

TO: House Committee on Ways and Means  
FROM: Vermont Adult Education & Literacy Network  
RE: CTE Report  
DATE: July 2023



Dear Chair Kornheiser,

The Adult Education and Literacy Network (AELN) understands that your Committee will be reviewing the Study on the Funding and Governance of Career and Technical Education in Vermont (March 31, 2023), and we would like to add our voice to the policy discussion.

AELN is a key part of Vermont's statewide workforce development system, and any conversation around strengthening Vermont's CTE system should also consider the needs of Vermont's Adult Basic Education system as the "on-ramp-to-CTE" piece of the pipeline. The recommendations in the CTE Report "assume that Vermont sees CTE as a key part of its statewide workforce development system to meet evolving workforce needs to keep the state competitive." We agree that CTE programming is critical. The AELN respectfully submits this memo to supplement the CTE Report, with information about the role Adult Education and Literacy (sometimes referred to as Adult Basic Education) plays in CTE and workforce development in Vermont.

The AELN serves a different population than CTE Centers - our students are often not yet eligible or ready for CTE. Vermont's four Adult Education & Literacy (AEL) service providers have a **statutory role under Title 16** in providing adult education and a path to a high school diploma or GED. There is no other program in Vermont that offers a free path to a high school credential for all people 16 and up not in the public school system. Our students may come to us directly after dropping out of high school, or much later on in life, and they often lack the basic skills to participate successfully in tech ed programs, free college programs or workforce training. We serve a large number of English Language Learners, who must first learn English before moving through the workforce development pipeline. **We are the very first stop for Vermont's most vulnerable populations. Investing in AEL services upstream supports and increases the success of money invested further downstream in workforce development initiatives such as CTE.**

Students are at the center of our work, and the AEL providers offer a broad range of services that are specifically tailored to each student's needs. Our services change people's lives and build their asset bank, so that our students can then pursue further education or careers that align with their passions and goals. Success looks different for every student, and we work at each student's individual pace. We help students to identify concrete goals and then break those goals down into steps in a way that is more flexible and individualized than downstream programs. **AEL providers give students the opportunity to include career training as part of their high school completion requirements, allowing students to obtain their Diploma while participating in CTE programs.**

**AELN's Role in Workforce Development for Critical Occupations.** The grants that AEL providers receive from the State require Integrated Education and Training (IET) programming. AEL providers are direct partners with the VT Department of Labor, HireAbility and local School Districts and get student referrals from these entities. Some AEL providers also get direct referrals from the Department of Corrections and Community Justice Centers. An IET program includes the following three components:

1. Adult education and literacy activities
2. Workforce preparation activities
3. Workforce training in an in-demand industry

**As the State's only providers of IET programs, all AEL providers work directly with their local workforce development teams to address critical occupation needs in their region.** For example, The Tutorial Center is a member of the Bennington County Regional Commission which has been working on an Integrated Education and Training program for

early childhood education workers and LNAs in the Bennington area. NEKLS also has an IET focus on early childhood. Vermont Adult Learning's Energy Works program is an IET for weatherization, heat pump installation, and solar panel installation workforce needs. The program has trained 49 Vermonters in the skills needed to enter well-paying jobs in the emerging energy sector. The AELN has recently received a Sanders earmark for workforce development programs across the Network, which is helping all 4 AEL providers enhance their workforce development work. Please see Appendix A below for language that currently exists in statute regarding the connection between AEL services and workforce development.

**Community High School.** The AEL network is currently working with Community High School to develop processes for more seamless transitions from incarceration into the community. Many in need of educational services utilize opportunities while incarcerated, and we hope to increase the numbers of those who do so post-incarceration. Expected outcomes are increased rates of high school credentialing and overall work readiness.

**Students Served.** The AELN served approximately **1,837** students in fiscal year 2023. Below is a breakdown of student numbers per program statewide as well as student demographics per Center.

**Table 1. AELN Student Numbers Per Program**

	High School Completion Program	English Language Learning	Adult Basic Education
Fiscal Year 2022	384	390	925
Fiscal Year 2023	396	551	929

**Table 2. Student Demographics Per Center (FY22)**

AEL Student Demographics		CVABE	NEKLS	TTC	VAL
<b>Age Group</b>	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
<b>Gender</b>	Male	170	58	54	430
	Female	198	89	63	641
<b>Ethnicity</b>	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
	<b>Total BIPOC</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>398</b>
	White	261	129	98	672
<b>Labor Status</b>	Employed	147	61	30	457
	Unemployed	219	77	78	574
<b>Barriers to Employment</b>	Ex-offenders	17	1	2	16
	<b>English language learners / low literacy levels / cultural barriers</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>1073</b>

	Homeless/ runaway youth / foster care involved youth	11	3	3	36
	<b>Low income</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>180</b>
	<b>Individuals with disabilities</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>180</b>
	Single parents	34	8	9	63
	<b>Students that received &lt;12 of schooling</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>801</b>

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

The CTE Report recommends significant increased funding for CTE. While we do not disagree with this recommendation, **we ask that your Committee also consider the financial needs of AEL service providers when discussing this subject during the legislative session.** Most AEL providers are currently operating on deficits each year. We have avoided cutting programs only because of the one-time funding we secured in the last two state budgets (FY23 and FY24), but one-time funding is not a sufficient investment in Adult Basic Education. The FY24 Budget calls for a Study Committee to recommend solutions for ongoing, sustainable funding to Vermont’s four AEL providers, and we look forward to bringing this report to your Committee in mid January so it can be reviewed and discussed in conjunction with the CTE Report. Please see Appendix B for the Study Committee language.

**The Adult Education and Literacy Network will be requesting a base increase of \$500,000 in the FY24 Budget Adjustment Act to fill an existing need and budget gap for the current fiscal year.** Our funding request for fiscal year 2025 will depend on the recommendations that come from the Study Committee. We respectfully ask for your Committee’s support for our funding needs.

Adult Basic Education is the first step to further education and career goals, and we are a critical piece of the puzzle. Thank you for your interest in this subject. We are happy to answer any questions your Committee may have.

Sincerely,

The Adult Education & Literacy Network  
 Catherine Kalkstein, Central Vermont Adult Basic Education  
 Michelle Faust, Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, Inc.  
 Sean-Marie Oller, The Tutorial Center  
 Hal Cohen, Vermont Adult Learning

## APPENDIX A - AEL FINDINGS LANGUAGE IN ACT 183 OF 2022

The Legislature passed and the Governor signed [Act 183](#) in 2022. [Here is a summary of Act 183](#). Sec. 41 of the bill is findings language regarding Adult Education & Literacy. Here is the language of Act 183 Sec. 41:

### Sec. 41. ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY; FINDINGS

*The General Assembly finds:*

*(1) Adult education and literacy services are a key piece of the workforce development system and serve as the entryway into career readiness and workforce development for tens of thousands of our most vulnerable Vermonters, those with low literacy, undereducation, or those simply in need of increased skills so that they can succeed.*

*(2) 36,000 adults in Vermont do not have a high school credential, and tens of thousands more lack the skills to matriculate into and be successful in college, in career training programs, or both. Adult education and literacy providers are the first stop on the path to the transformative opportunities that Vermont is offering for these individuals.*

*(3) Adult education and literacy services help people build the assets they need to move out of poverty successfully, as well as the confidence to continue to move toward success throughout their lives. Students are supported to identify concrete goals and then break those goals down into steps. Students set goals in the domains of:*

- (A) family and life;*
- (B) academics; and*
- (C) career and college readiness*

## APPENDIX B - AEL STUDY COMMITTEE IN FY24 BUDGET

This language is found in Sec. E.504 of the [FY24 State Budget](#).

### *Sec. E.504 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND LITERACY HSCP STUDENT ACCESS STUDY; REPORT*

*(a) The High School Completion Program (HSCP) is experiencing decreased enrollment due to the COVID-19 pandemic, policy changes within the program, and lower literacy skills that limit acceptance into the program. Adult basic education programs overall are experiencing funding reductions due to decreased enrollment.*

*(b) There is created the Adult Education and Literacy HSCP Student Access Study Committee to review and report on decreased HSCP enrollment and subsequent adult basic education funding issues. The Committee shall make recommendations to the Joint Fiscal Committee, the General Assembly, and the Agency of Administration on or before January 15, 2024 to increase enrollment in HSCP.*

*(c) Membership. The Committee shall be composed of the following members:*

- (1) a current member of the House, who shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House;*
- (2) a current member of the Senate, who shall be appointed by the Committee on Committees;*
- (3) the Secretary of Education or designee;*
- (4) the Executive Director of Racial Equity or designee; and*
- (5) the Executive Director of Central Vermont Adult Basic Education or designee.*

*(d) Powers and duties. The Committee shall review and make recommendations to reduce barriers for vulnerable Vermonters, including English learner applicants to Adult Education Programs, including any discrepancies between admission and testing standards for English learner applicants and all other applicants. The Committee shall 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. The Committee shall include in its report any administrative changes that could be made to help achieve these goals.*

*(e) Assistance. The Committee shall have the administrative, technical, and legal assistance of the Agency of Education.*

*(f) The Committee shall submit a written report to the Joint Fiscal Committee, the General Assembly, and the Agency of Administration on or before January 15, 2024 with its findings and any recommendations for legislative action based on the analysis conducted pursuant to subsection (d) of this section. It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Committee report be used to inform fiscal year 2025 budget considerations and that the recommendations of the Committee be implemented to increase HSCP enrollment.*

*(g) The Secretary of Education or designee shall call the first meeting of the Committee. The Committee shall hold not more than five meetings, the first of which shall be on or before September 15, 2023.*