introduces uncertainty in course offerings but also places an undue burden on Adult CTE staff. Their time is disproportionately consumed in securing funds, curtailing their capacity to innovate and expand programs for their communities.



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The challenge is further exacerbated by the absence of a systematic tracking mechanism for additional funding. While anecdotal evidence from Adult CTE leadership during the stakeholder engagement suggests inconsistent funding across centers, concrete data to validate or refute these claims remains elusive. A systematic approach to track all funding sources is imperative. If disparities in funding exist, it implies that some centers can offer more comprehensive programs than others, leading to an inequitable distribution of opportunities. An integrated adult education system, adequately funded, would ensure equal access and opportunities for all adult learners.

Stakeholder discussions unveiled the fragmented nature of collaboration within Vermont's adult education landscape. While isolated instances of successful collaboration exist, such as one Adult CTE program's monthly meetings with a nearby AEL center, they are exceptions rather than the norm. The primary barriers to expansive collaboration are the lack of a centralized communication platform and insufficient funding for joint initiatives. The current disjointed structure, comprising multiple 4AEL providers overseeing 19 centers, 17 Adult CTE centers, and community colleges, operates on constrained budgets, which inadvertently stifles collaboration. This results in missed opportunities for synergistic partnerships, detrimental to the overarching goal of providing comprehensive adult education.

A pressing concern that resonated during stakeholder discussions was the stagnation of state funding for Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) programs. Despite the nominal consistency in funding levels, which amounted to \$4,196,850 for the 2023 fiscal year, they have not been adjusted for inflation or the rising costs of educational resources and skilled personnel during the past decade. This financial stagnation has tangible repercussions: it impedes the recruitment and retention of quality educators, restricts essential learner support services, and hampers technological advancements. Stakeholders unanimously advocated for a funding model that reflects the real costs of delivering top-tier adult education in the contemporary economic environment.

The Community College of Vermont stakeholders also highlighted an alarming funding disparity. A staggering 80% of their technical education course funding is derived from tuition fees, with a mere 20% from state appropriations. This lopsided funding model not only intensifies the competition for alternative funding but also exposes institutions to the volatility of enrollment numbers, creating financial barriers for Vermont's adults.

The overarching sentiment from these discussions is clear: the funding gaps are severely hampering the ability of staff to provide comprehensive services to Vermont's adults. An integrated adult education system, bolstered by significant funding enhancements, is the panacea to these challenges. Such a system would not only bridge the existing gaps but also empower the adult education sector to thrive. This, in turn, would cultivate a robust workforce in Vermont, primed to excel in high-demand sectors, thereby contributing significantly to Vermont's economic and communal fabric.

### Barriers and Needs of Returning Citizens



In dialogues with Adult CTE providers, it was underscored that the Department of Corrections is proactively taking steps to synchronize training and education with the broader community's needs. One such initiative is the provision of the TABE to those incarcerated, facilitating a smoother transition into the workforce training programs offered by Adult CTE. Yet, a notable challenge arises when certain Adult CTE centers deny admission to these individuals due to their past criminal records. For example, having a felony on their record could preclude them from securing employment in the field they wish to train for. Consequently, these individuals often find themselves compelled to approach Adult CTE centers situated at greater distances, exacerbating their difficulties. It's imperative to rectify these enrollment disparities to champion adult education and open doors for this often-overlooked group.

Tailored for formerly incarcerated individuals, reentry programs are designed to be holistic, covering academic and workforce skills enhancement, life mentorship, and assistance in job placement. Such endeavors are instrumental in aiding these individuals' successful reintegration into both the community and the job market.

### **Cultural and Familial Barriers and Needs**

AEL stakeholders, drawing from their extensive experience and deep engagement with students, highlighted the distinct hurdles faced by certain adult learners. They shared that one prominent challenge facing adult students in Vermont is rooted in family or cultural beliefs that may downplay the importance of securing high school credentials. The AEL stakeholders shared anecdotes of families emphasizing immediate job prospects over sustained educational goals. To address this prevailing mindset, it is essential to launch community outreach initiatives that resonate with these cultural values. Mobilizing local community champions can play a pivotal role in shifting these views, encouraging more adults to tap into the resources of their local AEL programs.

The need for specialized programs catering to English Language Learners was emphasized. Such initiatives would not only offer English classes but also ensure translation of course materials, making certain that language doesn't stand as an impediment to learning.

### **Need for Personalized Approaches to Adult Education**

AEL stakeholders pinpointed several pivotal strategies to effectively engage and sustain the interest of adult learners. Key among these are offering adaptable instructional timings, cultivating a nurturing educational ambiance, and ensuring the availability of top-tier instructors. One participant underscored the potential of a tailored program delivery in achieving impressive retention rates, emphasizing the criticality of a responsive and supportive learning environment tailored to adult learners.

To ensure consistent engagement and retention, AEL stakeholders proposed a myriad of tactics. These include scheduling classes during both regular work hours and evenings, facilitating both face-to-face and virtual tutoring sessions, integrating credentials within the curriculum, and guaranteeing easily accessible financial aid.

These methods highlight the importance of adaptability, unwavering support, and well-defined academic and career trajectories.

Feedback from adult students further validated the staff's dedication to addressing individual needs and preferences. One student pursuing high school equivalency/completion remarked, "They encouraged me to progress at a pace comfortable to me, offering assistance whenever I faced challenges." Another student shared how the teaching approach was tailored to their personal interests, stating, "They incorporated my passions, interests, and strengths into the learning process."

Many students expressed gratitude for the staff's adaptability in accommodating their unique challenges. One student pursuing high school equivalency/completion shared, "The staff was instrumental in navigating the obstacles I faced, ensuring I remained committed." An Adult CTE student lauded the staff's flexibility, saying, "They adjusted my workload to align with my schedule, making content more comprehensible."

### **Barriers to Access and the Imperative for an Integrated System**

The disparities in the modes of learning among different groups of students in Vermont's adult education system are evident. A significant 74% of Adult CTE students reported participating in fully in-person learning, as per the student survey. In contrast, only 22% of English language learners and 24% of students working towards their high school equivalency or completion did the same. Conversely, virtual learning was the preferred mode for 40% of English language learners, compared to 34% of high school equivalency or completion students and a mere 11% of Adult CTE students. The value of virtual options becomes clear when considering barriers like transportation, as students found these options to be a lifeline in such circumstances.

Practical solutions to these barriers were often provided by the Adult CTE and AEL staff, including offering gas cards to alleviate transportation issues, providing parking passes, and ensuring course materials were accessible via email. As one high school equivalency/completion student shared, "They offered virtual [classes] when I needed it. They were supportive and they offered gas cards."

However, the conversation with stakeholders from the Community College of Vermont brought to light more profound challenges. Affordability stands out, with tuition and other college expenses being a significant barrier. Coupled with Vermont's geographical challenges and high cost of living, many individuals desiring further education find themselves in a bind, unable to leave their jobs. Proposed solutions encompass a strengthened financial aid system, flexible course schedules for working adults, and comprehensive support services. These services should address childcare and transportation, two pivotal barriers for Vermont's adult learners.

Yet, the overarching challenge, as reiterated by both AEL and Adult CTE stakeholders, is the chronic underfunding of these programs. This financial shortfall severely restricts their capacity to offer comprehensive support services. Many stakeholders, both from AEL and Adult CTE, emphasized that while the current funding is consistent, it falls

short of meeting the diverse needs of Vermont's adult learners. This underscores the pressing need for increased state investment in adult education programs, aiming to eliminate logistical barriers and provide robust educational support.

Data from focus groups with Vermont's Adult CTE leadership stakeholders further emphasizes the urgency for funding to create a cohesive, statewide system. This would ensure standardized courses and services across all regions. While recognizing the value of Adult CTE programs for skill development, these stakeholders also highlighted the multifaceted challenges Vermont's adults face in accessing and completing these programs. Barriers range from transportation and childcare to language difficulties and financial constraints. To truly elevate the effectiveness of Adult CTE programs and ensure equitable access, stakeholders advocate for enhanced support services and improved collaboration between funding organizations. Without a surge in funding and enhanced inter-agency communication, the potential of many Vermont adults remains untapped, depriving them of the benefits of these programs.

An integrated adult education system, fortified by significant funding boosts, could bridge these gaps, enabling Vermont's adult education system to thrive. Such a system would be instrumental in cultivating a robust workforce, ready to contribute to Vermont's in-demand industries, economy, and communities.

### **Governance and Funding Models to Support Integrated Learning and Connected Pathways**

Connected pathways allow adults to move from AEL to an Adult CTE and then to college with prior learning “credit” transferred along the way. These pathways and other initiatives are governed in diverse ways nationwide. So, it is not surprising to find that the funding for these entities and the effort for an integrated system varies as well. The following are examples of how other states are addressing governance and funding for AEL and Adult CTE.

Following are some models that address policies and funding related to critical issues that focus on career pathways and influence advance adult learning through prior credit, transfer of credit, as well as partnerships and joint collaborative efforts.

In the state of Ohio, policies regarding adult literacy education (Aspire) and Adult CTE centers (Ohio Technical Center - OTC) fall within the Ohio Department of Higher Education. Aspire programs are housed within OTCs or community colleges to create seamless pathways for adult students. Once an Aspire student successfully completes their high school equivalency or required remediation, the student may apply for postsecondary education. Once a student successfully completes a CTE program Ohio has a statewide policy on transfer and transcription of credits to avoid duplication of course requirements. The Ohio Department of Higher Education says the effort is “to help students, returning adults, veterans, and service members at public universities, colleges, and career-technical institutions seamlessly transfer academic credit.” The Ohio Transfer to Degree Guarantee that pertains to career-technical coursework (both

secondary and postsecondary) are called Career-Technical Assurance Guides (CTAGs) and Industry Recognized Credential Transfer Assurance Guides. The higher education website includes a tool that has a comprehensive list of approved CTAG programs and courses that are transferable among Ohio public institutions. Additionally, a One-Year Option allows adult learners who have earned a certificate of completion for a skills training program at an adult CTE institution, along with the respective credential, credit toward an associate degree. The Ohio policy for institutional transfer explains directives of the Ohio General Assembly addressing the credit for prior learning processes.

Governance to integrate AEL and Adult ACTE provides a seamless pathway from literacy to skills gains to degrees. Researching Louisiana's HB 216 yielded information that could be used by Vermont to create the alignment of curricula and create pathways from literacy, to skills gain to degree earning. Although the legislation addresses elementary and secondary education curricula alignment to transfer and articulation pathways for CTE programs, this legislation could be used to inform how adults navigate from a high school equivalency certificate to an industry credential earned at an Adult CTE, and then a degree earned at a community college.

Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) provides adult learners the opportunity to gain literacy, work, and postsecondary readiness skills. Policy addressing specific pathways for Vermont's AEL centers to incorporate I-BEST while simultaneously enrolling students in Adult CTE programs for seamless pathway to employment could boost enrollment and provide Vermont residents with low-income a path to advance knowledge and income simultaneously. The state of Washington's I-BEST program is nationally recognized and provides planning tools and teaching modes to encourage its growth.

Vermont could consider looking at new ways to address funding for AEL and possibly Adult CTE by taking note of ideas in a report by the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO), a nonpartisan fiscal and policy advisor overseen by California's Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC. Redesigning California's Adult Education Funding Model states that California began restructuring its adult education system in 2013-2014). Shortcomings of the state's funding model for adult education are exposed, but the report also provides recommendations for implementing a new funding model. The model is comprehensive and looks at annual adult education program funding growth, additional ways to calculate attendance, allocations linked to need and performance, phasing in the new funding model, and more. Although California and Vermont are not comparable in population or scale, the model uses metrics such as attendance and performance to inform funding levels, sets a uniform base per-student rate for adult education providers, and provides a "phasing in" of the new funding model over several years.

Building partnerships could yield increases in cohorts and funding for AEL and Adult CTE programming. The Maine Department of Education provided more than 9,000 adult learners with programs that allowed for further educational opportunities, provided skills training, or afforded them a gain in better employment during FY 2022. Maine's integrated system combines its adult literacy and education centers. Funding for Adult

Education includes state and local dollars as well as that from the US Department of Education. But there are additional unique ways the state funds training for adult learners, including a partnership with the Woodfords Family Services. According to Jeffrey Carpenter of Woodfords Family Services, a nonprofit provider of disability related services in Maine, the organization works with the Bangor Adult & Community Education and other partners to offer a Behavioral Health Professional Certificate at no cost to Maine residents that are at least 18 years old and have a high school diploma (or equivalent). This training is made possible through local grant funding and donations to the partner organization. Another example is the Central Lincoln County Adult Education's free Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) course that is also an apprenticeship program funded through ARPA Build Back Better funds under a jobs recovery program created by Maine's Governor. It is built on a partnership between the adult center, the community college, and a statewide hospital system. By working closely with partners, Vermont's AEL and Adult CTE providers can build collaboration to address workforce needs with programs held at integrated adult learner centers.

### Funding for Individuals

Policies that will provide Vermont adult students with access to funding for use with Adult CTEs have a number of potential benefits -an increase in student enrollment, an increase in adults with industry credentials and/or technical skills, and Vermont employers with a trained workforce to name a few.

South Carolina's Workforce Industry Needs Scholarship (SCWINS) is a scholarship program available to any adult or recent high school graduate seeking an industry credential or associate degree in a high-demand career field. South Carolina's HB 3144 provides SCWINS recipients funding to cover tuition, fees, and course-related materials. Vermont could enact legislation that specifically names both Adult ACTE students and the community college students eligible for such funding.

Adding legislation that provides individuals additional funding like that of Michigan's SB 268, has allowed adult learners access to associate degrees and industry-recognized credentials. Policies that provide for skill building and postsecondary education to meet employer needs could be a powerful way for Vermont to influence the increase in the number of adults furthering their education. The residual benefit is employers engaging with potential hires who bring industry knowledge and education to the interview table and incumbent workers with better opportunities to advance with current employers. The Michigan reconnect grant act provides individuals aged 25 to 64 with a college degree or skill certificate or credential.

### Braided Funding

The consideration of braiding various funding sources is often used by community colleges to address career pathways programming but could also be considered for AEL and Adult CTE funding as well. The Jobs for The Future (JFF) Braided Funding Toolkit could be adapted to plan for funding for adult literacy adult CTE programs. The



toolkit emphasizes possible partnerships that could be used to tie together funds for adult literacy and adult CTE programs. The toolkit includes four areas:

1. Braiding streams (private, state, and federal) for integrated pathways.
2. Ways to strategize for potential sources of funding.
3. An assessment tool to examine current funding and strategies and to identify opportunities and challenges to using such funding for programming.
4. A searchable database with funding sources and strategies used previously.

The toolkit was used as part of the Accelerated Opportunity Model that addressed helping low-skilled students earn college credentials. This model is a good consideration for AEL and Adult CTE institutions because it provides and speaks directly to populations that these education providers may already be educating.

The self-proclaimed “playbook for state policymakers”, *Funding for Value: Maximizing the Impact of Career and Technical Education Funding*, makes solid points concerning the alignment of secondary programs to postsecondary programs and secondary to postsecondary credits/hours, and outlines five steps for leveraging the strengthening of CTE and maximizing CTE funding impact. Although the report focus is on secondary CTE, the content addressing the pathway from CTE secondary to postsecondary learning provides something to consider on how Vermont’s adult CTE system could provide added value to secondary students by providing a seamless pathway to stackable credentials. For example, when a secondary CTE automotive service tech student earns 8 of 10 Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) credentials, the last two could be earned during evening classes provided by the adult program or the student could complete those ASE related courses in the fall with an adult cohort. Also, in addition to traditional funding from Perkins, the report gives examples of other local funding a CTE may seek. A joint request by connected secondary and postsecondary CTE could yield a value-added request attractive to funders.

Future governance from the legislature on AEL and Adult CTE policy and funding must address the importance of building strong partnerships, as partnerships will have direct impact on successful programming and potential funding. Skills Commons provides prospects for building professional relationships and connections, sharing workforce educational resources such as online materials for courses, programs, curricula, etc. at no cost, and it highlights best practices such as engaging employers as strategy partners. The site provides a showcase of videos in five different industry sectors and key lessons learned via employer engagement. Additionally, Skills Commons provides professional development and technical support for training providers. These are all prospects that Vermont’s AEL and Adult CTE could benefit from via partnerships.

Overall, and more broadly, AEL and Adult CTE funding sources include:

- **State Budget Allocation:** The state government can allocate funds from its annual budget specifically for adult technical education. This funding can be used

to establish and maintain vocational training centers, update equipment and curriculum, and support instructors.

- **Federal Grants:** The state can apply for federal grants aimed at promoting workforce development and adult education. The U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Education, or other relevant agencies may offer grants and funding opportunities to support adult technical education initiatives.
- **Private Partnerships:** Collaborations with private businesses and industries can provide funding for adult technical education. Companies with a vested interest in a skilled workforce may contribute funds, equipment, or expertise to support training programs that align with their needs. This can be done through partnerships, sponsorships, or donations.
- **Workforce Development Programs:** Many states have workforce development programs designed to enhance employment opportunities and skill development. These programs often include funding for adult technical education, such as on-the-job training, apprenticeships, and retraining initiatives. By partnering with these programs, states can secure funding for adult technical education.
- **Student Tuition and Fees:** Adult learners can be charged tuition and fees to cover the costs of technical education partially or fully. By implementing reasonable tuition rates and offering financial aid options, states can generate revenue to support adult technical education programs.
- **Tax Incentives:** States can provide tax incentives to businesses that invest in adult technical education. By offering tax credits or deductions to companies that support workforce development initiatives, states can encourage private investment in adult education programs.
- **Philanthropic Organizations:** Non-profit organizations, foundations, and philanthropists often provide grants and funding for education-related projects. States can seek out partnerships with these organizations to secure funding for adult technical education programs.

The availability and effectiveness of these funding sources may vary considering Vermont's economic situation and the political climate. Vermont should consider a combination of funding mechanisms to ensure sustainable support for adult technical education.

### **Creating an Integrated Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and Postsecondary Career and Technical Education System in Vermont**

At present, Vermont's Adult Education landscape is bifurcated into two distinct systems: The Adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE) focuses on workforce training, while the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) caters to adults aiming for their high school equivalency diploma, traditionally aged high school students, and English Language Learners (ELLs) seeking English fluency courses.



The existing AEL and Adult CTE frameworks undoubtedly equip adult learners with pivotal skills. However, there's a pressing need to ensure that every Vermonter, irrespective of their geographical location or financial standing, can seamlessly access these systems. Envisioning and actualizing an integrated system, buttressed by robust funding and advocacy strategies, can pave the way for a larger cohort of adult learners to access continuous education, refine their workforce competencies, and secure enhanced employment opportunities. The magnitude of challenges, from delayed responsiveness to the pressing needs of learners to the financial strains borne by students, accentuates the urgency for a holistic, integrated approach to adult education in Vermont. This transition necessitates policy reforms, augmented funding, and heightened collaboration among educational entities and key stakeholders.

Drawing from the comprehensive analysis of the strengths, shortcomings, and access barriers of the current dichotomous system, as discerned through meticulous research and extensive stakeholder engagement, the following section details recommendations to guide the State of Vermont in its endeavor to establish a unified Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and Postsecondary Career and Technical Education System.

### **Recommendation #1: Centralized Coordination of AEL and Adult CTE Programs**

To ensure a seamless and efficient integration of Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) and Adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE) programs, it is imperative to establish a unified office under the purview of the Agency of Education (AOE). This centralized approach offers several advantages:

**Unified Leadership:** Appoint a dedicated lead who will be responsible for the oversight of both AEL and Adult CTE programs. This individual will serve as the primary point of contact and coordination, ensuring that both programs align with Vermont's educational and workforce goals.

**Strengthened Collaboration with Colleges:** The lead should also act as a liaison, fostering strong ties with the Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees. This collaboration will ensure that the state's higher education system is in sync with the integrated adult education framework, facilitating smoother transitions for students and addressing the state's workforce needs more effectively.

**Comprehensive Oversight:** The centralized office will be tasked with the integration of AEL, Adult CTE, and community college programming. This holistic approach will ensure that adult learners in Vermont receive consistent, high-quality education and training opportunities, regardless of their entry point into the system.

**Efficient Fund Allocation:** Entrust the office with the responsibility of distributing funds to AEL and CTE centers. The allocation should be based on a thorough

assessment conducted by the integrated office, incorporating feedback from a diverse range of state and local stakeholders. This ensures that resources are directed where they are most needed, optimizing the impact of every dollar spent.

**Grant Acquisition Support:** Beyond the distribution of state funds, the office should actively assist local centers, and potentially community colleges, in securing grants. By pooling expertise and resources, the state can enhance its chances of obtaining external funding, further bolstering the integrated adult education system.

**Alternative Model:** Main's integrated system of literacy and CTE programs provides adult learners the opportunity to move seamlessly from literacy skills (if needed) to CTE programs that provide industry recognized credential and then lead to employment or advanced positioning within current employment.

Incorporating these elements into the integration strategy will not only streamline operations but also ensure that Vermont's adult education system is responsive, equitable, and poised to meet the evolving needs of its adult learners. This recommendation, rooted in the insights and challenges highlighted earlier, underscores the importance of a cohesive and well-coordinated approach to adult education in Vermont.

## Recommendation #2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy

To fortify Vermont's adult education landscape, it's paramount to devise a statewide integration plan that bridges the gaps between Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) and Adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE) programs. Drawing inspiration from successful models and addressing current challenges, this plan should encompass:

### Learning from Existing Models:

- Louisiana's SB 216 (2022): While primarily aligning K-12 with CTE programs, this model offers valuable insights. Adapting its core principles can serve Vermont's unique needs.
- Washington's I-BEST Approach: This method, which integrates AEL and Adult CTE centers, is primarily community college-based. It exemplifies a seamless transition between basic education and technical training.
- Ohio Department of Higher Education: The state system integrates adult literacy, adult CTE, community colleges, and universities under one umbrella. Ohio's CTAGs and One-Year Option provide for pathways from CTE to college.

### Streamlining Local Mandates:

It's essential to eliminate restrictive and unfunded mandates on AEL and Adult CTE centers, ensuring a consistent statewide approach.

### Immediate Integration Steps:

- Implement an automatic referral system for AEL students nearing program completion (75%) to Adult CTE programs.
- Facilitate regular interactions between Adult CTE instructors and AEL classrooms, promoting Adult CTE programs.
- Organize site visits for AEL students to Adult CTE centers, offering firsthand exposure.

### Connected Pathways:

Establish clear, interconnected pathways to ensure smooth transitions for adult learners.

- Develop a credit transfer system, allowing students to carry forward credits from secondary CTE programs to Adult CTE.
- Embrace the Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) model, combining basic literacy with career training.
- Utilize AEL as a preparatory step for Adult CTE programs with specific skill-level prerequisites.
- Explore the potential of pre-apprenticeship programs linked to employer-registered apprenticeship programs.
- Promote AEL for remedial learning, offering an alternative to loan-dependent college education.

### Collaborative Initiatives:

The Brattleboro Childcare Work Training program stands out as a beacon, integrating AEL for foundational skills and college for specialized training. Such collaborative efforts, involving entities like the Brattleboro Development Credit Corp, can be replicated, incorporating Adult CTE.

### Stakeholder Collaboration:

**Providers:** AEL and Adult CTE leaders must collaboratively design pathways tailored for adult learners. Additionally, secondary and Adult CTE leadership should devise strategies for high school students aspiring to continue their career journey post-graduation.

**State Involvement:** The AOE should assess the feasibility of AEL-driven remediation, weighing its implications on the broader education system. Concurrently, the Department of Labor (DOL) should partner with Adult CTE programs to explore potential pathways for adult learners.

**Policy Advocacy:** Vermont requires a robust policy framework advocating for the integration of these pathways into legislation, ensuring long-term sustainability and effectiveness.

## Recommendation #3: Enhancing Funding Mechanisms for a Robust Adult Education System

To bolster Vermont's adult education framework, it's imperative to diversify and amplify funding avenues. A robust financial foundation will ensure that the integrated Adult Education system can effectively serve Vermonters, equipping them with the skills needed for in-demand industries and contributing to the state's economic growth. Here's a comprehensive approach to achieving this:

### Direct Revenue Augmentation:

**General Revenue Boost:** An immediate increase in the general revenue allocated for adult education is essential. To ensure the sustainability of this funding, it should be periodically adjusted for inflation, guaranteeing that the program's financial needs are consistently met.

### Drawing Inspiration from Successful Models:

**South Carolina's HB 3144 (2022):** This model introduces a student scholarship with a three-year duration, offering up to \$5,000 annually. What's noteworthy is its design: the scholarship becomes available to students only after they've exhausted all other federal and state aid options. Adapting such a model ensures that financial support reaches those who need it most.

**Michigan's SB 268 (2020):** This innovative approach provides financial aid to residents pursuing an associate degree or an industry-recognized credential. The key feature is the portability of the credential, ensuring it's widely accepted by multiple employers within a specific industry. Such a model not only supports students but also aligns with industry needs, creating a win-win scenario.

**California's Adult Education Funding Model:** The model uses metrics to inform funding levels, sets a uniform base per-student rate for adult education providers, and provides a "phasing in" of the new funding model over several years

### Collaborative Funding Initiatives:

Explore partnerships with private sectors, industries, and philanthropic organizations. By creating a collaborative funding model, the financial burden on the state can be distributed, while also ensuring that the curriculum remains aligned with industry needs.

### Transparency and Accountability:

Ensure that every dollar allocated to adult education is utilized efficiently. Regular audits, performance metrics, and stakeholder feedback can ensure that funds are directed towards impactful initiatives, building trust, and encouraging further investments.

## **Building a Brighter Future for Vermont's Adult Learners**

Vermont stands at a pivotal juncture in its journey towards creating a comprehensive and inclusive adult education system. The insights gleaned from this report underscore the profound potential that lies in integrating the Adult Career and Technical Education (Adult CTE) and Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) systems. By doing so, we can create a seamless pathway for adult learners, ensuring they are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in today's dynamic workforce.

The barriers identified, ranging from geographical challenges to cultural nuances, are not insurmountable. With a concerted effort, backed by robust funding and legislative support, we can transform these challenges into opportunities. The recommendations provided offer a roadmap to achieve this transformation, drawing inspiration from successful models across the nation and tailoring them to Vermont's unique context.

The call to action is clear: Vermont's legislators have the power to catalyze change, bridging the gaps in the current system and fostering an environment where every Vermonter, irrespective of their background or circumstances, has access to quality adult education. Such an initiative will not only uplift individual lives but will also contribute significantly to Vermont's economic growth and community development.

The future of Vermont's adult education system is bright, filled with promise and potential. By embracing the recommendations of this report and working collaboratively, we can ensure that this potential is fully realized, paving the way for a more educated, skilled, and prosperous Vermont.

## Appendix A: Focus Group Guide

Good morning/afternoon! My name is <<NAME>> and with me is my colleague <<NAME>>. We are from Thomas P. Miller & Associates, and we have been hired by the Vermont Agency of Education to speak to various agencies and organizations involved with Adult Education in Vermont to better understand the challenges of the current adult education system, and to identify needed changes.

What you share with us today will remain 100% confidential. In our report, we will not use your name or any other details that might make it easy to figure out who you are. We want you to feel comfortable being completely open and honest with us about your experience.

I will ask you a few questions, and <<NAME>> will turn her camera off so she can take notes about our conversation. We would also like to record our conversation if that is ok. This recording will ONLY be shared with our team; no one outside of us will ever see it. We just like to record it so we can go back and make sure we accurately capture what you said. The recording will be deleted once the report is written.

Are you ok with us recording this conversation? <<NAME>> CLICK RECORD IF THEY GIVE PERMISSION.

- 
1. What is your name, role, and organization?
  2. What are the main funding sources for education and training programs for adults in Vermont, and how do these funding sources impact the availability and quality of services?
  3. What are some of the biggest challenges that adult learners in Vermont face when accessing and completing education and training programs for adults?
    - How can these challenges be addressed?
  4. What populations and/or subgroups of adults have more difficulty accessing education and training programs in Vermont than their peers?
    - **PROMPT:** English Language Learners, individuals with disabilities, etc.
    - What work is being done (or needs to be done) to address these barriers?
  5. What are some of the most successful education and training programs for adults in Vermont?
    - What makes them successful?
  6. How do providers of education and training programs for adults in Vermont collaborate with each other?

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- **PROMPT:** To ensure that learners are able to access a continuum of education and training services?
7. What other stakeholders, such as employers, community organizations, and government agencies, need to collaborate?
    - **PROMPT:** To ensure that learners are able to access a continuum of education and training services?
  8. What role do data and information sharing play in improving the outcomes for education and training programs for adults in Vermont?
    - How can these processes be improved?
  9. What strategies do providers of education and training for adults in Vermont use to engage and retain adult learners?
  10. What are some of the factors that contribute to student success?
  11. What are some of the ways that providers of education and training for adults in Vermont are adapting to changing workforce needs and emerging technologies?
  12. How are providers of education and training for adults in Vermont preparing learners for the jobs of the future?
  13. What are some of the most important indicators of success for providers of education and training for adults in Vermont?
    - How do you measure and evaluate the effectiveness of their programs?
  14. What are some of the biggest opportunities and challenges facing the education and training programs for adults in Vermont, and what can be done to address them?
  15. Finally, what do you believe are the most important initiatives for improving the outcomes of education and training programs for adults in Vermont?
    - What steps should be taken to achieve these initiatives?



## Appendix B: Employers Focus Group Questions

1. What is your name, role, and organization?
2. How are VT employers (you) addressing workforce development?
  - Consider both incumbent and new hires
  - Engagement with other entities (education, WDB, CBOs, ED, Chamber)
3. What are AEL and Adult CTE education providers doing to address workforce development?
  - Alignment with in-demand jobs
  - Engagement with other entities
4. What are some of the ways that providers of education and training for adults in Vermont are adapting to changing workforce needs and emerging technologies?
  - Including jobs of the future
5. What populations and/or subgroups of adults have more difficulty accessing education and training programs in Vermont than their peers?
  - English Language Learners, individuals with disabilities, etc.
  - What work is being done (or needs to be done) to address these barriers?
6. What efforts can be made to increase diversity equity and inclusion in Lancaster County?
  - Employment/recruitment
  - Increased decision-making roles
7. What are some of the biggest opportunities and challenges facing the education and training programs for adults in Vermont, and what can be done to address them?
8. Finally, what do you believe are the most important initiatives for improving the outcomes of education and training programs for adults in Vermont?
  - What steps should be taken to achieve these initiatives?

**Appendix C: Stakeholder Engagement List**

<b>Stakeholder Group</b>	<b>Date of Engagement</b>
Vermont Adult Education Literacy Network	3/8/2023
Vermont Adult CTE Association	3/9/2023
Vermont Adult CTE Association Directors	3/27/2023
Vermont Community Colleges	4/6/2023
DOL/VR/WD/DOC	4/6/2023
AEL/CTE Affiliated Employers	4/7/2023
Agency of Education AEL/CTE Leadership	4/13/2023

## Appendix D: Student Interview Guide

Good morning/afternoon! My name is <<NAME>> and with me is my colleague <<NAME>>. We are from Thomas P. Miller & Associates, and we have been hired by the Vermont Agency of Education to talk to current and former students to understand your experience with adult education in Vermont so we can help the Vermont Agency of Education make everyone is experience the best it can possibly be.

What you share with us today will remain 100% confidential. In our report, we will not use your name or any other details that might make it easy to figure out who you are. We want you to feel comfortable being completely open and honest with us about your experience.

I will ask you a few questions, and <<NAME>> will turn her camera off so she can take notes about our conversation. We would also like to record our conversation if that is ok. This recording will ONLY be shared with our team; no one outside of us will ever see it. We just like to record it so we can go back and make sure we accurately capture what you said.

Are you ok with us recording this conversation? <<NAME>> CLICK RECORD IF THEY GIVE PERMISSION.

1. What is your name?
2. Where in Vermont do you live?
3. What kind of instruction or courses did you take (or are currently taking)?
  - **For ADULT CTE ONLY:** What learning have you done at or through the CTE/tech/career center?
  - **PROMPT:** Like math or English, or maybe a class to help you get a job, like nursing or welding?
4. Where did you take these courses?
5. When will you finish your courses?
  - **IF THEY SAY THEY DID NOT FINISH:** Why did you need to stop?
  - **FOLLOW UP:** Did you experience any challenges in finishing those courses?
6. Were all your courses held in person?
  - **IF THEY TOOK COURSES IN PERSON:** How did you get to those courses? How far of a drive was it?

- **IF THEY TOOK VIRTUAL COURSES:** What courses did you take online? Walk me through how those courses worked. What was your experience like taking those online courses (e.g., did you enjoy them?)?
7. What made you want to take these courses?
- **FOLLOW UP:** Will finishing these courses help you get where you want to go (e.g., get a job)? Why or why not?
8. How did you find out that these courses were available?
- Walk me through how you enrolled/signed up to take the courses.
  - **ADULT CTE FOLLOW-UP:** How did you pay for these courses? How did you find out about financial aid?
9. How did you like the courses you took?
10. Did you experience any challenges in taking those classes?
- **PROMPT:** Challenges like having to take longer, transportation, illness, etc.
11. How did the teachers help you with those challenges?
12. What was your overall experience with the teachers?
13. Would you tell your family and friends to take courses at this center? Why or why not?
14. What suggestions do you have to improve the experience of this center for future students?
15. Are you using what you learned in those classes in a job, in college, or in a training right now (OR do you plan to use the skills you learned in a job, in college, or in a training in the future?)
- **FOLLOW UP:** What kind of job do you have? How long have you worked there?
  - Will the courses you took at the Adult Tech Center or AEL help you get a new or better paying job or a promotion?
  - If you took college classes, did you feel adequately prepared?

Thank you so much for your time today! We really appreciate you sharing your experiences with us.

## Appendix E: Vermont Agency of Education Visioning Session Guiding Questions

### Relationships

- How would you describe the current relationship between AOE and Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) providers, and what improvements would you like to see in this relationship?
- How would you describe the current relationship between AOE and Adult Career and Technical Education (CTE) providers, and what improvements would you like to see in this relationship?

### Data Sharing

- What do you see as the strengths and opportunities for improvement in sharing data between AOE, AEL, CTE, and Higher Education?
  - In what ways can AOE better support the sharing of data between these entities to ensure the success of adult education students?

### Pathways to Higher Education

- How would you describe AOE's role in creating pathways to connect adult education students (learners of AEL & Adult CTE) to higher education institutions?
  - What are some ways AOE can improve its role in creating these pathways to higher education institutions?

### Funding

- What is your understanding of AOE's role and responsibility for future adult education funding, and what influence do you believe you have in funding change requests? This includes not just requests to change funding but the funding framework itself.
  - How do you think AOE should approach funding requests for adult education in the future to ensure equitable access and success for all students?

### Virtual Education

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- How does AOE currently support virtual adult education courses/training, and what changes would you like to see in AOE's approach to supporting these programs?
  - What challenges do you anticipate AOE facing when supporting virtual adult education programs, and how can these challenges be addressed?

## Appendix F: Recommendations Implementation Guide

These recommendations are provided in the following Implementation Guide to provide a format to assist in planning and tracking AOE's work.

<b>Goal 1: Centralized Coordination of AEL and Adult CTE Programs</b>
<b>Strategy 1.1:</b> Appoint a dedicated lead who will be responsible for the oversight of both AEL and Adult CTE Programs
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 1: Centralized Coordination of AEL and Adult CTE Programs</b>
<b>Strategy 2.1:</b> Foster strong ties with the Vermont State Colleges Board of Trustees
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 1: Centralized Coordination of AEL and Adult CTE Programs</b>
<b>Strategy 3.1:</b> Integrate AEL, Adult CTE, and community college programming
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 1: Centralized Coordination of AEL and Adult CTE Programs</b>
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## LEADERSHIP · SUPPORT · OVERSIGHT

**Strategy 4.1:** Distribute funds to AEL and CTE centers based on metrics and stakeholder input

**Metric:**

**Partners:**

**Resources Needed:**

**Action Steps:**

**Completion Timeframe (month and year):**

**Goal 1: Centralized Coordination of AEL and Adult CTE Programs**

**Strategy 5.1:** Secure grants

**Metric:**

**Partners:**

**Resources Needed:**

**Action Steps:**

**Completion Timeframe (month and year):**

**Goal 2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy**

**Strategy 2.1:** Learn from existing model sin other states (CA, ME, OH)

**Metric:**

**Partners:**

**Resources Needed:**

**Action Steps:**

**Completion Timeframe (month and year):**

**Goal 2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy**

**Strategy 2.2:** Streamline local mandates

**Metric:**

**Partners:**

**Resources Needed:**

**Action Steps:**

**Completion Timeframe (month and year):**

<b>Goal 2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy</b>
<b>Strategy 2.3:</b> Immediate Integration Steps
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement an automatic referral system for AEL students nearing program completion (75%) to Adult CTE programs</li> <li>● Facilitate regular interactions between Adult CTE instructors and AEL classroom, promoting Adult CTE programs</li> <li>● Organize site visits for AEL students to Adult CTE centers, offering firsthand exposure</li> </ul>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy</b>
<b>Strategy 2.4:</b> Establish clear, interconnected pathways
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy</b>
<b>Strategy 2.5:</b> Collaborative Initiatives
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 2: Implementing a Comprehensive Statewide Integration Strategy</b>
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<b>Strategy 2.6:</b> Stakeholder Collaboration
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 3: Enhancing Funding Mechanisms</b>
<b>Strategy 3.1:</b> Direct revenue Augmentation
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 3: Enhancing Funding Mechanisms</b>
<b>Strategy 3.2:</b> Drawing Inspiration from Successful Models
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>

<b>Goal 3: Enhancing Funding Mechanisms</b>
<b>Strategy 3.3:</b> Collaborative Funding Initiatives
<b>Metric:</b>
<b>Partners:</b>
<b>Resources Needed:</b>
<b>Action Steps:</b>
<b>Completion Timeframe (month and year):</b>