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## Massachusetts: A Case Study of Improvement and Growth of Adult Education Services

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John Comings  
Lisa Soricone

### INTRODUCTION

Federal funding for adult education has grown slowly over the last decade, but a handful of states have expanded their adult education services at a faster rate through state funding. In fact, seven states (California, Florida, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts, and North Carolina) account for 80% of all the state funds supporting adult education services (Chisman, 2002). These state adult education systems have been able to prove their worth to governors and legislators. Massachusetts is one of these states, and this case study explores how its adult education<sup>1</sup> system has been able to grow and improve dramatically over the last 15 years.

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<sup>1</sup>The term “adult education” throughout this chapter refers to instruction in adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English for speakers of other languages.

Massachusetts is geographically a small state, but it has a midsized population of approximately 6,379,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). The state's economy is largely based on research and development, service industries, and tourism, which represents a shift from the emphasis on agriculture in the 18th century and manufacturing in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries.<sup>2</sup> Reports from the Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC, a nonpartisan policy group) identified two challenges to the economy that have formed the foundation for current advocacy efforts in support of adult education services (Comings, Sum, & Uvin, 2000; Sum, Bahuguna, Fogg, Fogg, Harrington, & Palma, 1998). The first challenge is the limited growth of the workforce. Over the entire decade of the 1990s, the Massachusetts workforce grew by only 1.5%. Only three states had a smaller growth rate (Comings et al., 2000). Without foreign immigration, the workforce would have declined during that time period. For the foreseeable future, the state will depend on foreign immigration for its workforce growth (Sum et al., 1998). The second challenge is the development of a new economy built on a foundation of communications and information technology. This technology helps each worker be more productive, but the new economy requires a better-educated workforce. The MassINC reports identified the provision of English language services to immigrants and basic skills and high school equivalence training to undereducated workers as critical to developing a more educated workforce.

Comings et al. (2000) estimated the size of the population that needs these services by looking only at adults between the ages of 18 and 64, those who make up most of the state's workforce. The report found that:

- 195,000 adults did not speak English well;
- 280,000 adults spoke English well but did not have a high school diploma or GED;
- 667,000 adults spoke English well and had a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate but had literacy and math skills at Level 1 or 2 on the five-level National Adult Literacy Survey.

These three groups represent 35% of the state's 3.2 million workers,<sup>3</sup> and all of these adults, most of whom work, face a barrier to full participation

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<sup>2</sup>"Massachusetts" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <http://www.search.eb.com> [Accessed October 24, 2002]

<sup>3</sup>This figure refers to individuals aged 16 to 64 who are active in the labor force. It excludes full-time students, the incarcerated, and individuals not seeking employment.

in the new economy. The Comings et al. (2000) study noted that the skills needed for success in the labor force are related to those needed in the other adult roles of parent, family member, citizen, community member, and lifelong learner.

In the past 15 years, total state and federal funding for adult education services in Massachusetts increased from below \$4 million in 1987 to \$45 million a year in 2002. Two thirds of the system's present funding is from state revenues.<sup>4</sup> Over this same time period, the per-student expenditure grew from \$150 to \$2,000 per year.

The growth of funding in Massachusetts was supported by changes in the adult education system that occurred as the result of a comprehensive reform effort. That reform effort has been characterized by commitments to:

- Strong leadership and a sustained advocacy effort;
- Improvements in the quality of services at the expense of quantity;
- Institutionalization of staff and program development;
- The involvement of multiple resources to support students.

Each of these elements has contributed to the improvement and expansion of adult education services in Massachusetts.

The experience of Massachusetts offers important lessons to state adult education systems that are still trying to garner increased support from their political leadership. This case study first describes the history of adult education services in Massachusetts and provides an overview of the state's current adult education system. The case study then explores the reform movement that began in 1987 by focusing on the four commitments just listed. It concludes with the lessons that other states can learn from the experience of Massachusetts.

The case study draws on published and unpublished reports and on the personal reflections of five adult education leaders<sup>5</sup> who also read and commented on drafts of the chapter. This analysis is not meant to serve as an evaluation and, as a result, does not focus on unsuccessful initiatives and mistakes made during the reform process. The chapter describes what appear to be the most important elements contributing to the development of the adult education system in Massachusetts. This focus on successful

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<sup>4</sup>Sources of the PY02 (Program Year 2002) budget for adult education in Massachusetts broke down as follows: 65% state, 23% federal, and 12% other, including local contributions and all additional funding not directly granted to ACLS but containing a component that pertains to adult education (e.g., Even Start and Americorps).

<sup>5</sup>Bob Bickerton, Mina Reddy, David Rosen, Roberta Soolman, and Sally Waldron.

reform efforts provides useful insights to educators embarking on, or engaged in, the process of strengthening their adult education systems.

## HISTORY

The history of adult education services in Massachusetts is comprised of four distinct periods. The first period includes several efforts in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries that provided a foundation for the establishment of a system. The second period began in the 1960s with the passage of federal legislation that authorized funding of programs specifically targeted to adults seeking to acquire basic skills, English literacy, or a high school equivalency. The third period began in the late 1980s, when a serious effort to expand and improve adult education services began to bring coherence to a disconnected set of programs. The fourth period began in 1998 with the enactment of the federal Workforce Investment Act.

### The Early History

Martin (1970) describes this early history in the following way. Massachusetts was one of the first states to recognize the importance of offering publicly supported learning opportunities to adults. In 1847, First Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education Horace Mann proposed a law that authorized cities and towns to appropriate money to support schools for the instruction of adults in reading, writing, English grammar, arithmetic, and geography. As the state's immigrant population grew in the latter part of the 19th century, programs to teach English and citizenship were established.

By the 1950s, the priority of adult education had shifted toward high school equivalency programs, and by the end of the 1960s, the GED tests had become the principal means through which the state awarded a high school equivalency. Through the 1950s and early 1960s, the state government showed little concern with adult education programs. At the end of this period, the most significant form of adult education services in the state consisted of volunteer-based tutoring instruction provided by privately funded local organizations. For more than 100 years, Massachusetts had acknowledged that adult education was a state responsibility but had provided very little funding for it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>This is true with the possible exception of the turn-of-the century immigration (1890–1910) period, during which per capita expenditures for citizenship classes were significant, but accurate data on these expenditures is unavailable.

## **Establishing a Foundation**

In 1966, the state government commitment increased with funding from the new federal Adult Education Act (AEA). As a result of the AEA, Massachusetts established its first comprehensive adult learning centers (Martin, 1970). One of the most significant aspects of the AEA was its requirement to appoint a state director of adult education, as this position provided the first statewide leadership for the field (National Institute for Literacy, 1995). The AEA also helped bring about in 1967 the first study of the status and needs of adult education in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Adult Education Planning Project (MAEPP) surveyed adult education, determined problem areas, and made recommendations. MAEPP documented the fragmentation of adult education services when it identified 83 different state agencies, scattered among different departments or reporting directly to the governor, that had some responsibility for adult education services.

Adult education services were supported through the 1970s solely with federal funds, through the AEA and programs such as Model Cities<sup>7</sup> and the Community Education and Training Act (CETA). The first state appropriation for adult education of \$600,000 was finally made in 1982. A successful effort by advocates in 1985 helped to raise the appropriation to \$2 million. By 1987, annual state and federal funding for adult education had increased to almost \$4 million.

At the end of this second period, Massachusetts had expanded its adult education services and built a foundation, supported by a combination of state and federal funding, on which an adult education system could be built. Despite this progress, the fragmentation of services identified by MAEPP still continued. Adult educators faced the challenge of creating a coordinated and effective system to serve adult students. Had they not met that challenge, services would probably have continued with meager funding and little state commitment.

## **Building an Effective Adult Education System**

The National Center on Education and the Economy (1995) states that during the 1980s, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and

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<sup>7</sup>The Model Cities project was an inner-city revitalization program of the Department of Housing and Urban Development launched in 1966 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty.

the U.S. Department of Labor became involved in supporting educational services for adults or expanding existing support. These departments were interested in improving adult education services as a way to meet their agencies' goals. At the same time, the U.S. Department of Education pursued its own efforts to strengthen state adult education systems with technical assistance and research. Massachusetts became a partner in this effort when it constituted an advisory committee to look at adult education, community education, and student services. A group of leaders in the field requested the formation of an extended committee, which included one advisory committee member plus the group of leaders, to focus on adult education. The extended committee approached the Commissioner of Education requesting the establishment of a system of adult education. He established a Bureau of Adult Education and allowed the director to report directly to the commissioner. The Board of Education also established the right of every Massachusetts resident to obtain the basic academic and communication skills expected of a high school graduate, regardless of age, and the Massachusetts Department of Education (MDOE) developed the state's first adult education 4-year plan (1986–1990).

The establishment of the Bureau of Adult Education led to two significant actions. First, MDOE hired a new director who had the support of the adult education leadership. The adult education leaders on the extended committee negotiated to participate in the search for the director. MDOE agreed to this request because it lacked expertise in adult education. Second, MDOE convened task forces on program effectiveness, funding, staff development and certification, and high school equivalency. The activities of these task forces culminated in a set of recommendations that guided development of the second 4-year plan (1990–1994). Although the reform movement started in 1987 with the convening of the task forces, the implementation of reform started with this second 4-year plan.

This plan had two initiatives. One was based on the need to strengthen the existing array of adult education programs and services and forge them into a comprehensive and effective system. This was accomplished through the establishment of the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), which provided technical assistance and training to build the programs' capacity and link funding to specific measures of program quality (World Education, 1992). The second initiative was a planned expansion of the system, which would close the gap between supply and demand of instructional services in stages, but there was no political will at the time to fund that expansion.

In 1993, that political will began to develop when adult education advocates argued that adult education should be included in the state's Education Reform Act (ERA). Once this idea gained acceptance, the ERA included the stipulation that the Department of Education, in coordination with other state agencies, should develop a comprehensive system, subject to appropriation, for the delivery of adult education services that would lead to universal adult literacy, better employment opportunities, and adults being better equipped to carry out their roles as family members and citizens. The addition of adult education to this legislation expanded and clarified the scope of adult education programs and set adult education objectives for the Department of Education. These objectives included:

- Development of a full continuum of services that take an adult from the lowest level of literacy or English language proficiency through high school completion leading to advanced education and training.
- A network of trained, full-time professional instructors, qualified to provide high quality effective services.
- A strong documentation and evaluation capacity that would enable the state to determine which methods of instruction and means of service delivery are most effective in educating adults.
- Coordinated accountability mechanisms that simplify the existing reporting and refunding processes. (Education Reform Act, Chapter 69, Section 1H)<sup>8</sup>

Section 75 of the ERA also established the Adult Education Committee, the purpose of which was to study the adult education system and then recommend adequate and appropriate funding mechanisms. The Committee consisted of single representatives from the Departments of Education, Public Welfare, and Employment and Training, along with the education and human services secretaries, the governor or lieutenant governor, two members of the Education and the Ways and Means Committees selected by the Senate president and Speaker of the House, the secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO, and not less than five representatives drawn from a diverse cross-section of adult education providers and advocacy groups.

The committee's final report, known as the *Grossman Report* (MDOE, 1995, named after the committee chair), began building political will in the state legislature by persuasively documenting the huge need for adult

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<sup>8</sup> Available at [http://www.doe.mass.edu/edreform/erfacts/98/erfacts98\\_a.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/edreform/erfacts/98/erfacts98_a.html)

education compared with the tiny fraction of potential students served by the adult education system. The report also brought attention to the thousands of adults who were waiting for classes, showing how the system did not meet the active demand for services. The committee found it difficult to clearly identify the number of people in need of adult education services and instead focused on the size of active demand, indicated by waiting lists. The report recommended a 5-year plan to close the gap between the demand for and supply of adult education. To achieve this, the plan called for annual budget increases of \$7 million over a period of 5 years, amounting to a \$35 million increase overall. The report recommended that the increased funds should also be used to continue improving the quality of services. In 1996, shortly after the report was released, the state doubled its annual adult education budget to \$8 million, and for the first time, state funding for adult education exceeded federal funding. In each subsequent year, until 2000, the state increased the amount of money it devoted to adult education. By the end of this period, the state had a comprehensive adult education system that could implement, improve, and expand services.

### **The Workforce Investment Act**

In 1998, most federal support to adult education services came under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA; Balliro & Bickerton, 1999; Irwin, 1999; Northwest Regional Literacy Resource Center, 1999; National Institute for Literacy, 1998). The WIA consolidated more than 50 employment, training, and literacy programs into four block grants states could use for adult education and family literacy, disadvantaged youth, adult employment and training services, and the rehabilitation system. The WIA's focus on preparing people for employment and on family literacy did not necessarily diminish the importance of services for adults pursuing their education for other purposes, such as citizenship or personal improvement. The MDOE has maintained its commitment to remaining responsive to adult students and the goals they articulate.

The WIA established the National Reporting System (NRS) for performance accountability. The performance measures focus on four areas (core measures) of student achievement:

- Demonstrated improvement in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, and speaking in the English language, numeracy, problem solving, English language acquisition, and other literacy skills.

- Placement in, retention in, or completion of postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment, or career advancement.
- Receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- Other objective, quantifiable measures, as identified by the state agency and that can include input from local providers.

Each state's department of education must identify expected performance levels for its programs that show student improvement, and then negotiate an agreement with the U.S. Secretary of Education. Each state must also report annually to the Secretary of Education on its progress with respect to the performance measures, and this information, including comparisons with other states, is made public (National Institute for Literacy, 1998).

The WIA also includes a requirement for states to develop their own 5-year plan for improving adult education. These plans must be developed in consultation with literacy providers in the state and must include a description of the process used for public participation and comment on the plan. Each state plan must include an objective assessment of the literacy needs of individuals in the state. Each state is required to include specific goals for the first 3 years of its plan and is judged on the degree to which it meets those goals. Under the WIA, states were given the option to submit a plan by April 1999 or to request a year to transition and prepare a unified plan that would respond to each area (title) of the new legislation. Massachusetts opted to take this year of transition. This period allowed the adult education leadership to gather more feedback from the field in shaping its new state plan and grant application process.

The adult education leadership within the MDOE anticipated the changes that the WIA would bring about and prepared for these changes in a number of ways. The state had already begun to develop a program accountability system and to forge links with the workforce development system. Because the state had already put a structure for monitoring student-articulated goals in place, Massachusetts had its greatest success in responding to the WIA in the area of accountability. In addition, initiatives aimed at strengthening programs throughout the 1990s prepared the state to meet the performance demands of the new legislation.

Nonetheless, the WIA poses a number of persistent challenges. First, for programs that serve the lowest level learners, the WIA's outcome measures do not permit reporting of the progress within levels that many learners experience. Second, the outcomes that the WIA focuses on do not necessarily coincide with individual student goals. In some cases, individuals seek to learn to read for strictly personal reasons (e.g., greater

independence or to read to children). Massachusetts chose to evaluate outcomes for both WIA standards and student goals. Although the legislation did not preclude such an approach, it also did not provide additional funds to carry it out. Third, the WIA's requirements for follow-up on participants in adult education programs created a significant data collection burden for programs. Massachusetts provided funding for student follow-up and, as a consequence, exceeded its WIA requirement in this area. In the future, follow-up will involve data matching with Social Security numbers, but the collection of Social Security numbers as a means to track students remains a contentious issue. Some in the field view it as an infringement on student privacy rights. Finally, the WIA's requirement of measuring program performance based on standard, reliable, and valid instruments did not provide sufficient time for states to develop appropriate assessment systems. The demands of the legislation prompted Massachusetts to rely on existing standardized tests, which may not capture students' full range of skill development and progress. Consequently, Massachusetts has adopted existing assessment tools in the short run but plans to develop its own assessment system to meet both federal and state-selected outcomes.

The accountability system developed in anticipation of the WIA provided data for a report that made a case for greater support for adult education services. In 2000, MassINC published *New Skills for a New Economy: Adult Education's Key Role in Sustaining Economic Growth and Expanding Opportunity* (Comings et al., 2000). This report assessed the need for adult education services, estimated the size of the potential student population, and called for expansion and improvement of the existing adult education system. It resulted in putting adult education on the front page of the state's newspapers and reignited the political support that had waned since the *Grossman Report*. The governor and the state legislature proposed additional spending and new programs, but the economic downturn came at the same time. However, even though the last 2 years have produced cuts and even the elimination of many state services, adult education has been able to hold on to most of its gains.

## THE PRESENT SYSTEM

### Administration and Funding

MDOE administers adult education services through its Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) unit. The ACLS has about 35 profes-

sional staff and has been directed by Bob Bickerton, a former adult education teacher and program director, since 1988. ACLS oversees a planning process with the field and maintains relationships with the governor's administration and the state legislature around adult education. Its main functions are managing and distributing state and federal funds, collecting data about the adult education system, and supporting efforts to improve services. MDOE provides the majority of funding for adult education, but other state agencies provide funding as well. These agencies include the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Transitional Assistance, Commonwealth Corporation,<sup>9</sup> the Board of Library Commissioners, and the Board of Higher Education.<sup>10</sup>

Programs also receive funding from other sources. Some cities and towns include adult education in their school or city budgets. In 1995, 35 school districts reported school committee expenditures for adult education that ranged from \$125 to \$315,617 and totaled slightly more than \$2 million. Very little data are available about fee-based services offered by private for-profit and not-for-profit corporations, or the amount of private funding invested in adult education services. Figure 4.1 provides an overview of the sources of adult education funding. The data presented here cover only the state and federally funded programs.

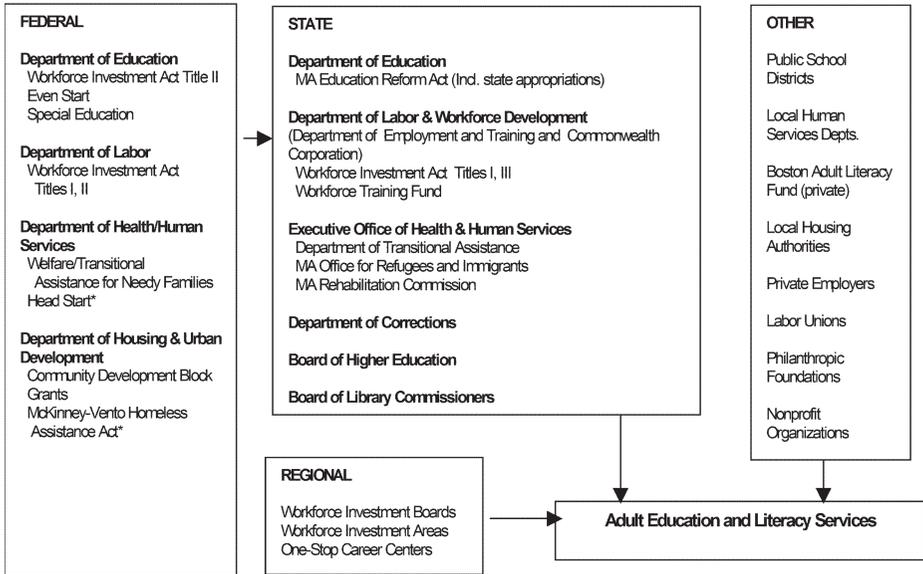
The network of providers in Massachusetts is diverse, and programs compete against each other for funding. The largest share of ACLS funding goes to community-based organizations (CBOs). The next largest share goes to school districts. A smaller share goes to community colleges and other postsecondary institutions, municipal agencies, correctional institutions, local workforce investment boards, and other workforce development agencies, as well as businesses and unions. Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of funds by type of service provider.

Service providers that submit applications for ACLS grants compete within their geographic region. An ACLS formula that takes the need for services into account by using the most recent census data determines funds available to regions. In addition, programs can apply for a smaller number of specific statewide set-asides that target funds for special populations (e.g., correctional or workplace education) or for support services

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<sup>9</sup>Commonwealth Corporation is a quasi-public organization that administers and delivers a variety of workforce development initiatives that serve the needs of businesses and workers.

<sup>10</sup>This refers to the Board of Higher Education's funding of Developmental Education at community colleges.



\* Indicates that funding goes directly to local programs.  
 Note: Public School Districts use local tax-base funding for adult education.

FIG. 4.1. Funding sources for adult education.

to help address impediments to learning, such as child care and transportation. Special grants are also offered to improve services for students with learning disabilities.

The size of individual grants is determined using a series of formulas embedded in a rates system. This system applies student-hour rates to proposed services. These rates vary by type of service and represent a commitment to paying the real costs of adult education services. The system is tied to a set of guidelines that describe minimum standards for effective programs and outline what is needed for different program aspects (e.g., teacher–student ratio limits, instructional intensity and duration, minimum levels of program and staff development, and teacher salaries and fringe benefits).<sup>11</sup> According to the panel of stakeholders, this system has greatly reduced problems associated with unrealistic requirements and unfunded mandates, and represents an institutionalized effort to bring equity to funding decisions.

<sup>11</sup>The Massachusetts Department of Education *Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education* are available via the ACLS website <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/wiatitleii/adeguide.pdf>

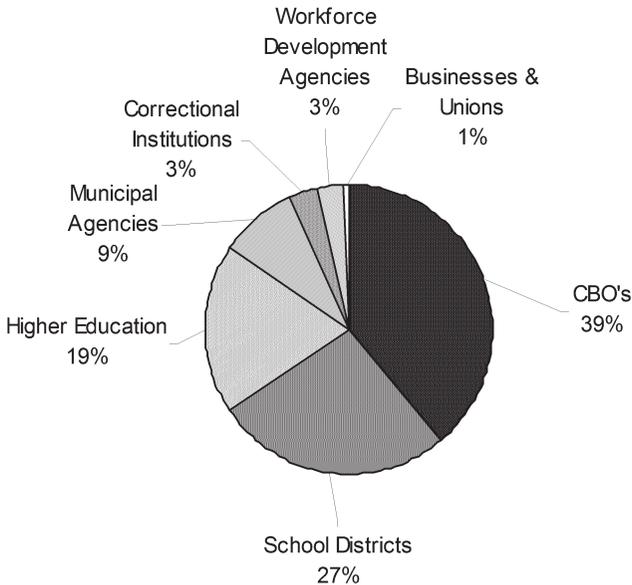


FIG. 4.2. Distribution of funds by adult education service provider. Total exceeds 100% because of rounding. Based on data for PY01 from "Massachusetts Adult Basic Education Overview: 21 June 2001," *MDOE Report to the Governor's Task Force on Adult Education and Training* (MDOE, 2001a).

## Programs

Adult education programs in Massachusetts vary in format, size, intensity, and location. They provide classroom-based instruction, one-on-one tutoring, and combinations of the two approaches. In addition, the state is currently piloting programs to test a distance learning model as part of a national project. Some programs offer 5–8 hours per week for a class, whereas others offer up to 15–20 hours per week. Some programs run in closed cycles of a few months to a year, and others have ongoing classes with open-entry admission to fill seats of students who drop out. Classes are held in a variety of venues, including community centers, social service agencies, workplaces, libraries, prisons, community colleges, churches, and schools (MDOE, 1996).

Adult education programs in Massachusetts provide instruction in adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Programs offer a range of services to meet diverse student needs: family literacy, workplace education,

corrections education, education for the homeless, native language literacy instruction, citizenship education, health education, and education for adults with disabilities.

ACLS-supported programs are funded to provide a continuous sequence of instructional opportunities that enable students to progress from the most basic level of proficiency to a level of proficiency sufficient to meet their goals. For native speakers of English and immigrants who have fluency in English, programs provide two levels of basic skills instruction. For other immigrants, the programs provide three levels of ESOL instruction. For students whose English literacy skills are above the eighth grade level, programs provide preparation for the GED tests or another form of instruction that leads to an adult secondary school credential. To accommodate learner progress, each program must offer at least three levels of instruction within the same time period (morning, for example), although bilingual or native language literacy instruction may be limited to two levels. Recently, a new type of service was added to help adults successfully transition from adult education to further academic education in college or to specialized skill training.

Although most adult education services in the state are organized around classes, the work of volunteer tutors provides an important additional form of instruction for adult learners. The state makes use of volunteers in two ways. The largest share of funding goes to support volunteers who supplement instruction provided by paid teachers. The ACLS provides direct support for volunteer services through the Commonwealth Literacy Corps (CLC). Since its inception in 1987, the CLC has recruited, trained, and placed more than 10,000 volunteers in programs throughout the state. At present, ACLS estimates the number of its volunteers to be between 2,000 and 2,500. ACLS also funds volunteer services as the primary form of instruction. In Massachusetts, such services are provided through Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts, the Eastern Massachusetts Literacy Council (a Laubach Literacy affiliate), and independent church and community-based efforts.

## **Practitioners<sup>12</sup>**

Practitioners have a range of educational and professional backgrounds. Some hold K–12 certification and have spent several years in school class-

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<sup>12</sup>Data was provided by ACLS with the help of Donna Cornellier, management information systems administrator.

rooms, whereas others have entered the field directly. In Program Year 2002 (PY02),<sup>13</sup> ACLS-funded programs employed 1,824 practitioners. This number includes teachers (74%), administrators (15%),<sup>14</sup> and counselors (11%).

Adult education teachers are a highly educated group. In PY02, 94% of teachers had at least a 4-year college degree, and 47% also had a graduate degree. Unfortunately, there is a high turnover rate among teachers. Fifty-seven percent have been with their programs for less than 2 years, and only 19% have been with their program for more than 5 years.<sup>15</sup> As teachers work in adult education, they gain valuable experience and frequently move on to other more promising jobs. As the state director notes, the adult education workforce often serves as a “farm team” for the K–12 system.

ACLS has been committed to improving the working conditions of adult educators, in part by increasing the number of full-time teaching positions. Currently, 11% of teaching positions are full-time.<sup>16</sup> In addition, ACLS has attempted to improve teacher salaries. The ACLS Rates System supports a salary rate for teachers of \$17.48 per hour (PY03) if fringe benefits are provided and \$21.85 if benefits are not provided, but it encourages local programs to use matching sources to increase pay beyond this level. If programs choose not to provide the suggested salaries, they are required to return the difference between the recommended minimum level and actual salaries. The potential savings cannot be used for other program purposes. ACLS hopes that this policy will help to ensure higher salary levels for all adult educators.

ACLS grants fund teachers for time spent in preparation, follow-up, initial assessment, recruitment, progress assessment, translation, counseling, and staff development. ACLS has been increasing this support regularly in an attempt to make adult education teachers’ salaries more competitive with comparable jobs, such as those of K–12 teachers. Although salaries vary across programs, only 6% of teachers currently earn below the suggested salary level.

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<sup>13</sup> Program year corresponds to the fiscal calendar by which programs are funded. It runs from July 1 through June 30.

<sup>14</sup> Many administrators also act as teachers and counselors.

<sup>15</sup> Figures are for PY02.

<sup>16</sup> As the collection of ACLS data has changed, comparable percentages for previous years were not available. Comings, Sum, and Uvin (2000) reported that between 1994 and 1998 the number of full-time positions (including administrators, teachers, and counselors) more than doubled, reaching 557 of a total 1,535 staff members (which included teachers, administrators, counselors, and other staff).

## Students

At present, the state adult education system serves about 24,000 adults. The statewide waiting list includes more than 21,000 potential students.<sup>17</sup> Half of those on the waiting list are seeking English language services, for which potential students can wait up to 1 year, and the wait is longest in urban areas (Comings et al., 2000). The Massachusetts Department of Education reports that in PY02, 57% of students were enrolled in ESOL services, 30% in ABE services, and 13% in ASE services. Approximately 60% of the students were women. Whites (some of whom were immigrants) were the largest group in the system but accounted for only 26% of all students. Hispanics (most of whom were immigrants) were the next-largest group at 23%; 19% of students were African American (some of whom were African or Afro-Caribbean immigrants); 12% were Asian (most of whom were immigrants); and roughly 1% were Native American or Alaskan Native. The gender, racial, and ethnic mix of students has remained stable over the last several years.<sup>18</sup>

The majority of all students grew up speaking a language other than English at home, but English remains the single most common first language. Spanish is the second most common, followed by Portuguese and Haitian Creole. In PY02, 72% of the students were between the ages of 19 and 44, 7% were between 16 and 18 years old, and 21% were over the age of 45. In PY02, slightly more than half (59%) of all students were employed in the labor force, and 25% were unemployed but looking for work. The others were homemakers, retired, or not actively looking for work. The proportion of students receiving public assistance was 16%. As of PY02, 38% of students had a high school credential, 37% had some high school education, and 25% had completed eighth grade or less.

## Reports on the Effectiveness of the System

Two sources of information provide an indication of the success of the ACLS commitment to quality. The first is an outside evaluation, the MassINC study, and the second is the most recent performance report of the ACLS. The MassINC study (Comings et al., 2000) indicates the ways in which Massachusetts has become more successful at helping students meet their goals. The study looked at data from the program year 1998

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<sup>17</sup>This is an estimate made by ACLS staff in October 2002.

<sup>18</sup>PY02 data was provided by ACLS with the help of Donna Cornellier, management information systems administrator.

(July 1, 1997–June 30, 1998) for 19,800 participants in adult education programs across the state and looked at learning gains, hours of instruction, the probability of obtaining a high school credential, and the probability of finding a job. The authors of the study found that 56% of students in ABE programs gained at least one grade level equivalent (GLE), and 63% of students in ESOL classes gained at least one student performance level (SPL). Roughly 30% of ABE students gained at least two grade levels and a similar proportion of ESOL students gained at least two SPLs.

Internal reports on the system's effectiveness indicate positive results. According to a report issued by ACLS (MDOE, 2002), in PY00:

- 33% of students enrolled in ASE earned a high school diploma or equivalent.
- 39% of students who indicated they wanted to obtain a job actually did so within a single year.
- 39% of students credit the program with helping them to improve their own health and the health of their family.
- 55% of parents credit the program with enabling them to read and write more with their children.
- 17% of students at the highest level credit the program in any given year with enabling them to enroll in college or a postsecondary training program.

In addition, the state's adult education programs in PY00 averaged more than 120 hours of instruction per student per year, a rate well above the average of 97 hours in PY98 (Comings et al., 2000) and above the national average of 66 hours (U.S. Dept. of Ed. estimate for PY01). Overall, students in Massachusetts receive more hours of instruction than their counterparts across the country. In their study of adult learners in Massachusetts, Comings et al. (2000) found that as students had more hours of instruction, they were more likely to achieve learning gains. The authors found that ABE and ESOL students who received at least 150 hours of instruction had a 75% chance of achieving a learning gain of at least one level.<sup>19</sup> Hours of instruction were also positively related to obtaining a high school credential, and more hours of instruction seemed to offset other characteristics, such as age, ability at the beginning of instruction, and receipt of public assistance, that reduce the likelihood that a participant

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<sup>19</sup>This refers to one grade level equivalent for non-ESOL students, and one SPL for ESOL learners.

will earn a high school credential. In PY02, it took students an average of 129 hours to achieve an educational gain of at least one grade level equivalent or student performance level (MDOE, 2002). The challenge, as Comings et al. (2000) point out, is to keep students in programs long enough to achieve such learning gains and reach their goals. Massachusetts appears to be making progress in this area.

With respect to WIA's core performance measures, in PY01 the state exceeded its targets for 7 of the 10 performance measures for demonstrated improvement in literacy skills. In addition, it surpassed the target of 37% GED (or other high school equivalence certificate) completion with an actual rate of 43%. Rates for placement in postsecondary education or training, and placement or retention in unsubsidized employment, were also well above targets set in the state plan (MDOE, 2001b).

### **KEY ELEMENTS OF ADULT EDUCATION REFORM IN MASSACHUSETTS**

Massachusetts now has an effective system of adult education that provides a wide variety of services for a modest number of students. This system of programs developed through a process of comprehensive reform. Four components of that reform appear to be critical to its success: strong leadership and a sustained advocacy effort, improvements in the quality of services at the expense of quantity, institutionalization of staff and program development, and the involvement of multiple resources to support students.

Strong leadership and sustained advocacy have been the backbone of the reform effort, fostering growth and pushing for continued improvements. The funding growth that persistent advocacy efforts brought about provided the opportunity to improve the quality of services through program and staff development. The variety of provider agencies and support organizations allowed the system to serve a diverse group of learners and their different needs, while competition for funding encouraged the continual strengthening and enrichment of programs.

#### **Strong Leadership and Sustained Advocacy Effort**

During the reform period, Massachusetts benefited from the hard work of a leadership group of adult educators who committed decades of their

professional lives to supporting the advancement of the field. In the early 1980s, this leadership group came together in informal meetings to share ideas and strengthen their work. Frustrated by the low profile of adult education in the state Department of Education and recognizing that policy should be informed by experience in the field, this leadership group fought to participate in policy discussions. The group met with the chair of the Ways and Means Committee in the House of Representatives. The chair advised the group that they needed to convince politicians that the people who were served by and worked in the adult education system were a voting constituency and to demonstrate that the services produced positive outcomes. This helped define the future advocacy effort.

When the reauthorization of the Adult Education Act required each state to develop a plan through a process of public review, the leadership group told the Board of Education that they would manage the review. The review was held at the State House and included testimony by students and teachers. It educated the board, which previously knew very little about adult education. After this event, the group's persistent lobbying led to the establishment of a Bureau of Adult Education (which evolved into ACLS). The Bureau director reported directly to the commissioner of education, and a professional with experience in adult education was hired to fill that position.

At the time that Bob Bickerton assumed the position of state director in 1988, annual expenditures for adult education were \$150 per student, and the system was highly fragmented. Bickerton pursued a vision of a strong adult education system and established a local and national reputation for competence and professionalism that garnered further support for the field within the MDOE and the state administration.

Without a simultaneous "bottom up" effort from the field, however, Bickerton's vision could not be realized. Operating outside the MDOE, the leadership group has advocated for the advancement of the field for more than 20 years. Today, these efforts are largely based in the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE), formed in 1992 through the merger of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Literacy and the Massachusetts Association for Adult and Continuing Education. MCAE has a broad membership of more than 1,000 adult educators engaged in instruction, counseling, administration, policy, and research, and it supports the field through both an annual conference (called *Network*) and ongoing activities that provide information for public policy, such as informing the public of impending changes in legislation and funding. The organization benefits from state funding, which provides staff and supports the

conference and other professional development efforts. Membership fees provide support for advocacy work, and volunteers carry out much of the organization's work (MCAE, 2002).

MCAE provides strong leadership in the area of public information as it develops and disseminates information regarding current and emerging adult basic education policies to its members, policymakers, and public officials (MCAE, 2002). Volunteers from its board and membership are influential in advocating for adult basic education services by providing up-to-date information on what is happening in the field and what educators can do to help, such as contacting legislators about urgent issues (MCAE, 2002). Contributing to the strength of the organization is MCAE's pursuit of both ongoing and crisis mode advocacy efforts. Among its regular efforts, the organization has a public policy committee that meets monthly to stay abreast of changes and strategize for the future. Annual activities include invitations to legislators to visit local programs, visits by students and practitioners to the State House, and a postcard campaign in which graduating and wait-listed students contact their legislators to acknowledge or request further support for adult education. MCAE regularly works to instill the idea that advocacy is the work of all educators, students, and other adult education supporters. As state funding can fluctuate, the MCAE leadership feels that the field requires an advocacy system like MCAE's in place to step forward when necessary. Over time, the organization has adapted its tactics in times of crisis, changing from phone trees to e-mail lists, enabling MCAE to mobilize both its membership and the wider field of adult education practitioners and supporters across the state.

MCAE has forged links with groups that are stakeholders in the adult education system, including organized labor, welfare, and immigrant and refugee groups. MCAE also works with the Massachusetts Association of Teachers to Speakers of Other Languages (MATSOL), which voices the sociopolitical and employment concerns of ESOL educators. MATSOL recently joined with MCAE to form the Working Conditions Committee, which focuses its efforts on improving employment and compensation for adult educators and publicly recognizing exemplary employers. MCAE also works with adult learners through the Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (MassAAL), which involves current and former students in activities that support adult education instruction across the state.

Advocates work in support of adult education at a variety of levels. The ABE Advisory Council advises the Board of Education on policy issues. At the operational level, the ABE Directors' Council (an elected body of program directors) represents ACLS-funded programs and practitioners

regarding policy issues, communication among providers and policymakers, and the development of strategies to improve the status of the profession. Adult education in Massachusetts has also benefited from the support at the state level from many legislators and both Democratic and Republican governors. The House even has a literacy caucus that meets periodically to stay abreast of current issues in the field.

The hard work of committed advocates over the last two decades has helped increase and sustain funding to support the effective implementation of adult education programs. The effectiveness of this effort was evidenced in November 2001, when the PY02 budget included a nearly 50% cut to adult education, a change that would have meant closing nearly all publicly funded programs by February 2002. Immediately, MCAE and its fellow advocacy groups rose to the occasion. Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, the field launched a campaign that included hundreds of student visits to the State House; thousands of phone calls, letters, and faxes to legislators from students and practitioners; and a media blitz of more than 150 articles, letters to the editor, editorials, and news clips on radio and TV. This effort was supported by classroom materials, which explained to students that, as members of a democracy, they had the right and responsibility to advocate for the services they needed. As a result of these efforts, all but 2% of the adult education budget was restored, and legislators congratulated MCAE and its colleagues for the best organized advocacy efforts they had ever seen (Rosen, 2002).

In addition to the sustained efforts of organizations that advocate for adult education, the growth of the field has been supported by several reports that served as outside evaluations of the field and identified strengths and key areas for improvement. In 1967, the Massachusetts Adult Education Planning Project surveyed adult education, highlighting the fragmentation in services and recommending improvements. The 1995 *Grossman Report* documented the need for expanded adult education services and recommended a 5-year plan that included annual funding increases of \$7 million. In 2000, MassINC released *New Skills for a New Economy: Adult Education's Key Role in Sustaining Economic Growth and Expanding Opportunity* (Comings et al., 2000). The report identified the challenge to the state's economic growth posed by an undereducated workforce and focused on the important role of adult education in supporting economic growth. The report used data from MDOE to provide information on the current system's effectiveness and make recommendations for system improvements. Rather than resisting these external reports on the adult education system, ACLS and MCAE have embraced them as

opportunities to draw attention to adult education and its importance as an additional element of the state's educational system. Given its bipartisan nature and reputation for accuracy in research, MassINC has proved to be an important ally by raising the visibility of adult education as an issue and also validating the work of the field, building partnerships, and garnering the interest of influential leaders in the state.

Although advocacy for adult education in Massachusetts has been quite successful, a number of challenges to success persist. When state income decreases, the adult education budget will always be in jeopardy. To be ready for these times, the adult education system needs a strong sustained community of advocates. The combination of paid staff and volunteers has been essential to advocacy success. The field faces the challenge of building a new generation of activists as committed to advancing the field of adult education as those who have fought these battles for several decades. Such continuity will be vital not only to advocacy efforts, but also to the continued improvement of the system overall.

### **Improving Service Quality**

A key decision adult education leaders made at the beginning of the reform effort was to change the system's goal from trying to serve as many students as possible with the funds available to serving only the number of students who could receive high-quality services with the available funds. In PY91, the system purported to serve 40,000 students; however, many received as few as 12 hours per year. Rather than waiting for additional funding to become available, the adult education leadership committed to improving quality by cutting the number of students served with the existing budget. ACLS cut the 40,000 students by two thirds, to 12,000. This meant that new funding would be put into program and staff development, and only once quality began to improve would the number of students served begin to increase. As an important step toward improving the quality of services, Massachusetts began a significant effort to define quality and measure it.

***Defining Quality.*** In seeking to define good quality programs, ACLS has worked to gather input from the field to help shape its policies and prescriptions. The effort to define quality services is focused both on process and outcomes. The goal of this effort is to ensure that programs operate in a way that provides students with a real opportunity to learn and that students are, in fact, benefiting from those services.

In an effort to define good quality programs, the ACLS articulated a uniform set of guidelines for programs it will fund. *Principles for Effective Literacy and Basic Skills Programs* (Massachusetts Interagency Literacy Group, 1990) emerged from the recommendations of practitioner task forces in the late 1980s and has been regularly updated with field input. The guidelines followed the goal of increasing resources for each student and put it into a set of limits on how many students programs could serve with the funding they were provided. In addition, they established a floor under which program quality would be judged insufficient.

The guidelines cover the areas of student services (including instructional hours and class size), counseling requirements, program and staff development (including requirements for paid time for staff and program development, orientation for new staff, and creation of community partnerships), and administration (including requirements for matching funds, minimum coordination time, fiscal procedures, and minimum recommended salary rates). The guidelines include requirements, such as minimum contact hours, as well as suggestions for additional elements or policies to strengthen services, such as provision of child care and transportation to students.

***Monitoring Quality and Measuring Outcomes.*** As part of its efforts to maintain and foster quality services, ACLS monitors both processes and outcomes. Once during each program's 5-year grant, ACLS conducts a program review. Program reviews cover quantitative outcome data but also include a formal 2- to 5-day monitoring visit, during which ACLS staff observe classes and interview staff, students, administrators, and advisory councils. Reviewers employ a checklist of indicators of program quality developed from the guidelines.<sup>20</sup> The monitoring visits are intended to assist program planning for continuous improvement, support the development of new initiatives, provide assistance to programs with compliance or performance issues, and facilitate the sharing of best practices among programs (MDOE, 2001b).

Once a program has been funded, it must demonstrate satisfactory performance for student participation, student goal achievement, and educational gains. Programs that achieve less than one standard deviation below

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<sup>20</sup>The indicators of program quality for the monitoring process are as follows: student educational progress; family, career, and community impact; professional development; program planning; program management and accountability; data collection and evaluation; instructional support services; curriculum development and implementation; instructional methods; and community linkages.

the statewide average for these indicators are placed on probation. As ACLS also wants to acknowledge program success, it is currently developing a system through which a program's past success is factored into subsequent applications for funding. Details of this system are still developing, but ACLS is committed to formally recognizing the effectiveness of its programs by including performance data in the scoring of funding proposals. In the next round of grant applications, programs that have a record of 5 years of strong performance will not be required to complete the usual lengthy proposal; instead, a record of performance will serve as their application.

Early in the reform effort, the adult education leadership in the state decided that it had to do a better job of measuring the impact and outcomes of its services to garner additional support. This effort began with planning for the 5-year state plan, *Building Effective Adult Basic Education*, in 1990. Under this plan, ACLS initiated a multi-year process to develop more precise definitions of educational attainment levels, which were not necessarily keyed to K–12 grade levels, for ABE and ESOL. These levels would have criteria for entry and exit of a level, along with measures to assess progress. As the pressure to measure results grew, ACLS leadership decided it had to identify uniform measures of progress. As a result, ACLS returned to grade levels for ABE and ASE students and the 10 student performance levels (SPLs) from the Basic English Skills Test (BEST) for ESOL students.

In addition to this preliminary work, *Building Effective Adult Basic Education* also explicitly called for a field-based process to design an accountability system. In 1992, the ACLS launched the Massachusetts GOALS (Greater Opportunities for Adult Learner Success) project. The GOALS project was designed to explore, with learners, practitioners, and policy-makers, issues of accountability and measurement of results to determine the components of a comprehensive adult education accountability system. The project's primary components involved interviewing 250 learners<sup>21</sup> about their reasons for attending programs and reviewing existing data collection in programs. This project helped ACLS begin articulating learning goals to supplement the grade and SPL levels, as the latter provided only a rough estimate of meaningful progress. These goals were then incorporated into the ACLS management information system.

The effort to develop measures of student achievement made clear that the state's information system was inadequate. In 1996, Massachusetts

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<sup>21</sup>Half were ESOL learners who were interviewed in 15 different languages.

established the System for Managing Accountability and Results Through Technology (SMARTT) in an effort to improve data collection and management. Since 1998, SMARTT has been a Web-based application that programs can access from their sites. Programs use the system to enter and update their records but can also use it for program planning and management (for example, enrollment and waiting list management). Although student goals remain a centerpiece of the system, SMARTT has three principal components: student profiles, detailed service profiles, and information on staffing and funding so that each dollar is linked to each student in a class. SMARTT consists of a relational database that contains information at the agency, program, and class levels and includes data pertaining to staff (including background, compensation, employment, and teaching hours) and students (including demographics, assessment information, goals, attendance, and progress).

Through SMARTT, ACLS intended to provide local directors and regional and state funders and policymakers with a tool to better describe, analyze, plan, manage, evaluate, and improve adult education services in the Commonwealth. In addition, researchers would be able to conduct secondary analyses of program data, and state officials and legislators would be able to examine SMARTT data for accountability purposes.

Implementing SMARTT has proved challenging both technologically and in terms of program satisfaction with the system. For the first several years, programs found the system difficult to use and extremely time consuming. ACLS listened to the programs' complaints and suggestions and invested in improvements. Major technical issues have been resolved, and new software enables programs to make queries for their own purposes. Through the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), ACLS also provides numerous training opportunities for system users, focusing on making use of SMARTT data. Programs are just beginning to make use of the SMARTT data for their own purposes. In some cases, the system does not yet produce all the information (e.g., longitudinal data) that program directors would like. Program planning based on data is new to many program directors but may well become more common in years to come as the system responds to their data needs.

SMARTT generates a unique identifier for each student to eliminate double counting, but in 2002, ACLS began requesting Social Security numbers from participants on a voluntary basis. Social Security numbers can be matched to data on earnings and employment status so that the impact of participation after completion can be measured. ACLS has worked with several workforce development agencies to establish

performance standards in response to WIA. These efforts include matching data across adult education (including GED information systems) and workforce systems, which cannot be accomplished without Social Security numbers. Many practitioners oppose gathering Social Security numbers, viewing the collection of such information as an invasion of privacy unrelated to the acquisition of basic skills. They fear that such data gathering may inhibit some adults from attending programs.

The NRS has raised further concerns about monitoring program outcomes. ACLS established the Performance Accountability Working Group (PAWG) to “refine measures and develop program specific benchmarks, and performance levels related to student participation, student learning gains and achievement of student-defined goals” (MDOE, 2001b). Made up of teachers and directors of adult education programs, MDOE staff, and representatives from the workforce development system, the PAWG has reviewed the assessment procedures used by programs around the state and issued recommendations for documenting student progress in order to respond to national reporting requirements and the state’s need for additional student performance data. The PAWG has recommended that the state use the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education), the BEST, and the REEP<sup>22</sup> until it has had time to develop a statewide assessment system that is aligned with the adult education curriculum frameworks.

***Challenges to Improving Quality.*** Strengthening the adult education system in Massachusetts has put a strain on programs. Although most program directors favor improving services, the resulting demands placed on programs and the pace of change have been stressful for all programs and overwhelming for some. For programs that were already strong when serious reform was undertaken, the demands of higher quality standards were less of a burden but still presented a significant demand on staff time. For other programs, however, adapting to a strengthened system has been more challenging. This has been particularly true for smaller programs, especially those headed by part-time directors. The competitive ACLS grant process has led to closure of weaker programs. In fact, funding was discontinued to 20% of previously funded programs in the competitive grant process over the last 15 years (MDOE, 2001a).

Although procedures that weed out weaker programs may lead to improved services, they also make new programs’ entry into the system

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<sup>22</sup> Arlington Education and Employment Program; this is a writing assessment tool for ESOL students, developed in Arlington, Virginia, public schools.

more difficult. Some of the non-ACLS funding carries less rigorous program standards that help new programs serving groups or areas that are underserved. The City of Boston is one source of this funding, with a \$4 million program of English for New Bostonians. This program draws on city and private-sector funding. The Boston Adult Literacy Fund, established more than a decade ago, also raises private funds and provides support for programs outside the ACLS system.

In its vigorous pursuit of quality services for adult learners, ACLS has launched numerous initiatives in recent years. Although the department has made an effort to fund its mandates, allocations may not be sufficient to support actual work requirements. Programs, often understaffed, lack the personnel required to focus on simultaneously implementing several ACLS initiatives. Moreover, some requirements, such as assessment, may pose serious logistical challenges. At one point, ACLS was pursuing 17 strategic initiatives at once, and the field reacted strongly. Over time, ACLS has recognized the advantages of pursuing a more limited set of initiatives accompanied by the support programs needed to carry them out. Today, only seven strategic initiatives are in operation: curriculum frameworks and assessment, community planning, teacher licensure, organizational development, technology, workforce development, and family literacy. In interviews, adult educators say that they have been challenged by the system's development but stress that they retain an appreciation for its strength and ability to withstand external threats, such as those encountered during recent state budget negotiations.

The move to 5-year grants and likely refunding for programs that record consistent success has alleviated some of the stress brought on by competition. Five-year cycles allow for planning based on a reasonable expectation of funding over several years. Although ACLS efforts have led to a more stable system, the entire enterprise is still funded using annual appropriations that could disappear with a single vote of the legislature.

In interviews, practitioners indicated that the competitive grant process contributes to the perception of a fragile system characterized by an environment of uncertainty; however, once a program is identified as successful, the fragility is more likely to be a result of the uncertainty of the overall level of state funding. In this environment, programs may not commit to long-term investments in technology or infrastructure, and staff may not commit to a career in adult education. This lack of commitment makes building and sustaining high-quality programs more difficult.

Teachers and staff know that funding could end at any time, and as their agency's funding comes up for renewal, that uncertainty increases. Indeed,

the state budget process of the last two years has demonstrated that adult education funding remains insecure. As a result, adult educators are often drawn to jobs that offer better salaries and benefits in the K–12 system or elsewhere, contributing to the high turnover among the teaching and administrative staff of adult education programs. In addition, this instability creates challenges to finding and maintaining space to accommodate programs, as programs risk committing to leases and subsequently losing funding. The present situation is much stronger than it was 15 years ago, but it is still not as stable as the K–12 and higher education systems.

### **Institutionalization of Program and Staff Development**

At the same time that ACLS sought to improve the quality of adult education programs, its leadership understood that programs and practitioners needed access to services that would help them increase their ability to meet the new quality standards. In 1990, ACLS (then the Bureau of Adult Education) established SABES to strengthen the quality of adult education in the Commonwealth through a network of training and technical assistance agencies. (Note: The section that follows draws heavily from a World Education [1997] case study.)

Launched one year before adult education reforms were implemented, SABES was seen as a key element in the state's effort to strengthen services and forge them into a comprehensive and effective system. SABES was designed to provide program and staff development services, establish a clearinghouse of useful materials and sources of information, and initiate a program of research and development. Funding for the project came from combined federal and state resources. In its 13 years of operation, SABES has built a comprehensive system of program and staff development and a clearinghouse that provides information to practitioners. Research proved to be a low priority among practitioners, but the development component of the SABES mission has continued and today includes activities in the areas of teacher licensure, technology, and assessment.

SABES is comprised of five Regional Support Centers (RSC) based in four community colleges and the University of Massachusetts, as well as a Central Resource Center (CRC), located at World Education, a Boston-based nonprofit agency. The CRC is responsible for providing overall coordination and leadership in staff and program development and manages ACLS-supported development activities. In addition, it houses the SABES clearinghouse, which coordinates with regional clearinghouses at the RSCs, including the largest library of adult education materials in

New England at Boston's Adult Literacy Resource Institute. The CRC also manages the SABES Web site,<sup>23</sup> which provides a statewide training calendar and full-text, field-generated resources.

Each RSC is managed by a regional coordinator or director. Each RSC appraises training and technical assistance needs, develops programs to respond to those needs, provides information on SABES, promotes the development of leadership skills of people in the field, and facilitates relationships among programs, teachers, and administrators. In addition to identifying local needs, each RSC administers small grants that support practitioner research and publication projects. Each RSC is also responsible for initiating regional activities and implementing statewide projects in their region. A full range of resources for instruction, training, and program development is available to practitioners at each RSC.

With an annual budget of close to \$2.9 million, SABES represents a significant investment in program and staff development on the part of ACLS.<sup>24</sup> SABES has 45 full- and part-time staff based in Boston and around the state. SABES is a comprehensive system that offers a range of services and uses a variety of approaches across a full array of programs, practitioner types, and content areas as it seeks to meet a range of practitioner needs. In PY02, SABES provided 22,231 participant hours<sup>25</sup> of activities.<sup>26</sup>

Early in its work, SABES staff found that improvements in adult education services required a coordinated effort at the practitioner and program levels. Programs need to address both organizational and individual needs simultaneously. SABES staff found that when teachers acquired a new skill, they were much more likely to employ it in class if their program had changed to accommodate this new activity. SABES staff, therefore, made

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<sup>23</sup><http://www.sabes.org>

<sup>24</sup>*Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education* stipulates that "there must be support (paid hours) for staff to engage in meaningful staff development activities at not less than 2.5% of each staff person's total paid hours, or a minimum of 12 hours per employee per year, whichever is greater." In addition, programs "must provide support (paid hours) for staff to engage in meaningful Program Development activities. DOE requires an allocation of at least 3.5% of total paid staff hours" for this. Accessed November 14, 2002, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/wiatitleii/abeguide.pdf>

<sup>25</sup>This figure refers to activities centered on teachers and counselors in "The Basics" (see p. 114) and working with adults with learning disabilities. It does not include additional work with directors and coordinators, or additional activities undertaken by SABES (work on licensure, community planning, technology, publications production, and management of a literacy hotline).

<sup>26</sup>From interview/e-mail with SABES director Mina Reddy, November 5, 2002.

a deliberate decision to connect program and staff development. The dual approach has worked well with some programs, but SABES is continuing to explore the most effective means of simultaneously addressing the two areas of staff and program development.

In its role as a statewide organization, SABES must balance the need to address both regional concerns and statewide initiatives. SABES remains a federation of six independent organizations. To build cooperation, regional and central staff met weekly for the first 2 years to maintain a unified direction and build an organizational culture. With this type of regional organizational structure, it was essential for staff to have such opportunities to meet face-to-face regularly. After the first two years, the time between meetings was increased, but a commitment to strong communication and a shared sense of purpose and culture remains. In addition, an advisory committee meets three times a year and represents the five state regions and all the different types of programs served by SABES. The committee ensures that practitioners have input into critical decisions made by SABES.

While paying attention to statewide and regional concerns, SABES must also balance the needs of practitioners with those of ACLS. It does this through two types of activities. The first is "strategic objectives," which relate to statewide concerns and implementation of ACLS policies, including curriculum and assessment of student learning, professional standards, technology, organizational development, community planning, the implementation of the GED 2002, and transitional education. Second, SABES focuses a significant proportion of its resources on what it calls "The Basics," generic activities intended to increase program and practitioner effectiveness in teaching, assessment, counseling, and other support services. Through "The Basics," SABES directly addresses practitioner needs.

In addition to SABES, a number of other organizations provide support to the work of adult educators. MCAE organizes an annual conference, *Network*, that provides an opportunity for sharing among practitioners across the state, as well as a forum for presenting and discussing research and policy developments in adult basic education. MATSOL offers an annual conference and other smaller forums for exchanges among ESOL educators working with learners of all ages.

Teachers are the most important resource in a program. Although SABES provides opportunities for professional development, it does not certify that teachers have the skills and knowledge they need to be effec-

tive. The issue of adult education certification has been debated in the field for more than two decades.<sup>27</sup> Despite disagreements in the field about the skills required of adult educators and the value of a credential, ACLS embarked on a process of soliciting input from the field to shape certification in the Commonwealth in 1994. In 1998, legislation dictated that ACLS and the teacher certification office of the MDOE should initiate a voluntary certification program. In coordination with SABES, ACLS worked with the field to create a model for a voluntary professional license for adult education teachers. This process involved repeated gathering of feedback from practitioners and professional development organizations, as well as the efforts of an advisory committee and working group.

Accepted by the state in 2001, the license is valid for five years and renewable every five years after that. Professional standards of the license are comprised of a full range of skills including understanding the adult learner, instructional design, and teaching approaches; facilitating the adult learning environment; learner assessment and evaluation; diversity and equity; and professionalism. Four different routes to licensure are available to accommodate both novice and experienced adult educators, including individuals who already possess a pre-K–12 license.<sup>28</sup> In conjunction with ACLS, SABES developed and now offers a series of courses to address specific areas covered by the license. MDOE began issuing adult education licenses to qualified, experienced educators in the fall of 2002. The license requires a substantive effort on the part of candidates who seek it, and the actual benefits (e.g., salary increases, job opportunities, and security) that will result from possession of the credential remain to be seen. Nonetheless, the license represents a major step forward in professionalization of the adult education field in Massachusetts.

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<sup>27</sup>For a discussion of certification efforts in Massachusetts and elsewhere, see “Professionalization and Certification for Teachers in Adult Basic Education” by Sabatini, Ginsburg, and Russell (2002). *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, Vol. 3, pp. 203–247.

<sup>28</sup>The four routes to licensure are as follows: (a) for candidates with less than five years (2,400 hours) of documented ABE experience and who do not have a teacher license; (b) for prospective ABE teachers or novice teachers who hold a teacher license but have less than one year of documented ABE experience; (c) for candidates with one year or the equivalent (480 hours) of documented ABE experience and who hold a teacher license; (d) for candidates with five or more years (2,400 hours) of documented ABE teaching experience. (Accessed November 15, 2002, from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr47/47.06.html>) For more information on the ABE license, visit <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/abecert>

## Multiple Resources to Support Students

ACLS has made a commitment to involve many different types of provider agencies and to help students connect with the services they need to participate and be successful in a program.

***Provider Agencies.*** Unlike many states, where adult education services are largely offered under the auspices of a single provider, Massachusetts supports a variety of institutions. The state's multiple provider system allows the strengths of various organizations to be drawn on in meeting adult learner needs. For instance, some adults may prefer the academic environment of a community college and others may prefer the more informal atmosphere of a CBO. Although an academic institution may have more resources to support learning, a CBO may have a stronger connection to the community that supports recruitment and retention.

The development of this system of multiple providers has been driven over time by a combination of funding opportunities and a commitment to serving adult learners. During the 1970s, CBOs, well acquainted with the needs of local populations, offered services that were supported by direct federal funding through programs such as Model Cities and CETA (and its preceding forms). In 1983, Boston used \$1 million of federal community development block grant (CDBG) funds to support and strengthen 16 CBOs and a resource center, the Adult Literacy Resource Institute. The city's current Adult Literacy Initiative still supports the original 16 programs and has been expanded to include all ACLS-funded programs in the Boston area. When state funding for adult education became available in the 1980s, CBOs were encouraged to apply for state support. The program and staff development services ACLS put in place allowed these CBOs to continue improving so that they could meet the challenge of competition with much better-funded academic institutions.

***Connecting Students to Services.*** ACLS leadership is aware that most students have barriers to participation in programs. These barriers include the need for child care, transportation, counseling, health care, housing, employment, and emotional support. To address these needs, ACLS has required its programs to offer student support services since 1990. This requirement led to a number of activities meant to develop the right mix of services.

In 1991, a statewide practitioner task force developed a counseling resource guide to improve staff development services for adult education counselors. More development work in the area of student support ser-

vices took place over the next three years, including staff training, sharing groups, and materials development based on the information in the counseling resource guide. In 1994, a study group report emphasized the critical need for support services that strengthen students' motivation and self-confidence and that help them avoid feelings of isolation and alienation. These recommendations led to the mandate that 2.5% of the total student instructional hours must be devoted to providing paid student support services. The study group report made clear that a counselor is a necessary part of every program but cannot manage all student problems. The report states that students who have serious problems such as alcoholism, drug abuse, mental illness, eating disorders, intense domestic problems, physical or emotional crises, custody issues, and sexuality concerns would be better served by an appropriate social service or mental health agency.

The report recommended that programs look into community collaborations as a source of direct student support services, rather than providing those services themselves. In response to the report's findings, ACLS began asking programs to direct greater attention to community partnerships as a way to strengthen support services in 1997. This community planning process is an attempt by ACLS to connect adult education agencies to the many services their students may need. It asks each service agency to work with the community it serves to form a network that will provide those support services. This kind of community collaboration among agencies serving the same population is essential not only to improving adult education, but also to improving the provision of all social services. In addition, the process supports programs examining their communities to be sure their work addresses current needs. The community planning process makes adult education services into something that local businesses and other stakeholders see as serving their needs, thereby building support for the field.

The goal of the Massachusetts ABE Community Planning Initiative is to place adult education into a comprehensive network of services that help adults succeed as workers, family members, and citizens. The objectives of the initiative are described as:

- The needs of all undereducated and limited English proficient constituencies are accounted for, and strategic plans are developed to identify how and when every such constituency will ultimately be served.
- Every organization with an interest in and the potential for supporting services to these populations is included in such planning, and protocols are established to coordinate these services.

- Students benefit from the broadest possible array of educational, employment and training, and health and human services available, which so many adults need in order to successfully pursue their goals and aspirations.
- Adult education takes its place as a key ingredient in each organization's, community's, and region's plan to improve the quality of life for its citizenry. (MDOE, 2001b)

After successful piloting in more than 40 communities, the community planning process became a universal requirement for 5-year ACLS grants in 2001. In the first year, programs are expected to forge partnerships in their communities with agencies that serve adult education populations. During the second and third years, programs conduct a comprehensive needs and assets assessment of their community. During the fourth and fifth years, programs must submit strategic 5-year plans for meeting local adult education needs. The first such plans will be submitted in 2004.

Many if not most students who come to ACLS programs are looking to enter or reenter the workforce or improve their income. A connection to employment services, therefore, is an important part of student support. For several years, ACLS has worked toward a close collaboration with the state's workforce development system. Since 2000, ACLS has been a key partner in the Workforce Investment Act Steering Committee convened under the auspices of the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Through this involvement, ACLS representatives participated in various subcommittees to develop the WIA State Plan, including the areas of youth services, one-stop career centers, performance accountability, and individual training accounts (MDOE, 2001b). In addition, the ACLS director chaired the WIA Vision Subcommittee charged with crafting the overall philosophy and guiding principles of the Massachusetts WIA state plan (MDOE, 2001b). ACLS representatives met with staff from state and regional workforce investment boards, representatives of the Commonwealth Corporation (previously the WIA Title I agency), the Division of Employment and Training, the Division of Transitional Assistance (the agency that implements the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF] program), and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive integrated system to deliver adult basic education and training services throughout the Commonwealth. As a result of these meetings, the MDOE made significant strides in integrating the ABE activities funded under Title II with other adult education and workforce development programs throughout the state during PY01.

Evidence of this integration takes a variety of forms, including specific agreements, representation across agencies, and joint endeavors. For instance, ACLS has entered into agreements with the state's 16 local workforce investment boards to distribute funds and identify overlap in the provision of intake, initial assessment, and referral services to undereducated and limited English proficient adults. In addition, adult education providers and one-stop career centers across the state have established working relationships. ACLS recently joined workforce agencies in developing a state system of performance measures that pertain to impact on employment, business and skill-building, and customer satisfaction (among workers and businesses).<sup>29</sup>

Opportunities for the adult education and workforce development sectors to be aware of each other's interests are fostered by instances of cross-agency participation. For example, representatives from ACLS-funded programs serve on local workforce investment boards to ensure the inclusion of adult education issues in discussions and activities of local workforce development communities. Representatives of local workforce investment boards attend the annual adult education program directors' meeting, and ACLS staff attends monthly meetings of the Workforce Investment Board Association. Information developed by the ACLS is shared with executive directors of the local workforce investment boards and disseminated among workforce development agencies.

Integration of adult education with other sectors also takes the form of collaborative projects. The Building Essential Skills through Training initiative is a state-funded strategy to coordinate incumbent worker training that emphasizes adult basic education. The initiative involves the collaboration of MDOE, the Division of Employment and Training, the Department of Transitional Assistance, the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Commonwealth Corporation (MDOE, 2001b). Another initiative is the Massachusetts Family Literacy Coalition, which includes 14 state agencies and six statewide organizations that are concerned with education and social support to families (MDOE, 2001b). In the mid-1990s, ACLS worked with the state's Office for Refugees and Immigrants to develop a citizenship and civic education curriculum, and with the Department of Public Health (and local health care providers) to develop and implement the ABE health education initiative.

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<sup>29</sup>These measures are outlined in a memo to the State Workforce Investment Board from the Performance Measurement Committee, dated September 5, 2002. This committee grew out of the Governor's Task Force to Reform Adult Education and Worker Training, formed in 2001.

ACLS-supported programs cannot provide their students with everything needed to succeed as workers, family members, and citizens, but they can connect students to community agencies that provide those services. These services have the added benefit of providing students with support that makes participation in educational programs possible.

## LESSONS FOR OTHER STATES

The reform movement in Massachusetts started with a small base of support for addressing the issue of adult education. This support had existed for more than a century, but a real system for adult learning was not possible until the field began to build an advocacy effort and focus on improving program quality. These elements have been an essential part of the reform process in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts experience offers valuable lessons to other state adult education programs that seek expanded funding and improvement. The ways in which states go about this process might differ, depending on size, population, and other state-specific factors; however, these issues will remain key in bringing about reform.

### **Lesson 1: Reform Requires Long-Term Leadership and Advocacy**

Long-term leadership from the field and within the state adult education agency is essential to accomplishing the task of reform. The reform movement in Massachusetts has been successful in part because a group of professionals in the field, both inside and outside the government, committed 15 to 20 years of their working lives to this task. They saw the need for advocacy and built a network of students and practitioners who kept up this effort and were also available when emergencies threatened program gains. Gains were a result of pushing the legislature in an organized and well-planned effort.

State leaders need to have an understanding of the realities of adult education, as well as the ability to negotiate with bureaucratic institutions and build a network of support for the field. They must develop a vision for adult education and mobilize the energy needed to realize it. In addition, state leaders must cultivate leadership at other levels, including educators and students, so that everyone is working to improve the system.

Realization of a vision for adult education requires advocates at a variety of levels, including students and legislators. Massachusetts built strong advocacy efforts through a mix of paid staff and volunteer efforts. Only a

broad base can support a system as it moves forward in strengthening and expanding services over many years.

### **Lesson 2: The Pursuit of Quality Over Quantity Is Necessary to Strengthen a System**

An adult education system must commit to providing high-quality services, even if this means serving fewer students. This process should include clear goals, a capacity to monitor progress, and incentives for improved performance. Developing quality standards should be viewed as a continuing process that draws on input from the field and takes into account changing demands both within and beyond state borders. The leadership in Massachusetts built its own vision for adult education while paying attention to the vision developing at the federal level. This allowed them to meet their own goals at the same time they prepared for the coming of WIA.

As part of its pursuit of quality, the leadership in Massachusetts welcomed outside evaluations of their services, knowing that these reports would identify weaknesses. These reports brought attention to the adult education system and supported the system's focus on improving quality. Moreover, these evaluations always led to additional political support.

### **Lesson 3: The Implementation of Standards Requires Support**

Improvement in services does not come from changes in administrative and management procedures alone. Prior to implementing major reform initiatives, Massachusetts put in place a permanent capacity to provide program and staff development services to help meet new standards. This capacity continues to respond to both state- and field-identified needs. Of course, Massachusetts embarked on its reform during a period of relative freedom, prior to WIA implementation. Other states initiating reform in the current climate may face limitations in what they can achieve. However, WIA is meant to support reform that leads to improved quality, and states should request the latitude to experiment or seek additional state funds to support their own vision of reform.

### **Lesson 4: Multiple Resources Are Needed to Support Adult Learning**

Meeting adult learner needs is a complicated task that requires multiple resources. Massachusetts has benefited from a range of service providers

all working with a common set of standards. The system makes available a full range of services to accommodate different learner requirements.

The complexity of adult learners' lives and goals necessitates an approach that draws on resources outside the adult education community. An adult education system can serve its students better when it is integrated into a network of services and institutions. Massachusetts requires programs to develop networks with local services and institutions that their students need. Although supporting learner progress, this effort has the added benefit of building support for adult education among these different institutions and the agencies that fund the other services.

### **Lesson 5: Change Takes Time**

Programs need time to reach agreement on goals, refine them, and successfully meet them. Implementing too many new initiatives at one time can lengthen the reform process. Adult educators from other states should keep in mind that this case study is a short summary of the work of hundreds of people over almost two decades. The growth in funding from \$7 million to \$45 million in 15 years required a lot of work, all of which was necessary to achieve the goal of establishing an effective adult education system in Massachusetts. Those reading this case study for inspiration should prepare themselves for a long and challenging task.

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