ABSTRACT

With the start of the three-year grant cycle beginning in 2017–2018, the Georgia Office of Adult Education (GOAE) implemented a state policy to require all adult education providers, not just Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) grantees, to develop and implement at least one integrated education and training (IET) program for adult education students. The goal of the state mandate was to emphasize Georgia’s focus on workforce development and career pathways among adult education providers. Through hard work and collaboration, by 2019–2020, all 30 of Georgia’s adult education providers have at least one IET program in place. Adult education students participating in IET programs are successfully gaining employment, transitioning into postsecondary education or training, and advancing along career pathways. GOAE will continue to develop and promote initiatives such as IET that support workforce development in Georgia, ensuring all Georgians are on a path towards self-sufficiency and a family-sustaining wage.

Keywords: integrated education and training, IET, workforce development, adult education, Georgia

RECOGNIZING THE NEED FOR INTEGRATED EDUCATION AND TRAINING (IET)

With the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the creation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, the Georgia Office of Adult Education (GOAE), housed at the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG), saw an opportunity to change the tide of workforce development for adult education providers in the state. Although the elements of WIA and WIOA were in place, GOAE saw a unique opportunity with integrated education and training (IET). IET offers adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for the purpose of educational and career advancement. IET is an allowable adult education and literacy activity, but WIOA only requires IET for Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) programs.

IET programs can put adult education students on a fast track to employment, a better job, a higher wage, and ultimately, a career pathway, while simultaneously pursuing their high school equivalency or improving their English. GOAE did not want to limit these opportunities to only IELCE participants; the office believed any adult education student who walked through the door should have access to an IET program as part of its mission to assist adults
in attaining self-sufficiency and a family-sustaining wage. Therefore, with the start of the new three-year grant cycle beginning in 2017–2018, GOAE implemented a state policy to require all adult education providers, not just IELCE grantees, to develop and implement at least one IET program for adult education students.

The goal of the state mandate for IET programs was to emphasize the focus on workforce development and career pathways among adult education providers. GOAE’s decision was also timely. Around the same time as the creation of WIOA, Georgia Governor Nathan Deal began the High Demand Career Initiative (HDCI). The HDCI was a statewide initiative involving employers and educational institutions that aimed to identify workforce needs in order for Georgia to remain the number one state in the nation for business (Technical College System of Georgia, n.d.). The HDCI ultimately developed an Occupations List that identifies key industries that are in demand, pay an above-average entry-level wage, and are considered strong options for pursuing a successful career in Georgia. Students pursuing certificate or diploma programs in one of the industries identified through the HDCI are eligible for the lottery-funded HOPE Career Grant that can cover tuition costs. The larger push for workforce development in Georgia at the time spurred GOAE to leverage IET as the bridge between adult education students and postsecondary education and employment opportunities.

STATEWIDE ROLLOUT OF IET

Given the statewide mandate for IET programs, adult education providers needed time, guidance, and support from GOAE to begin developing programs. During 2017–2018, GOAE held several statewide trainings on the components of an IET, developing a single set of learning objectives (SSLOs), and identifying local in-demand industries and workforce partners to serve as the training provider. Georgia’s adult education providers were at different stages of IET development and implementation; some providers participated in Accelerating Opportunities, a previous grant sponsored by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that supported dual enrollment opportunities for adult education students. As such, GOAE facilitated forums for early implementers to share best practices with other providers. GOAE recognized that a statewide rollout required a joint effort among all providers to support each other. GOAE also had to set up its management information system to collect data on IET participants for federal reporting.

By 2018–2019, more adult education providers were ready to start implementing their IET programs. GOAE continued to provide professional development and technical assistance to local programs to support IET development. GOAE also encouraged local programs to identify external sources of funding outside of WIOA for IET so that the programs could be sustainable moving forward. Many programs identified funding streams through their local workforce development boards and WIOA Title I partners, ultimately establishing stronger relationships between adult education providers and their local workforce development systems. By the end of the year, 13 adult education providers (42% of Georgia’s WIOA-funded providers) offered IET programs serving 217 adult education students across the state. The IET programs addressed local industry needs, many of which also aligned with HDCI industries, such as
industrial technologies (e.g., manufacturing, welding), healthcare and nursing, and cyber and related fields.

In the current 2019–2020 year, all 30 of Georgia’s adult education providers are offering at least one IET program as of February 2020. Additionally, 461 students are participating in IET so far, more than double the total served in 2018–2019. After the strong push from GOAE and a steep learning curve for all adult education providers, GOAE is proud of the tremendous growth in IET participation over the last two years.

**THE IMPACT OF IET**

The greatest advantage of IET is the positive impact an IET program can have on adult learners in Georgia. As a result of GOAE’s statewide emphasis on implementing IET programs, local adult education providers have witnessed the transformative impact their IET programs have had on students. The following vignettes highlight a few examples of the positive impact IET has had on Georgia’s adult learners.

**Gwinnett Technical College**

Gwinnett Technical College (GTC) serves the northeast metro Atlanta region. When program leaders learned about IET and the statewide mandate, their first step was to consult their local workforce development board’s plan. Knowing that IETs must focus on in-demand career pathways, GTC identified the high-demand industries in their local area—information technology, healthcare, and logistics. Program leaders then considered the existing training opportunities through GTC’s Department of Continuing Education and local employer needs. Through this collaborative process, GTC ultimately decided to pursue two initial IET programs in medical administrative assisting and information technology. GTC also successfully partnered with their local workforce development board and WIOA Title I provider to secure funding for students to participate in the IET programs.

GTC designed their first IET programs to last for 10 weeks, establishing the name “Take Ten” to recruit students to the IET. Take Ten provided an opportunity for students to obtain a desired certification in a high-demand industry while simultaneously earning their high school equivalency in just 10 weeks. By intentionally focusing on addressing the economic needs of their local area, GTC created excellent postsecondary and career opportunities for its IET participants. After seeing the success of the IET programs, GTC expanded its program by adding phlebotomy as another IET program to address a local workforce need.

Through the Take Ten program so far, IET participants have earned their high school equivalency, obtained an industry-recognized credential, and either found jobs or enrolled in postsecondary education to continue their training. For instance, several adult learners who completed the medical administrative assistant IET program are now employed as patient aides or bilingual medical administrative assistants. One student who completed the information technology IET decided to enroll at GTC to pursue an Associate’s Degree in computer science and also secured an internship with GTC’s information technology department. Similarly, another student who completed the phlebotomy IET also enrolled in GTC’s Associate Degree program for phlebotomy. GTC also has boot camps before the start of
the IET to provide a foundation of soft skills and build students’ confidence to be successful in the program. In a matter of just a couple months, Take Ten students complete the program with a high school equivalency, industry-recognized credentials, a renewed sense of purpose, and a clear pathway for a self-sustaining career.

Moving forward, GTC’s success with Take Ten has put the program on the map among local employers, opening more doors for new IETs in the future. GTC is beginning a new welding IET program after a local manufacturing company and the Department of Continuing Education approached program leaders with the employer’s need for welders. Through this new IET program, students will begin paid internships midway through the IET, and if they remain successful throughout the IET, the company will offer students full-time jobs. By leveraging the full potential of IET for its students, GTC is putting more adult learners on a clear path towards educational attainment and career advancement.

**Savannah Technical College**

Savannah Technical College (STC) is located along Georgia’s eastern coastline. Before GOAE’s statewide mandate for IET, STC already had programs and partnerships in place since 2014 that aligned with the IET model. As such, STC was one of Georgia’s first adult education providers to implement IET under WIOA. Previously, STC had offered workforce preparation activities related to forklift training and other occupational skills associated with the ports in the area. However, with IET, STC saw an opportunity to pursue additional in-demand industries unique to the Savannah area that would benefit adult learners—namely, hospitality.

STC first developed its hospitality IET to target English language learners (ELLs). As a tourist city, Savannah’s hospitality industry presented an opportunity for adult education students to begin a career in the industry or work a well-paying job while pursuing other career goals. STC was also intentional about partnering with local employers that would provide the right environment for adult learners, focusing on the premiere properties and hotel management groups in Savannah. STC’s program leaders also ensured all of the critical partners were involved in the development of the IET, including the local workforce development board for funding, the Office of Economic Development for workforce training, and adult education staff. Through strong collaboration, STC developed a hospitality IET that offered concurrent and contextualized workplace preparation and adult basic education, resume writing, interview practice, and ultimately, industry-recognized credentials from the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

By laying a strong foundation for the hospitality IET program from the beginning, STC has seen great success with students from the first cohort to now. One STC student in the initial IET cohort came to the United States as a refugee and enrolled in STC as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. She worked hard to transition from the ESL program to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program with the goal of obtaining her high school equivalency. She wanted to eventually go to college, but lacked the confidence and knowledge to do so. Through her participation in the IET, she earned three industry-recognized credentials, obtained employment working the front desk at a premiere hotel in downtown Savannah, and has maintained this job while transitioning to college to pursue a nursing degree.
STC’s hospitality IET has also fostered unexpected opportunities for adult education students. Through the IET program, many students develop greater confidence and self-efficacy as they learn relevant workplace skills. During STC’s hospitality IET, students visit multiple hotel employers in Savannah to learn about the industry and gain hands-on experience. Through these connections, one student not only earned her industry-recognized hospitality credentials but also established a relationship with a premiere hotel that was interested in her piano-playing skills. In addition to her training, the student secured a job as a pianist at the hotel making $80 an hour. STC’s IET program opened the door for this student to create her own career pathway. STC continues to expand its IET programs to provide the same opportunities for even more students in the future.

South Georgia Technical College
South Georgia Technical College (SGTC) is one of Georgia’s smaller adult education providers located in the southwest corner of the state. After learning about the statewide mandate for IET programs, SGTC faced the challenge of identifying an appropriate training provider to partner with from the rural community they serve. SGTC program leaders also had to identify adequate external funding sources to support the IET program due to limited funds. SGTC presented these IET challenges to their adult education advisory committee, which consisted of 20–25 members at the time. The advisory committee identified a local food manufacturer looking for employees, especially those with certifications in safety, as a potential partner. After speaking with the employer, SGTC staff designed a short-term IET program focused on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) 10-hour certification and ServSafe Food Handler certification, both of which the employer identified as in-demand credentials for hiring. The IET lasted for 12 full eight-hour days and directly targeted a local industry need.

To help reduce the cost of the IET program, SGTC partnered with an instructor from the Office of Economic Development to serve as the ServSafe training provider. SGTC’s program administrator decided to complete an online OSHA certification course to provide the OSHA 10-hour training to students without paying for an external training provider. By bringing part of the training in-house, SGTC maximized their limited resources and designed an IET with a minimal cost per student. To supplement the training, SGTC also invited instructors from various departments at the technical college to speak to students about the importance of the certifications they were pursuing. In addition, students toured the local manufacturing company to observe the skills they were learning in a real world environment. At the conclusion of the tour, the employer guaranteed all of the students an opportunity to interview after they completed the IET program and received their high school equivalency. He reiterated that by having the two industry-recognized credentials, the students were in a position to receive a higher starting salary. All students successfully completed the program and earned the two credentials, and at least one is now working for the employer.

Despite their initial challenges, SGTC’s first IET cohort was very successful. In addition to reducing costs by leveraging existing SGTC staff to provide workforce training, SGTC secured additional funding through donations from the adult education advisory committee. Furthermore, SGTC partnered with the local technical college foundation to cover the cost of the OSHA 10-hour and ServSafe certification tests for all students who successfully completed
the training. Now, within the rural community SGTC serves, more employers are taking an interest in developing IET programs as they hear about the successes. One executive from another local company recently contacted SGTC about a grant available through the company that could fund additional IET programs. Additionally, former SGTC students who completed the IET are sharing their experience with other adult education students, creating more interest and enrollment in IET overall.

**NEXT STEPS FOR GEORGIA**

Georgia’s focus on workforce development is not stopping with IET. In January 2020, GOAE decided to introduce a high school equivalency (HSE) diploma based on the attainment of college credentials. This new opportunity is called Career Plus HSE (CPH) and is currently in a pilot phase. GOAE modeled CPH after a dual enrollment program, where students will receive both a college-level credential while simultaneously earning an HSE diploma. CPH requires nine high school or equivalent credits in specific subject areas (two English, two math, two social studies, two science, and one health/physical education credit) combined with either two Technical Certificates of Credit, or a technical college diploma or degree. Students interested in CPH must participate in adult education to work on soft skills training and receive remediation in subject areas that need improvement.

The CPH model supports workforce development because it encourages adult education students to pursue a high school equivalency and postsecondary education and training at the same time. Additionally, GOAE has intentionally employed a braided funding model to support student participation in CPH to ensure all of Georgia’s workforce partners are involved in the initiative, as well as to reduce, if not eliminate, the cost for students. GOAE has partnered with the Technical College System of Georgia to encourage CPH participants to pursue certificate or diploma programs in one of the HDCI industries and receive the HOPE Career Grant to help cover tuition costs. GOAE has also collaborated with Georgia’s Office of Workforce Development, also known as WorkSource Georgia, to provide WIOA funds such as individual training accounts or Out-of-School Youth funds for eligible CPH participants. Other potential funding sources include federal student aid through Ability to Benefit alternatives, as well as various scholarships from local technical college foundations to community literacy groups. As CPH participation grows in the future, GOAE anticipates even more funding opportunities as well. The CPH pilot and its braided funding approach help ensure that GOAE and adult education are part of the state’s overall workforce development strategy.

Overall, GOAE’s goal is to continue to promote IET, CPH, braided funding models, and other innovative approaches to support workforce development in Georgia. Adult education and workforce development are deeply intertwined—one cannot happen without the other. By emphasizing this reality to all of Georgia’s adult education providers, GOAE is committed to strengthening Georgia’s workforce and ensuring all Georgians are on a path towards self-sufficiency and a family-sustaining wage.

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1. GOAE will evaluate all prior learning assessments in determining the nine required high school or equivalent credits, including high school transcripts, successful GED or HiSET subject area tests, or previous college credits.
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**REFERENCE**