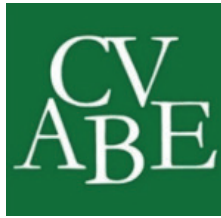


TO: Senate Committee on Appropriations
FROM: Vermont Adult Education & Literacy Network
RE: Flexible Pathways
DATE: April 21, 2023



Dear Chair Kitchel,

Thank you and your Committee for your careful consideration of the Adult Education & Literacy Network's [FY24 Funding Request](#). The Network respectfully submits this memo to help answer questions that have come up in your Committee regarding Flexible Pathways and AEL services. Like the Committee, we would prefer for the response to come from the VT Agency of Education directly. Absent that response, we would like to provide you with the information needed to make an informed decision on our request for a \$1,500,000 base increase. As you know, this request was included in the House budget, and it was also a high priority for your Senate Economic Development, Housing & General Affairs Committee.

AEL BASE FUNDING

It is important to note that the High School Completion Program (HSCP) is a fee for service program. The Adult Education & Literacy Network (AELN) considers the **Adult Basic Education (ABE)** and the **Adult Diploma Program (ADP)** grant funding from the Agency of Education in Sec. B.504 of the budget as the Network's base funding. These programs are separate from the HSCP, and the Agency of Education has indicated their support for increased funding to either of these budget line items which we are very grateful for. The ABE grant program is funded with state general funds, and the ADP is funded out of the Ed Fund. Funding from these two programs totals around \$3,500,000 for Vermont's 4 AEL service providers. **The funding amount for these two programs have stayed consistent since 1992, despite significant increases in costs of providing Adult Basic Education services.**

HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION PROGRAM - FEE FOR SERVICE

Through a competitive RFP process with the Agency of Education, AEL providers administer the HSCP for the State. AEL providers have secured the contract to administer this program since it was opened to adults over the age of 22 in Act 77 of 2013. The last application was in calendar year 2021, and the Network has submitted its application for the next two-year cycle on April 7, 2023. High School Completion is a fee for service program that comes out of the Ed Fund, and while the fee schedule has remained flat over the years, costs of providing this service have increased significantly.

Funding for the HSCP has decreased significantly due to three primary factors: 1) lower student enrollment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, 2) policy changes within the program, and 3) our student population is entering with lower literacy skills and do not yet qualify for this program. In FY2019, the Agency adopted a revised and more difficult standardized test that students are required to take before they can enter the HSCP. A student must take this standardized test in Reading, Math and Language and have a signed graduation plan with a school in order to qualify for HSCP, and we have found that this policy change significantly increases the barrier to entry for the program. Students must score at least a 5 (scale of 1-6) in all three areas of the standardized tests in order for AEL providers to draw down a significant portion of the available HSCP funding. Many of our students come to us with significant barriers to participating in traditional academic settings, and getting to a level 5 score can be extremely burdensome both on the student and the teacher.

Drawing Down HSCP Funds

AEL providers are not able to draw down full HSCP funding until a student shows skill gains in the three standardized assessments and/or successfully completes the program and graduates by fulfilling their individualized education plan and scoring at least a 5 in all three test areas - reading, math and language. Because of this, HSCP has unfortunately become the least flexible of Flexible Pathways. It also takes a longer time for our students to get there, which corresponds to longer teaching times and higher provider costs. Furthermore, the standardized testing for HSCP is more rigorous than the graduation requirements for our public school system, which causes a system where our most vulnerable Vermonters

are actually held to a higher standard to earn their high school diploma than students in the public school system, who often do not face the same barriers to education.

As you can see in the graph below, the combination of these policy decisions and the fact that students are coming to us with lower skills and greater barriers have resulted in a decrease of over \$2,000,000 over the last 5 years for HSCP services. At the same time, our costs to administer this program have increased significantly due to the longer teaching time required to get a student up to a level 5 score on a more difficult test and working with students with higher needs and lower literacy levels.

We would very much like to partner with the General Assembly and Agency of Education in addressing these policy issues with an eye towards equity for our students and AEL providers. In the meantime, our request for a base increase of \$1.5million is critical just to maintain our current level of services for the students we serve and not run budget deficits. Below is also a chart of our student demographics to give you a sense of who we work with.

Funding for AEL Services, Fiscal Year 2017-2023

Adult Education & Literacy Network Funding	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23
Federal WIOA Title II Grants	\$742,307	\$755,478	\$798,248	\$754,436	\$765,285	\$798,690	\$795,915
Federal IELCE Grants	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$47,728	\$71,768	\$60,670	\$61,470
State (ABE & ADP grants)	\$3,267,712	\$3,334,728	\$3,609,231	\$3,540,842	\$3,496,850	\$3,496,850	\$3,496,850
One-Time Budget Adjustment/FY24 funding (GF)	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$350,000	\$700,000
High School Completion Program (HSCP) - Fee for Service	\$3,512,051	\$3,001,642	\$2,383,069	\$1,576,913	\$1,189,439	\$1,239,782	Data Not Yet Available
Other (non-state, non-federal) AEL funding	\$400,508	\$412,903	\$402,544	\$473,427	\$362,955	\$422,256	\$215,794
Total AEL Funding	\$7,982,578	\$7,564,751	\$7,253,092	\$6,393,347	\$5,886,297	\$6,018,248	\$4,570,029

AELN State and Federal Funding Sources (2017-2021)

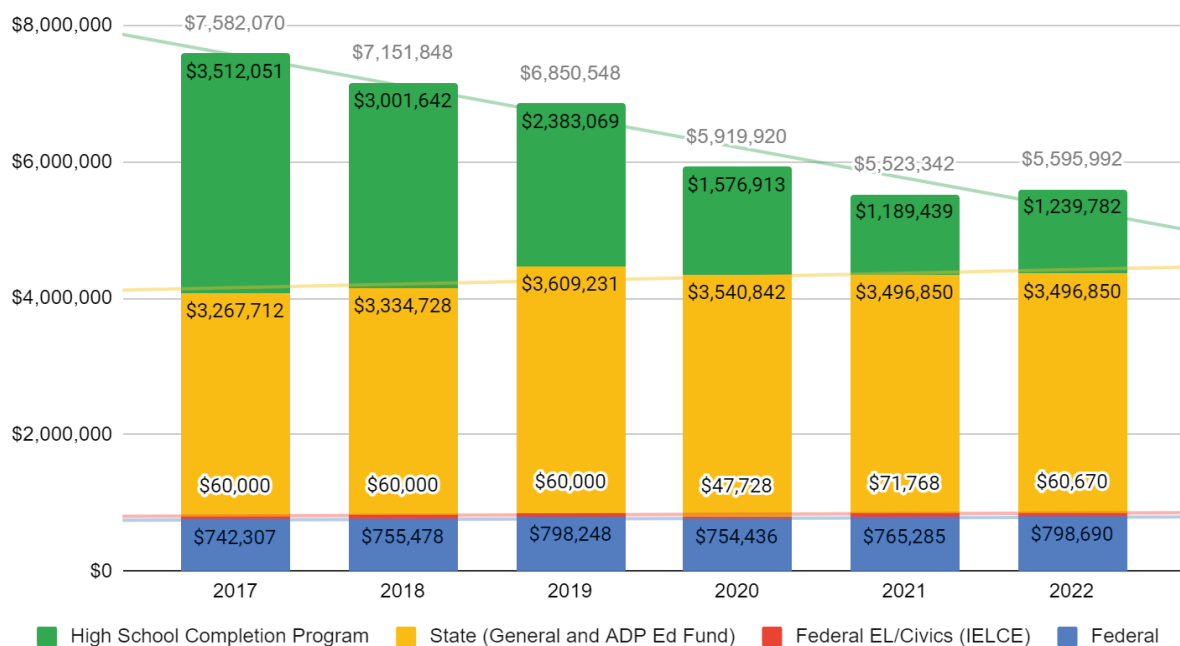


Table 2. Student Demographics Per Center (FY22)

AEL Student Demographics		CVABE	NEK-LS	TTC	VAL
Age Group	16-18	120	71	53	343
	19-24	69	38	30	222
	25-44	100	21	25	364
	45-54	40	7	2	84
	55+	39	10	7	60
Gender	Male	170	58	54	430
	Female	198	89	63	641
Ethnicity	American Indian or Alaskan	7	3	1	12
	Asian	30	6	3	99
	Black or African America	19	2	4	158
	Hispanic or Latino	35	4	5	97
	Two or more races	16	3	6	32
	Total BIPOC	107	18	19	398
	White	261	129	98	672
Labor Status	Employed	147	61	30	457
	Unemployed	219	77	78	574
Barriers to Employment	Ex-offenders	17	1	2	16
	English language learners / low literacy levels / cultural barriers	368	147	117	1073
	Homeless/ runaway youth / foster care involved youth	11	3	3	36
	Low income	153	11	22	180
	Individuals with disabilities	191	16	11	180
	Single parents	34	8	9	63
Students that received <12 of schooling		258	125	97	801

NOTE: Each AEL provider has further demographic breakdown sheets available upon request. This table is extrapolated data that provides numbers for specific categories of people we were asked about in your Committee. If there is interest in receiving further information, for example regarding the specific type of disabilities we see in our students, that information can be provided.

Who Are Our Students? (Network Wide Key Data - % of Total Network Student Population):

58% Female	53% Unemployed
22% BIPOC (variable by county)	100% with barriers to employment
46% with at least 1 disability	76% No high school credential