

CAEP Annual Plan: 2020/21

About Students Regional Consortium, Riverside

Executive Summary

The ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium for Adult Education began implementation of the 3-Year Plan focusing on strategies that would address the planning goals. As the foundation and guidance of long-term planning, the consortium members identified four primary goals in the 3-Year Plan, which include:

1. Strengthen industry and community partnerships and short-term CTE program offerings.
2. Strengthen the consortium's approach to connection with students, potential students, and the community at large.
3. Increase student success by clarifying pathways, expanding opportunities (e.g. articulation, certificates), and supporting students in achieving their goals.
4. Improve data collection and reporting practices to more accurately capture student performance and member/consortium effectiveness.

From the 3-Year Plan, the 2019/20 Annual Plan identified areas of growth to target specific strategies. The strategies or goals identified allowed members to invest resources and CAEP allocations for the region to include activities that would:

1. Increase short-term CTE course offerings
2. Increase effective outreach in our communities
3. Align and clarify career and educational pathways,
4. Establish communities of practice among members

2019/20 Consortium Accomplishments

The achievements made by the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium support efforts which align with the 2019/20 Annual Plan, to increase short-term CTE offerings, to increase outreach in the community, to align and clarify career and educational pathways, and to establish communities of practice. During the 2019/20 school year, the region was able to make significant gains and reach milestones that support the regional goals and serve the adult education students in the region.

Members of the consortium have succeeded in increasing offerings that prepare students for the workforce and for entering post-secondary education through expansion efforts in the CTE program. CTE pathways and integrated educational training became a means for several members to serve more students enrolled in ESL and ABE effectively by providing career training. Successful CTE pathways developed by members offer students opportunities to enter courses such as Job Skills, Automotive Service Technicians, Pharmacy Technician, Medical Billing, and Computer Information Sciences. Members are also increasing efforts to have CTE courses listed on the Eligible Training Provider List, which connects students to courses through a referral process from workforce development partners. The community college member gained state approval for CTE curriculum developed after conversations around student need with adult school members and industry need with industry partners. Local colleges offered 31 sections of noncredit CTE courses during the 2019/20 school year.

Another goal from the ABOUT STUDENTS 2019/20 Annual Plan that improved services to adult education students was to increase outreach efforts in local communities. To support the region's efforts to increase outreach, members contracted with Full Capacity Marketing to develop a media outreach plan, which provides leads of potential students to member agencies. Consortium members collaborated on the development of a regional brand, an ad campaign, contact leads, and an outreach website. Each member contributed to the consortium's regional outreach efforts and branding process, strengthening the consortium's ability to connect with students in the region. The adult school members worked closely with the community college member to promote and transition students to college. Members also participated in an abundance of events held in their communities that increased outreach locally. Some of those events included working with community partners such as chambers of commerce, clubs and organizations, workforce development, and Census 2020. Finally, consortium members actively recruited students of need into programs by conducting presentation and publications of agency services and offerings, and by providing workshops and campus tours. Through involvement in their community activities, consortium members expanded outreach and connected with potential students.

During the 2019/20 school year, the ABOUT STUDENTS began to align and clarify career and educational pathways. Through initial efforts, the community college members held presentations to students about options for pathway completion and developed transitional pathways. Another member worked to identify three educational pathways that supported program development. The educational pathways, Business and Finance, Child Development, and Skilled Trades, coincide with labor market index data validating job market needs for the region.

Finally, the establishment of the Data Team, designed as a community of practice, was one of the consortium's strongest accomplishments for 2019/20. The Data Team, which included representation from all members, met quarterly to review data, share best practices, and refine strategies for accurate data acquisition and reporting. During focus sessions, members participated in discussions that led to improved knowledge of systematic data management and growth in regional reporting outcomes. However, due to school closure events from the COVID-19 pandemic, final analysis of regional data improvements could not be validated.

Impact of Seismic Events

The ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium experienced a severe impact of the disruption of school activities because of recent events including the COVID-19 pandemic, possible budget reductions, and systemic racial injustices. These events created devastating impacts on members' abilities to assess how students were served during the 2019/20 school year. Without the ability to complete testing expectations during the final three and a half months of operations, literacy gain data remains incomplete and fails to reflect an accurate measure of student growth and achievement for the 2019/20 school year. Incomplete data measures notwithstanding, members responded immediately to each of these crises being strategic and intentional to the unique situation. They reacted with support and understanding to students they serve during each crisis. Additionally, members responded to staff and faculty by providing support and guidance.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the governor's "stay-at-home" order in March, 2020, members responded by quickly pivoting to providing instruction remotely. All eight members transitioned existing class offerings to a remote or distance learning format. Most members also provided counseling and advisement via online platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet. Some

members were able to continue to enroll new students into their programs, immediately placing students into distance learning environments. All members which previously offered curriculum through digital software, increased student accessibility to assist with the ongoing needs of students. Members provided additional instructional opportunities using platforms such as Google Classroom, Canvas, Padlet, Remind and others to support learners during distance learning. Many teachers held virtual class meetings with students for at-home study using Zoom or Webex. For those students with limited technology skills or accessibility, or where curriculum had yet to be digitalized, members distributed paper copies of materials such as textbooks and packets for at-home or incarcerated use. As a means for students to work remotely, some members provided devices and/or connectivity for student use at home. However, some members were unable to loan equipment because of costs or lack of availability.

Due to a shift in demands experienced by some members, their allocations or budgets were also required to shift to meet the changing needs. Many members experienced increases in personnel costs due to additional professional development costs, custodial costs, and unexpected equipment purchases. Most members continued to compensate staff and faculty at established salary and benefit rates during school closures. Another impact on budgets was a loss of supplemental support from community partners that required members' allocations to meet gaps in support. One member shared that projects were placed on hold due to unknown funding projections.

Members of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium recognized the unexpected needs of staff and faculty and provided additional resources to meet those needs. All consortium members provided devices to staff members for use at home for delivering instruction, connecting with students, and providing support services. Members provided additional professional development opportunities as support staff and instructors shifted to online learning. Many teachers needed training to assist them with using new platforms and delivery methods of instruction. With the increase in the use of technology, members provided additional technology support to both students and staff to troubleshoot challenges and barriers. Another area of support members provided was social and emotional support to staff members as they coped with the stress related to COVID-19 and the new environments. Extending support services to students became a priority for the region. Members shared resources with students for local public assistance offered in the community for food, employment, health and shelter using social media, communication tools and one-on-one contacts.

As the fiscal crisis became evident from the immediate economic downturn in California, the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium members reacted swiftly and decisively. With the announcements of possible budget reductions, members prepared for multiple scenarios. In the event of budget reductions, members have reviewed budgets to identify essential and non-essential services and personnel. Members anticipate that class schedules for the 20-21 school year will be driven by data and needs of the community with fewer offerings available. Conservative spending and other fiscal resources will also be identified that may assist members with leveraging funds. Several members reduced or eliminated summer class offerings in anticipation of budget reductions. Travel allowances are suspended and several districts enacted spending freezes on non-essential purchases. Economic instability continues to cause members to conservatively plan for the future, considering both current and upcoming budgets.

In light of the current educational environment and the challenges presented to the members of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium, the goals for the 2020/21 school year align with the 3-year Plan with a focus on addressing immediate challenges:

1. Develop and expand distance learning opportunities for students to address possible decrease in enrollment.
2. Increase student retention and persistence using effective strategies and practices.
3. Explore solutions for assessing and evaluating student outcomes and achievement within current testing limitations.

Regional Planning Overview

The ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium has been effective in implementing its three-year plan. Focusing on goals of outreach, data collection and reporting, and career and educational pathway alignment, implementation strategies continue. Members have worked consistently and deliberately to improve data collection and reporting. With improved data processes, members effectively review the information and use it to guide local and regional decision-making. While adult education programs have had a positive impact on our region and on the growth of our programs, the lack of increased funding, now coupled with potential reductions and increased costs will not allow us to continue to offer additional programs to serve the needs of our communities.

The consortium has also engaged in a powerful rebranding process to improve outreach efforts in the region, leading to a recruitment logo, tag-line, and an improved consortium website designed to generate student leads. The consortium continues to explore outreach opportunities and expand ways to connect with students who would benefit from adult education services.

To serve the community during school closures and beyond, the consortium members plan to continue to develop and improve distance learning options for students. During the pivot from traditional delivery of instruction to remote learning in March 2020, members and their students experienced many challenges and barriers. Members identified gaps in their ability to connect or recruit student participation, gaps in access due to a significant digital divide among populations, changes in students' home dynamics, and gaps that limit agencies from offering short-term CTE instruction.

Through state and local professional development, members are implementing activities that will assist with the goal to increase retention to support student achievement, directly connected to the gaps identified. Although, adjustments to the 3-Year plan are not needed, some redirection of the focus will support the members' efforts to implement the plan. As members continue the implementation of the 3-Year Plan, efforts to connect and recruit students into programs, improve data collection and reporting, and clarifying career and educational pathways remains relevant. Adjustments will focus on the strategies and how members can address the gaps for the upcoming year.

Meeting Regional Needs

Regional Need #1

Description of Gaps in Service or Regional Needs

Lack of access to instruction due to inequities created by the digital divide

In response to county health concerns, racial injustices and economic projections, members are focusing plans to implement and develop quality distance learning programs. Efforts include ongoing support and professional development for staff and faculty, investment in devices and connectivity, expansion of licensed products for student use, and continued flexibility as the educational environment evolves. Of considerable concern by all members is the evident digital divide that occurs among the populations served. Not only are students disadvantaged due to lack of devices and connectivity but also due to limited digital literacy skill sets they possess. Some members are addressing these inequities by implementing strategies to improve access for underserved populations. Strategies include device loaning programs, orientations that connect students to appropriate placement, and supplemental training to improve digital proficiencies. Members plan to reduce the digital divide by providing the necessary support to students through supplemental instruction and available resources.

Description of How the Gaps Were Identified

Identifying the gap of the digital divide and its impact on student accessibility to services was experienced throughout the region as well as the state. Ongoing conversations among consortium members repeatedly accounted challenges faced by students who were unable to access distance learning offerings. Clearly discovered during the review of survey data, students shared challenges associated with lack of access to devices, unreliable internet connectivity, and low digital proficiencies in study skills. Often when members connected with students to transition their learning to online, students explained the barriers that prevented them from participation. Another result that could be an indicator of a gap in access is the reduction in the number of students who persisted in distance learning classes compared to traditional attendance. Enrollment numbers and attendance hours of students participating in instruction during school closures decreased across the region at varying degrees.

Description of How Effectiveness Will Be Measured

How will you measure effectiveness/progress toward meeting this need? Please be sure to identify any local indicators planned for measuring student progress.

As the region moves to address the gap of access and narrow the digital divide, members expect to see progress through indicators in enrollment and participation data. Solutions to device access and connectivity through loaning programs can provide adults the opportunity to engage in learning activities previously unavailable to them. Some members are implementing basic digital literacy classes

to provide students with the necessary skills to navigate remote learning. Training students on the use of devices, navigating software and increasing their overall digital skills will be measured by tracking participation in those supplemental activities. Ultimately, ongoing monitoring of the impact of activities that decrease digital barriers for students will be measured through analysis of retention and persistence rates.

Regional Need #2

Description of Gaps in Service or Regional Needs

Decline in student enrollment and participation

Another gap identified in the region created by the most recent events is a decline in enrollment across programs and throughout the region. Several factors contribute to the decline and have been discussed both locally and statewide. Members of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium have identified elements that have greatly impacted students' participation in meeting their educational goals. One factor identified includes the altered family dynamics and demands on adults as a result of the pandemic, economic downturn, and racial injustices. The economic impact of the rise in unemployment in the region to 14.8% demonstrates challenges and difficult times faced by our students. Many students have lost jobs or experienced loss of income due to the current economic situation. Most adults who are unable to engage in their education are focused on meeting the basic needs of their families with limited resources: food, housing, safety, and health care. Providing necessities has become the most important concern with the populations served by adult education. With quarantine requirements in place, students are impacted by changes in their responsibilities at home, by caring for children who might usually be in school, or family members unable to be outside the home. Students experience an increase in stress, health concerns, and overall safety of exposure to the coronavirus. Many are focusing on the care and well-being of family members and the change in the dynamics has resulted in students unable to concentrate on their educational needs.

Another reason for the decline in enrollment and participation is the low comfort level adult education students have with online learning. Coupled with issues related to the digital divide, many adult education students experience difficulty learning in a traditional classroom setting which is magnified in the remote setting. The flipped classroom model intrinsic to distance learning shifts the roles and responsibilities of both teacher and student. Students often feel incapable of being able to learn in the remote environment and lack the confidence to be successful.

Decline in enrollment extends to issues unique to specific programs as well. For students who might otherwise enroll in a high school equivalency preparation classes, the effort of preparing for a high-stakes exam like the GED or HiSET may not be reasonable when scheduling to take the test has been suspended or not feasible. From the students' viewpoint, they may enroll again once testing has resumed and are easily accessible. Another programmatic challenge exists for students interested in career technical education. Some members are scaling back on offering classes which have a high amount of practical skill application imbedded into the curriculum, requiring in-person instruction. Some trade classes, such as construction, automotive, or welding may be limited because the curriculum contains activities requiring physical presence of the student and instructor. CTE courses have been identified as some of the most difficult to provide effectively in a distance learning setting. Fewer offerings creates additional declines in enrollment.

Description of How the Gaps Were Identified

Identifying the gap of declining enrollment was experienced consequently to school closures throughout the region as well as the state. Ongoing conversations among consortium members revealed that enrollments fluctuated significantly as members shifted instruction from traditional classroom to remote learning. Members continued to monitor attendance and participation of students in online learning activities. Agencies put systems in place to gather enrollment and participation data to assist with navigating the situation. Members continuously monitored trends occurring in enrollment as a tool for planning and decision-making for the fall re-opening of schools. Although members implemented multiple measures to connect and support students with online instruction, data collected revealed a decline in participation from 20% to 60%, depending upon program and populations.

Regional data provided by PIAAC, reveals the percentage of proficiency in literacy for Riverside County is 32% at or below level 1, 29% at or below level 2, and 38% at or below level 3. The regional data provided by PIAAC for numeracy proficiency indicates 42% of Riverside County residents are at or below level 1, 29% at or below level 2 and 29% at or below level 3. With the reported levels of low proficiency for both literacy and numeracy skills, a significant need exists in the region for basic educational skills for adults.

Description of How Effectiveness Will Be Measured

ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium members are committed to continuous outreach and student recruitment that will address the decline in enrollment. Multiple avenues are used to connect with students and provide services and assistance with enrollment. Some of those activities include social media outreach, distribution of mailers and flyers, leveraging partnerships for recruitment, and more. The consortium also utilizes an internal referral outreach system that generates leads to potential students. Tracking leads and new enrollments will help measure outreach efforts and progress toward increasing enrollments.

Gaps in Service

2020-21 Strategies

Strategy #1 To address the need for English language literacy development for immigrants in the region, the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium will continue to offer, and where appropriate, increase instruction and services to non-native English speakers. Courses may include English as a Second Language, citizenship preparation, speaking and pronunciation, grammar and writing, or vocational courses for English language learners.

Strategy #2 To address the need for basic skill development in the region, the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium will continue to offer, and where appropriate, increase instruction and services to appropriate candidates needing skill development in basic literacy. Courses may include adult basic education, high school diploma completion, high school equivalency preparation for students lacking secondary completion and proficiency.

Strategy #3 To address the need for short-term career technical education in the region, the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium will continue to offer and increase instruction and services in areas of career development. Courses may include medical assisting, welding, auto machining, computer technology, and more.

Strategy #4 Continuing to provide and expand academic advisement services is an important component of student success. Members of the consortium will provide academic counseling, transition to post-secondary advisement, and other support students need to continue on their path to advancement.

Strategy #5 To increase the capacity and expansion of services offered in Basic Skills, Immigrant Services, Short-term CTE, and Workforce Preparation, members of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium have developed an outreach plan to more effectively recruit students into programs of high need in the region. Outreach activities include website development connecting referrals to services, participation in local events such as town hall meetings, parent advisory meetings, community events, business group activities such as Chamber of Commerce and association meetings, local job fairs, and more. Members will continue to distribute outreach materials and publications while adding or continuing digital connections using social media.

Strategy # 6 Providing alternative means of study to adult education students is another strategy identified by the members of the consortium. Some of the alternative methods of study planned in the region include online learning, hybrid course offerings, and other digital support for increasing access for potential students. Tutoring outside the classroom will also be offered to students to provide additional learning opportunities.

Seamless Transitions

2020-21 Strategies

Strategy #1 The ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium members have established transition practices within the county office, school and college districts to support the transition of students between institutions. Members of the consortium will continue to expand the collaboration among members and partners to assist students to transition to post-secondary opportunities and the work place. Some of the transition support activities include providing college tours for students, advisement from college transition specialists, hosting workshops on FAFSA and trainings for college applications and financial aid.

Strategy #2 Another strategy to support transitioning students between programs such as ESL, ABE, ASE and CTE is to conduct routine testing cycles assessing student progress and level advancement readiness. By providing students with frequent progress assessment, students can better set and strive for goals that support learning achievement and advancement within levels.

Strategy #3 To support workforce bound students, members will continue to provide workshops on resume writing, interviewing skills, and re-entry training targeting job skill development and job attainment. Members support students transitioning to the workforce by connecting education and labor.

Strategy #4 As one of the goals in the 3-Year Plan indicates, the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium will work to strengthen industry and community partnerships. Members will continue to develop relationships with local businesses through job fairs, meet and greet opportunities, and on-site interviewing sessions. Some members will hire dedicated staff members to support career development and job navigation.

Student Acceleration

2020-21 Strategies

Strategy #1 Members of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium plan to continue or implement technology integration into course offerings within varying programs and levels of instruction. Extending learning opportunities outside the classroom using online applications will assist with accelerating student progress. Using online programs such as Burlington English, Google Classroom platforms and more, connects students to additional digital resources that support learning opportunities and student goal attainment.

Strategy #2 A strategy being implemented to accelerate student progress by some members is to integrate English language and literacy development with contextualized learning with career pathways. Members will use delivery models appropriate for their capability to provide integrated educational

opportunities for students. Agencies will share best practices and resources to support regional success to accelerating student progress.

Strategy #3 Advising students using an individualized study plan is a strategy continuing for some members and being implemented by others. Counselors, advisors, teachers and support staff can be effectively influential in supporting student achievement by assisting with goal setting and study planning. Members will share concepts and practices to best meet the needs of their students within the means of its operations.

Strategy #4 Increasing student success by clarifying pathways, expanding opportunities and supporting students in achieving their goals is another identified goal in the 3-Year Plan. Members plan to increase options for articulation and concurrent enrollment. Connecting and offering courses that directly lead to employment and post-secondary education will support upward mobility for students on the educational journey.

Strategy #5 To improve and accelerate student success, consortium members will form workgroups consisting of internal stakeholders to share best practices and make recommendations for needed changes to programs and processes to improve outcomes. Each member will identify the appropriate workgroups, resources needed, and activities to address its program development objectives.

Shared Professional Development

2020-21 Strategies

Strategy #1 The ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium will continue to host an annual conference for its members and their staff. During the annual conference, participants have the opportunity to share best practices, attend workshops presented by subject experts, and network within the region. The annual conference connects all regional staff and provides valuable networking opportunities.

Strategy #2 Another strategy to build capacity among consortium members is to establish teams focused on regional growth to equip staff with the support and tools needed for program improvement. A team will be established to target regional policies and practices effective for data gathering and accountability reporting. Additional teams will be considered that focus on student persistence and outcomes.

Strategy #3 Participation and attendance at professional development opportunities offered through CALPRO, OTAN, and CASAS will continue with most members in the consortium. Local workshops and internal trainings will be attended when appropriate, including networking and collaboration meetings. Local and state conferences will be attended by members, including the CAEP Summit.

Strategy #4 The ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium sponsors an annual Leadership Retreat for the official representatives and one other staff member. The Leadership Retreat provides meetings that include

strategizing and networking, planning activities for the upcoming year, as well as team building. The retreat is an important part of the region's efforts to work collaboratively and share in the regional adult education efforts.

Leveraging Resources

2020-21 Strategies

Strategy #1 Increasing opportunities with school districts facilities to provide services for adult students is an ongoing opportunity for many of our members. By providing short-term CTE classes on high school campuses or ESL classes at other school campuses, members have been able to increase services to their students and will continue to explore additional usages on district campuses. Partnership with the neighboring districts and continuation high schools, which offers CTE classes during the day, will continue to benefit adult students and communities.

Strategy #2 Adult Education funding will be braided with college financial resources to develop, and ensure the necessary infrastructure for, noncredit certificates, individual counseling to prospective students after they have worked with an advisor to advance to the final stages of the matriculation process, and support the outreach services that complement the educational advising offered at the adult schools

Strategy #3 Adult school and college members will continue to work together to share facilities and ensure easier access to services for potential college transitions. Individual educational advisors from each of the member colleges work with transitioning students and conduct workshops at adult school classrooms and campus facilities.

Strategy #4 Members have partnerships with community organizations and educational institutions, such as the AUMT Institute ("The Phlebotomy School"). Adult students benefit from the instruction, the certification, and assistance with job placement after completing the course. Other partnerships with United Way, local cities, the Department of Public Social Services, and more provide classroom space with little or no cost to the member.

Strategy #5 A member partners with a temporary employment agency for job placement for students who have completed portions of CTE coursework. Students can earn work experience while being paid.

Strategy #6 A member collaborates with Riv-Co Probation Dept. to increase ASE offering. Probation staff at community correction sites recruit and enroll their clients in CTE offerings at their sites.

Strategy #7 A member partners with the Riverside County Youth Treatment Facility (YTEC) to provide CTE online and workforce readiness skills to 18-year old transitional students who have already completed diploma or HSE.

Fiscal Management

Members of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium utilize the planned allocations to provide instruction and support services in accordance to CAEP guidelines. Allocations will be spent in direct alignment with the goals identified in the 2020/21 Annual and 3-Year Plans. Funding to support personnel and program development and expansion involves the majority of planned expenses. The consortium is determined to focus funding resources to prepare students for academic growth, transition, or workforce. Increasing student persistence and retention, increasing access for students during school closures, connecting with community through outreach and student support services, aligning transitions and pathways, continue to be the emphasis of the ABOUT STUDENTS Consortium. The funding allocation will be spent exclusively on the described activities, which will advance the consortium's goals of preparing students for higher education and the workforce. In the 2020/21 budget and beyond, an additional member, Val Verde Unified School District, is funded to provide instructional and support services to its community. The allocation for Val Verde Unified School District was previously included in the Moreno Valley Unified School District's allocation. Beginning the current year, VVUSD will manage and report its allocation expenses independently. All members of the consortium designate their CAEP allocation to provide instruction and support services to students enrolled in basic skills, secondary education, English as a Second Language, and short-term Career Technical Education programs.

Consortium members utilize carry-over funds from prior years to complete activities planned in program development. Quarterly, members received regional reports that inform them of percentage of annual expenditures by agency to assist with fiscal management and reduction of carryover funds. As directed by the CAEP Office, members expend funds with the "first in, first out" process. Members are currently evaluating the fiscal impact of recent events and establishing plans to target resources in priorities which align with the 20/21 Annual Plan. Some priorities include the hiring of additional staff and instructors, purchasing equipment and materials that can support varying instruction modalities, investing in technical professional development for all staff, and capitalizing on outreach expenses that will promote programs to students most in need.

Across the state, adult education funding remained the same as the previous year, thus being "flat funded". Therefore, members' allocations have not increased, but personnel and materials costs have increased, thus requiring carryover funds to be leveraged to cover base costs. Carryover funds will be spent down to adjust to increasing costs of operations and used to maintain and sustain the programs and services which have been established.