



## **Learning In Context:**

Preparing Latino Workers for Careers and Continuing Education

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR)—the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States—works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations, NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas—assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has regional offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, and San Antonio.

NCLR's Workforce Development component seeks to ensure the Latino community's ability to contribute to and share in the nation's economic opportunities through initiatives focused on improving Latinos' economic and career mobility. Working in partnership with its Affiliates, local and state governments, training and education providers, businesses, and other strategic partners, NCLR builds programs that bridge Latino workers' education and skills gaps and prepare them for lifelong career advancement. NCLR also works to bolster Affiliates' capacity as workforce development advocates to ensure that workforce development policies and programs meet the needs of Latino workers. Together, NCLR and its Affiliates serve as the link between Latino workers and job-seekers and the workforce development systems and institutions in their communities.

# Learning In Context: Preparing Latino Workers for Careers and Continuing Education

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ninety million Americans lack the basic literacy, numeracy, and English language skills needed to qualify for continuing education, training, and good jobs, yet projections hold that employers will respond to continued technological and economic changes by increasingly demanding workers with at least some college education or vocational certification. Without the full participation of native-born and immigrant Latinos in the U.S workforce, our nation will struggle to meet this demand.

Adult education services, including education for those lacking basic literacy and numeracy, preparation for the high school equivalency diploma, and English-as-a-second-language courses, play a crucial role in bridging the basic skills gap for Latinos and other workers with limited formal education and training. With recent policy and program shifts focusing on preparing low-skill adults for the demands of work and continued learning, integrated training programs—programs that provide vocational training and teach basic skills and/or the English language simultaneously—have emerged as a promising method for improving the learning and earnings outcomes of participants.

Seeking to better understand the impact of integrated training strategies on low-skill and limited-English-proficient adults, NCLR embarked on a study of eight programs in four states. Across the programs, striking commonalities in participant characteristics, program design, and system dynamics emerged as having major impact on the programs' successes and challenges. With a focus on the accessibility of integrated training programs for Latino and low-skill workers and the practicality of taking these programs to scale, NCLR offers insight and recommendations to policymakers, program administrators, and funders to ensure that these promising strategies reach the workers most affected by the basic skills gap.

## BACKGROUND

### America's Skills Crisis

Good jobs—jobs that offer family-supporting wages, employer-sponsored benefits, and a pathway to economic mobility—are accessible primarily to workers with at least some formal education or training. Education has long been an important component of labor market success, but structural economic changes that were present during the previous economic boom and accelerated by the recent recession have increased employers' need for workers with greater skills and, in turn, caused the wages for low-skill workers to stagnate or drop. Technological advancements across nearly all industries have decreased the demand for low-skill labor, while growth industries such as advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, information technology, and health care increasingly require medium- and high-skill workers to not only drive innovation and develop new ideas but also take those ideas to market.<sup>1</sup> Projections hold that by 2018, only 10% of jobs will be accessible to workers without a high school diploma and 28% to those with only a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup>

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**10% of jobs will be accessible to workers without a high school diploma by 2018.**

**88 million working-age Americans lack education beyond a high school diploma or have limited English proficiency.**

**18% of Latino youth, 92% of whom are U.S. citizens, are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential.**

**30% of the workforce in 2050 will be Latino.**

The American workforce is ill-equipped to meet the needs of the 21st-century employer. Eighty-eight million working-age Americans either lack education beyond a high school diploma or have limited English proficiency.<sup>3</sup>

About 90 million adults scored at or below basic literacy in the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, most recently conducted in 2003; of the 30 million adults with “below basic” literacy, 55% did not have a high school diploma, 44% had not spoken English before starting school, and 39% were Hispanic\* adults.<sup>4</sup>

These millions of individuals with low skills and deficiencies in basic reading, writing, math, and English have aged out of the reach of primary and secondary education systems. Yet employers' demand for workers with at least some postsecondary education or occupational training will continue to outpace the supply of workers by as many as three million postsecondary degrees and 4.7 million postsecondary certificates by 2018.<sup>5</sup>

The U.S. public primary and secondary education systems have struggled to prepare Latino workers for the demands of the labor market, continuing education, and training, leaving many trapped in low-wage jobs with limited upward mobility. Eighteen percent of young Latino people, 92% of whom are U.S. citizens, are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential, compared to 4.8% of White youth and 9.9% of Black youth.<sup>6</sup> Latino immigrants, representing more than half of the Latino workforce, tend to have difficulty speaking English and have significantly fewer years of formal education: 72% of foreign-born Latino adults speak English less than “very well”<sup>7</sup> and 49% have completed a high school diploma.<sup>8</sup> As the size of the Latino workforce (native-born and immigrant alike) grows from 14% to 30% in 2050, we can no longer ignore the lack of workforce preparedness growing in our Latino communities.<sup>9</sup>

### The ABCs Aren't Just for Kids

The U.S. has the education and training infrastructure to address the skills crisis and prepare Latino and other low-skill workers for the demands of the new economy.

\* The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.



Our workforce development systems provide a range of services including job readiness and employment services, occupational skills training, and vocational postsecondary education.

Adult education services typically include adult basic education, courses for adults preparing for the general equivalency diploma (GED), and English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction. Adult basic education instruction targets learners who lack even the most basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as the speaking, problem-solving, and computation skills needed for work and family. GED preparation, for those with some basic skills, helps adults prepare for an adult high school credential or its equivalent. ESL programs help adults learn the English that they will need for the workplace, continuing education, and vocational training.

A survey of adult education programs found that instruction is typically individual or classroom-based, with programs running for at least nine months for four to six hours a week, and with open enrollment that allows students to begin and stop classes as needed. They are delivered by a range of entities, with about half of the programs administered by local education agencies, one-quarter by community-based organizations (CBOs), and one-fifth by community colleges. Approximately one-third of participants complete one level of instruction in a year and one-fifth advance one or more levels, while 32% of learners do not advance. Twenty-seven percent of participants dropped out of classes before completing an educational level. Of the Latinos enrolled in adult education programs, two-thirds were in ESL classes.<sup>10</sup>

While adult education policy has traditionally focused on goals as wide-ranging as personal enrichment, life skills, civic participation, and improved parenting, the 1990s ushered in a new policy approach that emphasized the importance of “work first” over education and training for low-income adults. The change

was codified with the inclusion of adult education in the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and adult education and ESL programs gained a new mandate to contribute to the productivity of the workforce and address the growing basic skills crisis facing large numbers of American adults who were ill-prepared for the higher-skilled jobs of the new economy.

As a result, work-oriented adult education and ESL policy and program strategies have blossomed, testing new ways to help low-skill working adults prepare for jobs in the short term and gain the skills they need to pursue the postsecondary education and training needed for the jobs of tomorrow. Integrated training programs, or programs that combine basic skills and occupational skills training, have been tested and piloted using a range of strategies: occupational training supported by basic skills and English language instruction, incumbent worker training programs customized to meet the needs of particular employers, bridge programs that prepare students for academic credit programs, career or academic orientation programs that incorporate occupational preparation within a standard adult education curriculum, and career pathways programs that combine education and training within a specific industry or occupation with case management and supportive services and focus on helping individuals advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment.



## The Promise of Integrated Training

While still a relatively new program area, integrated training programs have shown that participants have stronger outcomes in earnings and academic gains. Studies have found that students learn basic skills faster, retain their learning longer, and are more likely to complete training and education programs if they can see the short-term benefits and relevance of learning for a particular occupation.<sup>11</sup> An evaluation of welfare-to-work programs found that combining basic education and training helped participants increase earnings for at least five years.<sup>12</sup> A randomized evaluation of programs serving mainly Latino and limited-English-proficient participants found that participants had a sustained earnings gain of more than \$3,000, which is 40% greater than that of the control group.<sup>13</sup>

of accountability and reporting requirements. Programs tend to require a minimum threshold of basic skills or English proficiency, leaving out very low-skill workers, including large portions of the limited-English-proficient population. They have also reported difficulty developing curricula that balance the needs of employers and students.<sup>16</sup>

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Aside from a handful of studies, little research has focused on the role and scalability of integrated training for low-skill and limited-English-proficient learners. Many studies of sector-focused and bridge training programs have found that successful programs utilized an integrated learning component and were often operated by community-based organizations.<sup>14</sup> Yet the programs studied often heavily screen participants based on work and education backgrounds and operate at higher per-capita costs—sometimes as high as \$17,000 per participant.<sup>15</sup>

Informal surveys focusing on integrated training programs have also found that programs may be less accessible to participants with lower basic education or English attainment, which has troubling implications for Latino and other low-skill workers. Programs reported carefully selecting participants to ensure their success, because components such as time-intensive learning schedules, supportive services, and specialized faculty are more costly and the fragmented funding streams require an array

## PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Through its Career Pathways Initiative, NCLR partners with 17 Affiliates to provide customized workforce development programs in the health care, green jobs, and customer service/retail sectors. Targeting Latinos who face significant barriers to employment and career advancement, and industries with a significant need for trained Latino workers, NCLR's career pathways programs provide technical assistance to help develop curricula and program models that combine basic education and language competency with rigorous technical skills. Participants earn industry-recognized certifications, job placement assistance, articulations into continuing education and training opportunities, and career counseling and supportive services to ensure that they can advance along a career path.

NCLR undertook this study to better understand how integrated training programs are currently serving low-skill workers, as well as the opportunities for and challenges of taking this strategy to scale. Given the limited research conducted on only a handful of integrated training initiatives, this report will expand the understanding of this strategy by profiling programs housed at a variety of service providers not previously profiled, including local education agencies and CBOs, institutions with a history and mandate to provide education and training to participants of all skill levels. It analyzes common components of successful programs and offers recommendations on how to expand the use of this strategy to better provide Latino workers with the skills needed for the jobs of tomorrow.

With funding for the NCLR Health Care Career Pathways Initiative provided by the U.S. Department of Labor and the Aetna Foundation and funding for research and advocacy to strengthen workforce

development systems reaching underserved communities from the Ford Foundation, NCLR sought to study integrated training programs from throughout the country to identify promising, scalable practices that are helping low-skill and limited-English-proficient workers succeed in work and learning. NCLR hired an external researcher and evaluator to conduct this study. The evaluator identified community-based and other organizations with promising and scalable integrated training programs using professional networks, referrals from regional workforce boards, Internet-based searches, and interviews with leading field experts.

This report profiles eight programs across four states: Illinois, where NCLR's *Carreras en Salud* program is being implemented; Washington, known for innovation in integrated training; and Texas and Florida, states with large populations of Latinos and immigrants with limited English proficiency. Interviews were conducted with program practitioners and, when available, information from reports, evaluations, and websites was used to supplement the interviews.

## CASE STUDIES

### ILLINOIS

#### *Carreras en Salud*

*Carreras en Salud* trains Latinos for work in Chicago's health care sector and addresses the growing need for bilingual, bicultural Latino health care workers that can adequately and linguistically serve the growing Latino population. Two CBOs, Association House of Chicago and Instituto del Progreso Latino, provide basic and vocational ESL skills, bridge programs, case management, and supportive services to participants. A campus of the City Colleges of Chicago, Humboldt Park Vocational Education Center of Wilbur Wright College, provides technical training, and NCLR, as a national workforce intermediary, provides technical assistance and funding to improve, support, and expand the program. The partnership began in 2004, and more than 1,000 Latinos have been trained in health care careers including certified nursing assistant (CNA), certified medical assistant (CMA), licensed practical nurse (LPN), and registered nurse.

#### *Participants*

*Carreras en Salud* participants are all Hispanic and many have limited English skills. The program focuses on serving bilingual Latinos to ensure that they are able to work with monolingual Spanish-speaking patients in different health care settings.

#### *Program Design*

Participants receive intensive ESL and vocational ESL training contextualized for health care to ensure that they understand medical terminology in both English and Spanish. Participants with very limited English skills enroll in basic ESL classes first to build their skills to a level that is high enough to allow them to learn and absorb

the curriculum in the vocational ESL classes. Upon graduation from the vocational ESL class, participants can either enroll directly in the CNA or CMA programs offered by the community college or in a bridge program for the LPN class that offers advanced English and math skills contextualized for the health care industry.

The program offers multiple entry and exit points to allow greater flexibility for the participants.

Of the ten levels offered by *Carreras en Salud*, five focus on integrated training to adequately prepare students for the next level of technical training. Participants can exit at any level to find employment and then reenter at any level for advanced training.

#### *System Dynamics*

The program's most difficult challenge has been the community college's training capacity: The partner CBOs prepare students for CNA and LPN training more rapidly than the college can accommodate these students. While the college has created more capacity for LPN students by adding weekend and evening sections, reserving enrollment slots for qualified *Carreras en Salud* students, and providing instructors who are sensitive to the needs of limited-English-proficient and nontraditional learners, the program has nonetheless been unable to meet the demand from participants.



## WASHINGTON

### Tacoma Community House

Tacoma Community House (TCH), founded in 1910, aims to foster self-sufficiency by giving refugees, immigrants, and non-English-speaking adults and youth the skills they need to transition out of poverty, navigate American culture, and be successful in their lives as fully contributing members of society. TCH's classes include English contextualized for the workplace, taught either in the work setting or in connection with vocational training.

#### *Participants*

Instruction is accessible to a wide range of students. Rather than recruiting higher-level participants, TCH works with immigrants with language, skill, and work culture barriers. The program has found that individuals with lower levels of proficiency can be successful if they are motivated and already skilled in the technical area, or if the training is more focused on occupational skills than academics.

**“We don’t have to teach the world. Will they learn the language? No. Will they learn the language they need to do the work? Yes, enough to do their jobs better.”**

#### *Program Design*

English instruction is focused on students' practical workplace communication needs rather than solely academic preparation. TCH language instruction includes tasks such as the ability to follow two- or three-step instructions, ask for clarification, and summarize, as opposed to ESL taught in

community colleges, which tends to focus on grammar and academic success or life skills.

The ESL and vocational instructors work closely together, and program success depends on their respect and understanding of each other. For example, one ESL instructor enrolled in a welding program for an hour a day so he could learn welding and welding terms for his English language learners in that class. For another class, ESL instructors worked with Korean employees at a poultry processing factory in order to observe and inventory the language needs on the job, for communicating with supervisors, and for having discussions during breaks.

#### *System Dynamics*

TCH cautioned that workplace training alone is not enough to help participants improve their general English language skills. One interviewee explained that “[workplace language instruction] is very focused and specific. We don’t have to teach the world. Will they learn the language? No. Will they learn the language they need to do the work? Yes, enough to do their jobs better. But they haven’t become good English speakers; they are not yet educated.” Although integrated training was regarded as the most effective strategy for successful workforce ESL training, it is expensive, and without dedicated funding, it is out of reach for a CBO striving to meet the needs of participants at all levels of preparation.

## Refugee Women's Alliance

The Refugee Women's Alliance (ReWA) is a nonprofit organization serving the Puget Sound area since 1985. ReWA serves refugees and immigrants from countries including Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Butan, Burma, Iraq, Russia, Latvia, Honduras, and Mexico.

### Participants

About three-fourths of ReWA's participants are literate in their native language. One hundred fifty participants attend beginner ESL classes, and about 40 attend vocational training in child care or nursing assistance, sectors chosen because their short timelines allow participants to quickly qualify for entry-level positions with career advancement potential. The program admits that it struggles to balance the needs of higher- and lower-level learners; as it has begun to attract an increasing number of qualified applicants—more than they have slots for—the program has screened its participants more heavily than in the past, requiring enrollees to obtain at least a level three basic English competency.

### Program Design

Participants' English skills are assessed and then they are enrolled in ESL classes that are appropriate to their skill levels. Vocational training programs offer internship and workplace exposure, industry-relevant vocabulary, and job readiness skills such as budgeting, résumé building, salary negotiations, computer basics, and preemployment ESL. Program staff explained that "the classroom is a place where we practice being professional, responsible, being on time, and calling in if we'll miss class." After achieving level five English language skills, participants are encouraged to enroll in a community college to continue their education in a CNA program or early childhood education.

ReWA counts its supportive environment as one of its core strengths. Caseworkers develop relationships with their clients, identifying their strengths and continuing challenges to be overcome. ReWA offers services such as child care (on a space availability basis), assistance with transportation, job referrals, post-placement career counseling, and referrals for service needs such as housing or utilities. One staff member remarked that it is not uncommon for participants to have relatives in different class levels, as a sense of community helps people stay in class.



### System Dynamics

The organization has struggled to establish meaningful partnerships with community colleges to enable more participants to transition into degree and certificate-bearing training. Although caseworkers informally refer participants to colleges or even arrange for visits from college recruiters, efforts to establish more formal partnerships have been stymied.

## Seattle Jobs Initiative

Seattle Jobs Initiative (SJI) is a workforce intermediary that partners with CBOs to develop and implement sector-focused programs, including programs targeting basic skills and English language learners.

### *Participants*

About half of SJI's ESL participants are immigrants and refugees with higher English skills, for whom SJI helped to develop customized and cohorted college-level integrated training programs. For the many immigrants who do not meet the minimum English requirements for higher-level training, SJI developed programming with two CBO partners to boost their skills to qualify for established integrated training programs. Many participants struggle to complete their studies. An evaluation of the programs identified barriers to completion including access to child care and transportation and participants' need to return to work.

### *Program Design*

For the higher-level participants, SJI works with community colleges and other training partners to offer cohorted and customized integrated training programs that meet the needs of participants. One aspect of customization has been the incorporation of soft skills and employer expectations into the community colleges' curriculum, including punctuality, attendance, dress code, and performance evaluations. Another customization has been to enable participants to receive college credits for their vocational courses and articulate the courses for enrollment in degree programs.

For those with beginning English skills, on-site vocational ESL programming delivered by the local community college in collaboration with a CBO has been designed and tested for the mostly janitorial, housekeeping, and cafeteria workers of a medical center.

The curriculum includes workplace problem-solving techniques and employability skills, such as time management, health and safety knowledge, customer service, and workplace culture, and participants receive on-site career counseling, case management, and job placement. In order to increase flexibility and improve retention, the curriculum is broken into four-week modules. SJI found, however, that employer-based integrated training programs didn't always work; a basic English supervisory course for entry-level health care workers was discontinued for lack of funding, and English classes customized for employees of local hotels were discontinued after employers resisted giving participants paid release time for their studies and the program activities proved difficult to fund.

**“A lot is happening out there, but there’s a gap between the CBO and the community college, and they don’t know each other.”**

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### *System Dynamics*

Cohorts enable SJI to offer participants enrolled in community college courses support through partner CBOs, helping them to navigate college and mitigate any personal barriers. Participants have access to case management, drug and alcohol treatment groups, and a stress manager, receive help applying for financial aid and enrolling in classes, and can obtain referrals and assistance with bus passes, clothing, and housing referrals. Staff commented that one of the benefits of belonging to a cohort is the high level of support for participants, especially in navigating inevitably complex college bureaucracies; according to one staff member, “Colleges are great and innovative, but not

consistent or standardized...Even for calculating financial aid, colleges have different policies.”



But partnerships between community colleges and CBOs have proved difficult. Program staff noted that although CBO programs helped participants achieve language skills, they were still at a level that was too low for the requirements of the

community college system, creating a void for those wanting to continue to improve their abilities. “There is at least a two-pronged approach to serving immigrants: CBOs and community colleges,” commented a staff member. “A lot is happening out there, but there’s a gap between the CBO and the community college, and they don’t know each other.”



## FLORIDA

### Project STRIVE

Project STRIVE (Services To Refugees In Vocational Education), funded by federal dollars through the Florida Department of Children and Families' Refugee Services Program, serves refugees and asylees who have been in the country for less than five years. Arriving refugees and asylees receive benefits that support them for the first 90 days and education and training benefits for five years.

#### *Participants*

Participants vary in skill—about half arrive with little education from their native countries and half arrive with professional degrees. Although Project STRIVE accepts participants at all levels of English proficiency, the program has found that those with higher levels of English or stronger educational backgrounds in their native languages often can go directly into technical training and are more successful in subsequent certification. Participants' jobs, often temporary and/or service jobs, tend to interrupt the educational process. About half of program enrollees drop out, usually due to work demands, and while many return months or a year later, those who return when their five-year window is about to close must be referred to other adult education programs for services.

#### *Program Design*

Employability skills, such as résumé writing and interviewing, punctuality and attendance, and computer literacy are incorporated into all classes, and critical thinking components and teamwork are included in the higher-level English courses. As one staff member stated, “The benefits of classroom instruction are those interactions, the gestures, the facial expressions that

go along with the language that are very different from those of other countries.”

Once participants have reached a high level of English proficiency, they are placed in vocational training through partners in fields such as health care, automotive repair, marine mechanics, aviation, and culinary arts. Because participants struggle to balance work and studies, recent efforts have focused on creating weekend, evening, and online programming to help overcome this challenge.

#### *System Dynamics*

In addition to English language, basic education, and GED preparation classes, participants have access to a range of supportive services including career counseling, translation and evaluation of transcripts, and referrals to employment, child care, and other social services. Counselors work with participants to set educational and employment goals based on educational background and barriers, and they provide ongoing case management. A computer lab with long hours allows for software-based supplemental English study and developing research and writing skills.

**“The benefits of classroom instruction are those interactions, the gestures, the facial expressions that go along with the language that are very different from those of other countries.”**

## Catholic Charities of Collier County

Catholic Charities is a family resource center with offices throughout the country; Catholic Charities of Collier County focuses on providing employment services and regards English proficiency as the first key to economic self-sufficiency in this country. Clients are served through its two employment programs, Refugees Employed And Productive (REAP) and Career

Laddering. REAP places about 80% of its clients in employment, and many participants have advanced to become supervisors or mid-level managers.

### Participants

Catholic Charities program participants are mostly new entrants to the country. Low-skill and limited-English-proficient participants are enrolled in REAP. Career Laddering clients are “professional refugees” with higher-level English proficiency or professional training in their native countries, although they may be working as cab drivers, CNAs, or janitors in the U.S.

### Program Design

REAP's goal is to first get people working. They receive computer literacy training, résumé assistance, career coaching, and referrals to partners for services such as document translation and evaluation, and ESL (through a community college or Express Language, a private provider) and vocational training (through Project STRIVE). Programming is conducted in Spanish or Creole. Staff help participants obtain a Social Security number and driver's license or other needed documentation, and they

provide an orientation on working in this country, including the importance of English proficiency and workplace courtesy. After participants complete REAP activities, they can enroll in Career Laddering to build language skills and develop a career plan.

The Career Laddering program helps participants with higher-level English get started with licensure or re-licensure and training. With a time limit of one year for services provided under the state's refugee services funds, the program is not always able to see the clients all the way through the process, so it instead focuses on short-term goals such as placement into a better job.

### System Dynamics

Despite efforts to develop integrated training programming, Catholic Charities' ESL programming remains largely citizenship-oriented. With budget constraints that have forced the organization to reduce even its standard English classes, participants are now increasingly referred to outside language courses offered by public schools and other providers. In the absence of integrated courses, the program has introduced other measures to improve the work relevance of its classes, including the development of a dictionary with phrases and terminology for job categories such as landscaper, CNA, housekeeper, and carpenter.



## TEXAS

### Texas Industry-Specific English as a Second Language (TISESL)

A recent focus on improving collaboration among the Texas Education Agency, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, and Texas Workforce Commission to better meet the needs of shared clients, including individuals with limited English proficiency, has led to the creation of the Texas Industry-Specific English as a Second Language (TISESL) curricula. The curricula are copyrighted by the State of Texas and a state agency limits the access of entities that can implement them.

#### *Participants*

The curricula are designed for students with high-beginning to low-intermediate English skills and basic education, and they target those most in need of and least likely to receive workforce training from current programs. While participants vary from site to site, one provider implementing the TISESL health care curriculum reported that the typical dropout rate of students in traditional CNA training is 60–80%, a rate they hope the TISESL curriculum will reduce.

#### *Program Design*

El Paso Community College, seizing the opportunity to participate in the TISESL initiative, developed modular curricula for the health care, manufacturing, and sales and service sectors. The curricula offer instructors' manuals, lesson plans, and student workbooks. Each curriculum provides bridge instruction that can be delivered at the workplace or within ESL classes, introducing students to the industry and its entry-level occupations and familiarizing them with industry vocabulary and critical concepts. An additional soft skills curriculum, also available online, focuses on work-based communication

and problem-solving scenarios for both ESL and basic education students with a variety of interests. Instructors who piloted the curricula concluded that the “lessons are a balanced mix of ESL, grammar, math, employability, and life skills.”

The curricula have had anecdotal successes. At a local nursing and rehabilitation center where the TISESL health care curriculum is being used to help housekeeping staff qualify for CNA training, some students previously not admitted to training were able to enroll in courses, and others who had previously been unable to find employment as CNAs were hired after completion of the TISESL curriculum. Management at a hotel that utilized an adapted sales and service course for hotel workers reported improved English, computer literacy, and self-confidence and greater employment retention and advancement to positions with more responsibility. About half of the instructors participating in a satisfaction survey reported changes in student attitudes, self-confidence, and the ability to communicate after using a TISESL curriculum, and about as many expressed interest in more involvement with the curricula.

#### *System Dynamics*

Implementation of the curricula has been slow. While both community colleges and nonprofit organizations have been trained to implement a TISESL curriculum, the extensive materials offering up to 200 hours of instruction have been daunting for some instructors and there has been more uptake of the shorter employability curriculum. To address this challenge, the program has been conducting “train the trainer” workshops to prepare faculty to use and adapt the modular curriculum to their students' needs.

## Education Service Center, Region 20

Education Service Center, Region 20 (ESC-20) in San Antonio, one of the 20 education service agencies in Texas, works with school districts to improve student performance and increase the effectiveness of schools. ESC-20 provides adult basic education, GED preparation, and ESL instruction across nine Texas counties. Although GED and ESL classes are contextualized for 21st-century workplace skills, such as teamwork and critical thinking, as one staff member explained, “We can’t ever get away from general ESL classes. Community members expect it and want it.” While the majority of ESC-20’s basic education and English language courses follow a traditional model, the organization recognizes the importance of contextualized classes to improve their relevance to adult students and increase their retention.

### Participants

Students range from recent immigrants who are illiterate in their native language to individuals who just need to brush up their skills. Because the classes attract students with a wide range of language skills and the organization does not have sufficient funding to offer classes at separate levels, instructors may teach all levels in a single classroom. Many students enroll because they wish to improve their employment prospects. A staff member explained that “if we go out and talk to community members and say, ‘You’ll learn English and at the same time we’ll help you prepare for a job as a welder,’ it’s more appealing. If you can entice people to register and stay in class, and they know that they have a good chance to get a certificate that will give them better job opportunities, we’ll be doing a better job.”

### Program Design

One of ESC-20’s integrated training ventures has been the development of a GED preparation class contextualized for the health care industry by integrating vocabulary and concepts that are relevant to health care and expose participants to career opportunities. While participants were not recruited based on prior interest in a health career, those interested were referred to the local workforce center for health care training. Another new course is ESL contextualized for school cafeteria workers, which offers materials related to food, food preparation, purchasing, measurement, recipes, and other language necessary for working in the cafeteria, with the goal of improving job performance and helping participants advance their careers in the food industry. Other ESL courses have worked

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with community college instructors to develop GED or ESL lessons related to green jobs and with college-level English and math professors to improve college readiness for students bound for community college.

### System Dynamics

Cost has been a barrier to the development of additional work-relevant ESL and GED classes. While there has been increased encouragement from the state to collaborate to better serve the educational needs of Texas’ adults, in practice it is expensive to engage both community college and ESL instructors in lesson planning and classroom

instruction. ESC-20's previous partnership with a community college was limited to providing classroom space within the college campus for traditional ESL classes. New funding currently being sought will permit an integration of ESL instruction into the community college's CNA class, enabling co-planning and co-teaching among the ESL and CNA instructors.

Without funding for a career counselor to work with participants to identify goals, needs, and barriers and help participants transition into postsecondary education, many students who successfully complete ESL and GED programs do not take advantage of continuing training opportunities. Participants receive supportive services and case management from partner CBOs, but the services don't meet the need for academic and career-oriented support. As one staff member explained, "Our students don't know that they would qualify for money for tuition. The distance between sites is a barrier to college counselors visiting, so teachers need to be able to offer that additional information."

## FINDINGS

Across all of the programs studied, patterns emerged among factors that influence the success of an integrated training program. The table below outlines commonalities in participant characteristics, program design components, and system dynamics that shaped their efforts to boost the basic and technical skills of low-skill and limited-English-proficient workers.

### Participant Resources and Qualifications

Factor	Consideration
Education Level	Those with higher educational or English language skills are usually able to enter and graduate from vocational training programs more quickly.
Motivation	Participants who are ambitious and hard-working tend to succeed more quickly.
Technical Skills	Those who already possess technical skills may not need as much English language proficiency to succeed in the technical class, especially if the job area is more skill-based than concept-based.
Employability Skills	Participants who are not sensitive to the cultural demands of the American workplace may not be able to retain employment successfully.
Support and Personal Obligations	Participants who struggle with basic needs and personal obligations are likely to need more support.

## Program Resources and Design

Factor	Consideration
Stable Funding	Stable funding permits incremental development and ongoing improvement of a program.
Levels of Instruction	CBOs take low-skill and limited-English-proficient learners, but most programs require higher educational attainment.
Contextualization	Contextualization was the most effective teaching strategy to facilitate learning and increase retention. Most providers do not contextualize their beginning-level classes.
Accreditation	CBOs are often more accessible than community colleges, but colleges offer the credentials and curricular required for accreditation.

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## System Dynamics

Factor	Consideration
Partnerships	Effective collaboration among CBOs, education and training providers, and workforce development agencies allow clients to receive needed training and services seamlessly and efficiently.
Relationships with Employers	Strong links with employers facilitate access to internships or jobs for program graduates and provide feedback to trainers about the effectiveness of the training.

# LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FIELD

In order to ensure that integrated training programs are accessible to Latino and low-skill workers and can be implemented at a larger scale, NCLR offers the following lessons and recommendations to policymakers, program administrators, and funders.

- **Workplace learning is different from academic learning.** There is real value to integrating basic learning with vocational skills. Entrenched, historical distinctions between education and training make this new program area a challenging undertaking for many organizations. However, participants do make significant gains in motivation and persistence as well as acquisition of basic and work-related skills.

*Recommendation:*

Invest in the development and implementation of programs embedded and fundable within federal funding streams that address work and learning needs simultaneously.

- **The integrated training needs of limited-English-proficient learners are different than those of higher-level learners.** All of the vocational programs examined required a high level of skills or English proficiency for admission, and many reported that participants who were literate in their native language moved through the training more quickly. While some programs for those with lower-level English skills have developed contextualized curricula such as “English for Parents” and “Workplace English,” programs agree that greater contextualization is more possible at

higher levels of proficiency and lower-level learners have diverse interests and needs not well accommodated by integrated programs.

*Recommendation:*

Explore integrated training models that more effectively target the needs of diverse lower-level basic education students and English language learners.

- **Training and support for workers with the most barriers falls largely on CBOs.** The majority of low-skill and limited-English-proficient workers are left out of integrated training programs that are preparing participants to enter good jobs and transition into credit- or certificate-bearing education and training. With missions to help move people out of poverty, CBOs take on the important work of preparing lower-level participants for higher-level programs and providing case management and supportive services to participants of all levels to ensure that they are able to stay and succeed in their studies.

*Recommendation:*

Increase collaboration with CBOs as partners in adult integrated training programs to ensure that workers of all levels can access and succeed in learning opportunities.

- **Participants prioritize work over classes.** While programs were designed to build participants’ long-term economic self-sufficiency, participants needed to work for short-term economic survival. The need to work and learn is all the more imperative because of the lengthy horizon for low-skill learners to master basic literacy, numeracy, and the English language. Successful programs incorporated aspects such as flexible times and convenient locations, computer



labs for individualized learning, and modularized or compressed curricula to improve participant retention and completion.

*Recommendation:*

Explore program model designs that accommodate the competing demands of working and learning simultaneously.

- **Implementing integrated training requires new organizational capacity.** Basic education and English proficiency for work demands the development of new curricula, professional development of instructors and career counselors, and establishment of partnerships with community stakeholders such as CBOs, community colleges, employers, and government agencies to ensure that participants make gains in learning and work alike. Programs benefited from opportunities to share in knowledge and materials developed by others, especially programs targeting low-skill participants.

*Recommendation:*

Provide peer learning exchanges, technical assistance, and a national clearinghouse of best practices for integrated training programs.

## ENDNOTES

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