



Enhancing Performance Through Accountability: The National Reporting System

Final Report

2004 – 2007

Introduction

The National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education is the outcome-based accountability system for the state-administered, Federally funded adult education program. The NRS meets the accountability requirements of Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA); it identifies and defines measures for national reporting, establishes data collection methods, and sets requirements for reporting to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). NRS data include student descriptive and participation measures, and outcomes that measure student success in:

- Improving literacy skills,
- Obtaining and retaining employment,
- Obtaining a GED or secondary credential, and
- Entering postsecondary education.

The American Institutes for Research has worked under the direction of ED's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) to assist states in meeting NRS requirements through a technical assistance and support project: *Enhancing Performance Through Accountability*. This final report provides an overview of the project's achievements and its impact on the field over the past three years. Through technical assistance and training, data collection and analyses, support for assessment and implementation of federal policies and procedures, and the *NRSWeb*, the NRS support project ("the NRS project") has promoted continuous improvement of the adult education program. To learn more about the project and its products and services, visit *NRSWeb* at <http://www.nrsweb.org>.

Training and Technical Assistance

Training and technical assistance are important ways to provide states with the information and tools they need for continuous improvement. Through regional small-group training, assistance to individual states, online training, and webinars, the NRS project has helped states implement NRS requirements and procedures, improve their data systems and data quality, and use data to improve local programs. Participants have consistently given the project's training high marks. They praise the organization of the sessions as well as the opportunities for state teams to meet together and develop plans and to hear from other states that have already implemented new data systems.

Training

Regional Training

The NRS project provided annual regional training designed to improve the quality and use of NRS data among states and local programs.

◆ *The Third Wave of the NRS: A National Seminar on NRS Improvement for State Directors of Adult Education* — In 2005 the project held regional two-day seminars to review NRS history, policies, and procedures; discuss upcoming changes; and identify states' technical assistance needs. The seminars covered issues such as new reporting requirements for employment measures, revised ESL educational functioning levels, federal use of NRS data, state assessment policies and evaluating adult education assessments, and fine tuning states' data systems. The three regional meetings included 98 participants from 40 states and territories.



◆ **Learning to be an NRS Data Detective: The Five Sides of the NRS** — The 2006 regional training addressed several aspects of the NRS,

The templates for data analysis are like gold to us. [We] truly appreciate the preparation that went into putting these resources together. Very high quality training.

—Data Detective Training Participant

including data collection procedures and requirements, and methods to improve data quality and data use. The training provided hands-on tools such as charts, graphs, and templates to aid states in the step-by-step process of becoming a data detective. In total, over 100 attendees from 47 states and territories participated.

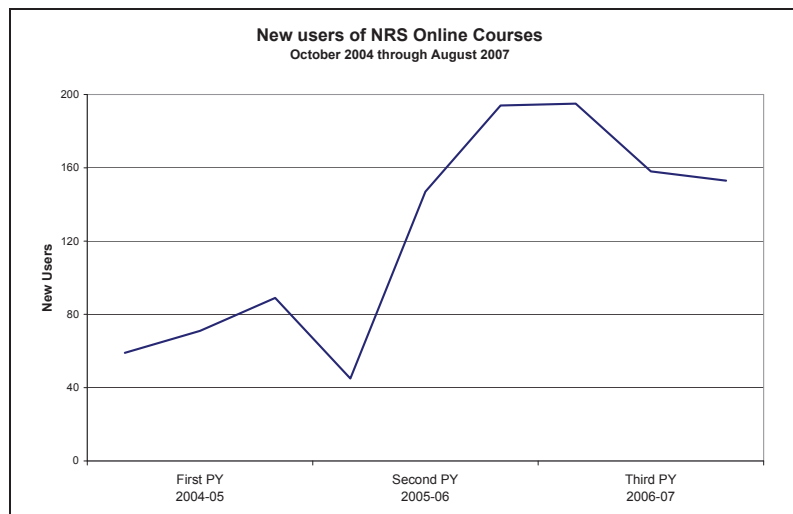
◆ **Desk Monitoring: Improving Program Performance** — The summer 2007 regional training, which 92 state and local staff from 43 states and territories attended, examined desk monitoring methods. Participants selected measures and performance targets or other benchmarks for their desk monitoring tool, created a rubric for ranking program performance, planned how to use the desk monitoring process, and generated ideas for using desk monitoring to motivate performance and identify technical assistance needs.

The [Desk Monitoring] training was excellent; the team from Montana that attended your training left with a proposed desk top monitoring tool and rubric...we accomplished in three days what would have taken months for us to do on our own.

—Montana State Director

Online Training

Online training is a flexible, low-cost way to assist adult educators and administrators with NRS-related topics. *NRSWeb* provides interactive training courses that are designed specifically for adult education program administrators. These courses cover NRS basics, data quality, and the use of data. The graph below shows a significant increase in access and use of these online courses over the past 3 years. Over 1,300 new users have registered for the online NRS courses since October 2004.



Targeted Training

In addition to conducting regional training open to all states, in 2005 and 2007 the project provided targeted training to selected states on developing state and local report cards.

Demonstrating Results: Developing State and Local Report Cards for Adult Education Summer Institute

— In 2005, ten states were selected through an application process to participate in an intensive three-day summer institute in which each state team developed a state and a local report card draft. Report cards are used by states for accountability purposes, and the states selected by DAEL to attend the workshop were required to develop and implement their report cards within one year after the training. (Several state report card examples are available on the *NRSWeb* site.)



The trainers who conduct the NRS training are extremely professional, very well prepared, and bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the sessions.

—Technology/Assessment Consultant,
Connecticut Department of Education

Due to high demand, the NRS project staff then revised the report card templates and in 2007 helped another small group of 20 state and local staff from 7 states develop local and state accountability report cards.

Webinars

Another aspect of the *NRSWeb* site that has evolved during the course of this project is the introduction of webinars—short seminars delivered through the combined use of the Internet and conference calls. Bimonthly webinars have covered a variety of topics, including:

- Changes to the *NRS Implementation Guidelines*;
- Changes to the national employment reporting policy;
- The redesigned *NRSWeb* site; and
- Follow up to training on using data for program improvement, including brief presentations by states of their progress, products, and lessons learned.

Technical Assistance

The NRS project staff has in-depth knowledge of the national adult education program, the NRS and its requirements, and data systems for collecting and reporting information for the national system. During the course of the project, eight states have received direct technical assistance: California, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Utah. Project staff have reviewed state plans for developing, revising, and implementing data collection systems; reviewed assessment, goal-setting, and data reporting plans; and conducted workshops to introduce or review important

reporting concepts such as goal-setting and development, data quality and use, and assessing educational gain.

For example, the NRS project staff began working with the Utah Adult Education office in summer 2006 to review their data system and assess its functionality, reliability, data integrity, and usability. Based on this assessment, the Utah state office modified its MIS requirements and technical design to better meet NRS requirements. In 2006 and 2007 project staff also assisted the Georgia Office of Adult Literacy by reviewing the NRS requirements and developing report specifications that the state has used to guide the development of its student data system. NRS project staff have also remained available for continued support after training and technical assistance efforts have been completed.

With the assistance of the AIR team, we feel Georgia now has one of the best student data collection and reporting systems in the country. In addition, as we continue to expand our system, we look forward to a continued relationship with AIR.

—Georgia’s Assistant Commissioner
Office of Adult Literacy

Data Collection and Analyses

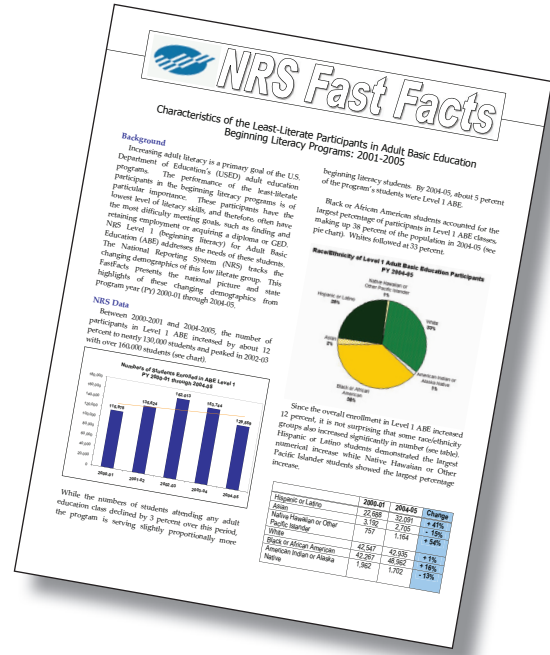
The collection and use of NRS data is vital to accountability and program improvement in adult education. Quality data paint a picture of how adult education is doing and provide a guide for action. The project has assisted DAEL in describing the adult education program, provided information to the field, and presented data to inform and improve practice.

Data quality with high integrity is the result of our relationship with AIR.

—Texas State Adult Education Director



Report to Congress — Each year the NRS project team has assisted DAEL in preparing the annual *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Report to Congress on State Performance*, which is a barometer of adult education at the national and state level. It provides Congress and the public an overview of the purpose of the adult education program, data on student enrollment and demographics, and a summary of student educational gain and achievement of other goals (including obtaining a secondary credential, entering postsecondary education, and finding and keeping a job) over time. In addition to national data, the report provides demographic, fiscal, and performance data for each state, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Congressional Reports may be found on the Office of Vocational and Adult Education’s website, at: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/resourcelindex.html>.



Current NRS FastFacts on the NRSWeb site include:

- Characteristics of English Literacy Participants;
- Ages of Adult Education Participants; and
- Characteristics of the Least Literate Participants.

Special Analyses — The NRS project has conducted a variety of analyses for DAEL to support policy development and communication with the adult education field, the general public, and policy makers. For example, the project produced a report for DAEL that analyzed the NRS adult basic education (ABE) levels to determine whether the “High Intermediate” level needed to be altered to accommodate the educational progression of adult education students. The NRS project also provided analytic support to DAEL for:

- National presentations by the director of DAEL;
- A presentation on the characteristics of low literate adults; and
- State performance over five years of the NRS.

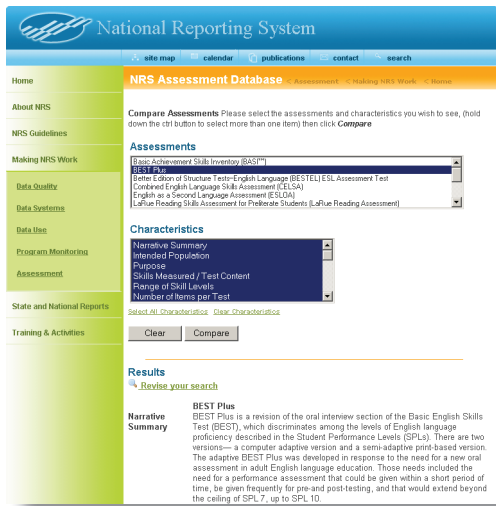


NRS FastFacts — The NRS FastFacts briefs explore issues that are of interest to adult education practitioners, policymakers, and the general public. These two-page briefs summarize relevant NRS data and provide brief analysis of a particular topic.



Assessment

The NRS project has assisted states in implementing assessments to measure adult education students' educational gains. Assessment of educational gain continues to present challenges and opportunities to the adult education field; to ensure the quality of adult education assessments, DAEL has directed the NRS project to form a panel of outside experts to review and approve all tests for use in adult education.



In addition, in order to give adult educators and administrators the information they need to make informed decisions, the NRS project created the *Assessment Database*, which provides basic information about adult education tests (submitted by test publishers) in an easily searchable format on *NRSWeb*.

Policies and Procedures

Understanding NRS policies and procedures is crucial to the successful implementation of the federal reporting system. The NRS project provides guidance through publications that are regularly updated to keep up with changes in federal policy and in the field.

NRS Implementation Guidelines

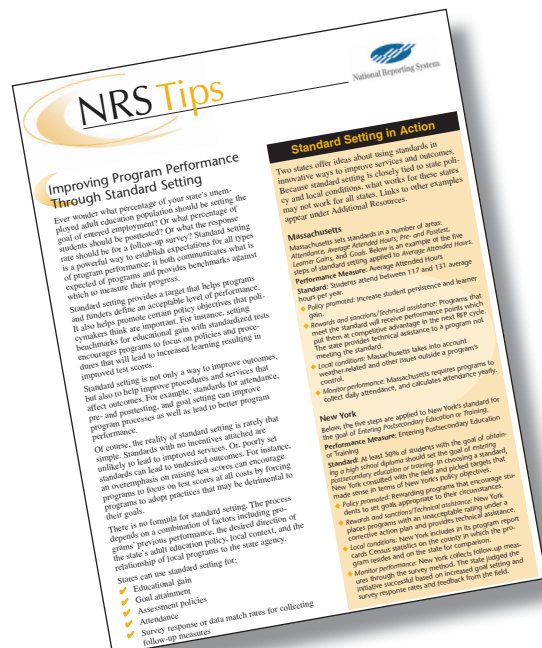
The *NRS Implementation Guidelines* publication is the core document that guides data collection,



data matching, and quality control for the federal accountability system. It also describes the data flow process, provides definitions of core and secondary measures, and discusses NRS reporting requirements. Over the past three years, the project staff has revised the *Implementation Guidelines* to respond to new NRS policies and requirements, such as the creation of new ESL levels and new distance education requirements. The document can be downloaded as a full document, or viewed through *NRSWeb* in a new searchable format.

NRS Tips

NRS Tips documents give brief, timely, and understandable explanations of NRS policies and procedures. They are typically released after important changes in NRS requirements or in conjunction with webinars, training, or other





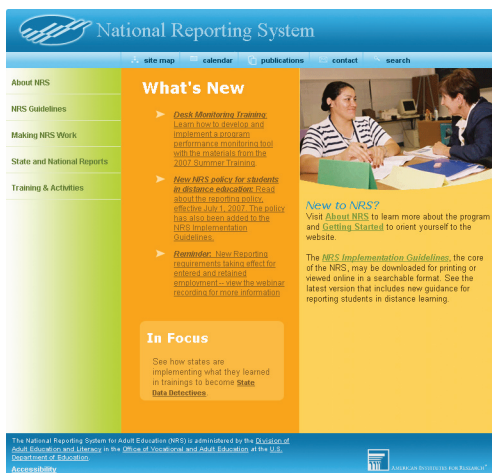
events. The current *NRS Tips* documents on the website include the following topics:

- Revised *NRS Implementation Guidelines*;
- Planning an NRS Data System;
- Creating Longitudinal Data Systems;
- NRS Goal Setting; and
- NRS Standard Setting.

NRSWeb

One of the primary means of communicating with the adult education community is through the project's website, *NRSWeb*, which is located at <http://www.nrsweb.org>. *NRSWeb* is the adult education field's source for NRS policies and procedures, changes to the federal accountability requirements and guidelines, publications and related information, direct online training, materials from face-to-face training, webinars, and a calendar of future events.

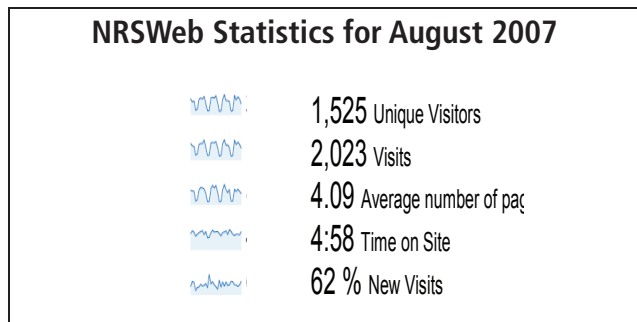
The project staff redesigned the website in 2006 after usability testing and feedback from the field. The design, functionality, accessibility, and usability of the site were greatly improved, and the new site has been well received. New state staff are directed to the website to obtain materials (such as the *NRS Implementation Guidelines*) and other information to help orient them to NRS policies and procedures. The *NRSWeb* site design allows viewers to look for information by interest or by document type. The What's New section highlights important topics, a direct link on the Home page points viewers



I utilize the website often for the implementation guide [and] the mini-classes on NRS, and encourage the new teachers to take the mini-classes as follow-up to our new teacher training.
—South Dakota Director of Adult Education

to learn more about the NRS, and state directors and local program staff can find training, reports, and important topics of the NRS through different entry points on the site.

A new web-based analytical tool was introduced in mid-February 2007 to track the use of *NRSWeb*. The chart below shows recent statistics about visits to the site.



These data provide the project staff and DAEL with information about the frequency of visits to the site and the types of information that are most important to the viewer. The most frequently visited pages in *NRSWeb* include the *NRS Guidelines* (including the online searchable *Implementation Guidelines*), About NRS, Training, and Reports.

The NRS website is how I keep up to date on changes, download the implementation guidelines, and find resources from trainings and webinars. The new format for the Implementation Guidelines has a more logical flow to it, and I find it easier to locate what I need.
—Washington State Adult Education Director



Having an Impact

The NRS project has helped increase the use and improve the quality of state and local programs' adult education data and data systems, and has advanced the use of standardized assessments for measuring educational gain. The project, under direction from DAEL, is also helping states demonstrate the positive results of their efforts to provide literacy and education to adults in their schools and communities.

Better data systems. At the start of this project most states had some kind of data collection system, but few had developed accessible and reliable web-based data collection and reporting systems. Now most states have web-based systems, and all states have systems that meet the basic requirements of collecting and reporting NRS data elements. A handful of states have created complex data systems that provide real-time data at the teacher level. For example, the Texas education agency has a system that automatically pulls local programs' grant application data and electronic expenditure reports periodically. According to the state's adult education director, this encourages programs to monitor their data integrity.

Better quality data. State attendees have been vocal at training and webinar events about the improvement in the quality of their data, a result of better systems for inputting data and of the buy-in of local program staff that have learned to value data for improving programs.

As a result of AIR's "Data Detective" [training] we used several of the hand-on activities in trainings for our local programs. We feel this was helpful and made staff review data more carefully.

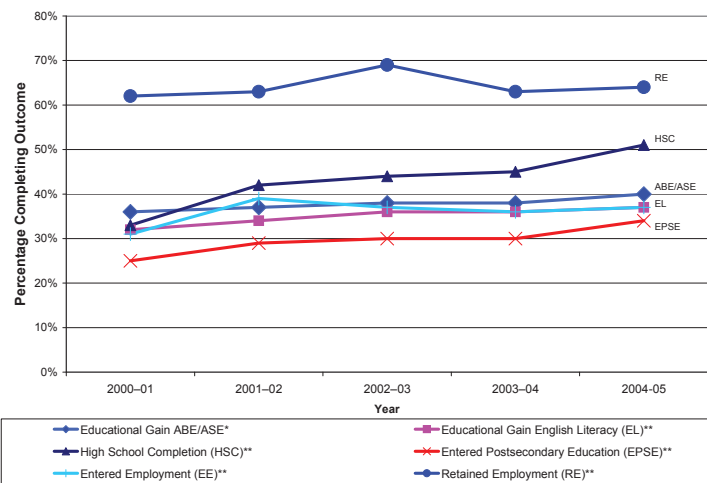
—Project Manager Massachusetts
Department of Education

Increased use of data. The Data Detective and Desk Monitoring training events have helped state staff develop tools that help them to track data, use data for program improvement, and train other state and local staff on how to monitor program performance.

We utilized the information from this training to enhance our accountability model, conduct targeted data analyses, and improve reports that are available through our data system. These interventions have continued to raise local program awareness of the relation between their program practices and the outcomes as evidenced in the data.

—Education Consultant, Connecticut
Department of Education

Adult Education Outcomes from PY 2000–01 to PY 2004–05



Improved assessment. The NRS closely monitors adherence to its requirement that all states have a policy for assessment. DAEL is taking the lead by introducing an assessment review process to review and approve tests used in adult education. The NRS project, in addition to assisting with this review process, has provided training and technical assistance to help states meet the NRS requirements.



Demonstrated program performance. The national performance data the NRS project produces were instrumental in adult education achieving the highest rating possible—“effective”—from the Performance Assessment Rating Tool (PART) process of the Office of

AIR staff [have] always been available to answer my questions. What a great support for us.

—South Dakota State
Adult Education Director

Management and Budget (OMB). The PART report examined NRS data showing that adult education state grants that have led to (1) positive effects on adult education students, (2) the development of data quality standards, and (3) improvements to the collection of NRS data.

Future of the NRS Project

While the NRS will continue to evolve in response to new legislation and changing circumstances, it will retain its focus on assisting states in using quality data, with the ultimate goal of improving outcomes for adult education students. Through technical assistance and regional trainings, this project will continue to help states understand the dynamics of accountability systems and how to use data to improve programs.

The NRS project will further integrate outreach to the states through training and follow-up support, technical assistance to help states improve their data systems and the quality of adult education assessments, and support for states to use data to examine the status and performance of their adult education programs. The project will continue to update and revise its key documents and the *NRSWeb* in response to legislative changes, directives from DAEL, and the needs of the field.

Contact NRS

www.nrsweb.org

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
Division of Adult Education and Literacy
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/index.html>

About AIR

Founded in 1946, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a not-for-profit corporation with a long history of accomplishment. AIR's staff of more than 1,000 professionals performs basic and applied research, provides technical support, and conducts analyses based on methods of the behavioral and social sciences. Since 1998, AIR has conducted projects for OVAE on evaluation and accountability in adult education, including the NRS.

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