

ALLIES



Alliance for Language Learners'
Integration, Education, and Success

Recommendations for Developing Regional Adult Education Consortia

*Building on the ALLIES Experience in San Mateo and
Santa Clara Counties, 2010-2013*

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The Alliance for Language Learners Integration, Education and Success (ALLIES) has worked for three years in Silicon Valley to support adult schools and community colleges in meeting the needs of adult English language learners by cooperating closely and aligning the two systems. Our partners have tested a range of innovations: aligning curriculum, coordinating assessments, and providing opportunities for teachers and other staff to work together. Our experiences provide lessons and options for other regions to follow. The success achieved by ALLIES has clear implications for the current planning to improve delivery of basic adult education in California.

The primary lesson from ALLIES is that collaboration works. Silicon Valley adult schools and community colleges have worked together to align and coordinate their systems at a time of declining resources. The collaboration has been driven by a strong grassroots effort and supported by a dedicated support team focused on promoting collaboration. This has allowed all institutions to build on their strengths for the benefit of students.

As local leaders and state policy makers develop plans to launch regional collaborations, ALLIES provides an example that well-designed partnerships, based on a collaboration of equal partners, work to improve student outcomes.

ALLIES Background

ALLIES is an alliance serving the two-county Silicon Valley region of San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. Launched by a grant of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation in 2010, mission of ALLIES is to advance regional economic and social health through high-impact alliances for immigrant educational and career success. Since 2011, main activities of ALLIES have been as follows:

- ***Facilitating Collaboration:*** Promoting collaborations between educational providers and other partners.
- ***Conducting Best-Practice Research:*** Assessing what works locally as well as disseminating findings from California and national best practices.
- ***Conducting Outreach and Education:*** Presenting on the needs of adult language learners and the potential of collaboration to educator professional organizations, the Little Hoover Commission of the California State Legislature, and the Silicon Valley Community Foundation Immigrant Integration Action Forum. ALLIES issued policy recommendations on the Governor's 2013 budget proposal and is participating in state and local policy development efforts regarding the consortium-building processes.
- ***Supporting Partnership Development:*** Building relationships with businesses, labor, the workforce system, and community based organizations.

A central activity of ALLIES has been to convene the ESL Providers' Network (EPN) of practitioners from adult schools and community colleges. The EPN – including over 60 faculty and administrators representing the ten colleges and 15 adult schools in the region – has met

twice per year to share best practices and discuss future directions for the overall ALLIES effort. Its mission is to support student access and success in adult English language acquisition programs through provider collaborations that promote: alignment and coordination, best practices, improved access, policy changes, and measurement of results.

The regional meetings have stimulated local partners to collaborate between sessions on specific partnership initiatives. Additionally, participants have used the EPN to share resources and opportunities, such as the Library Literacy program tutors, resources produced by KQED, funding opportunities, etc.

ALLIES has been very successful in getting different institutions to cooperate for the benefit of students. In fact, it is considered a national model. In 2012, it partnered with the three Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) of the region to secure a \$2.6 million Workforce Innovation Fund grant to develop and implement the ALLIES vision in partnership with the WIBs, employers, community-based organizations, labor, and funders.

ALLIES works with key partner agencies and consortia to align change efforts for the benefit of the regional economy and students. Some of the partners include:

- Career Ladders Project
- Bay Area Community Colleges Consortium
- The Silicon Valley Community Foundation Immigrant Integration Initiative
- The Community College Coalition for Immigrant Education
- California Adult Education Administrators Association
- California Council for Adult Education
- California Teachers of English Speakers of Others Languages

Recommendations for Regional Consortia

Based on ALLIES almost three years of experience helping adult schools and community colleges collaborate, stakeholders have identified key findings that have made ALLIES a success. The findings and corresponding recommendations are summarized below.

Recommendation 1: Create a strong, student-centered vision and diverse leadership team to guide collaboration

Finding: ALLIES has supported ongoing collaborative innovation between adult schools, community colleges and other systems for three years, resulting in improved alignment and coordination and student success. Furthermore, our success is reinforced by a clear consensus in the professional and academic research that coordination and alignment across educational levels and among education and community, employer and workforce partners is essential for success.¹

Action Step: Develop a cross-agency leadership team to advance a proactive, student-centered vision for the consortia.

Recommendation 2: Involve diverse stakeholders in the consortium process

Finding: Many types of organizations and perspectives are needed to address the multiple barriers faced by English language learners and adult basic education students. These different organizations bring different strengths and capabilities, and opportunities to leverage funding.

Recommended Action: Consortia should have a broad tent, including adult schools, community colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, libraries, support services, students, employers and labor groups, and others such as CalWORKs. To the extent that an increasing number of adult basic education students are likely to be non-native English speakers, it is important to also coordinate with immigrant advocate organizations.

Recommendation 3: Use a structured collaborative model with neutral facilitation.

Finding: Collaboration works best when it is data driven and carefully planned by neutral facilitators. Creating an effective collaborative is challenging and takes time and commitment.

Recommended Action: Consortia should be required to produce a plan that starts by identifying student needs for adult education and lists the strengths and capacity of different stakeholders to meet those needs. The plan should also identify what data will be tracked over time. They should use a neutral third party facilitator whose job it is to promote collaboration.

¹ Collective Impact, SSIR, 2012. Kotter, Why Change Efforts Fail, Harvard Business Review. Jobs for the Future, Presentation WIF Grantees.

A neutral facilitator who has time dedicated to the project will ensure that all voices are heard and help the group move through difficult issues.

Recommendation 4: Share decision-making in developing the consortium's collaborative plan.

Finding: There are many different types of students served by the adult basic education system, and no one institution can meet all those needs. To ensure that the full range of students' needs are considered, it is important to not let any one institution control the process.

Recommended Action: Decision making authority must be shared equally among adult schools and community colleges. The process should be jointly convened and jointly owned. The student voice must be a central input to developing the collaboration.

Recommendation 5: Take a long-range perspective

Finding: System change is iterative and it can take several refinements before gains are fully realized.

Recommended Action: Consortia should take a long-range view and their plans should cover multiple years. The partnerships should change over time, with initial discussions being heavily planning in nature. Over time, more of the conversation should turn to implementation. However, as partnership progresses and the landscape changes, it will be important to adapt the plan.

Recommendation 6: Use a regional approach

Finding: While some partnerships involve just a community college and an adult school, using a regional approach allows for sharing of best practices, more efficient use of resources, and a more a coherent system for students.

Recommended Action: Schools within a region should join together to form consortia. Individual schools within each consortium can partner for different activities, but it should be in the context of a broader collaboration.

Recommendation 7: Develop data sharing tools

Finding: It is essential that schools and other institutions be able to share information about students.

Recommended Action: Community colleges and adult schools that have partnered should identify the key information they need to collect and share, and then do so. Ideally, there would be one system throughout the state, but in the interim, different institutions need to find data sharing tools that work for them.

Recommendations Based on Policy Research and Best Practices

A number of recent studies have identified best practices for the California basic education system including *Restructuring California's Adult Education System* by the Legislative Analyst's Office; *A Golden Opportunity, Strategies to Focus Adult Education on College and Career* by LearningWorks; *Gateway to a Better Future: Creating a Basic Skills System for California* by the California Budget Project; *Linking Adults to Opportunities: Transformation of the California Department of Education Adult Education Program* by the California Department of Education (CDE); and the CDE, Adult Education Office, strategic plan and the needs assessment.

Key success factors are summarized below:

- 1. Develop efficient systems so data can be shared among institutions.** The state should facilitate the sharing of data so information about students can be tracked from adult schools to community colleges to workforce programs to other community partners. A data sharing system is the foundation of being able to serve student needs well and evaluate accomplishments over time. The state must take the lead promoting this system.
- 2. There needs to be a clear assessment system that evaluates both student placement and student progress. The system must ensure there is *no wrong door* so wherever students are assessed, they can be directed to the classes they need.** The assessment systems in regions must be aligned so that students can quickly and efficiently be placed in classes that are appropriate for their needs. The assessment must be paired with a customized education plan that specifies the students' goals. This assessment should be required of all new students (and this requirement should be enforced). Both common assessment tools and assessments with results understood by all parties are options.
- 3. Adult schools and community colleges should use best practices such as career pathways and technology supported education to accelerate and improve student outcomes.** Generally, institutions need to help students meet their goals quickly, before students drop or stop out. Other states, such as Washington, have made dramatic improvements in their adult basic education system and California should learn from these advances. Two policies that have been successful include having students learn basic skills while in career technical courses, and supplying support services for English language learners so they can take more advanced classes. Additionally, connecting basic skills instruction to career pathways and ladders has a positive impact on persistence and outcomes. To make this possible, it may be helpful to co-enroll in multiple schools. Consortia can support this process, as can common data and assessments.

4. **The funding system for basic education should be reworked.** Currently, different institutions receive various funding levels to offer similar classes. Consequently, students may pay nothing or a moderate amount for a class depending on where they take it. Institutions should be offered more funding if their student base has higher needs. Because support services are so important, a percentage of the funding should be dedicated to this purpose. Funding on the state level should encourage and reward best practices and be aligned to outcomes, not only for enrollments or attendance. In the short term, institutions should be rewarded for experimenting. In the longer term, funding should be tied to following best practices.
5. **The State should set clear goals and conduct annual evaluations to document progress.** Community colleges and adult schools have often suffered because they tried to offer too many services to too many constituents. It is important to clarify the goals of basic education and then to evaluate based on meeting those goals. This also implies a need to delineate function so as to take advantage of each system's or agency's strengths.
6. **The Chancellor's Office and the CDE both have important roles in supporting the newly formed regional consortia.** They should identify technical assistance people to assist schools as they work together. This will help all regions learn from each other and improve together.
7. **Remove barriers to cross referrals between different institutions.** Community colleges, schools and other educators should be encouraged to refer/recommend students to the program that best meets their needs. Policies or rules that make this difficult should be changed.

ALLIES Experience

This section provides an overview of the activities of the ALLIES collaboratives. Several general observations set a context for the collaborative activities:

- Partners designed their own collaborative approaches and did not use a prescriptive model. The original only guidance was to present best practice examples to the ESL Providers Network in 2011. Since then, the partners have shared activities and results at EPN meetings. Many have also adopted practices initiated/established by their peer agencies.
- Many institutions have partnerships with multiple institutions.

The table below summarizes the collaborative activities of ALLIES participants. This is based on a 2012 survey that was conducted of participating institutions. It documents a number of different types of partnerships and collaborations.

Staff Collaboration – Joint planning or information sharing meetings.

College Information or Services Provided at Adult Schools – College staff provide presentations and/or services such as registration, assessment or placement at an adult school.

Adult School Tour of Colleges – Adult school students and/or faculty visit community colleges.

Assessment Alignment – Identify equivalencies across assessment instruments.

Curriculum Alignment – Develop or share curriculum to expedite transitions.

Transition advising and counseling – Formal, multi-element processes to facilitate transitions between institutions.

Career Elements – Career preparation, job placement or career technical education.

Data Sharing – Exchange of data on student transitions to understand transitions.

Shared Staffing Strategies – Joint staffing or positions created to facilitate transitions.

Co-Location – Community college classes at an adult school or joint facility

Non-Education Partner – Participation by institutions other than adult schools or community colleges.

Financial Support – Scholarships for books and supplies for adult education students that are transitioning to community college

Table 1: Summary of Collaborative Activities

	Staff Collaboration	College Info / Services at AS	AS Tour of Colleges	Assessments Align	Curriculum Align	Transition advising and counseling	Career Elements	Data Sharing	Staffing Strategies	Co-Location	Non-Educ. Partners	Financial Support
San Mateo County												
Sequoia Adult-Cañada CC	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
San Mateo Adult-San Mateo CC	●	●	●		●	●		●				
South San Francisco-Skyline CC	●											
Jefferson Adult-Skyline CC	●	●		●		●						
North Santa Clara County												
Palo Alto Adult-Foothill CC	●	●	●									
Palo Alto Adult-Building Skills Partnership	●						●		●		●	
Palo Alto Adult-Palo Alto Housing Corp.	●						●		●		●	
FUHSD Adult School-Santa Clara Univ.	●											
South Santa Clara County												
Campbell Adult-West Valley CC	●	●	●		●		●					
Campbell Adult-San Jose CC	●	●	●									
Campbell Adult-De Anza CC		●										
Campbell Adult-Catholic Charities, Foothill CC							●				●	
Campbell Adult-Gavilan					●							
MetroEd-West Valley CC	●	●	●									
Gilroy Adult-Gavilan	●	●		●	●		●			●		

Results

This section summarizes key results of the collaborative activities of ALLIES partners, based on participant answers to questions 3 and 4².

Student Outcomes

The collaborations reported many student benefits, as described below.

Increased Student Awareness and Motivation. Several collaboratives report that their partnerships helped students see community college as a viable option. At the same time, students developed more realistic expectations of what is required to succeed at college. Students reported appreciating the personal outreach of college staff.

These increases in awareness and motivation are the result of collaborative strategies such as college staff presentations, college visits, transition advising and assessment testing. Three collaboratives provided data on presentations and tours:

- Palo Alto Adult-Foothill College: 15 adult school students attended a presentation by college staff, and 6 visited the college.
- San Mateo Adult-College of San Mateo: 100 adult school students attended a college presentation and 36 went on a field trip.
- Skyline-Jefferson Adult: 100 Adult school students were oriented via presentation. Skyline-South San Francisco: 27 students and 3 instructors.
- Since the survey was completed in 2012, coordination has continued. For example, Campbell Adult and Community Education (CACE) and Metropolitan Adult Education (San Jose) have had multiple trips with students going to both San Jose Community College and West Valley Community College with well over 100 students in the last year.
- Sequoia holds “Back to School” trainings for former adult school students to provide essential information the students need while they are in college. In the fall of 2013, 54 students attended.

Adult School-to-College Transitions and Success. Three collaboratives noted positive outcomes related to college transition, as shown in the list below. Regarding success, at Cañada College faculty estimate that a large proportion of those *completing* the ESL program started at the adult school (based on observations at the May 2012 ESL Department Recognition Ceremony). Also, Sequoia Adult School has collected individual success stories, including a graduate on the Cañada College Dean’s list (top five percent of all college students).

- *Campbell Adult and Community Education:* 20-30 students (estimate)
- *Skyline-Jefferson:* At least 40 students

² This is not a comprehensive assessment of outcomes. The data are self-reported and most institutions did not attempt to quantify outcomes. There is also considerable variation in what institutions addressed.

- *Sequoia-Cañada*: Transition over 100 students annually to Canada College classes. Faculty estimate that a large proportion of those completing the ESL program started at the adult school (based on observations at the May 2012 ESL Department Recognition Ceremony).
- *San Mateo Adult-College of San Mateo*: An informal survey of College of San Mateo classes suggests that approximately one quarter of ESL students have taken classes at San Mateo Adult School.
- *Campbell Adult tracked increased placements/transitions to SJCC, WVCC, De Anza, Mission, and Foothill*

Employment Gains

Two collaborations reported employment benefits:

- 22 clients have found jobs. (Palo Alto Adult-Palo Adult Housing Corporation)
- Many clients secured better employment (CACE-Gavilan)

Learning Gains

While the collaborations did not generally track data on learning gains, Gavilan-Gilroy Adult School provided some information. First, they report learning improvements based on improved CASAS scores and that 10 of 25 adult school students using SkillsTutor tested out of ESL. Six students are preparing to complete their GED. The same institution notes that the online program has helped to accelerate learning gains.

Student Participation in Programs

Several collaboratives reported on student participation in special programs:

- *College Courses at Adult School Site*: 188 adult school students registered for college ESL course offered at the adult school over three semesters, and 107 completed (57 percent) (Sequoia-Cañada).
- *Intensive Academic Writing Course*. 25 students enrolled in a Spring 2012 course designed to help prepare students to move to College of San Mateo. (San Mateo Adult School).
- *Vocational ESL Course at Stanford University*. 30 janitors participated (Palo Alto Adult-Building Skills Partnership).
- *Job Developer Counseling and Workshops*: Average caseload is 15-23 students. Twenty two clients have found jobs. (Palo Alto Adult-Palo Adult Housing Corporation).
- *Co-Located Courses in Proximity to Support Services*: 400-600 adult school and community college non-credit students attend classes at South Valley Middle School per semester. The educational center is in a complex that houses a dental and medical clinic and a child-care facility that serves low-to-moderate income families (Gilroy Unified School District-Gavilan College).
- *Access to SkillsTutor*: Adult school students access community college on-line resources (CACE-Gavilan). Ten of 25 adult school students using SkillsTutor have tested out of ESL. Six are preparing to complete their GED.

- *Use of Tutors:* A local private university provides tutors for adult school classes. San Jose Library Partners in Reading have provided multiple tutors for students at CACE for the last two years.

Instructor Knowledge and Relationship Building

The foundation for collaboration consists of adult school and community college faculty interacting in various ways: planning, site visits, class observations, aligning assessments and curricula, etc. Several collaboratives have reported important benefits related to faculty knowledge, relationships and motivation to undertake collaborative work. Several collaboratives conducted class observations. Skyline College has created a conference for college and adult school staff focused on writing with the intention of “nurturing the growing relationship among faculty and focusing on commonalities and alignment.” Other collaboratives made the following comments:

- Instructors from both the adult schools and community colleges have “better understood the linguistic competencies needed.”
- “Working with the community college has encouraged us to look at practices to accelerate learning. “
- “Sequoia Adult School finds it effective to hire Canada graduates to work at the school. They are excellent advisors and motivators for our students.”

Curriculum Development / Alignment

Several collaboratives compared curricula to see appropriate transition points, while others developed new courses to better prepare students:

- Two adult schools developed academic writing courses to help students prepare for community college (San Mateo Adult, Sequoia Adult)
- An adult school developed transitions classes in both morning and evening programs (CACE).
- A Community college non-credit program is developing a course to support transition to credit ESL (Gavilan)
- An adult school used a community college non-credit online instruction module (CACE-Gavilan)
- A community college coordinated a “transitions conference” focused on writing to determine alignment of writing courses. (Skyline)
- A community college refers students to the local adult schools if intake assessment indicates that is the best educational option for them.

Assessment Alignment

Several collaboratives have established cut scores at which adult school students are ready to transition to community college.

Transition Processes

Several collaboratives have formally articulated approaches, or models, that include multiple elements designed to support transition. The Sequoia-Cañada collaborative has several features: assessment scores for transition, co-located classes, adult school transition adviser, community college transition liaison, and curriculum to facilitate transition. The Skyline/Jefferson collaborative has identified where student writing aligned between the two programs, a CASAS cut score indicating readiness, and a transfer form that satisfied placement test requirement (based on the cut score, quality of a writing portfolio, and instructor assessment of personal skills for college success).

Other groups have discussed improvements that could lead to a more explicit model. With input from West Valley College, the MetroEd (San Jose) curriculum specialist developed an information sheet – with CASAS score, teacher recommendation, and writing sample – students can bring when visiting the college. The San Mateo collaborative also developed an information sheet to aid transition. Additionally, the ESL department at San Jose Community College is working with CACE ESL teachers to develop metrics and rubrics to determine college ready writing.

Funding

Several of the collaboratives received grant funding to support collaborative work, several provided by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation and one from the California Community Colleges Basic Skills Initiative. These supported college tours, curriculum development, data collection, individualized learning plans, and transition adviser positions.

Student Financial Support

The Sequoia Adult School faculty organized a scholarship fund to support students pursuing further education. They awarded 34 scholarships in 2012, up from two in 2011, which was their first year of operations. They provide support for GED testing, transportation, college textbooks, and other needs.