



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

# 2016-17 Adult Education and Literacy Grant Program Evaluation Report

Submitted to:

Office of the Governor

Colorado State Board of Education

Colorado House Education

Committee Colorado Senate

Education Committee

The Joint Budget Committee of the Colorado General Assembly

Colorado Senate Business, Labor, and Technology Committee

Colorado House Business, Labor, Economic, and Workforce Development Committee

By:

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October 2017

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## Executive Summary

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In an effort to meet workforce, educational attainment, and poverty-reduction goals, the state of Colorado is taking steps to address the need for adult education. Although there are several postsecondary programs that focus on workforce development and skills acquisition, these programs typically assume that participants are or have been in the workforce in some capacity and have already attained a base level of literacy and numeracy. Adult education and literacy programs, however, are typically designed for adults who have been unable to enter the workforce in a meaningful capacity due to a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Investing in these programs enables adult education and literacy programs to serve a larger share of the state's eligible adult population and ensures that more adults can reach and complete the next level of education and training, leading to better employment outcomes that enable more low-income, low-literacy adults to ultimately achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Article 10 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 22, was enacted in 2014 to address the needs of these adult students. This article authorized the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Grant Act Program to refocus the mission of adult education and literacy programs through the active collaboration and coordination of a variety of state agencies and organizations that are involved in adult education and literacy, postsecondary education, training and credential attainment, workforce development, economic development, and human services. The AEL Grant Program at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) awards state funds for public and private nonprofit adult education and literacy programs. Adult education and literacy programs provide adult basic education, adult secondary education leading to a high school equivalency credential, English language acquisition instruction, or integrated basic education and skills training. The awarded grant funds are used to support two primary goals:

- 1) To enable more low-income, low-literacy adults to ultimately achieve economic self-sufficiency (realistically supporting a family without public or private assistance) through providing services and support throughout the steps of their training and employment preparation; and
- 2) To foster partnerships and leverage resources between state, regional, and local agencies and industry leaders that assist adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills leading to additional skill acquisition, postsecondary credentials, and employment.

In 2016-17, \$795,595 were awarded to nine AEL grantees that serve 17 counties. This report includes information and outcomes of the 2016-2017 fiscal year for the nine three-year AEL grant recipients.

In total, grantees enrolled 844 adult students with very diverse backgrounds and challenges. Sixty-eight percent were female and 32 percent were male; and most were white (28 percent) or Hispanic (24 percent). While the majority of those enrolled were not employed upon enrollment, many demonstrated measurable gains in learning and employment during this grant period. In addition, 79 percent of the participants, who gained employment in 2015-2016, were reported to have retained employment in the 2016-2017 reporting year.

All of the grantees reported progress in securing resources and identifying strategies to lay a sustainable foundation that will allow them to effectively serve adult students. Partnerships with more than 150 state agencies, community organizations, and businesses have helped grantees meet the unique needs of adult students. These collaborative partnerships are resulting in processes that identify and eliminate duplication of services and foster the leveraging of resources across agencies and organizations while meeting the current needs of local industry.

Technical assistance by CDE's Office of Adult Education Initiatives staff has resulted in programs developing strategies for program improvement and partnership development through data-driven decision making. Through the use of common tools and processes developed by CDE, programs are finding an identity in the career pathways model and building sustainable programs that better serve adult students.

## Introduction

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In an effort to meet workforce, educational attainment, and poverty-reduction goals, the state of Colorado is taking steps to address the need for adult education. Although there are several postsecondary programs that focus on workforce development and skills acquisition, these programs typically assume that participants are or have been in the workforce in some capacity and have already attained a base level of literacy and numeracy. Adult education and literacy programs, however, are typically designed for adults who have been unable to enter the workforce in a meaningful capacity due to a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills. Investing in these programs enables adult education and literacy programs to serve a larger share of the state's eligible adult population and ensures that more adults can reach and complete the next level of education and training, leading to better employment outcomes that enable more low-income, low-literacy adults to ultimately achieve economic self-sufficiency.

According to the Working Poor Families Project, in Colorado in 2015, almost 320,000 adults are without a high school diploma or equivalent and nearly 865,000 are without a completed postsecondary degree or certificate.<sup>i</sup> Research on opportunity youth (ages 16-24) shows significant social and financial burdens through lost output/wages and lost taxes, above average levels of criminal involvement, and high use of social services. Additionally, the long-term unemployed face a unique combination of social, emotional, and skill deficiencies caused by the duration of their unemployment. This requires intensive “wraparound” services to address these issues effectively while rapidly moving individuals to paid work experience and re-employment. Research also finds that average annual earnings increase and unemployment rates decrease with each successive level of education or training that a person achieves and that postsecondary education and credential attainment are increasingly central to a person's ability to earn family sustaining wages, participate more fully in Colorado's 21st century workforce, and contribute to the state's economic health and vitality.<sup>ii</sup>

Article 10 of the Colorado Revised Statutes, Title 22, was enacted in 2014 to address the needs of these adult students. This article authorized the Adult Education and Literacy Grant Act Program to refocus the mission of adult education and literacy programs through the active collaboration and coordination of a variety of state agencies and organizations that are involved in adult education and literacy, postsecondary education, training and credential attainment, workforce development, economic development, and human services.

### The Unique Needs of Adult Learners with Career-Entry Barriers

Millions of unemployed and underemployed Americans have severely limited career opportunities because they lack basic academic and technical skills. From the industry perspective, the problem is not a shortage of people with bachelor's degrees because in many industries, associate degrees or technical certificates are sufficient credentials. However, for many adults, returning to school to gain any credentials presents formidable obstacles.

Adult students with career-entry barriers include:

- Students who did not finish high school;
- High school completers who did not pursue further education or training;
- College non-completers;
- Foreign-born U.S. residents;
- Veterans who entered military service immediately after high school;
- Criminal offenders who have completed their terms of incarceration; and
- Adults in need of retooling (i.e., those who are low-skilled or need to upgrade their skills to change careers, advance in careers, or re-enter the workforce).<sup>iii</sup>



Most of the people in the seven categories above are characterized by one or more (usually several) of the following characteristics:

- Range in age from 18 to 50s (average is late 20s);
- Support themselves and, in many cases, minor dependents and cannot afford to be full-time students for 2-3 years;
- Have limited access to financial aid;
- May need childcare and/or transportation;
- Often require remediation in reading, math, communication, and basic computer skills;
- May lack proficiency in English;
- Have low self-esteem, confidence, and interest in academics;
- Lack study skills;
- Need employability or “essential skills;”
- Know about “the real world” and may have “survival skills,” but do not know how to channel that knowledge into acquisition of marketable career skills;
- Are highly motivated to earn a decent wage;
- May be interested in careers but do not know how to pursue them;
- Have had no career guidance;
- Have average to above average intelligence; and/or
- Know very little about what it takes to obtain and keep family-supporting jobs.

Meeting the needs of these adult learners with career-entry barriers presents significant challenges to our community colleges, our employers, and our society. Short-term strategies that meet this challenge are ineffective because they only produce short-term results.

## The Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Grant Program

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Established in 2014, the Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Grant Program at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) awards state funds for public and private nonprofit adult education and literacy programs. Adult education and literacy programs provide adult basic education, adult secondary education leading to a high school equivalency credential, English language acquisition instruction, or integrated basic education and skills training. The AEL Grant Program is managed through CDE’s Office of Adult Education Initiatives and requires that the funded Adult Education and Literacy programs serve as lead agencies and fiscal agents for Adult Workforce Partnerships. At a minimum, a workforce development partnership includes a local education provider, at least one postsecondary education or training provider, and at least one workforce development provider.

The awarded grant funds are used to support two primary goals:

- 3) To enable more low-income, low-literacy adults to ultimately achieve economic self-sufficiency (realistically supporting a family without public or private assistance) through providing services and support throughout the steps of their training and employment preparation; and
- 4) To foster partnerships and leverage resources between state, regional, and local agencies and industry leaders that assist adults in attaining basic literacy and numeracy skills leading to additional skill acquisition, postsecondary credentials, and employment.



## Application and Selection Process

Local Education Providers that operate as adult education programs were eligible to apply for these funding opportunities, which per C.R.S. 22-10-103, include:

- A secondary or postsecondary, public or private, nonprofit educational entity, including but not limited to a school district, charter school, board of cooperative services (BOCES), state institution of higher education, junior college, and area vocational school;
- A community-based, nonprofit agency or organization;
- A library;
- A literacy council or other literacy institute;
- A business or business association that provides adult education and literacy programs either on-site or off-site;
- A volunteer literacy organization;
- A work force board;
- A one-stop partner; and
- A consortium of entities listed above.

Local Education Providers were required to be members of an Adult Workforce Development Partnership to be eligible for this grant. In addition to the Adult Education Provider, a Workforce Development Partnership needed to include:

- 1) At least one Postsecondary Education or Training Provider. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - a. A state institution of higher education, junior college, or area vocational school;
  - b. An apprenticeship program;
  - c. An entity that provides accelerated education and skills training certificate programs;
  - d. An entity that operates programs through the manufacturing career pathway established by the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education;
  - e. A community-based workforce development program that is operated through the Colorado customized training program.
- 2) At least one Adult Workforce Development Provider including, but not limited to:
  - a. A work force development program described in the “Colorado Career Advancement Act,” Part 2 of Article 83 of Title 8, C.R.S.; and
  - b. A program that is supported by the state work force development council created in Article 46.3 of Title 24, C.R.S.

Applications were reviewed and scored by a panel of experienced professionals. These scores informed funding decisions. Other considerations included funding priorities designated in statute or identified by CDE program staff. Final awards were made upon approval of the Colorado State Board of Education.

## Grant Awards - Final Year of a Three-Year Funding Cycle

Each AEL grant award given in 2014-2015 represented the beginning of a potential three-year funding period. In the 2014-2015 fiscal year, \$576,851 was distributed to nine AEL grantees for expenditure before June 30, 2015. Continuation funding was distributed annually contingent on the availability of state funds and a review of annual evaluation reports submitted by grantees in July. The continuation awards were approved based on grantees demonstrating measurable progress in meeting program goals set in the grant application, complying with assurances and cooperative agreements, and showing significant support to sustain the program past the funding period. Information regarding the first year of implementation for the nine three-year grants awarded can be found in the [2015-16 Adult Education and Literacy Act Grant Program Evaluation Report](#).

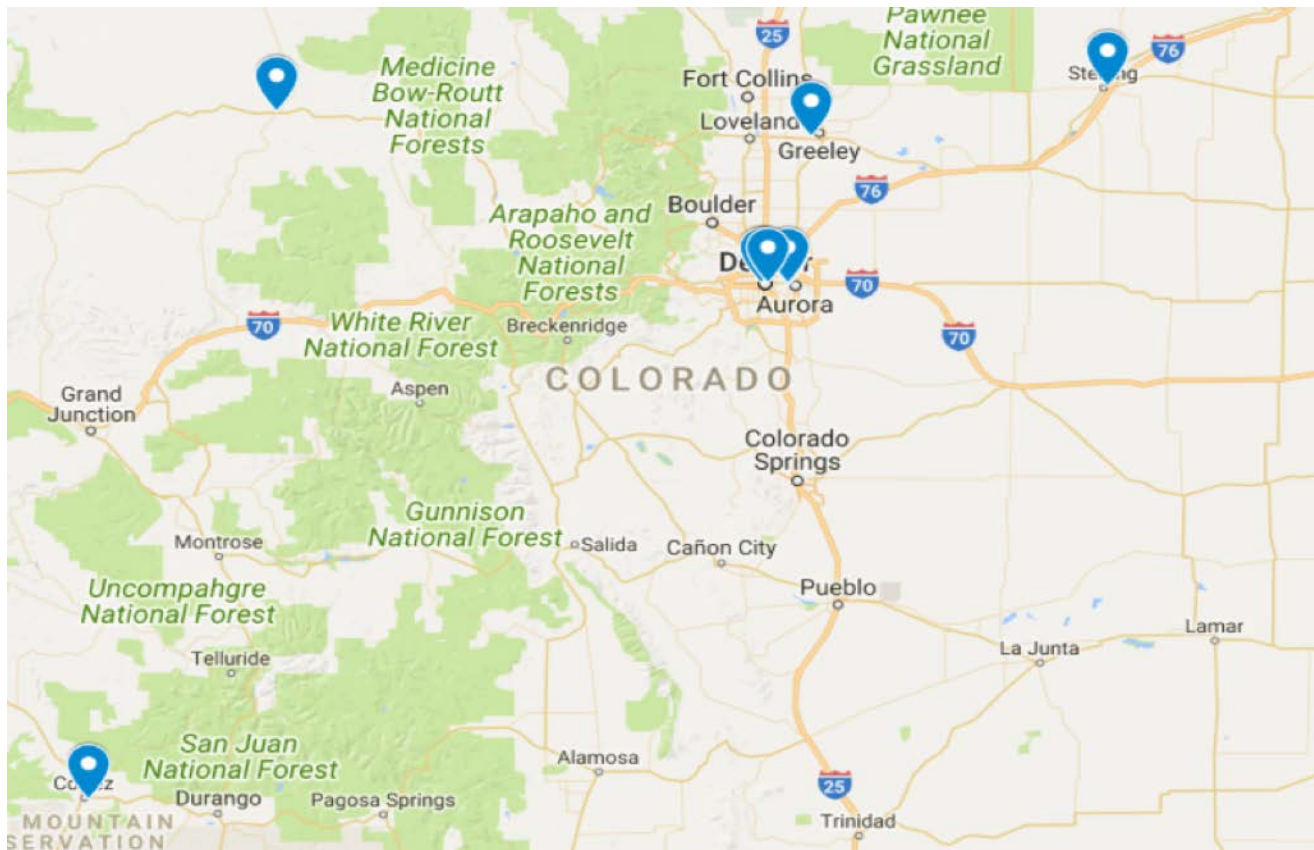
In fiscal year 2015-2016, \$824,095 and in 2016-17, \$795,595 were awarded to the same nine AEL grantees. This report includes information and outcomes of the 2016-2017 fiscal year for the nine three-year AEL grant recipients.



## Service Area

The 9 grantees represented five community colleges, one technical college, and three community-based organizations. The grantees serve 17 counties across Colorado and seven workforce development areas, including three rural sub-areas (see map below).

MAP: AEL Grantees' Service Area 2016-17



## Methodology

Each of the 9 grantees was required to submit an annual progress report to CDE, which included the reporting and measurement of activities toward achieving the AEL Grant Program goals – serving adult students and partnership development. Each grantee was required to provide aggregate-level data on the students enrolled in the grant program from July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017, as well as provide data about partnerships and career pathways for their program. CDE staff checked for data quality and integrity. Missing data were noted if programs opted out of reporting specific information. Currently, funding has not been allocated to support the use of an information management system, limiting CDE's ability to analyze data at the student level. Thus, all the data for this report are from grantees' end-of-year reports.

The authorizing legislation requires that an annual report on the AEL grants be submitted to the education committees of the state legislature annually. This report is intended to meet the statutory reporting requirements outlined in C.R.S. 22-10-105.

## Evaluation Findings

### Goal 1: Adult Learner Participation

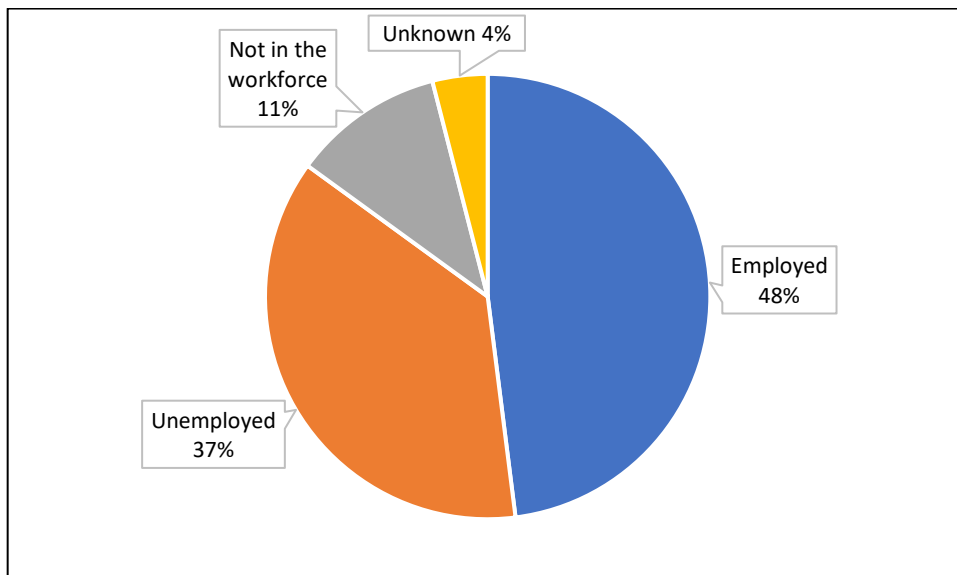
Grantees reported enrolling a total of 844 adult learners from July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017. Across a number of demographic variables explored, AEL grantees served a diverse group of students with various challenging circumstances. Of those 844, 69 percent were female, and 31 percent were male; and most students enrolled identified as white (28 percent) or Hispanic (24 percent, see Table 1).

**TABLE 1: Adult Learners Enrolled by Gender and Race/Ethnicity**

Race/Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
American Indian	10	58	68	8%
Asian	46	116	162	19%
Black	24	78	102	12%
Hispanic	70	139	209	24%
Native Hawaiian	0	1	1	<1%
White	89	151	240	28%
Two or More Races	28	47	75	9%
Unknown	1	1	2	<1%

At the time of enrollment, 48 percent of the adult learners were employed, 37 percent were not employed, and 11 percent were not in the workforce at all (see Chart 1).

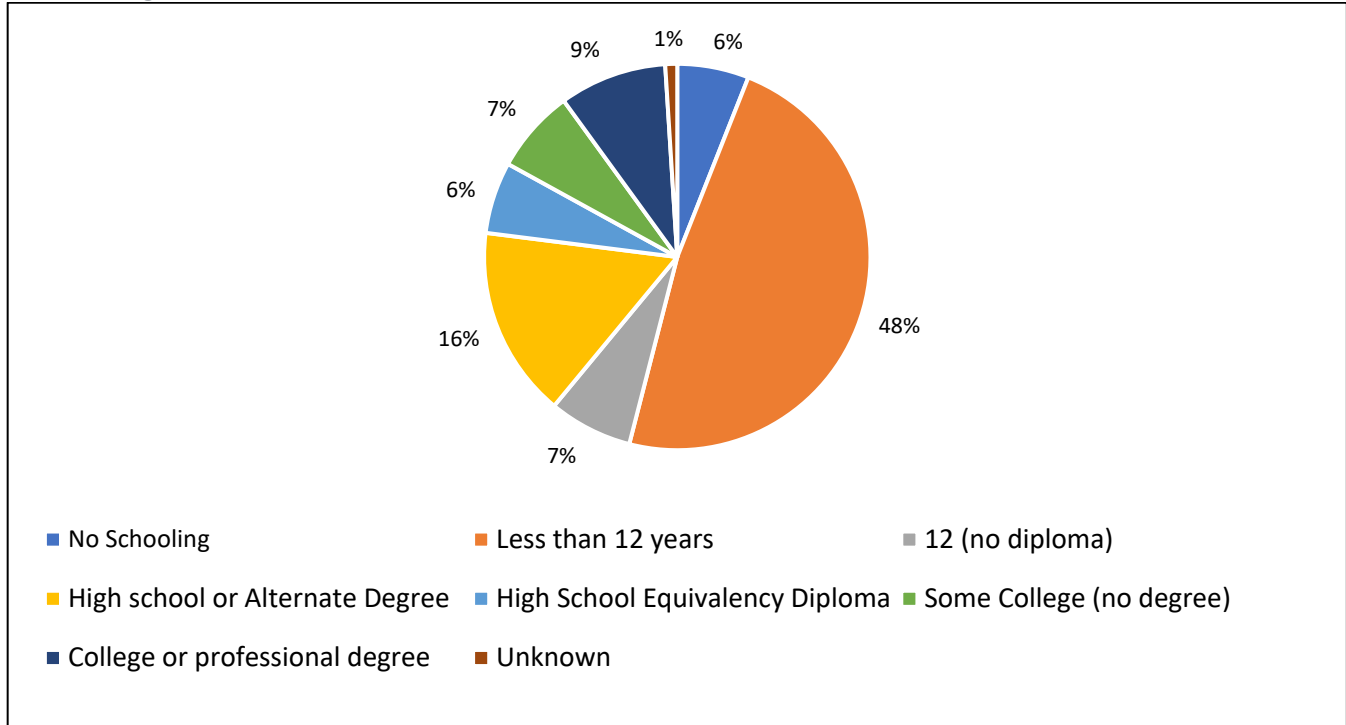
**CHART 1: Labor Force Status at Time of Enrollment**





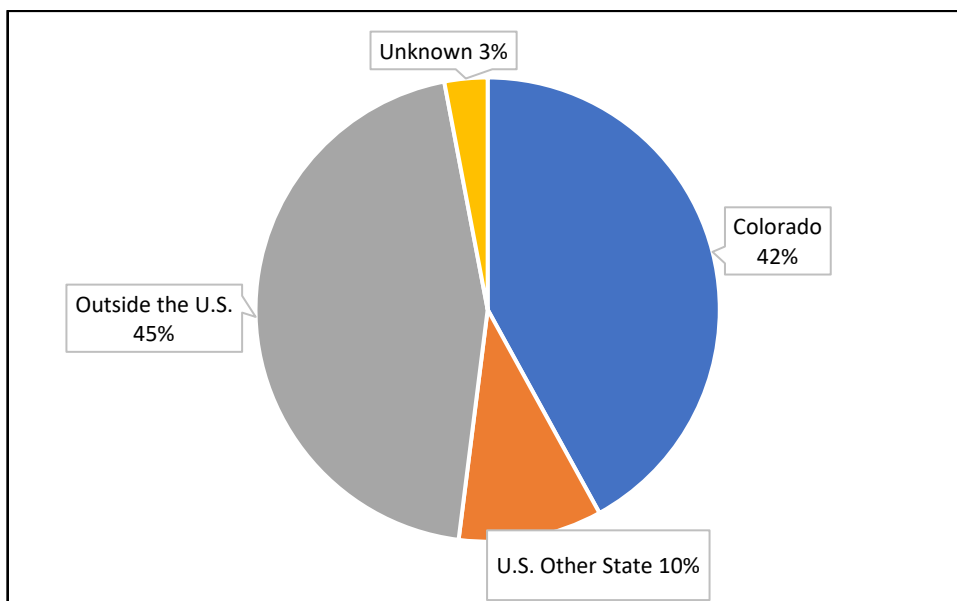
The majority of the learners enrolled, who had some but less than 12 years of education (48 percent, see Chart 2) were between the ages of 25 and 44.

**CHART 2: Highest Level of Education**



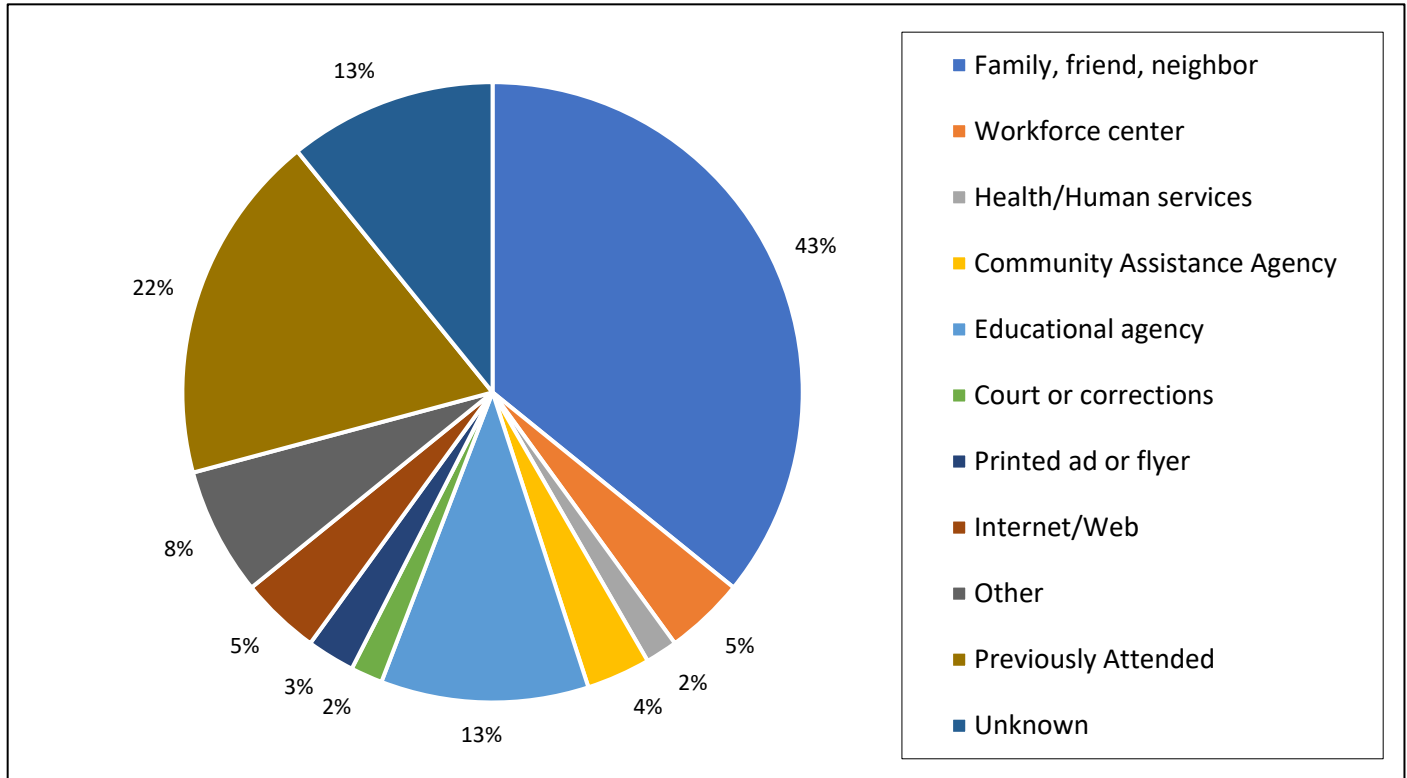
Of all enrolled learners, nearly twenty percent of them were not educated in the U.S. (see Chart 3).

**CHART 3: Location of Previous Education**



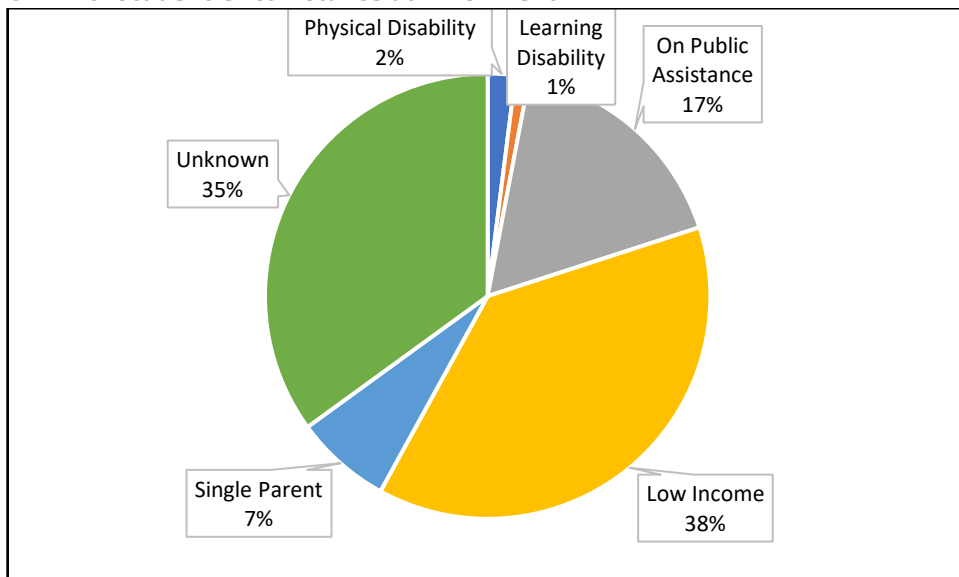
Of the adult learners enrolled, 43 percent were referred by family, friend, or neighbor; and 13 percent were referred by another educational institution. Twenty-two percent had previously attended the program. Referral sources are broken down in Chart 4; however, vocational rehabilitation centers and employers are not included because they represented less than 1 percent of all referrals.

**CHART 4: Referral Sources**



The AEL program is serving students with challenging circumstances, as intended, with 38 percent being low income and 17 percent receiving public assistance. Student circumstances are optional for grantees to collect; therefore, a significant percentage of the circumstances of those enrolled, 35 percent, are unknown (see Chart 5).

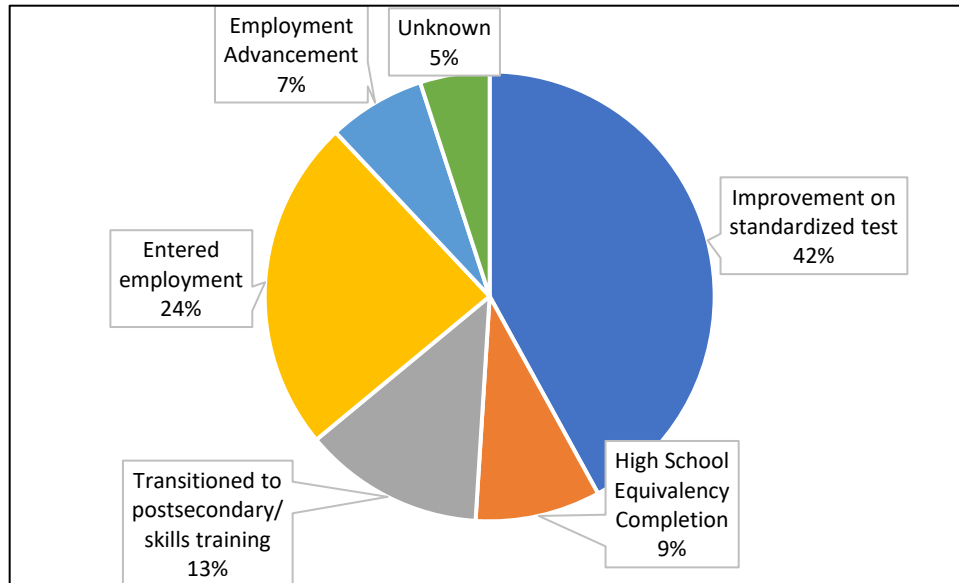
**CHART 5: Student Circumstance at Enrollment**



## Goal 2: Education & Employment Gains

Grantees were asked to report gains their students made during the grant period as demonstrated by standardized tests, certifications, entering and advancing in employment (see Chart 6). Notably, approximately 30 percent of participants experienced more than one gain.

CHART 6: Education/Employment Gains



Most notably, grantees reported that 79 percent of their 2015-16 participants retained their employment gains in 2016-17.

## Goal 3: Collaborative Partnerships

Grantees reported partnerships with more than 150 state agencies, community organizations, and businesses that have helped them meet the unique needs of adult students. Grantees consistently reported specific benefits of these partnerships including, but not limited to:

- **Adult student recruitment** - workforce centers, human services agencies, and community-based organizations provided referrals to the adult education program;
- **Funding sources** - workforce centers and community-based organizations provided access to funding sources, such as scholarships, childcare, and transportation stipends;
- **Transition support strategies** - postsecondary institutions implemented postsecondary transition strategies, including identifying appropriate college coursework;
- **Job entry skills training** - local workforce centers and other community-based organizations provided the students with job entry skills training, such as resume and employment application writing and interview skills;
- **Employment resources** - workforce centers provided access to job fairs, employment opportunities, and information related to occupation outlook;
- **Workplace experiences** - industry partners provided opportunities for job shadowing, internships, and employment;
- **Job skills identification** - industry partners provided specific information related to their employment needs, skills requirements, and product/service design to inform the AEL programs' curriculum; and
- **Public awareness** - partnerships provided access and exposure to local radio, television, and print media.



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## Conclusion

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This report details the effectiveness of the AEL Grant Program during the 2016-2017 fiscal year. In total, grantees enrolled 844 adult students with very diverse backgrounds and challenges. Sixty-eight percent were female and 32 percent were male; and most were white (28 percent) or Hispanic (24 percent). While the majority of those enrolled were not employed upon enrollment, many demonstrated measurable gains in learning and employment during this grant period. In addition, 79 percent of the participants, who gained employment in 2015-2016, were reported to have retained employment in the 2016-2017 reporting year.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The Working Poor Families Project. (2017). Education and Skills Status of Adults. <http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Data-WFPF-2017-Chapter-2-PRB.xlsx>

<sup>ii</sup> Colorado Workforce Development Council (2016). The Colorado Talent Pipeline Report. [https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/170109\\_2016\\_CO\\_Talent\\_Pipeline\\_Report\\_pdf](https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/170109_2016_CO_Talent_Pipeline_Report_pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Hinckley, R., Mills, D., & Cotner, H. (2011). Adult Career Pathways: Providing a Second Chance in Public Education. Waco, TX: CORD Communications