

**Educating the Public and Elected Officials about Adult Education:
Report on Adult Education Advocacy Efforts in New England**

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ABSTRACT

This report takes stock of the local and statewide advocacy strategies by adult educators in each of the six New England states. Although not a definitive statement about adult education advocacy or advocates in New England, the report paints a picture of the advocacy strategies, accomplishments, trends, and needs within each state's economic, legislative and adult education context in 2007.

The findings show that adult education advocacy efforts in New England are multi-faceted, and growing in sophistication and reach. All but one New England state achieved an increase in their state's appropriation for Adult Basic Education in 2007. The report discusses the principal challenges and related promising strategies revealed through interviews with leading adult education advocates in New England. They are grouped into four areas:

- 1) **Visibility:** The most enterprising programs mine all the connections that staff, students, volunteers and community allies have and enlist them to advocate for adult education. They dedicate time to "branding" the program and adult education in the community and getting media coverage.
- 2) **Framing the Message:** The preponderance of views stressed the economic argument, i.e. increasing the community's tax base and educated workforce while reducing the need for various forms of public assistance. Another way to frame that message posits adult education as central to the achievement of many quality of life outcomes, such as children's educational achievement, health and safety through reduced recidivism.
- 3) **Student Involvement:** Integrating critical thinking, self advocacy skills, and student leadership development in the educational program appear to be key strategies for building students' sense of ownership over the program and enduring student involvement.
- 4) **Increasing and Sustaining Advocacy Efforts:** Promising strategies included hiring people who are passionate about adult education (when that is possible), orienting them to a program culture where civic involvement is valued and expected, and harnessing that passion toward advocacy, as well as carving out different options for people's involvement in advocacy.

While diverse strategies can yield the same desired outcomes, which combination of strategies an individual program or advocacy coalition chooses to pursue is informed by a host of factors: their perception of the local context; their beliefs about the purposes and goals of advocacy; their organizational culture; and of course, the amount of time and resources they can commit to the cause. Answers to the following questions also shape the coalitions' and individual programs' approach to adult education advocacy:

- Do they view their efforts as part of a long tradition of fighting for social change that requires everyone's involvement?
- To what extent should adult education advocacy groups reach out and join efforts with other groups advocating for immigrants and low-income people?
- Do program directors view adult education advocacy as an opportunity for learners and teachers to connect with their own voice and sense of collective power or as one more thing to manage?
- Is advocacy an opportunity to promote broader civic participation and learning goals?

The most frequently cited needs for improvement of advocacy efforts and technical assistance were:

1. How to frame the message about the importance of adult education;
2. Development and implementation of an ongoing public awareness/ marketing plan;
3. A compendium of effective adult education advocacy strategies; and
4. How to train and involve students as advocates.

Addressing these needs will help adult education advocacy coalitions build a sustainable strategy that offers multiple ways for all stakeholders – students, staff, allies—to be involved in educating elected officials and the general public about the importance of adult education to their communities' health and prosperity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Public awareness about the value of adult education is one vehicle for fulfilling the mission of the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) to strengthen adult literacy services in New England. To pave the way for effective adult literacy advocacy in New England, NELRC conducted a survey about how the adult education community in each state is engaging and educating elected state officials about adult education¹. This survey generated baseline information that informs NELRC about how it can make a meaningful contribution, as a regional entity, to the member states' advocacy efforts.

This survey is not a definitive statement about adult education advocacy or advocates but it does paint a picture of the advocacy strategies, accomplishments, trends, and needs within each state's economic, legislative and adult education context. This survey does not address how the states are involved in federal advocacy efforts.

Data Collection

For this survey we interviewed adult education program directors, state directors of adult education from the six New England states as well as leaders of four adult education advocacy coalitions who recommended adult educator advocates to be interviewed. A total of 33 of individuals were interviewed between August and December 2007 by Harvard Graduate School of Education intern Ami Magisos and NELRC director Silja Kallenbach who also analyzed the survey data. Please see Appendices A-D for a list of the individuals interviewed, and the interview questions.

II. STATE PROFILES

New England State Adult Education Data at a Glance

Fiscal year 2007 was a relatively good year for adult education in New England. Five New England states succeeded in increasing the state's adult education allocation and Massachusetts was able to prevent a funding cut. For two states, (Rhode Island and Vermont) the increase was a one-time appropriation that may or may not set a precedent for a higher appropriation in FY 2008. Most of Rhode Island's increase was a transfer from another existing funding source (the Job Development Fund) and Vermont's increase was for infrastructure improvements. Nevertheless, these results bespeak of increasingly more effective and organized advocacy on behalf of adult education.

¹ Adult education, as used in this document, refers to a continuum of instruction that ranges from basic literacy to preparation for the GED and adult high school diploma and for college, as well as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) .

State	FY 2008 State Adult Education Appropriation	+/- from FY 2007 State Appropriation	FY 2008 Federal Adult Education Appropriation incl. EL/Civics	Total*
Connecticut	\$20,596,400 plus projected capped local match is \$19,889,092, \$500,000-separate state appropriation for Young Adult Learner competitive grant program	+\$1 M from state appropriation	\$5,793,786	\$46,779,278
Maine	\$5.5 M, plus \$8.1M in local match	+\$700K for college transitions	\$2,040,067	\$15,640,067
Massachusetts	\$30,101,348, + about \$10 M in local match		\$10,486,339	\$50,486,339
New Hampshire	\$2.3M + \$1M in local match	+\$375K	\$1,881,183	\$ 5,181,183
Rhode Island	\$7.4M	+\$2.1 M	\$2.2 M	\$ 9.5 M
Vermont	\$2.7M	+\$500K (one time)	\$1,064,246	\$4,264,246

Figure 1

* These totals do not include other public or private funds that tend to be state-specific smaller appropriations.

State	Number of Publicly Funded Adult Education Programs	Number of ESOL Students Served	Number of ABE, GED, EDP and Adult Diploma Students Served	Total Number of Students Served With Public Dollars	Average Cost per Student
Connecticut (FY 05 data)	70	13,891	18,067	31,958 (04-05 data)	\$1,260
Maine (FY 05 data)	118	2,110	15,000	17,110	\$ 912
Massachusetts (FY 06 data)	109	13,014	9,235	22,249	\$1,820
New Hampshire (FY 06 data)	28	2,140	5,342	7,482	\$608
Rhode Island (FY 07 data)	34	3,345	3,442	6,787	\$1,450
Vermont (FY 06)	4*	610	3,502	4,112	\$1,124

* All 4 operate under one umbrella of Vermont Learning Works.

Figure 2

Connecticut

"As a program director, I realized I had to deal with local legislators and convince them about what the funding means for their constituents. They came to view us as a legitimate force in the community."

*~ Art Muldowney, former Director of Middletown Adult Education, Co-Chair of CAACE
Legislative Committee*

Program & Policy Context

Perhaps the most defining contextual factor that affects adult education advocacy in Connecticut is the way the adult education delivery system is set up and funded. By state law, each school district must provide or cooperate in the provision of ABE, Secondary school completion programs (e.g. GED, Adult High School Diploma, National External Diploma Program), Citizenship and ESOL services to adults and receives funds for it on a formula that takes into account the amount of property tax revenue and the number of adults without high school diplomas. Poorer communities receive more compensation from the state than wealthier ones. The formula also provides an incentive whereby the more money a school district allocates to adult education the more matching funds it receives from the state. Forty-seven school district based providers serve Connecticut's 169 cities and towns. Seventeen community-based providers receive funding through the school districts as "cooperating eligible entities" at a lower rate than the school districts.

Connecticut allocates money to adult education through a combination of local, state and federal funding. This funding enables Connecticut to serve the highest number of adult learners of any state in New England at 31,958 through 71 programs many of which have multiple sites and serve hundreds of adults. Instructional intensity varies from 3-6 hours a week to more intensive offerings that provide 15-20 hours per week. The majority of the teaching staff is part-time.

Legislative Context

The Connecticut legislature appropriates budgets in two-year cycles. It is possible to advocate for an increase in the non-budget years but very difficult to achieve. A spending cap was placed on funding for a number of education and human service programs during a state budget crunch by the Connecticut legislature about 5 years ago which reduced state adult education funding annually between 5 to 18%. This greatly affects advocacy strategies related to increasing the adult education allocation. If the legislature lifts the cap off adult education they'd have to take it off all other budget items affected by the cap. Thus, Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) believes that it is a better strategy is to go for an increase in appropriations rather than to try to get the cap lifted. This strategy worked in FY 2007 when the Connecticut legislature appropriated an additional \$1 million for adult education.

Statewide Advocacy

The legislative agenda and strategies of Connecticut's statewide adult education advocacy organization, CAACE, are influenced by the fact that Connecticut's adult education system is firmly rooted within the K-12 system with a legislative mandate. This is also reflected in the composition of the CAACE Board which currently has no representation from community-based adult education providers. CAACE contracts with a legislative liaison and also employs a part-time director who coordinates monthly meetings, maintains its website, and handles the logistics of the annual CAACE conference.

CAACE's advocacy work is spearheaded by a legislative committee of 8-10 members, and the legislative liaison. The legislative committee co-chair estimates that about a third of the program directors (20-30 people) are actively involved in advocacy and another third are involved when major issues come up. The most active members tend to be the directors of larger school-based programs located in schools.

The four program directors interviewed for this report all expressed a strong sense that the most effective advocacy strategy is local, building strong relationships with other key providers and local legislators so that adult education comes to be viewed as a legitimate force in the community. According to Mary Berry, director of Norwich Adult Education, "If we in adult education are making ourselves invaluable to our community, advocacy will take care of itself. Instead of being the stepchild, we are now the program to which other agencies turn." Her program has come to be seen by local health providers and safety officials (fire and police) as an effective venue through which they can educate adults, be it about breast exams or fire safety. In addition, her program and all others invite legislators, the mayor and other city officials to events such as an annual Family Literacy Day. The director of Vernon Adult Education, Rich Tariff, employs similar strategies: "We are visible in every chamber of commerce, school board and Workforce Investment Board meeting." He advocated successfully to get the school superintendent to include an adult learner among students to whom the school district gives an award every year. Such inclusion has symbolic value of granting equal status to adult education. Tariff talks about the importance of branding adult education. He has done that in his region, for example, by distributing T-shirts and mugs with the slogan, "No adult left behind."

CAACE is a member of the Campaign for Working CT. One of the policy issues, with potential financial implications for adult education, is an initiative of the Campaign to secure and channel more funds for workforce development through the state's Workforce Investment Boards. CAACE wants to ensure that the school based adult education providers play a significant role in this effort. Another policy issue CAACE is monitoring is the state's redesign of K-12 teacher certification that may have implications for adult education staff that have to be certified.

Lessons Learned

*"You cannot lie down and rest. You have to do advocacy all the time."
~ Richard Tariff, Director, Vernon Regional Adult Education*

The following are some of the principal lessons learned by the advocates surveyed:

- Advocate from the heart and demonstrate your passion for adult education.
- Speak to the needs of employers and superintendents.
- Make your program a valued provider in the community to whom other agencies will turn for information and collaborations and access to adult learners. Seek grant opportunities and devote staff time to making connections in the community.
- Celebrate student successes publicly.
- Operate from the strengths of the advocates so that no one person feels they are doing an overwhelming task.
- Get policy-makers involved in what you do.
- Be careful about how you promote adult education: Some taxpayers are not happy to pay for a second chance for adults.

Goals and New Activities

Survey participants cited the following efforts that they were planning for the coming year:

- Connecticut Bureau of Adult Education will work with the state Governor's office on a documentary that will promote adult education and for which the Governor's Office has promised to buy air time on radio and television.
- Eastern Connecticut Regional Adult Education will sponsor Community Forums on adult and family literacy in collaboration with the local United Way, Literacy Volunteers and other agencies.
- Norwich Adult Education will assess small businesses' needs for adult education and build employers' awareness of how adult education can respond to those needs.

- Vernon regional Adult Education will promote adult education with a new message: 'Preparing for the Next Step.'

Technical Assistance Needs

The most pressing technical assistance needs identified by the Connecticut respondents, and the CAACE legislative co-chair in particular, are:

- "High powered" advocacy training
- How to involve students as advocates
- Development and implementation of an ongoing public awareness/ marketing plan, and institutionalization of the process.

Maine

"We need to make them aware that adult education is a vibrant and significant aspect of the school department, that there is a real need for these programs. For folks in adult education, it's not their first inclination to trumpet their successes, but it's critical, especially when taxpayers are scrutinizing how their tax dollars are spent."
 ~Rob Callahan, Director of Lewiston Adult & Continuing Education

Program & Policy Context

Maine stands out as the other New England state, besides Connecticut, where school districts are the delivery system for adult education. Similar to Connecticut, adult education programs' funding levels are tied to the amount the local communities allocate for adult education. In fact, the local towns need to appropriate funds in advance and are retroactively reimbursed at the rate of 70-75% of what they spend up to a set ceiling. Like Connecticut, the funding formula provides an incentive whereby the more money a school district allocates to adult education the more matching funds it receives from the state. Larger programs receive about a third of their budget from the state, a third from the local town through the school district and a third through grants, contracts and fees from continuing education classes. Classes are offered 3-6 hours a week and the majority of the staff is part-time. 17,110 adults were served in ABE, GED, adult diploma and ESOL classes by 118 adult education programs.

Legislative Context

Maine has a part-time legislature of 186 legislators. As a result, most of the legislators have other jobs in the community, which, in many cases, provides adult education programs more opportunities to build relationships with them. Also given that Maine's towns and communities are small, adult education program directors tend to know the local legislators personally. One program director we surveyed hired a legislator as the evening supervisor. However, Maine's 8-year term-limits necessitate ongoing cultivation of relationships with new legislators and new leadership in key committees by local programs.

Nevertheless, there are three issues that potentially threaten the stability and future funding of adult education in Maine. In 2006 a tax cap proposal, called Taxpayers' Bill of Rights, was narrowly defeated. A similar referendum question may be again put before the voters in 2008. If passed, it would greatly curtail local tax revenue and therefore funding for adult education, particularly since state funding is predicated on local appropriations. The second issue is the state's \$37 million budget deficit that has already led to the impending closing of the state's long-standing professional development center, Center for Adult Learning and Literacy and the University of Maine. Finally, adult education may be affected by a new law that mandates the regionalization of school districts and consolidates school districts and thus eliminates superintendent and other administrative positions. The new law is essentially a cost-cutting mechanism, whose impact on adult education is as of yet unclear. However, it is clear that it is changing the relationships and decision-makers on whom adult education programs have come to rely on for their local funding.

Statewide Advocacy

Similar to Connecticut, the legislative agenda and strategies of Maine's statewide adult education advocacy organization, Maine Association for Adult Education (MAEA), are driven by the fact that Maine's adult education system is firmly rooted within the K-12 system. MAEA employs a part-time director who coordinates MAEA's work, monthly Board meetings, advocacy trainings, and also serves as the legislative liaison. MAEA also sponsors Maine's annual adult education conference that generates some income. MAEA retains the services of Howe, Cahill and Company for governmental advocacy in Augusta.

Founded in 1965, MAEA has 80 institutional members, that pay a fee according to the size of their budget, as well as some individual members. MAEA also has 15-20 partner agency members, such as Women, Work, and Community, Maine Center for Economic Policy, MelMac Foundation, and Center for Adult Learning and Literacy. MAEA's executive director, Cathy Newell, estimates that about 20 programs are very active and maybe 80% are involved in advocacy to some extent. Some of the more active members are assigned to cultivate relationships with and monitor bills by the Appropriations and Education committees.

One of MAEA's long-standing advocacy events is an annual Adult Education Day held in the Hall of Flags at the State House in Augusta. Local programs prepare displays about adult education, and coffee is served to legislators and their aides as part of the program. One year, as part of this event, MAEA recognized legislators who had earned their GED or adult diploma. This relates to another long-standing strategy which is to learn as much as they can about the legislators' personal and family connections as beneficiaries or through staff and other students. Such connections may be that a teacher goes to the same church as a school board member, or a legislator's offspring got his/her diploma or GED at the program. Programs are encouraged to invite legislators to visit classes and get to know students. At least one program has also invited legislators to teach a class. Through these connections, MAEA cultivates champions for adult education. Through these connections, MAEA cultivates champions for adult education.

MAEA counts among its recent victories the fact that in 2007, 100% of the State legislators signed a bill that recognized the importance of adult education. The bill had no money attached to it. MAEA leadership hopes that the symbolic value of this recognition will eventually translate into willingness to increase state funding for adult education. This willingness was already expressed in 2007 when the legislature made a nationally historic appropriation of \$800,000 in new funds for college transition components as part of adult education programs. Such an appropriation came as a result of years of advocacy, and a white paper by MAEA, reinforced by the New England ABE-to-College demonstration project that provided a program model with documented outcomes. It was one of very few new initiatives funded by the Maine legislature that year.

In 2007, MAEA contracted with a marketing firm to develop a strategic communication plan to enhance the visibility of adult education programs in Maine. The preliminary recommendations focus on branding and more aggressive advertising; promoting Maine Adult Education as a system with more uniform appearance in terms of program names, catalogue designs, course descriptions, websites, taglines, and a common web portal. The possible implementation of the firm's recommendations is being discussed.

Lessons Learned:

"We need to get across the message that adult education is essential. People don't get it that real economic development depends on adults."

~ Cathy Newell, Executive Director, MAEA

The following are some of the principal lessons learned by the advocates surveyed:

- Build relationships at the local level..

- collaborations are critical: develop collaborations with Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Investment Boards, Department of Health and Human Services.
- Plan time for advocacy into the schedule.
- Begin advocacy before you express any requests.
- Have your program portfolio ready with student data, outcomes, and anecdotes.
- Don't assume that everyone knows what adult education is/does.

Goals and New Activities

Building on its successful strategies, MAEA's principal future goals and new activities are:

- Push for an increase of the statewide appropriation from \$5M to \$9M which is equal to funding programs at the full reimbursement rate (called subsidy in Maine) set by the state statute.
- Provide regional advocacy trainings for program staff and students.
- Strengthen relationships at the local level, especially with School Boards.
- Improve public awareness of the value of adult education, and of the system of adult education that exists through coordinated marketing among programs. At the local level, some program directors plan to reach out more to volunteers to help raise public awareness.

Technical Assistance Needs

The most pressing technical assistance needs identified by the Maine respondents were:

- How to frame the message about the importance of adult education to make taxpayers feel satisfied about the investment they are making in adult education; and
- Templates for how to present local information.

PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILE: SUMNER ADULT EDUCATION

*"You need to cultivate a program culture that is committed to advocacy."
~ Ann Sargent Slayton, Director, Sumner Adult Education*

For Ann Slayton, Director of Sumner Adult Education, advocacy is part of the purpose of adult education: "I see my role as an educational leader as being an advocate, not only for students, but giving them the skills to advocate for themselves...this (is) my passion and my responsibility." This passion was grounded in experiences in the 1980s helping develop student leaders statewide: "I went to the national adult literacy Student Congress in the 1980s, and I was very inspired...we set a national agenda for adult literacy, and ...came back to start a state student leadership group... (including) a newsletter run by students."

This leadership approach is embodied in efforts to create an overall program culture at Sumner attuned to advocacy and empowerment. "I've hired people who are passionate about adult education. I'm the only person there who wasn't a non-traditional student. We provide opportunities during the weekly staff meetings to talk about advocacy, and we make decisions together as a whole staff. That makes (staff) more invested in adult education, more aware of the dynamics, so they understand the need," states Slayton. In practice, all staff are included in the MAEA listserv alerts, and Slayton advises on the specifics of following up. "If someone has a personal connection (to an official), I encourage them to use their connections."

In Civics classes, teachers incorporate advocacy into their teaching, including letter writing on important public issues such as the attempt to cut Carl Perkins loans. As well, students are encouraged to participate in local town meetings, which is where local school budgets are decided. "I do feel that students need to feel like they have ownership of their education, including advocacy."

Massachusetts

*"Students will get involved if asked, and asked in the right way.
We shouldn't assume that students are not interested."
~ Robert Hibbard, Program Director, El Centro Del Cardenal*

Program & Policy Context

Massachusetts features the most diverse adult education delivery system of any state in New England. The majority of programs are community-based programs but there are also programs operated by school districts, community colleges, libraries, and unions. In FY 2006, 109 providers served 22,249 adults with the funding they received from the Massachusetts Department of Education's division of Adult and Community Learning Services. Massachusetts spends the most money per adult learner of any state in New England (\$1,820), which is partially a reflection of the required intensity of service: a minimum of six weekly contact hours and at least minimal counseling and referral services. About 70% of program staff in publicly funded programs works part-time. A Working Conditions sub-committee of the statewide adult education advocacy coalition, Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) is actively promoting better pay, benefits and more full-time positions for adult educators.

Legislative Context

Massachusetts has a full-time legislature with 160 members serving in the House of Representatives and 40 members in the Senate. In 2007, the Massachusetts legislature appropriated over \$152 million for various economic stimulus programs, such as workforce development, of which \$3 million was for increasing the number of student slots in ABE and ESOL programs. This was a victory for adult education, especially in light of Massachusetts's substantial budget shortfall.

Perhaps the most serious issue facing adult education advocacy efforts in the coming year(s) is the state's considerable budget gap, estimated at \$1.3 billion for FY 2009. While MCAE has cultivated several champions in the legislature, the new Massachusetts Governor's office has demonstrated an alarming disregard for adult education. This is most clearly evidenced in the lack of inclusion of adult basic education in the Governor's new Readiness Council that through its subcommittees "will help bring to life the vision for a world-class, comprehensive public education system that educates and nurtures every child to the highest levels of achievement." Not one of the 13 subcommittees is focused on adult basic education. One other issue that may affect adult education funding and policy and that has surfaced with some regularity is whether adult education should continue to be housed in the Department of Education. Both the Department of Workforce Development and Executive Office of Community Colleges have been contenders for housing adult education. MCAE's leadership believes that preserving adult education within the Department of Education will require that they cultivate new legislative allies.

Statewide Advocacy

The statewide adult education advocacy is spearheaded by the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE). Unlike its counterparts in Maine and Connecticut, MCAE's membership consists mostly of individual program staff, some volunteers, students and allies. MCAE has about 800 members, all of whom receive the coalition's legislative alerts, e-newsletters and other communications directly. Thus, MCAE does not rely as much on program directors to communicate legislative alerts to staff as do its counterparts in Connecticut and Maine. However, the Massachusetts ABE Director's Council is a strong advocacy body in its own right and collaborates with MCAE.

MCAE sends out legislative alerts and news at least once a month through its listserv that has 1,071 subscribers. When action is requested, members are to report the actions they took and what the response was to program point people who report to regional public policy coordinators. The regional coordinators

are members of MCAE's Public Policy Committee that sets the public policy agenda for MCAE. MCAE provides scripts, fact sheets, sample letters, orientations and ongoing support for program staff.

When MCAE was formed in 1991 out of a merger of two adult education coalitions, Massachusetts was funding adult education at the level of \$4 million. In FY 2007 that allocation had increased over seven-fold to \$30 million as a result of an organized and ongoing advocacy campaign led by MCAE. According to MCAE Executive Director, Kenny Tamarkin, "Most programs do some advocacy and 10-20% really make it a top priority." MCAE is staffed by a full-time Executive Director, an Administrative Assistant, and a Public Policy Field Organizer, a new position secured through a foundation grant.

Two of MCAE's long-standing signature advocacy strategies are the Postcard Campaign and a "Meet and Greet." The Postcard Campaign was originally developed to create legislators' awareness about long waiting lists for adult education classes by asking adults as they were placed on a waiting list to sign a card that explained they were a constituent waiting to enroll in classes. A new version of the card invites students to add a personal comment. The postcard strategy has spread to many other states. The "Meet and Greet" refers to an ongoing effort to get programs to invite legislators to visit classes. One variation of it is annual legislative breakfasts that several programs host. The Center for New Americans Director, Jim Ayres, cited an instance where a legislative aide had visited classes and later recognized a student who is a bagger at a local grocery store. The aide told Jim that now every time he goes grocery shopping and sees the student he is reminded of adult education.

These activities are endorsed by the leadership at Massachusetts Department of Education's Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) that encourages program staff to join MCAE and expects them to engage in advocacy and public education within the limits of the law that governs the operations of tax exempt organizations. For example, MCAE has a permanent slot in the orientation of new program directors held by ACLS.

The ACLS also mandates and funds adult education programs in developing and sustaining local ABE Community Planning Partnerships. ABE Community Planning Partnerships are "encouraged to include every organization in the community with an interest in providing educational and support services to undereducated and/or limited English proficient adults and their families." While the primary purpose is to coordinate services for adult learners, these Community Planning Partnerships also serve the purpose of increasing the visibility of the adult education programs in their communities, a core building block of effective advocacy.

Over the years, MCAE has also increased the number of allied groups with whom it collaborates, many of which are represented on MCAE Board. They include the Massachusetts Workforce Alliance, the Workforce Solutions Group, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Alliance (MIRA), The Worker Education Roundtable (representing union-based programs) and the adult learner organization, Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (MassAAL). In addition to the Adult Education Day in March, MCAE is a supporter of the Immigrant Day organized by MIRA at the State House every April. ESOL program students and staff from across the state come to this event by the bus load. Most recently, MCAE joined the Coalition for Tax Fairness that advocates the closing of corporate tax loopholes. MCAE also has cultivated champions in the state legislature.

For the second year in a row, MCAE is collaborating with the adult learner organization, Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (MassAAL) in organizing an Adult Literacy Awareness Day at the State House. In March 2007, the event drew over 1,000 adult learners and educators, making it the largest adult literacy event in Massachusetts. The event involves trainings, jointly sponsored by MassAAL and MCAE, to prepare adult learners for the event. They include role plays of how to speak with legislators and the media, and tours of the State House for student leaders a few weeks in advance of the rally. MassAAL is the only

statewide, free-standing adult learner organization in New England dedicated to student leadership development and advocacy on behalf of adult education. In 2008 MassAAL and MCAE are collaborating in organizing four regional student leadership trainings in preparation for the Adult Literacy Awareness Day at the State House.

Lessons Learned

*"We need to connect advocacy with what's happening in the classroom so that the curriculum embraces it."
~ Stephen Hanley, WAITT House, MA*

The following are some of the principal lessons learned by the advocates surveyed:

- Before, advocacy focused more on increasing the quantity of services (student slots). That turned out to work against program improvement goals. Now MCAE is advocating more for increasing the intensity and quality in adult education services.
- It's important to have active advocates in every legislative district.
- Volunteers can be powerful advocates if they are mobilized for that purpose.
- Multiple ways need to be provided for staff and students to become engaged in advocacy.

Goals and New Activities

Building on its successful strategies, MCAE's principal future goals and new activities are:

- Push for an increase of the statewide appropriation.
- Provide regional advocacy trainings for program staff and students.
- Develop closer alliances with workforce development providers and policy-makers.
- Cultivate business partners who are willing to become active champions of adult education.
- Adult and Community Learning Services is considering a public awareness campaign to spotlight the GED.

Technical Assistance Needs

The most pressing technical assistance needs identified by the Massachusetts respondents were:

- Improve public awareness of the value of adult education.

PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILE: CENTER FOR NEW AMERICANS

*"We often forget to approach municipal leaders-- the mayors in smaller towns are very accessible."
~ Jim Ayres, Executive Director, Center for New Americans*

Relationship-based strategies on multiple levels are the core of advocacy for the Center for New Americans, states Jim Ayres, CNA's Director. The question for programs used to be whether they knew their state legislators, according to Ayres; "now the question we should be asking is: 'Do your legislators know who you are? Do they know that you're engaged and active in advocacy?'"

CNA takes this to heart by regularly inviting legislators to their centers and communicating with them, as well as offering them opportunities to host their events as guests of honor. "If they stand up publicly as a supporter on a local level, it's harder for them to not support (adult education) when a funding opportunity comes. Also, they're a draw for those events – people marginally interested in adult ed come because they see it as an opportunity to have access to legislators." Visits to centers allow decision-makers the chance to connect with students. On their side of the relationship, CNA participates in legislators' events such as

conferences, and serves as a resource to legislators. "Aides call when there are immigration issues, and we help them out in understanding issues that relate to us."

For students, building relationships with officials is a powerful learning experience. In their annual participation in *Immigrants Day at the Legislature* (organized by Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition), CNA students receive "a crash course in civics...it's very powerful for people who couldn't imagine getting access to decision-makers to engage with them. They feel very empowered...and they share that with others in the program."

Ayres notes that programs often forget to build relationships on a municipal level as well, and "visiting mayors is important because they have the ear of higher-ups, and can also advocate on a higher level." As importantly, visits with mayors give students the opportunity to talk about civic issues that affect them directly in the community. "For example," Ayres tells, "an owner of a laundry business (in our program) was being affected by the old municipal pipes, which were bringing water that was not as clean as it should have been, and was staining the customers' clothes. For him to be able to address this with the mayor and basically say, "Your plumbing infrastructure is ruining our business" opened the door during that visit for him to be able to come back and talk more." Clearly, relationship building at CNA reaches beyond traditional advocacy to powerful learning and sometimes unexpected connections.

New Hampshire

"We look at political literacy the way we look at health literacy or English literacy. Our expectation is that all programs, all staff and all students are involved in advocacy which includes letter-writing, making phone calls, and may involve meeting with State or federal legislators."

~ Art Ellison, State Director of Adult Education

Program & Policy Context

New Hampshire, like Maine and Vermont, is a rural state with a mix of 28 community-based and school-based programs. About half a dozen are larger programs that serve several hundred students a year and receive funds from the state, the local town or school district and grants. The bigger programs also provide fee-based continuing education classes. About a half of the adult education delivery system consists of Adult Tutorial programs that rely on volunteers for providing instruction 2-4 hours a week.

Legislative Context

With 435 legislators, New Hampshire has more legislators per capita than any other New England state. The legislators serve as volunteers and hold other (paid) jobs in the community. "Everyone knows a legislator," says Jim Verschuere, director of Dover Adult Learning. The state operates on a two-year budget cycle. There is no income tax or sales tax, hence all revenue comes from property taxes, and fees, which results in a limited tax base for any public expenditures. Like most of its New England counterparts, the State of New Hampshire faces a sizable budget shortfall of \$50 million that also limits prospects for substantial increases in adult education funding.

Statewide Advocacy

Unlike any other state in New England, New Hampshire's adult education legislative agenda is largely set by the State Director of Adult Education in consultation with program directors. There is no statewide adult education advocacy or membership organization. Yet, advocacy is engrained in the life of adult education across the state and is a clear and firm expectation. According to the State Director of Adult Education, Art Ellison, "The literacy field has taken on such a political presence that it's practically impossible for a legislator to discontinue funding for adult education. Adult education is like a 500 pound gorilla. Nobody

wants to irritate it." As the result of this advocacy, the appropriation for adult education has grown from zero to \$500,000 five years ago to \$1.7 million in FY 2007.

The core advocacy strategy centers around the program staff and students maintaining ongoing contact with legislators. As in all other states, these contacts take the form of letters, calls and visits. As in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Vermont, students are enlisted to send postcards to their Senators and Representatives as well as the leaders of key committees in the legislature upon entry and graduation explaining why adult education is important to them. In addition, programs regularly invite their local legislators to graduations and other program events. These activities are set in motion and reinforced through the 5-6 meetings the State Director of Adult Education hold with all program directors each year.

Some programs use a formal curriculum that teaches students advocacy skills and prepare them to become informed voters. Some New Hampshire programs participate in a critical thinking process called *The Right Question Project* and also use a voter education curriculum guide developed by staff at Dover Adult Learning, called *Pick Your Candidate*. Nevertheless, "For some students it's problematic. They ask, 'What does this have to do with the GED?' We stretch to make a connection to the curriculum but truthfully, it's a stretch," reflects Leslie Haslam, a long-time director of Exeter Adult Education. Some program directors also expressed strong sentiments about how burdensome and time-consuming advocacy is. As well, since there is no formal, organized advocacy coalition in the state, the cultivation of allies and the development of any partnerships have to be done at the local level.

Lessons Learned

*"It's too late to dig a well when your house is on fire."
~ Art Ellison, Adult Education State Director, NH Department of Education*

The following are some of the principal lessons learned by the advocates surveyed:

- Make advocacy a part of what you do. Don't wait until your funding is threatened. Advocacy begins the day after the elections with congratulations to whoever was elected. Go after an increase.
- Program administrators need to be supportive of staff when it comes to advocacy and set very clear expectations. Staff needs to be able to connect the local advocacy to the bigger picture.
- Advocacy is more successful when students are the ones who do most of the communicating to legislators.

Technical Assistance Needs

The most pressing technical assistance needs identified by the New Hampshire respondents were:

- Template for announcements that articulate the need for advocacy clearly, succinctly and in such a way that anyone can understand, not just those who are politically savvy. Number advocacy alerts and memos so that we can reference them afterward.
- A compendium of really effective adult education advocacy strategies, an infusion of new ideas.
- Learn more about developing student leadership.

PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILE: THE RIGHT QUESTION PROJECT (RQP) IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

"We have to recognize that students have all kinds of reasons for not trusting the government. Education and information are the best ways for them to see that we can make a difference. Even if the desired results weren't achieved, students know that they have learned the skill of advocacy that they can use another time."

~ Pat Nelson, Program Director, Second Start

Believing that people can learn to speak and act on their own behalf, the Right Question Project's methods center on teaching people a simple step-by step process for formulating their own questions. Over the course of two years, RQP staff trained groups of adult educators in NH in its educational strategy for developing advocacy skills in low-income adults. Many of the students are more likely than other groups to come into daily contact with public agencies and institutions that routinely make decisions that can have a profound affect on their lives. They are used to answering questions in these encounters but generally do not ask many questions because they don't know what to ask. Students learn how to advocate for themselves during these individual encounters.

Participants in the training returned to their classrooms and taught the method to their students, had them reflect on the situations where they could use it, and encouraged them to do so. As a result students began to share stories of how they were using the process to hold their welfare workers accountable for the information they were being given; to prepare for meetings with school personnel to advocate for their children; to fight for fair disposition in court cases; and to establish more cooperative relationships with their physicians. They used it to prepare for visits of local legislators and presidential candidates. Teachers felt the impact of the RQP training was enormous for many students. One student described the change she experienced by saying, "Now when I go to meetings where people are making decisions that affect my family, I don't have to sit there...I think about what I want to know and what I need to know and then I ask questions. What a difference!"

RQP believes that teaching people skills they can use to participate in decisions that affect them on the individual level can help them immediately. They can then use the same skills to participate more effectively in decision-making and democracy on many levels. For more information on RQP see www.rightquestion.org.

Rhode Island

"We have to continuously build relationships with legislators, year around. We need to get them to understand how the adult education investment pays off."

~ Heidi Collins, Director of Policy and Public Education, Rhode Island Poverty Institute.

Program & Policy Context

The smallest state in New England, Rhode Island has big plans for developing its adult education system that currently consists of 36 programs most of which are community and library-based. Classes are offered 6-20 hours a week, and the majority of the staff is part-time. 6,787 adults were served by the publicly funded adult education programs.

Legislative Context

Perhaps the most defining feature of the context in which adult education advocacy must currently take place in Rhode Island is the fact that the state has a growing deficit of an estimated \$380-\$450 million for FY 09, is in the process of laying off public employees, and is threatening to cut funding for education and social service programs. Advocacy efforts are further hampered by the part-time nature of Rhode Island's legislature of 113 legislators who start their work day at 3:30 pm. According to Heidi Collins, Director of Policy and Public Education at the Rhode Island Poverty Institute, "It's hard to get their attention or get them to become champions for your issues. We only have a small number of allies in the legislature. We need them to see new faces [among adult education advocates.]"

Statewide Advocacy

Unlike any other state in New England, adult education advocacy efforts in Rhode Island are now formally viewed as an integral part of the state's workforce development strategy for low-income, low-skilled people. This agenda is advanced by the state's new advocacy coalition, the Workforce Alliance, in existence since 2005. The Alliance is an affiliate of the national Workforce Alliance. Also in contrast to other New England states, the Chamber of Commerce and representatives from business, labor (AFL-CIO) and higher education serve on the Steering Committee that includes directors of seven adult education programs. The seven programs represent about 20% of the total number of adult education programs and are the most actively involved in advocacy; another 30% are sporadically involved in advocacy, estimates Linda Katz, Policy Director at the RI Poverty Institute. The Alliance also collaborates with the Rhode Island Organizing Project, One Rhode Island, and the Hispanic Center for Policy and Advocacy.

The Workforce Alliance is jointly managed by the Rhode Island Poverty Institute and the Rhode Island Economic Policy Council. Although the goals of the Alliance are broader than adult education, adult education has been its priority. The Alliance was successful in achieving the three goals it set for FY 2007: 1) increase the state funding for adult education from \$1 million to \$3 million; 2) include the Office of Adult Education on the Governor's Workforce Investment Board; and 3) improve access to adult education and other workforce services for TANF clients. Given the state's budget shortfall, it was a remarkable feat for the adult education community to achieve an increase of \$2.1 million even if most of that increase was a transfer from one line item with a surplus (Job Development Fund) to another.

Key advocacy strategies employed by the Alliance in 2007 include an Adult Education Day at the State House in which staff and 25 adult learners from seven programs participated. The Alliance and eight adult education programs also organized legislative breakfasts in different regions of the state. Although very few legislators actually showed up. At one site, no legislators attended, but the event was well attended by students and community members who turned it into a press conference that resulted in good coverage in the local press. Other ways in which the Alliance has prepared the field for advocacy include fact sheets, ready-to-use postcards for students to send to legislators, a workshop at the statewide adult education conference, and legislative briefings at the meetings of RIDE Adult Education Advisory Committee. In addition, individual programs engage students in civics lessons, visits with and letter-writing to legislators. However, like their counterparts in other states, some program directors feel burdened by the responsibility of advocacy. "Advocacy is a necessary evil. It's not fun for all of us. It's self-promotion and we are adding more responsibilities to what we already do," commented one director.

Lessons Learned:

"Advocacy is a lot of work but it pays off in money and increased awareness about the needs of our students that can lead to changes in policy."

~ Brenda Dann-Messier, CEO, Dorcas Place Family Learning Center

The following are some of the principal lessons learned cited by the advocates surveyed:

- Many legislators have no clue about adult education and its importance to the state's economic success.
- Programs need to be able to talk about the larger reasons why the state should invest in adult education, connecting the dots between adult education and economic success.
- Build relationships with and engage legislators one by one through personal contacts.
- The needs of adult learners have to be well articulated and well documented.
- Consistently thank legislators, and work with their staff.
- Always follow up with whatever you promised.

Goals and New Activities

Building on its success in 2007, the Workforce Alliance's principal future goals and new activities are:

- Form an Adult Educators' and Learners' Consortium as part of the Alliance and publish a bimonthly newsletter for the Consortium.
- Engage at least ten programs to strengthen their relationships with their legislators through workshops and fact sheets, such as 'The Adult Learner as Advocate' and 'The Adult Educator as Advocate.'
- Organize another Adult Education Day at the State House.
- Develop and implement a public relations campaign to educate legislators and the general public about the importance of adult education, including Public Service Announcements, and brochures.
- Increase adult education state funding by another \$2 million.

Technical Assistance Needs

The most pressing technical assistance needs identified by the Rhode Island respondents were:

- How to frame the message about the importance of adult education; and
- Learn from other advocates what has worked for them and what they have learned from their efforts.

PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILE: DORCAS PLACE

*"You have to create your own opportunities to cultivate relationships with elected officials."
~ Brenda Dann-Messier, CEO, Dorcas Place*

One focus of the advocacy work at Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center in Providence RI is to help students understand how each level of government can influence their lives and how they can become advocates for themselves, their families, and their community. Every year, as part their civics education program, Dorcas Place invites local, state and national elected officials, policymakers and business leaders to visit the agency. Each visit is assigned to a separate class. The class members do research about the official and the office he or she holds so that they can prepare relevant questions in advance. Student greeters meet and welcome each official.

During the visit the officials receive a tour of the classes during which teachers describe what skills and content the class is working on. The students explain why they are pursuing education at Dorcas Place and share their aspirations and future plans. The officials are asked to talk about their jobs and answer students' questions. Dorcas Place staff reports that students typically take a greater interest in the political process after meeting politicians because they have had a personal connection with a policy-maker.

In addition to the visits by officials, Dorcas Place sponsors tours of the State House, where students meet legislators and their aides on their turf, and holds mock elections at the school. In 2006, each class researched candidates running for office in preparation for the mock elections held the day before the actual elections. Every staff member and students registered to vote. Prior to voting, student poll workers checked voters' names. The results were announced at the end of the day so that students could compare them with the actual election results the next day.

Dorcas Place serves 1,100 students a year in classes ranging from ESOL and basic literacy to GED, college transition, and job readiness and training.

Vermont

*"We do our students a great injustice in not helping them understand the power of their voice."
~ Pixie Loomis, Executive Director, Vermont Adult Learning*

Program & Policy Context

In 2005, the state of Vermont adopted a single provider system whereby only one adult education provider was funded through a competitive process to coordinate and provide all adult education services in the state. The other three existing adult education programs provide their state-funded services under a subcontract with Vermont Adult Learning and are collectively called Vermont Learning Works. Vermont Learning Works consists of 14 sites operated by four non-profit adult education centers. Vermont Adult Learning is responsible for operating the data collection system and reporting outcomes to the state. In FY 07 the 14 sites served 7,365 students. Classes are offered 2-12 hours a week, and the majority of the staff is full-time.

In Vermont, the need for the field to speak with one voice is taken literally: The Executive Director of Vermont Adult Learning, Pixie Loomis, is the designated voice in communications with the state legislators. According to Ms. Loomis, "That has made a huge difference. People see me and they think of adult education." Even though "there has been no formal effort to get the field involved in advocacy" (beyond Ms. Loomis), as expressed by the State Director of Adult Education, Tom Alderman, each of the four programs does what they can to engage staff and students in increasing the visibility of adult education.

Legislative Context

The Vermont Legislature meets from early January through late April. The legislators work part-time and are very accessible in their own communities. One program director noted that it is a source of pride for legislators to be close to the grassroots.

All learning centers are encouraged to host an Open House and invite Legislators to come, meet students, ask questions about our services and programs, and answer questions about their views on issues. Students are actively engaged in planning these events and in organizing letter-writing campaigns to legislators when appropriate.

Students also serve on local advisory boards and some serve on a statewide board. Both the local boards and the statewide board are engaged in developing the AEL advocacy message. They also organize a Learning Works day at the Legislature that includes student testimony before key committees as well as meetings with the Governor and the Lieutenant Governor.

Statewide Advocacy

The statewide advocacy is spearheaded by Vermont Adult Learning (VAL). There is no adult education advocacy coalition. At the state level the advocacy strategy consists of cultivating champions among legislators and for the VAL Executive Director, Pixie Loomis, to have a frequent presence in the legislature, to organize learners to testify at hearings and committee meetings, and to visit legislators. A statewide Adult Education Day at the State House is planned for February for which students are planning to have written student stories on each legislator's seat.

VAL places great emphasis on preparing adult learners to become advocates at the local, state and federal levels. There are regional student advisory boards, as well as a statewide student advisory board whose meetings the VAL Executive Director attends. Loomis considers these meetings her "opportunity to hear directly from students about the program. Students' voice is the authentic voice." She personally takes a group of learners to Washington DC to visit Congress people and national sights. VAL sponsored a training for its student Advisory Board by VALUE, the national adult learner organization. One student, who attended two VALUE meetings, came back and organized a legislative breakfast with other students and staff at her program. She recruited other students to tell their stories in person and also on poster boards with photos. The event was so successful that the legislators asked to come back and meet with students again.

One of Vermont adult education's greatest, recent advocacy achievements is obtaining an appropriation from the state legislature for \$1,000,000 for a High School Completion Program to provide out-of-school youth, ages 16-21, with educational services for the attainment of a high school diploma. When they realized that 40 percent of their students were under 22, Vermont Adult Learning began actively advocating for this legislation. This legislation requires an unprecedented, formal collaboration between the adult education provider and the local high school. A key design feature of the program is individual graduation education plans that are developed with youth, the high school counselor and the adult education staff. The idea is to develop a plan that offers young people engaging and effective learning opportunities that fit their needs and interests. These learning opportunities can be provided by a wide range of organizations, such as local high schools, adult education and literacy providers, and other approved providers. "We are now seen as part of the education system," comments Loomis.

The states' other two large programs, whose directors were interviewed for this survey, focus their advocacy efforts more on increasing visibility at the local level. Central Vermont Adult Basic Education (CVABE), whose services are provided primarily by volunteer tutors, cultivate their volunteers to become advocates for adult education at their churches, workplaces, civic groups and with public officials. "We need to start to build in the public imagination how adult education feeds into a healthy community, that it is not pulling away from something else to support adult education. It's not a parallel system: we have a role in making other systems (e.g. public education, health care) work better," says CVABE executive director, Mary Leahy. One example of how they practice this credo is when CVABE hosted a community forum with some Representatives about Vermont's new universal health insurance law.

Central Vermont Adult Basic Education also encourages students to tell their stories to decision-makers. They have on occasion offered training in public speaking skills. "We've made it very overt to our students that participation in the community is very much a value in this organization," explains Ms. Leahy.

Lessons Learned

*"If students understand that their point of view is important, that's a huge change."
Pixie Loomis, Executive Director, Vermont Adult Learning*

The following are some of the principal lessons learned cited by the advocates surveyed:

- Don't wait until there is a crisis.
- If a volunteer has invested time with you, they have bought into the whole idea of adult literacy, and they will be prepared to advocate for adult literacy.
- Continually brand who you are, what you do, and why it matters.
- Empower students to become visible.

Goals and New Activities

- Create new staff orientation materials that also address advocacy.
- Raise funds to have paid part-time student advocate positions at each learning center.
- Adult learners plan to work with program staff to organize legislative breakfasts at their programs, with perhaps students telling their stories in person but also on poster boards.

Technical Assistance Needs

The most pressing technical assistance needs identified by the Vermont respondents were:

- Training for staff to integrate into instruction helping students develop self-advocacy skills as parents, workers and community members.

- Helping the public to understand how adult education benefits the whole community backed up by outcome data and compelling examples of student success.

PROMISING PRACTICE PROFILE: THE TUTORIAL CENTER

"In my mind, it's all about getting adult education out of the 'poor stepchild' role, and having the community see us in a serious educational role."

~ Jack Glade, Executive Director, The Tutorial Center

The Tutorial Center's (TTC) perspective on advocacy is informed by business approaches such as public relations and marketing. Director Jack Glade states, "I believe in lots of PR: A steady stream of press releases, presentations, electronic newsletters, and ads in the local newspaper." One creative example is a Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign which TTC creates and runs every other year, featuring five or six advertisements addressing different types of literacy needs, from children's literacy to pre-employment issues. "We've gotten local newspapers to run our PSAs for free. We always get a couple of calls every time one runs. They have general themes, like why it's important to read to your kids. We did a job training income-difference PSA, which led to calls looking for employment training. But this isn't about selling the company, but about the issue." As well, TTC has conducted an on-going Postcard Campaign for the past three years, where program graduates sign and send well-designed cards to public officials and community leaders to thank them for supporting adult education. TTC's Postcard was recently selected for a national adult literacy outreach effort.

Recognizing the local drop-out rate of 25% and that over half of TTC's students are 21 years old and under, Glade states that advocacy at TTC has successfully focused on increasing visibility and resources particularly for in-school and out-of-school population. Citing successes in his goal of impacting public perception, Glade states that "in the last decade we've moved TTC from being the 'dumping grounds' for people that no one knew what to do with to being considered a Proactive Solution...a core part of the educational system."

Internally, civic engagement is also folded into the curriculum with students, and that also results in increased PR. "We have a unit around being a self advocate, including how to write Letters to the Editor and letters to politicians about causes that students believe in. Part of the letter is that they're at The Tutorial Center; we get more public visibility, and (students) realize they can be successful in having their voices heard. We've had some times when students have done a campaign about a particular issue, including threats to adult education funding, where they write their personal opinions. I hear regularly from legislators that they get more letters on the adult ed funding topic than on any other. Advocacy is an important life skill, and gives students a chance to express their voices."

III. ANALYSIS OF THE SIX STATES' ADULT EDUCATION ADVOCACY CHALLENGES AND PROMISING STRATEGIES

Introduction

Adult education exists below the radar for most state and federal decision-makers. Perhaps the greatest challenge for adult education is its low standing in the education "food chain" among issues that galvanize policy-makers and the general public. In most states, adult education receives less than two percent of public funding for education. On one hand, the field of adult education and literacy has some elements of a high quality education infrastructure in place, such as curriculum and performance standards,

lists of teacher competencies, program models and a growing body of research about effective practice. On the other hand, the adult education field does not receive adequate funding to make optimal use of the standards or research. Ongoing advocacy and public education are critical to improving policies and funding that make quality educational services possible.

As stated by one program director interviewed for this report, "Everyone needs to realize that advocacy is an essential part of the mission. It's not an option, something that you can leave for others to do for you." But what *is* advocacy for adult education? The word often conjures up images of Action Alerts requesting letters, phone calls, and emails urging legislators to support adult education with a predetermined bill or budget item. The findings of this report show, however, that adult education advocacy efforts are more multi-dimensional than that. Certainly, a single focus approach is critical for specific legislative change, but as this report highlights, effective advocacy for sustainable adult education shines out in many creative ways and directions from students, staff, volunteers, and community allies.

In the section that follows, we show the principal challenges and related promising strategies that our interviews uncovered. While in real life they are interconnected, for the purposes of this analysis, we have grouped them into four areas:

1. Visibility;
2. Framing the Message;
3. Student Involvement; and
4. Increasing and Sustaining Advocacy Efforts.

Challenges and Promising Strategies

Challenge: Low Visibility

Although there is widespread agreement among the adult education advocates we interviewed about the need to increase public awareness regarding the central role of adult education in helping low-income adults improve the quality of their lives, how this can be achieved most effectively is a key question for each adult education advocacy group. Increasing adult education's visibility requires consistent, considerable and coordinated effort by a large segment of the field, including adult learners and volunteers. As well, it calls for constant cultivation of allies in the community and the legislature.

Although most adult education programs and coalitions do not have marketing budgets to speak of to finance TV spots, mass mailings, billboards and such, it doesn't mean that there isn't much we can do. It simply means that our public relations efforts need to match our "pocketbooks" and tap into the strengths we have. We can also reach out for pro bono assistance. Many programs we interviewed are doing just that, and we can all learn from them.

Promising Visibility Strategies

The most enterprising programs **mine all the connections** that staff, students, volunteers and community allies have and enlist them to advocate for adult education. They dedicate time to "**branding**" the program and adult education in the community and getting media coverage. They secure their future by strengthening their connections to their community and elected officials. They listen nationally and talk locally. As Jack Glade, Director of The Tutorial Center in Vermont puts it, "Many of the public figures we're trying to reach are well-tuned into national dialogs about education, employment, social issues. We can get our message onto their radar screen by translating those national dialogs into state/local terms."

Perhaps the most often cited visibility strategy is relationship building and networking. This can mean **becoming the place to go in the community** for other non-profits, elected officials, and employers who want to reach adults or need information about issues related to their needs. Some programs put themselves center stage in their communities by taking leadership in **organizing open houses, events and community forums** around issues that affect adult learners and the broader community. They broaden their networks of supporters by **servicing on boards and advisory councils**, and by encouraging their staff

to use their community connections with decision-makers. Some programs **recruit elected officials as volunteer tutors**, or even staff.

When it comes to **inviting officials to visit the program**, having students prepare for the visit in advance and scheduling time for a genuine dialogue between students and the officials is a time-tested strategy that no advocate should overlook. As one program director expressed, you shouldn't just let them come in and give a speech without really talking with students. **Organizing field trips** with learners to visit elected officials also gets adult education noticed. Art Ellison from New Hampshire stresses the "Rule of Four," meaning that there should be **at least four contacts between the adult education program and state legislators** during the year: 1) congratulations letters when they are elected; 2) meetings/visits; 3) request for funding; and 4) end-of-the-year reports that show what outcomes were achieved.

Maintaining visibility also means **reaching out to the local media** with Public Service Announcements and student success stories. Some programs take the time to write articles that connect new reports, for example on declining reading skills, to their work. One program **teaches students to write letters to the editor** as part of a self-advocacy course. Some programs reach for a higher profile also by getting their name and message out into the community through T-shirts, pens, and such. One program's slogan capitalizes on a well-known slogan from K-12: **"No Adult Left Behind"**.

On occasion, adult education coalitions have commissioned papers aimed at influencing public officials. The Maine Adult Education Association has recently commissioned an ambitious plan for adult education programs to market themselves more effectively using uniform PR tools (names, logos, slogans, catalogues, and a web portal) to **convey the existence of a high quality, coordinated adult education system**.

Challenge: How to Frame the Message

One enduring question on just about every adult education advocate's mind is about our message: How can we most effectively frame our message to different audiences? Which venues are most effective? And, of course, where can we find the resources to help us answer these questions?

George Lakoff² and others have made a compelling case that how we frame our message makes a crucial difference in whether it is heard as we intended. Metaphors and stories with a compelling core message are considered effective, but some metaphors and stories are more effective than others. In adult education, for example, we sometimes make our case as a need to give adults "a second chance." This does not appeal to more fiscally conservative people who do not want to spend public dollars twice on the same people. In the same vein, the medical metaphor that likens adult education to a cure or a remedy, conveys the message that adults seeking to improve their lives are somehow diseased, needing to be cured. Likewise, equating a lack of formal education with imprisonment conjures up images of criminals. Both metaphors are antithetical to student empowerment, to viewing adult learners as agents of change in their own lives and as advocates for adult education.

It goes almost without saying that given their paltry resources, adult education advocacy groups have almost no money to spend on expensive market research on how to frame the message. We can learn more about effective social marketing and messaging, and be more intentional and aware of how we make our case to different audiences in whatever venues are available to us.

Promising Strategies for Framing the Message

Perhaps the most central principle that should guide the framing of any message is understanding your audience; knowing where their interests connect with adult education. While just about everyone surveyed expressed a need to learn more about effective framing of the message, the preponderance of views stressed **the economic argument: increasing the community's tax base and educated workforce while reducing the need for public assistance**. Many want to use the Return on Investment (ROI) **argument** but few have actually crunched the numbers for their state or community. Rhode Island Department of Education Adult Education Office has on its website a chart of estimates developed by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University of the differences between federal and state

² Lakoff, G. (2004). *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know Your Values and Frame the Debate--The Essential Guide for Progressives*.

taxes and transfers made (both cash and in kind) by educational attainment level based on Current Population Survey data. Advocates have used this information to advocate for an increase in state funding, to a good effect.

Another way to frame that message posits **adult education as central to the achievement of many other quality of life outcomes** in the community. Most notably, these desired outcomes include children's educational achievement when parents are better educated and attentive, as well as healthy lifestyles, and safety through reduced recidivism. The New England adult education advocates recommend speaking about these connections often, with passion and a sense of urgency.

Challenge: How to Involve Students Meaningfully and on an Ongoing Basis

Many advocates believe that adult learners have the most powerful and compelling voice for advocacy, but few claim to have figured out how involve adult learners in meaningful, feasible and sustainable ways that extend beyond sporadic letter-writing. Program directors tend to be the most active advocates and easiest for coalitions to mobilize. Most coalitions rely on program directors to communicate advocacy alerts to staff and students. Program directors, in turn, often rely on teachers to involve students in letter-writing, preparing for meetings with legislators and other efforts, such as the Literacy President project.

Yet, many teachers and most students do not view advocacy as part of their role or within their comfort zone, and they are not typically involved in the inner circle of the coalitions. As one program coordinator put it, "Students don't necessarily see this (i.e. attending an adult education program) as a proud moment in their lives. Getting them to do some kind of public action is hard. How much should I advocate for them to do something that doesn't seem to be coming from them?" However, programs that make connections between students' daily lives and advocacy in their curriculum on an ongoing basis report increased advocacy engagement by students. We can learn from these programs and build on their efforts.

Promising Strategies for Student Involvement

As Stephen Hanley from WAITT House in Roxbury expressed it, "We cannot be shoving advocacy down students' throats. We have to think about how that will be received. We need to connect it to the classroom so a life skill is gained, so students can be advocates for themselves. We make advocacy contagious when we confirm what students know and then build on their critical awareness." Implied in Mr. Hanley's statement is a program philosophy that emphasizes **integration of critical thinking, self advocacy, and student leadership development**.

While some individual programs that we interviewed share and practice the WAITT House philosophy, only one state has a free-standing, statewide student organization whose core purpose is student leadership development and advocacy for adult education: the Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (MassAAL). MassAAL supports student councils and provides training on advocacy and civic literacy, and plans advocacy events where those skills are used with elected officials. Vermont also emphasizes student leadership development as adult education advocates through its statewide student advisory board and the resources Vermont Adult Learning **invests in trainings, field trips**, and such.

One strategy for training students to become effective advocates for themselves and their communities and that is used especially in northern New England is the Right Question approach through which students **learn how to advocate themselves using a specific questioning strategy** (profiled on p. 13). As well, programs across New England dedicate classroom time to building students' civic literacy skills, be it letter-writing to decision-makers, public speaking in hearings and meetings with officials, and **non-partisan voter education** (including often mock elections). Yet, very few programs reported that these civic literacy activities were a regular or standard part of their curriculum. Many, however, noted how motivating it was for students to meet legislators and to receive a written response from them. Helping students learn how to advocate for whatever issues are of concern to them is also a selling point noted by some programs. When a student who is also a laundromat owner gets to speak with the mayor about how the town's poor water quality is affecting his business, the value of advocacy is not lost on him or his classmates.

Challenge: Broadening and Sustaining Advocacy Efforts

More than one program director interviewed initially remarked on the tedious and “very burdensome” nature of advocacy. One program director noted, “The ‘Generals’ are clueless of what it’s like for the troops on the ground...The people initiating advocacy calls do not realize what it’s like to manage that on top of all the rest that we’re managing.” Some people were challenged and put off by different aspects their advocacy experience: the pressure of obligation and quotas for calls or letters to legislators; disruption from the curriculum; additional work for overworked staff; distrust of the people and processes that produce public policy; and the aim to engage staff members and students who are disinterested in or disheartened by politics. They perceive that all of this sacrifice is hard to sustain in the face of ever-present uncertainty about whether the advocacy will result in “winning” something concrete for adult education.

Even the most ardent advocates noted challenges quite beyond their control, such as the constant need to cultivate existing and new relationships with a changing cast of decision-makers, especially in states like Maine that have term limits. Having cultivated allies or champions in the legislature, sometimes it is challenging to develop an advocacy agenda if the allies tell the advocates to back off an issue or a request for a budget increase.

Increasing the ranks of advocates among, not just adult educators and learners, but also community members, agencies and other advocacy groups is yet another challenge. Although many adult education programs have supporters in their communities, they apparently rarely ask these allies directly to advocate for adult education. And although adult education coalitions network with other like-minded groups that address workforce development, immigrant rights, poverty, or tax equity, it is another matter altogether to coordinate advocacy agendas, and not compete for the same limited funds.

Promising Strategies for Broadening and Sustaining Advocacy Efforts

One coalition president remarked on the long-term commitment and vision shown by members of their public policy committee that despite the work, they shared a sense of solidarity and fun in strategizing for adult education. While it is probably true that some people enjoy the challenge of advocacy more than others, organizational culture and leadership play a key role in affecting people’s engagement with advocacy. **Hiring people who are passionate about adult education** (when that is possible) is a start. **Orienting them to a program culture where civic involvement is valued and expected** harnesses that passion toward advocacy. One director recommended that the history of adult education advocacy be part of every new staff training. This could be extended to student orientations as well. **Including staff and students in program decision-making** also fuels willingness to venture beyond one’s comfort zone to advocate for something you feel ownership in. Some programs have institutionalized advocacy as a permanent part of program operations by building it into their activities, curriculum and calendar.

Other strategies noted were more aimed at preventing burn-out, such as **carving out different options for people’s involvement** in advocacy so that the work load is shared. Encouraging engagement in advocacy as a challenging **learning game where the process is a learning opportunity** independent of the end result counters the inevitable disappointment in the face of setbacks. As well, taking time to **acknowledge efforts**, such as a speech well given, and to celebrate small victories, help keep spirits up in the long haul of adult education advocacy. Finally, securing **funding for a staff person to organize public awareness/relations and/or cultivate student leadership** are icing on the cake that some programs have achieved.

Although these interviews did not turn up many promising strategies broadening the base of adult education advocates, at least two efforts are worth noting. One is a recent collaboration between the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education and the Massachusetts Immigrant Rights Advocacy Coalition around advocacy for more funds for adult and citizenship education. Another is the Rhode Island Workforce Alliance whose members include business and labor representatives and who have successfully advocated for an adult education budget increase. The Maine Adult Education Association has had success with enlisting the active advocacy support of two allied organizations, The Compact for Higher Education and Melmac Foundation, to good effect. As well, both Maine and Massachusetts advocacy coalitions have aligned themselves with efforts that promote more equitable taxation and oppose income tax cuts. No doubt, adult education advocacy efforts could be strengthened through more attention on cultivating local

and statewide allies (e.g. individual community members, volunteer tutors, as well as agencies and other organizing efforts) and asking them to advocate for adult education.

Conclusion

While diverse strategies can yield the same desired outcomes, which combination of strategies an individual program or advocacy coalition chooses to pursue is informed by a host of factors: their perception of the local context; their beliefs about the purposes and goals of advocacy; their organizational culture; and of course, the amount of time and resources they can commit to the cause.

Whether the coalitions and program administrators expend much time and energy in reaching out to teachers and students is informed by how they believe their agenda can be best accomplished: through movement building or lobbyists, or a little bit of both.

- Do they view their efforts as part of a long tradition of fighting for social change that requires everyone's involvement? Or as a matter best handled by a small group of people and lobbyists?
- To what extent should adult education advocacy groups reach out and join efforts with other groups advocating for immigrants and low-income people?
- Do program directors view adult education advocacy as an opportunity for learners and teachers to connect with their own voice and sense of collective power or as one more requirement to manage?
- Is advocacy an opportunity to promote broader civic participation and learning goals?

Answers to these questions ultimately shape the coalitions' and individual programs' approach to adult education advocacy.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL COLLABORATIONS TO STRENGTHEN STATE LEVEL ADVOCACY

Resource and Technical Assistance Needs

The most frequently cited needs for improvement of advocacy efforts and technical assistance were:

5. How to frame the message about the importance of adult education;
6. Development and implementation of an ongoing public awareness/ marketing plan, and institutionalization of the process;
7. A compendium of effective adult education advocacy strategies; and
8. How to train and involve students as advocates.

Addressing these needs will help each adult education advocacy coalition build a long-term, sustainable strategy that offers multiple ways for all stakeholders – students, staff, allies—to be involved in educating elected officials and the general public about the importance of adult education to their communities' economic, social and physical health and prosperity.

APPENDIX A

Participants interviewed

Connecticut	Paul Flinter	Director of Adult Education, CT Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services & Adult Education
	Art Muldowney	Co-Chair of Legislative Committee, CAACE
	Carl Guerriere	Director, Greater Hartford Literacy Council
	Doris Dyer	Director, EastConn Adult Education
	Ginnie Gorin	Instructor, EastConn Adult Education
	Rich Tariff	Director, Vernon Regional Adult Education
	Mary Berry	Director, Norwich Public Schools Adult Education
Maine	Becky Dyer	Director of Adult Education, ME Department of Education
	Cathy Newell	Director, Maine Adult Education Association
	Larinda Meade	College Transitions Director
	Ann Sargent Slayton	Director, Sumner Adult Education
	Rob Callahan	Director, Lewiston Adult & Continuing Education
	Rob Wood	Director, Portland Adult Education
Massachusetts	Anne Serino	Director of Adult Education, MA Department of Education
	Kenny Tamarkin	Director, Mass. Coalition for Adult Education
	Jim Ayres	Director, Center for New Americans
	Steve Hanley	Director, WAITT House
	Robert Hibbard	Coordinator, El Centro Del Cardinal
	Fred Abisi	Director, Lowell Adult Education
New Hampshire	Art Ellison	Director of Adult Education, NH Department of Education
	Leslie Haslam	Director, Exeter Adult Education
	Jim Verschueren	Director, Dover Adult Education
	Pat Nelson	Co-Director, Second Start
Rhode Island	Johan Uvin	Director of Adult Education, RI Department of Education
	Heidi Collins	Director of public education, RI Poverty Institute
	Linda Katz	Policy Director, RI Poverty Institute, One RI
	Pat Bellart	Director, RI Regional Adult Learning
	Brenda Dann-Messier	Director, Dorcas Place
Vermont	Tom Alderman	Director of Adult Education, VT Department of Education
	Pixie Loomis	Director, VT Adult Learning
	Jack Glade	Director, The Tutorial Center
	Mary Leahy	Director, Central VT Adult Education

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions for Program Directors, Coordinators and Instructors:

1. What drives you to be actively involved in advocacy for adult education?
2. What are some challenges that you and your program face in advocacy for adult education?
3. What have been or are your preferred advocacy strategies?
4. What have been your experiences in engaging staff in advocacy? How about students?
5. Does your curriculum play a role in helping students see themselves as advocates? How?
6. How do you determine the effectiveness of your advocacy strategies?
7. What have been your most important lessons learned about advocacy for adult literacy?
8. What advice do you have for adult ed programs about doing advocacy?
9. What public awareness efforts have you sponsored or supported recently or planned for the future?
10. What are the biggest needs you see for your program, state or the field to improve advocacy for adult education?
11. Are there staff or students that you'd recommend that I interview for this advocacy survey?
12. Are there community or political advocates that you think should be interviewed?
13. Do you have any other suggestions or comments?

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions for Coalition Advocates:

1. How long has your group been in existence?
2. What is its structure?
3. Who constitutes the membership or participants?
4. How many members does it have?
5. What percentage of the adult ed community does that represent in your state?
6. Are there other groups actively advocating for adult literacy in your state?
7. How do you collaborate with them, or not?
8. What is your best estimate of the percentage of adult ed programs that are
 - a. actively involved in advocacy;
 - b. sporadically when there's a big push or emergency;
 - c. not involved?
9. How do you help adult ed programs become confident, skilled and active in advocacy or education of public officials? (e.g. scripts, sample letters, trainings, fact sheets, mentoring or buddy systems, celebrations, new staff orientations, recommendations about job descriptions)?
10. What are your advocacy goals? For what period of time? How did you determine them?
11. What are your preferred strategies for achieving these goals?
12. How do you determine the effectiveness of your advocacy strategies?
13. What challenges are there in achieving these goals, if any? What might help you in reaching them?
14. Who are your strongest allies among
 - a. other advocacy groups?
 - b. legislators and public officials?
 - c. community and business leaders?
15. What public awareness efforts have you sponsored or supported recently or planned for the future?
16. Do you solicit feedback from the field about the advocacy strategies? How?
17. What have been your most important lessons learned about advocacy for adult literacy?