

Regional Strategic Planning Meeting

Regional Strategic Planning Meeting Agenda

- Introductions
- Strategic Planning Process Update
- ABE Driving Forces: Review and discussion
 - Mission/vision/purpose
 - Local program implications
 - Policy considerations
 - Other issues
- ABE Strategic Priorities: Review and discussion
 - Reflecting the driving forces
 - Local program implications
 - Policy considerations
 - Other issues
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- Local Flexibility and Decision Making
 - What?
 - Who?
 - How?
- Open Forum
- Next Steps

In preparation for the meeting, please review the following information:

Driving Forces to Consider in Defining a Future Direction for Massachusetts' Adult Basic Education System

Identifying what is giving ABE momentum and pushing the system toward a certain direction is central to the strategic planning process. Knowing what the driving forces are and determining which of them will be important in the coming years will help the ABE Strategic Planning Committee to determine what the ABE system should look like in the future, its identity, and what programs and supports it offers to adult learners.

At a recent planning meeting the ABE Strategic Planning Committee determined that these six driving forces (listed alphabetically) should be further discussed at the regional meetings before any strategic decisions are made to include one or more of these driving forces in the draft plan.

Please review the six driving forces in advance of the ABE Regional Meeting. Thank you in advance

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ABE System Access and Accountability

Make ABE available to all

The crucial question that Massachusetts' political leaders and decision-makers need to answer is whether all adults living in the Commonwealth need to know how to read, write, and speak the English language or it is acceptable to have a percentage of the population remain illiterate or literate at the margins. If the answer is yes, should the ABE system have co-equal status as K-12 and/or higher education? If that policy shift were to be implemented, should ABE become a basic right in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, available to anyone?

Reduce student barriers

Another concern that needs to be addressed is the extent to which the ABE System should reduce the barriers that current and future students face in, first, trying to access the system, and second, when they want to attend. Potential students may not know what they need, where to go to improve their skills, or have the ability to take advantage of existing programs due to personal circumstances or program availability, scheduling, or a wait-list for services. Are there student barriers that should the system reduce or eliminate, or should that be left to the adults who choose to improve their skills to solve on their own?

Produce outcomes and results

ABE educators face several challenges in meeting professional and performance standards and producing the outcomes that policymakers, private-sector stakeholders, and taxpayers expect to see (in as short a period of time as possible). There is a constant tension between the time it takes to build program and institutional capacity to deliver more services, high quality services, and better results, compared with the political imperative for the system to produce outcomes as quickly as possible with minimal investment of time and resources – “getting results better, faster, cheaper.” Some see this as an unrealistic expectation that ensures ongoing frustration among providers and learners, and ultimately results in ‘creaming’ applicants, longer waiting lists, adult stop-outs, declining quality, and ultimately, system failure.

Economic and workforce development needs

Focus on multi-level labor markets

Looking at the big picture, companies are constantly making critical economic decisions to locate in Massachusetts or to stay in the state, if they have a presence. The global economy is creating fierce competition for existing talent and employees with the education and skills to meet their future employee needs at multiple levels. Having access to talented employees and skilled workers is an important consideration for individual businesses and whole industries in making that decision.

Recognize that there are different regional employment issues

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While there are significant regional differences throughout the state around specific business/industry labor market needs and job requirements, there is universal demand by employers for better educated, job ready applicants to help fill the skilled labor market gap. Companies in Massachusetts are having trouble today finding enough qualified applicants to fill jobs requiring technical skills because a large percentage of unemployed young adults and low-wage workers are not prepared to work because they lack the necessary work-readiness skills (hard and soft) and necessary credentials. These are decent, stable jobs with good wages (\$16 to \$20 per hour) that can lead to career advancement.

Work with the workforce development system

ABE has the potential to work with companies and the workforce development system in each region to help increase the talent pool and improve the economic future of the state, while meeting the individual goals of many ABE/ESOL students.

Societal and community needs

Recognize family, parent, and civic responsibilities

Basic societal needs require that Massachusetts' residents have the ability to fulfill multiple civic and family responsibilities as parents and informed citizens. Literacy is the basic foundation that enables those who are undereducated and do not have English language proficiency to earn a decent wage, have the time and motivation to engage in civic life, make it possible for parents to help their children succeed in school, and to imagine a better future for themselves and their family.

Achieve the American Dream

When all is said and done, ABE has the power to help adults acquire the knowledge, skills, and abilities to make critical intergenerational connections and enable its students to pursue The American Dream and move from 'just getting by' to the middle-class.

Student goals

Enable students to fulfill their different roles

ABE students make choices to attend ABE programs based on various reasons – some articulated to providers and some not. Students may have different motives when they begin class (e.g.: family, community, and work), reflecting the things that can make an immediate difference in their lives, as well as a difference sometime in the future. Each is important and each needs to be validated and supported.

ABE meets multiple goals

Given the diversity of today's students, it is clear that participant aspirations are not all the same and their goals may evolve, change, or become stronger as they progress and gain more competence and confidence while in the program. By listening to what students hope to gain from attending an ABE program, immediately and over the long-term, providers may find it necessary to modify existing services, change the program

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model, or redesign the delivery system to meet the needs of their students – their customers, and in the process, not only strengthen their program, but contribute to the overall ABE system.

Linking education and skill achievement to the next step beyond ABE

Promote ongoing learning

A couple of the images that come to mind for some people when they think about ABE are ‘stepping stones’ or a ‘gateway’ leading to a better future. The evidence is irrefutable that people with more education and higher skill levels earn more, are healthier, have children that do better in school, and the like. Should ABE be considered one of the building blocks of success? Should ABE be viewed as a critical component of the education and workforce continuum for adults, as are community colleges, job training, and other post-secondary programs? How can we encourage ABE students to aspire to higher education and gain more skills?

Connect students to the next step

Should it be the responsibility of ABE programs to create the institutional connections that will enable GED graduates to land their first job, attend college full or part-time, enter a skills training program, or begin a career? If so, what do local programs need to do to succeed?

ABE/ESOL workforce

Address current working conditions

While the intrinsic rewards of helping adults are significant, the tangible benefits are not; historically salaries have remained low, benefits are not where they need to be, and day-to-day working conditions are in need of an upgrade. The issue of whether to press for more full-time positions versus part-time jobs remains unresolved. Staff at all levels are interested in getting more staff development to better serve the diverse student base, including younger dropouts, and adults with learning disabilities and social service needs. These, and other, factors continue to impact staff retention and morale.

Develop career pathways for the next generation

Looking to the future, where will the next generation of ABE/ESOL instructors and program staff come from? At present, no college/university-based professional licensing program for ABE exists in Massachusetts and the state certification process, while rigorous, isn't a career booster or guarantees a higher salary. Can we expect younger educators to continue their careers in ABE without better working conditions and professional standing?

Address the cost vs. quality dilemma

The current and future challenges that the ABE System faces in dealing with the ABE/ESOL workforce satisfaction and conditions is linked to the cost and quality of

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services. Does the demand for higher quality services outweigh reducing the wait-list? Which services should be expanded, changed, developed?

At a time when having an educated workforce is critical to the state's economy and when having a literate and informed population is at risk, it is ironic that the future of the adult education workforce itself is in question and in need of renewal.

Note: Some have suggested that another critical ABE/ESOL workforce issue that has not gotten much attention is the aging of the current ABE/ESOL workforce. While there is no conclusive data on this issue, the concern is that a large percentage of current ABE/ESOL administrators and teachers will be leaving the profession over the next decade.