OVERVIEW

ABLE TRANSITIONS COLLABORATIVE INITIATIVE

Evaluation of Year Two

2009-2010

The ten-year Strategic Plan for Higher Education developed by the Ohio Board of Regents for the University System of Ohio (USO) aims to raise the education level of Ohioans to promote job growth around the state. The Ohio Skills Bank aligns with the plan to seamlessly link adult education, workforce development and economic development. The Transitions Task Force, with assistance from the State Leadership Network, designed the Ohio ABLE Transitions Framework and launched the ABLE Transitions Collaborative Initiative in January 2009 to extend the goals of the USO and Ohio Skills Bank. This is accomplished by building capacity within local Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Programs to assist students with transitioning to postsecondary education and training. The Initiative was supported by a two-year incentive grant received from the U.S. Department of Labor through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). It was awarded based on achievement of performance levels set by the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and included the following objectives:

- Increase the number of adults accessing postsecondary education and training;
- Support the capacity of ABLE programs to better serve adults with postsecondary and employment goals through training and resource development;
- Align education systems, policies and processes to optimize implementation and institutionalization of career pathways; and
- Begin implementation of a Stackable Certificate Program through the issuance of pre-college and industry recognized certificates.

TRANSITIONS FRAMEWORK

Professionals in nontraditional adult learning acknowledge their students often have different needs and aspirations than other students. Furthermore, these nontraditional students may require additional supports to achieve academic and workforce success. To meet the unique challenges faced by students, the ABLE Transitions Framework is organized around two components: instructional
and support services. The framework is constructed broadly to encompass requirements of both postsecondary and career/workplace transitions. Each framework component is comprised of several elements that assist in meeting these requirements.

**Instructional Services**
- Develop and deliver instructional program that facilitates student transitions
- Implement contextualized curricula
- Model selected postsecondary facets combined with ABLE instructional delivery

**Support Services**
- Build awareness of postsecondary and work options
- Provide comprehensive goal setting activities
- Incorporate individual and group advising
- Provide comprehensive support services

ABLE Transitions Collaboratives were formed from the 12 Economic Development Regions of Ohio and were expected to address at least one element of either of the two framework components while developing region-specific models of transition. In fall 2008, ABLE programs completed an online gap analysis and then were asked to use a worksheet provided by the OSU ABLE Evaluation and Design Project to perform an analysis assessing their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) for each program component. Following this activity, programs were organized by Economic Development Region, and a discussion of the needs assessment results was facilitated by the Ohio ABLE Resource Center Network at the Fall Director’s Meeting. These facilitated discussions were used to inform selection of project goals for each Collaborative.

Three of the 12 Economic Development Regions consisted of multiple Collaboratives to meet the needs of all local programs in 2008. As a result, sixteen Collaboratives applied for and participated in year one of the Initiative. Involvement was optional, and some ABLE programs chose not to participate in the Initiative. Involvement was optional, and some ABLE programs chose not to participate in the Initiative. Involvement was optional, and some ABLE programs chose not to participate in the Initiative. Involvement was optional, and some ABLE programs chose not to participate in the Initiative. Involvement was optional, and some ABLE programs chose not to participate in the Initiative. Participation was encouraged, as it was predicted to increase the likelihood of programs adopting the key paradigm shift promoted by the Initiative. This shift calls for ABLE programs to transition from helping students to prepare for the GED to serving as a gateway for postsecondary education and training.

The ABLE Resource Center Network was charged with facilitating the work of the Collaboratives and acting as fiscal manager for the funds distributed for the project. The first project year started in January 2009 and concluded at the end of June 2009. Implementation proposals for the second year were submitted in November 2009 and approved in December 2009. The second year concluded at the end of June 2010.
Evaluators at Ohio University’s Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs conducted a two-year evaluation of the ABLE Transitions Collaborative Initiative. The evaluation in year two focused on implementation of the Ohio ABLE Transitions Framework as proposed and developed by collaborating local programs that provide adult basic education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from each of the 15 Transitions Collaboratives for a comparative analysis.

- Site visits with seven of the 15 Collaboratives.
  - Individual interview with the Collaborative contact person(s)
  - Structured group interview with the members.
- Telephone interviews with the contact person at the remaining eight Collaboratives.
- Group interview with the ABLE Resource Center Network professionals
- Collaborative member questionnaire
- Review of Collaboratives’ Implementation Plans for years one and two
- Interviews with post-secondary partners
- Analysis of ABLELink accountability data
- Student Survey

**EVALUATION FINDINGS**

- Most Collaboratives made significant progress in further developing a shared vision and goals in year two and describe this effort as resulting in strengthened relationships, increased mutual support and reduced competition among ABLE members.

- Collaborative members and postsecondary school representatives see the Transitions Collaborative Initiative as having successfully generated a cultural shift within ABLE.

- This effort has led to substantial strengthening of ABLE programs’ relationships with providers of postsecondary education and employment training throughout Ohio.

- Students increasingly recognize obtaining a GED is not the ultimate goal, but rather one step on the path to adult education.

- Many ABLE sites are struggling to cover costs of basic services in the wake of recent budget cuts.
FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the information collected during the second phase of the ABLE Transitions Collaborative Initiative evaluation, the following issues may be worth considering in the development and implementation of future statewide efforts:

In addition to placing finished products in a statewide repository, it may be worthwhile to develop a proactive strategy for sharing information about the work of the various groups throughout the development process. Many Collaboratives expressed interest in learning about what other groups were working on, as well as sharing their own discoveries and resources with others.

Coordination of collaborative projects is challenging, particularly among groups that serve diverse populations and/or have a history of competing for resources. Although the majority of ABLE Transitions Collaboratives successfully worked together to achieve their goals, future projects that require this level of shared effort may benefit from providing groups with support from a trained facilitator and/or professional development on effective collaborative process.

With a few exceptions, the Collaboratives primarily focused on support and development of postsecondary education pathways rather than goals related to employment. Data suggest this tendency may be the result of a better understanding among members regarding the specific components necessary to effectively accomplish educational transitions. If a more equal balance between support for postsecondary and career attainment is considered desirable, additional effort should be made to identify and communicate the systems, policies and processes necessary for effective transitions to employment.

Collaborative members recommend a balance between the new efforts to support the role of ABLE programs in transition while preserving ABLE’s traditional services for adult learners in need of basic skills. Care should be taken that communication messages and programmatic funding mechanisms increase support for Transitions projects without suggesting a reduction in support for ABLE’s traditional services.

Despite the successes achieved by many Collaboratives, several groups referenced institutional barriers that limited the extent of change possible, particularly when working with higher education and the business community. As a result, many Collaboratives expressed interest in a more active effort at the state level to bring together ABLE programs, postsecondary institutions and workforce development groups to increase mutual understanding and engagement regarding future initiatives.

This report was prepared by Ohio University’s Voinovich School.