

Juliana Pearson
Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Ms. Pearson,

Docket No.: ED-2023-SCC-0034

My name is Bette Smith and as the Lead Adult Education Instructor of the Literacy Council of Alaska, I am writing today to share my thoughts relating to the Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education's (OCTAE) comment request on Measuring Educational Gain in the National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education.

First and foremost, the NRS is an outdated reporting system that does not fully capture or accurately reflect the number of participants that adult education programs serve on a year-to-year basis or the skills that adult learners gain from their participation in these programs. That is why we are urging the establishment of a pilot program to test out innovative accountability system approaches that can help determine the best ways to measure the performance of adult education learners and adult education programs. This pilot system has been proposed by Senators Jack Reed (D-RI) and Todd Young (R-IN) in their [Adult Education WORKS Act](#), which was developed with the input of adult education program directors, educators and learners.

The High School Equivalency program I oversee uses the TABE exam to fulfill NRS accountability requirements. This exam, like many other standardized exams, fails to capture the experiences and skills of students local to the Alaska region. Particularly, rural Alaskan students in native villages do not have the background that most traditional students in the Lower 48 do. As such, these students struggle to understand the examples and passages within the TABE forms. It is not uncommon to see students underperform on the TABE compared to the teacher evaluation of their skills based on student interviews, school history, and informal assessments. The proposed pilot program would allow the state of Alaska to tailor an accountability system that accurately evaluates the knowledge of rural and Native Alaskan students while still maintaining a rigorous curriculum that suits the needs of Alaskan adults.

Additionally, there is a discrepancy between NRS adult education enrollment data and State-level adult education enrollment data due to the fact that the NRS requires that learners receive 12 hours of instruction in order to be counted as a participant. There are many instances where learners receive services from a program under 12 hours. This can be the case when a learner enters an adult education program to gain a certain skill, attains it and then leaves due to a new work opportunity.

Further, adult education programs provide learners with a variety of skills not captured in the NRS, such as digital literacy skills and information literacy skills, that are necessary for success in the modern economy. By not allowing programs to demonstrate gains in these kinds of skills, policymakers at the Federal level do not have a comprehensive understanding of the services that adult education programs provide learners.

In sum, I urge that OCTAE enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected by focusing greater attention on reporting requirements that more appropriately and effectively measure

the progress and performance of adult education programs and their participants. Implementing a pilot to test out innovative approaches to accountability systems for adult education would improve the NRS so it captures education growth and achievement by adult learners and the impact of adult education programs.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of my recommendation.

Sincerely,

Bette Smith
Lead Adult Education Instructor
Literacy Council of Alaska
Fairbanks, AK 99701
bette@literacycouncilak.org