



REPORT

Professional Issues Focus Group Results

Focus groups developed and conducted by

Professional Issues Committee Literacy Minnesota

At ABE Regional Professional Development Events:
Correctional Education Association
Minneapolis-St. Paul Regional
Northeast Regional
Northwest Regional
Southeast Regional
Southwest Regional
West Metro Regional

Professional Issues Focus Group Summary

Professional Issues Committee
Literacy Minnesota

Introduction

From fall 2007 to fall 2008, the Professional Issues Committee organized seven focus groups at Regional ABE Conferences to:

- Hear what the major issues were throughout the state according to ABE staff; and
- Tell ABE staff statewide about Literacy Minnesota and the past and present projects developed by the Professional Issues Committee.

Session Basics

There were a total of 138 participants who attended one of the seven focus group sessions. The sessions were as follows:

- September 21, 2007
 - ✚ Southwest Regional Conference in Morton
 - ✚ Facilitated by Brad Hasskamp and Astrid Liden
- October 12, 2007
 - ✚ West Metro Regional in Hopkins
 - ✚ Facilitated by Pat Pawlak, Andrea Poulos and Gayle Middlecamp
- October 26, 2007
 - ✚ Northwest Regional in Thief River Falls
 - ✚ Facilitated by Brad Hasskamp and Astrid Liden
- November 9, 2007
 - ✚ Northeast Regional in Duluth
 - ✚ Facilitated by Rachel Bergquist and Britta Youmans
- March 21, 2008
 - ✚ Minneapolis-St. Paul Regional in Minneapolis
 - ✚ Facilitated by Brad Hasskamp, Kara Schommer, and Gayle Middlecamp
- April 10, 2008
 - ✚ Correctional Educational Association Conference in Bloomington
 - ✚ Facilitated by Brad Hasskamp and Astrid Liden
- October 24, 2008
 - ✚ Southeast Regional in Rochester
 - ✚ Facilitated by Britta Youmans and Kara Schommer

Main Issues

These were the top 5 issues raised in the focus groups:

- Student Retention
- Teacher Compensation
 - Including benefits, workload, professional development opportunities, paid preparation time, K12 equity, union representation, and pay scales
- Networking with ABE Professionals
- Resources, Materials and Curriculum
- Testing
 - Including policies, training, curriculum alignment and resources

Additional Issues

These were other important issues raised in the focus groups:

- Multilevel Instruction
- Funding and Grants
- Public Awareness of ABE programming and learner needs
- Student Recruitment
- Security at Sites
- Staff Relations, especially between teachers and administrators
- Building Partnerships Outside of ABE
 - Including Workforce Centers and Post-Secondary Institutions
- Improving Collaboration and Communication with other agencies
 - Including K12 schools, referral sources such as social service agencies, parole officers and public assistance case managers
- Transitioning Learners to Post-Secondary
- Non-Progressing Learners
- Managing Waiting Lists
- Motivating staff and students
- Learners with Special Needs
 - Including Fetal-Alcohol Syndrome, Fetal-Alcohol Effects and Chemical Dependency
- Research and Data
 - ABE Student Profile (needs, goals, motivations, abilities)
 - How do we know what does and does not work
 - Program struggles and causes, including retention
- Exploring new program models, especially with American-born learners
- Class Sizes (in some specific cases)

How can Literacy Minnesota help?

Hundreds of ideas were generated in the focus group sessions. Because of the large number of ideas, we have grouped the ideas according to issues they help resolve.

Main Issues

Student Retention

<i>What can Literacy Minnesota or other organizations do?</i>	<i>Who can accomplish this? Which committee/organization?</i>
Promote NCSALL Retention and Persistence Study Circle with Materials	Minnesota Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Coordinators, ATLAS
Promote Essential Skills Certificate provided by Minnesota Department of Education	Minnesota Department of Education, St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium
Provide training around retention strategies	Professional Issues Committee, ATLAS
Create Level Completion and Attendance Certificates; post on Literacy Minnesota web site (under promising practices)	Professional Issues Committee
Host an ABE Research Needs Forum for local universities, which would include "Serving American-Born Learners: What works and what does not"	Professional Issues Committee, local universities

Teacher Compensation

<i>What can Literacy Minnesota or other organizations do?</i>	<i>Who can accomplish this? Which committee/organization?</i>
Conduct Teacher Compensation Survey	Professional Issues Committee
Promote findings of 2005 Teacher Salary Survey	Professional Issues Committee
Develop Minnesota ABE Professional Standards (research and compare with national data)	Professional Issues Committee, Minnesota Department of Education, Literacy Minnesota Board
Organize an exploratory meeting between the Legislative Issues and Professional Issues Committees about Teacher Compensation	Professional Issues Committee, Legislative Issues Committee
Develop case studies on Teacher Compensation Issues (including Rochester, Department of Corrections, St. Paul Public Schools, other Community-Based Organizations, etc.)	Professional Issues Committee
Conduct focus groups with administrators to identify issues and promising practices around teacher compensation	Professional Issues Committee

Networking with ABE Professionals

<i>What can Literacy Minnesota or other organizations do?</i>	<i>Who can accomplish this? Which committee/organization?</i>
Develop summary and recommendations with focus group results	Professional Issues Committee
Provide ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute and regional events	Professional Issues Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Develop "train the trainer" session for staff presenting ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute (attend orientation with follow up)	Professional Issues Committee, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Develop site visit materials that include suggestions (including finding a date), sample agenda and promote programs willing to "host" (present this info at a training: How to make the most out of a site visit at Summer Institute and with Regional Professional Development Coordinators)	Professional Issues Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Find new ways to promote ABE Promising Practices	Professional Issues Committee
Find new ways to promote online discussion boards	Minnesota Department of Education, MLC, Professional Issues Committee
Develop ABE Mentoring System around state (including a list of standards, a list of potential mentors, a mentor training session at Summer Institute, and a mentor/mentee lunch at Summer Institute)	Professional Issues Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators, ATLAS, Minnesota Department of Education
Provide curriculum development sessions at Summer Institute and regional events	Professional Issues Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Conduct focus groups with administrators to identify issues and promising practices around teacher compensation	Professional Issues Committee
Develop Regional Managers & Administrators Meetings	Minnesota Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Develop ABE Manager Orientation Session for Moodle and Summer Institute	Minnesota Department of Education, MLC, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Increase Literacy Minnesota awareness	Literacy Minnesota Board,

with ABE professionals	Membership & Marketing Committee
Organize Professional Issues Committee Retreat	Professional Issues Committee
Develop Supervisor Training Sessions at Summer Institute and other venues that include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Management Training • Handling Employee Disputes/ Employee Management • Hiring • Program Development/Strategic Planning • Program Marketing • Teaching Instruction Basics • Evaluating Staff 	Professional Issues Committee, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee, Minnesota Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Coordinators

Resources, Materials and Curriculum

<i>What can Literacy Minnesota or other organizations do?</i>	<i>Who can accomplish this? Which committee/organization?</i>
Develop focus group summary and share ideas for other committees and organizations	Professional Issues Committee
Post training materials online for ABE Teacher Orientation	Professional Issues Committee, Minnesota Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Develop Moodle version of ABE Teacher Orientation	Professional Issues Committee, Minnesota Department of Education, MLC
Develop “train the trainer” session for staff presenting ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute (attend orientation with follow up)	Professional Issues Committee
Develop site visit materials that include suggestions (including finding a date), sample agenda and promote programs willing to “host” (present this info at a training: How to make the most out of a site visit at Summer Institute and with Regional Professional Development Coordinators)	Professional Issues Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators

Provide a "Finding Other Funding" session at Summer Institute and regional events	Summer Institute Program Planning Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Provide a grant-writing training at Summer Institute and regional events	Summer Institute Program Planning Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Find new ways to promote ABE Promising Practices	Professional Issues Committee
Find new ways to promote online discussion boards	Minnesota Department of Education, MLC, Professional Issues Committee
Promote NCSALL Retention and Persistence Study Circle with Materials	Minnesota Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Coordinators, ATLAS
Provide curriculum development sessions at Summer Institute and Regional events	Professional Issues Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Provide "How to write and format curriculum" session at Summer Institute	Professional Issues Committee
Promote effective integration of educational technology into ABE curriculum (also using MLC web site)	MLC, Professional Issues Committee
Add Extra Resource Table for teachers' unused/old texts, presenters' undistributed materials, vendors' free samples (after they leave), etc.	Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Develop ABE Manager Orientation Session for Moodle and Summer Institute	Minnesota Department of Education, MLC, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Create a "Day One Kit" for managers to develop orientation for new ABE Staff (with Basics on ABE)	Professional Issues Committee, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Promote ABE Licensure Program at the University of Minnesota	Professional Issues Committee, University of Minnesota

<p>Develop Supervisor Training Sessions at Summer Institute and other venues that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Management Training • Handling Employee Disputes/ Employee Management • Hiring • Program Development/Strategic Planning • Program Marketing • Teaching Instruction Basics • Evaluating Staff 	<p>Professional Issues Committee, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee, Minnesota Department of Education, Regional Professional Development Coordinators</p>
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Testing

<i>What can Literacy Minnesota or other organizations do?</i>	<i>Who can accomplish this? Which committee/organization?</i>
Organize TABE-alignment curriculum session at Summer Institute, regional events and/or other venues	MN ABE Assessment Training, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Organize CASAS-alignment curriculum session at Summer Institute, regional events and/or other venues	MN ABE Assessment Training, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Provide CASAS and TABE certification trainings at Summer Institute and regional events	MN ABE Assessment Training, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee, Regional Professional Development Coordinators
Increase GED student reimbursement	Legislative Issues Committee
Develop advanced CASAS administrators discussion sessions at Summer Institute and regional events	MN ABE Assessment Training, Regional Professional Development Coordinators, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Develop advanced TABE administrators discussion sessions at Summer Institute and regional events	MN ABE Assessment Training, Regional Professional Development Coordinators, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee
Provide GED Testing Accommodations Training at Summer Institute	Minnesota Department of Education, Summer Institute Program Planning Committee



Ideas Grouped by Committee

Here are the ideas that could be helpful to the following Literacy Minnesota committees.

Literacy Minnesota

Our Mission:

Literacy Minnesota is an organization of professionals serving adults with literacy needs through legislative advocacy and statewide support of quality Adult Basic Education programs.

Our Vision Statement:

- 1) Literacy Minnesota will develop, improve, and expand adult literacy services through legislative advocacy and statewide support of quality Adult Basic Education.
- 2) Literacy Minnesota will serve and respond to constituent needs through a governing board that values growth and continuous learning.
- 3) Literacy Minnesota will continue to build its reputation as a dynamic, professional organization.

Literacy Minnesota's Goals:

- To advocate for adult literacy programs with the State Legislature.
- To promote dialog between adult learners and providers of adult basic skills to ensure efficient and effective adult literacy programs.
- To create awareness for and impact of adult literacy programs throughout Minnesota.

Literacy Minnesota is a statewide professional membership organization. Yearly dues are the only revenue to support Literacy Minnesota's activities. Literacy Minnesota has an elected Executive Board, which coordinates and oversees committee activities that strengthen Adult Basic Education services in Minnesota.

Literacy Minnesota's Structure:

Literacy Minnesota is organized by a Board with executive members and members from various committees; the organization has four central committees: Legislative Committee, Professional Issues Committee, Volunteer Issues Committee and the Marketing and Membership Committee. Literacy Minnesota organizes the Summer Institute Conference.



Ideas for the Literacy Minnesota Board:

- Develop MN ABE Professional Standards (research and compare with national data)
- Develop public awareness campaign to increase ABE understanding that includes student and volunteer stories (especially including K12, school unions, employers, community members, legislators, etc.)
- Increase Literacy Minnesota awareness with ABE professionals

Ideas for the Literacy Minnesota Legislative Issues Committee:

- Develop public awareness campaign to increase ABE understanding that includes student and volunteer stories (especially including K12, school unions, employers, community members, legislators, etc.)
- Develop MN ABE Professional Standards (research and compare with national data)
- Increase GED Student Reimbursement
- Organize an exploratory meeting between the Legislative Issues and Professional Issues Committees about Teacher Compensation

Ideas for the Literacy Minnesota Volunteer Issues Committee:

- Promote and support volunteer involvement (possibly through trainings and program consultation), especially in greater Minnesota
- Increase visibility of Literacy Minnesota at Regional and State ABE events
- Develop public awareness campaign to increase ABE understanding that includes student and volunteer stories (especially including K12, school unions, employers, community members, legislators, etc.)

Ideas for the Literacy Minnesota Membership & Marketing Committee:

- Include Literacy Minnesota Web Site and contact information on all promotional items, materials and brochures
- Increase Literacy Minnesota awareness with ABE professionals
- Develop public awareness campaign to increase ABE understanding that includes student and volunteer stories (especially including K12, school unions, employers, community members, legislators, etc.)

Ideas for the Literacy Minnesota Professional Issues Committee:

- Provide training around retention strategies
- Create Level Completion and Attendance Certificates; post on Literacy Minnesota web site (under promising practices)
- Host an ABE Research Needs Forum for local universities, which would include "Serving American-Born Learners: What works and what does not"
- Conduct Teacher Compensation Survey
- Promote findings of 2005 Teacher Salary Survey

- Develop Minnesota ABE Professional Standards (research and compare with national data)
- Organize an exploratory meeting between the Legislative Issues and Professional Issues Committees about Teacher Compensation
- Develop case studies on Teacher Compensation Issues (including Rochester, Department of Corrections, St. Paul Public Schools, other Community-Based Organizations, etc.)
- Conduct focus groups with administrators to identify issues and promising practices around teacher compensation
- Develop summary and recommendations with focus group results
- Provide ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute and regional events
- Develop “train the trainer” session for staff presenting ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute (attend orientation with follow up)
- Develop site visit materials that include suggestions (including finding a date), sample agenda and promote programs willing to “host” (present this info at a training: How to make the most out of a site visit at Summer Institute and with Regional Professional Development Coordinators)
- Find new ways to promote ABE Promising Practices
- Find new ways to promote online discussion boards
- Develop ABE Mentoring System around state (including a list of standards, a list of potential mentors, a mentor training session at Summer Institute, and a mentor/mentee lunch at Summer Institute)
- Provide curriculum development sessions at Summer Institute and regional events
- Conduct focus groups with administrators to identify issues and promising practices around teacher compensation
- Increase Literacy Minnesota awareness with ABE professionals
- Organize Professional Issues Committee Retreat
- Develop Supervisor Training Sessions at Summer Institute and other venues that include:
 - Budget Management Training
 - Handling Employee Disputes/ Employee Management
 - Hiring
 - Program Development/Strategic Planning
 - Program Marketing
 - Teaching Instruction Basics
 - Evaluating Staff
- Develop focus group summary and share ideas for other committees and organizations
- Post training materials online for ABE Teacher Orientation
- Develop Moodle version of ABE Teacher Orientation
- Develop “train the trainer” session for staff presenting ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute (attend orientation with follow up)

- Develop site visit materials that include suggestions (including finding a date), sample agenda and promote programs willing to “host” (present this info at a training: How to make the most out of a site visit at Summer Institute and with Regional Professional Development Coordinators)
- Find new ways to promote ABE Promising Practices
- Find new ways to promote online discussion boards
- Provide curriculum development sessions at Summer Institute and Regional events
- Provide “How to write and format curriculum” session at Summer Institute
- Promote effective integration of educational technology into ABE curriculum (also using MLC web site)
- Create a “Day One Kit” for managers to develop orientation for new ABE Staff (with Basics on ABE)
- Promote ABE Licensure Program at the University of Minnesota

Ideas for the Summer Institute Committees:

- Develop “train the trainer” session for staff presenting ABE Teacher Orientation at Summer Institute (attend orientation with follow up)
- Develop site visit materials that include suggestions (including finding a date), sample agenda and promote programs willing to “host” (present this info at a training: How to make the most out of a site visit at Summer Institute and with Regional Professional Development Coordinators)
- Develop ABE Manager Orientation Session for Moodle and Summer Institute
- Provide a “Finding Other Funding” session at Summer Institute
- Provide a grant writing training at Summer Institute and regional events
- Create a “Day One Kit” for managers to develop orientation for new ABE Staff (with Basics on ABE)
- Organize TABE-alignment curriculum session at Summer Institute with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Organize CASAS-alignment curriculum session at Summer Institute with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Provide CASAS and TABE certification trainings at Summer Institute and regional events
- Develop advanced CASAS administrators discussion sessions at Summer Institute and regional events
- Develop advanced TABE administrators discussion sessions at Summer Institute and regional events
- Provide GED Testing Accommodations Training at Summer Institute
- Develop Supervisor Training Sessions at Summer Institute and other venues that include:



- Budget Management Training
- Handling Employee Disputes/ Employee Management
- Hiring
- Program Development/Strategic Planning
- Program Marketing
- Teaching Instruction Basics
- Evaluating Staff

Ideas for other organizations in Minnesota

Minnesota Department of Education – Adult Basic Education

Mission

The mission of Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Minnesota is to provide adults with educational opportunities to acquire and improve their literacy skills necessary to become self-sufficient and to participate effectively as productive workers, family members, and citizens.

For more information, please see the web site at <http://mnabe.themlc.org>.

Ideas for the Minnesota Department of Education:

- Promote NCSALL Retention and Persistence Study Circle with Materials
- Promote Essential Skills Certificate provided by Minnesota Department of Education
- Develop Minnesota ABE Professional Standards (research and compare with national data)
- Find new ways to promote online discussion boards
- Develop ABE Mentoring System around state (including a list of standards, a list of potential mentors, a mentor training session at Summer Institute, and a mentor/mentee lunch at Summer Institute)
- Develop Regional Managers & Administrators Meetings
- Develop ABE Manager Orientation Session for Moodle and Summer Institute
- Post training materials online for ABE Teacher Orientation
- Develop Moodle version of ABE Teacher Orientation
- Find new ways to promote online discussion boards
- Promote NCSALL Retention and Persistence Study Circle with Materials
- Provide GED Testing Accommodations Training at Summer Institute
- Develop Supervisor Training Sessions at Summer Institute and other venues that include:
 - Budget Management Training
 - Handling Employee Disputes/ Employee Management
 - Hiring
 - Program Development/Strategic Planning

- Program Marketing
- Teaching Instruction Basics
- Evaluating Staff

Regional Professional Development Coordinators

Regional Professional Development Coordinators work to develop trainings, conferences and other professional development opportunities for staff and programs in their region in Minnesota. Regions include: Northwest, Northeast, Mid-Central, Southwest, Southeast, West Metro, East Metro, Minneapolis, and St. Paul.

For more information, please go to

http://mnabe.themlc.org/Regional_Professional_Development.html.

Ideas for Regional Professional Development Coordinators:

- Promote NCSALL Retention and Persistence Study Circle with Materials
- Include Site visits of ABE Programs as part of a regional training/conference
- Provide the ABE Teacher Orientation at Regional Events
- Post training materials online
- Develop site visit materials that include suggestions (such as selecting a date), sample agenda and promote programs willing to “host” (potentially useful as a training titled, “How to make the most out of a site visit”)
- Develop ABE Mentoring System around state (including a list of standards, a list of potential mentors, a mentor training session at Summer Institute, and a mentor/mentee lunch at Summer Institute)
- Provide curriculum development sessions at regional events
- Develop Regional Managers & Administrators Meetings
- Promote online resources (including ABE Teacher Orientation)
- Organize TABE-alignment curriculum session at regional events with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Organize TABE-alignment curriculum session at regional events with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Provide CASAS and TABE certification trainings at regional events with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Develop advanced CASAS administrators discussion sessions at regional events with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Develop advanced TABE administrators discussion sessions at regional events with Minnesota ABE Assessment Training
- Provide a “Finding Other Funding” session at regional events
- Provide a grant-writing training at regional events



- Develop Supervisor Training Sessions at Summer Institute and other venues that include:
 - Budget Management Training
 - Handling Employee Disputes/ Employee Management
 - Hiring
 - Program Development/Strategic Planning
 - Program Marketing
 - Teaching Instruction Basics
 - Evaluating Staff

Minnesota ABE Assessment Training

Minnesota ABE Assessment Training is a supplemental service for programs throughout the state, headed by Marty Olsen at Southwest Adult Basic Education.

For more information, please go to www.mnabeassessment.com.

Ideas for Minnesota ABE Assessment Training:

- Organize TABE-alignment curriculum session at Summer Institute, regional events and/or other venues
- Organize CASAS-alignment curriculum session at Summer Institute, regional events and/or other venues
- Provide CASAS and TABE certification trainings at Summer Institute and regional events
- Develop advanced CASAS administrators discussion sessions at Summer Institute and regional events
- Develop advanced TABE administrators discussion sessions at Summer Institute and regional events

ATLAS (ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System)

ABE Teaching and Learning Advancement System is a statewide supplemental service based at Hamline University.

For more information on ATLAS, go to <http://www.hamline.edu/education/academics/centers/sltl/atlas/index.html>.

Ideas for ATLAS:

- Promote NCSALL Retention and Persistence Study Circle with Materials
- Provide training around retention strategies
- Develop ABE Mentoring System around state (including a list of standards, a list of potential mentors, a mentor training session at Summer Institute, and a mentor/mentee lunch at Summer Institute)



Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC)

The Minnesota Literacy Council is a statewide supplemental service offering services to ABE programs.

For more information on the MLC, please go to www.themlc.org.

Ideas for the Minnesota Literacy Council (MLC):

- Find new ways to promote online discussion boards
- Develop ABE Manager Orientation Session for Moodle and Summer Institute
- Develop Moodle version of ABE Teacher Orientation
- Promote effective integration of educational technology into ABE curriculum (also using MLC web site)

St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium (SPCLC)

The St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium is the largest ABE consortium in the state of Minnesota. The SPCLC also receives supplemental service funding for select projects developed for the state.

For more information on the SPCLC, please go to www.spclc.org.

Idea for the St. Paul Community Literacy Consortium:

- Promote Essential Skills Certificate provided by Minnesota Department of Education

Local colleges and universities

Adult Basic Education prepares students to transition from ABE programming to post-secondary education.

Ideas for local colleges and universities:

- Host an ABE Research Needs Forum for local universities, which would include "Serving American-Born Learners: What works and what does not"
- Promote ABE Licensure Program at the University of Minnesota

Conclusion

Obviously, the ideas generated are quite astounding, both in quantity and in quality. To properly address these issues, groups will likely need years to fully develop these ideas into effective projects that could have an immense impact statewide positively improving the work of all ABE programs and staff.

Credits

The focus groups and report were prepared, organized and presented by the Professional Issues Committee of Literacy Minnesota. Committee members that worked on this project include:

- Rachel Bergquist
- Brad Hasskamp
- Claudia Kinville
- Astrid Liden
- Pat Pawlak
- Gayle Middlecamp
- Andrea Poulos
- Kara Schommer
- Britta Youmans