

LEP Guide for Workforce Professionals

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Introduction: What Is the LEP Guide?

Anson Green

Workers and job seekers with limited English proficiency (LEP) are one of the fastest-growing segments of the Texas workforce. The LEP Guide for Workforce Professionals (LEP Guide) was created to assist workforce professionals in planning, developing, and implementing strategies that effectively deliver workforce solutions for this valuable population. Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) and staff, Texas Workforce Center staff, and education and training professionals can use the LEP Guide's four unique modules as a user-friendly blueprint for enhancing services to LEP customers.

Why an LEP Guide?

The Current and Future Workforce

- In 2005, Texas joined Hawaii, New Mexico, and California as majority-minority states. The fastest growing key segment of the population is Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).
- Between 2000 and 2005, the number of foreign-born LEP individuals age five and older increased over 29 percent to 2,197,648 (Migration Policy Institute, n.d.).
- Between 2010 and 2030, first- and second-generation immigrants together are projected to account for all U.S. labor force growth (Lowell, B., Gelatt, J., Batalova, J., 2006).
- Although 30 percent of immigrant workers have less than a high school education and tend to be employed in low-wage occupations, almost one-third of the foreign-born LEP population have attained the equivalency of a bachelor's degree or higher in their native country (Capps, Fix, Passel, Ost, Perez-Lopez, 2003).

The LEP Pipeline in Public Schools

- In 2005–2006, almost half of the Texas public school population were Hispanic. Over 34 percent of these students were LEP (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).
- Hispanic students account for over 50 percent of high school students lost to attrition. In 2005–2006, Hispanic attrition rates increased by 4 percent (Johnson, 2006).
- In 2006, only 12 percent of LEP students in the twelfth grade passed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test and only 8 percent of tenth graders passed all TAKS standards (Scharrer, 2007).
- Texas has slipped from 45th to last among states ranked by percent for citizens in 2005—age 25 and older—who have a high school diploma or General Equivalency Development credential (Murdock, 2007).

Current Readiness to Meet Business and LEP Customer Employment Needs

- In Texas, 57 percent of the 28 local workforce development areas (workforce areas) do not have local training providers that offer LEP-accessible occupational training programs (e.g., Spanish-language or bilingual training programs).
- Less than 6 percent of Texas employers have worked with adult education providers for English language or workplace literacy services (Texas Workforce Investment Council, 2006).
- Since 2001, there has been a 75 percent decrease in adult education students, including LEP students, who have the goal of transitioning to postsecondary training (Legislative Budget Board, 2007).

How the LEP Guide Can Help

The LEP Guide can assist workforce, education, and training professionals plan, develop, and implement strategies to effectively deliver workforce solutions for the growing LEP workforce in Texas.

The LEP Guide comprises four unique modules that present a user-friendly blueprint for enhancing services to LEP customers.

Module 1: Effective Intake and Case Management

This module guides effective, culturally responsive intake and case management services for LEP customers by introducing key concepts, promising practices, and strategies that can be used to maximize efforts and enhance the quality of services provided.

Module 2: Nontraditional Occupations and Entrepreneurial Opportunities

This module develops and implements effective strategies to support female LEP customers as they consider occupations that are not traditionally held or sought by women, or embark upon a path leading to small business ownership.

Module 3: Scorecards for Evaluating Training Services for LEP Customers

This module uses a balanced scorecard approach to assist workforce professionals in evaluating the effectiveness of education training courses for LEP customers. Five different scorecards measure unique areas that are critical to delivering LEP training programs based on local business demand and provide “driving directions” for engaging employers in training efforts. The five scorecards can assist Workforce Boards in:

- selecting courses for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List or other Workforce Board–approved vendor lists;
- improving the planning and evaluation of programs designed to connect LEP customers to high-growth, high-demand occupations;
- developing Requests for Proposals; and
- guiding training and adult education capacity-building efforts.

Module 4: Comprehensive Assessment for LEP Customers

This module guides the selection and use of appropriate assessment tests for LEP customers to ensure that their skills and abilities are assessed appropriately in order to make sound, evidence-based referrals to businesses or training providers.

Although the LEP Guide is specifically designed for Workforce Board and Workforce Center staff, it also provides beneficial information to community and technical colleges, adult education providers, community-based organizations, career schools, and other organizations that work with LEP customers seeking employment.

The LEP Guide's four modules provide a truly integrated approach to improving employment, literacy, and training services. The LEP Guide stresses the strong interrelationship between case management, assessment, instruction, and job development in culturally relevant contexts.

LEP Defined

LEP is used to describe individuals who speak English as a second language and who have rated their ability to speak English as "well," "not well," or "not at all" (RTI International, 2005). While some individuals often have less than the equivalent of an elementary school education, many have postsecondary degrees from their home country. Thus LEP should be viewed as an identification of *low levels of English* comprehension, *not limited education* or *low basic skills*.

Characteristics of persons who are LEP:

- ◆ Do not speak English as their primary language.
- ◆ Have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.
- ◆ Native language is not English.
- ◆ Live in a family or community environment in which a language other than English is dominant.

Source: Texas Workforce Commission, 2006

A Market-Driven Work-Based ESL Training System for Texas

Anson Green

We “cannot afford to leave any workers behind and the Texas workforce system must direct resources and training investments to ensure that no worker is left behind.”

Texas Workforce Commission, 2005

Supporting Business Competitiveness

Remaining competitive in regional, national, and global marketplaces is a top priority for Texas businesses. Texas’ attractive business and economic climate rests largely on the availability of a workforce that is young, growing, and well educated. The Texas workforce has radically changed in the last decade and will see continued changes, especially demographic changes, into the future.

From 1980 to 2000, 26.7 million new native-born workers age 25-54 provided the workforce needed for our dynamically growing economy. From now until 2021, there will be no additional native-born workers in this prime age group. None.

Source: Ellwood, 2002, p. 11

In the last 10 years, Texas’ population has grown, become more diverse, and less educated. However, a good sign for Texas’ future workforce is that its population is also becoming younger, unlike some states with shrinking populations and, therefore, an older population average. New Hispanic, Spanish-speaking residents have fueled this population growth, challenging education and training systems—from preschool to higher education—to redesign and rethink legacy educational paradigms in order to meet the needs of this current and future workforce.

Losing Ground in Educating LEP Youth and Adults

Texas is losing ground in educating and training the state’s LEP youth population:

- Passing TAKS scores are lowest and dropout rates are highest for Texas’ Hispanic youth.
- The percentage of Hispanic youth graduating from high school is the lowest in Texas, at just under 58 percent (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2006).
- Overall, Texas has slipped from 45th to last among states ranked by percent with populations age 25 and older in 2005 with a high school diploma (Murdock, 2007).

Additionally, Texas' LEP adult population's education and training systems need significant enhancements. To be competitive in the job market, LEP workers benefit from having higher levels of English literacy, yet few LEP workers with employment or employment advancement goals appear to access Texas' adult education system for English as a Second Language (ESL) services. According to the Texas Education Agency, only 1,445 of over 108,000 adult education students, including ESL students, had the goal of entering employment in 2005–2006. Of those, just 655 students reported finding jobs (National Reporting System, n.d.).

The numbers of all adult education students continuing their education through the postsecondary education level or into training are equally low. While some postsecondary education or training is required for almost all jobs today (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007), in 2005–2006, just 602 of over 108,000 adult education students in Texas reported a goal of transitioning into college or occupational training. Of those, just 172 students statewide reported accomplishing this goal (National Reporting System, n.d.).

In 2007, the Legislative Budget Board identified that rather than increasing the transition to postsecondary training for students, there has been a 75 percent decrease in adult education students with a goal of transitioning to postsecondary training over the last few years. Fortunately, the State is working to stem this trend through legislation passed by the 80th Texas Legislature.¹

While data may not tell the whole story, and surely more adult education students have employment and higher education goals, it appears that significant work must be done to ensure these students see adult education programs as a means to transitioning into occupational training or other postsecondary education and career-building jobs.

The transition to postsecondary training is particularly challenging for LEP customers. Research shows that even if LEP customers have training goals, 57 percent of the workforce areas in Texas *do not have* local training providers that offer LEP-accessible training programs (e.g., Spanish-language or bilingual occupational training programs). Many training providers still establish minimum reading standards (e.g., sixth- or ninth-grade reading level) for enrollment in occupational training. Often, these literacy requirements are higher than those actually required for performing on the job (Spruck-Wrigley, Richer, Martinson, Kubo, and Strawn et al., 2003).

Developing Workforce Solutions Using the LEP Guide

Current education and training trends are of little benefit to employers trying to fill critical labor shortages with skilled workers. Texas employers must continue to compete in the global marketplace and maintaining a skilled workforce is one of their prime concerns. Supporting the employment and training goals of the LEP workforce is clearly a core mission for Workforce Boards, training providers, and adult education programs.

Between 2010 and 2030, first- and second-generation immigrants together are projected to account for all U.S. labor force growth (Migration Policy Institute, 2006). Workforce Boards, training providers, adult education programs, and other community partners must form working partnerships that have a shared goal of increasing the employment success of the LEP workforce. Workforce Boards are well positioned to lead these efforts and the LEP Guide can assist them in developing workforce solutions for Texas businesses and LEP customers.

¹ House Bill 1, 80th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, includes a rider that addresses the alignment of adult education and postsecondary education services. The rider is listed as Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Rider 50 and Texas Education Agency Rider 77.

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