Chapter 10
Align and Redesign: An Evaluative Case Study in Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter emphasizes the design and evaluation of a system redesign initiative which included a unique professional development component for program staff within a comprehensive, multi-year initiative of Wyoming Adult Education and Family Literacy (AEFL) programs. Align and Redesign’s (A & R) goals in Wyoming were transforming AEFL services to a new type of delivery system, with greater student persistence, improved academic gains, increased social capital skills and successful transitions to college or careers. A & R involved intense professional development for all program directors and instructors. In short, the system was refocused and rebuilt to redesign services. A key question coming out of the substantial training investments Wyoming made in A & R is whether the investments were well spent. Using a mixed-method approach, AEFL transformation is evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively. Preliminary data indicate that something powerful is happening. Findings of the Wyoming case study support replication of Align & Redesign in other states and locations.

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INTRODUCTION

The Align and Redesign (A&R) initiative is an innovative, strategic, multi-year effort designed to transform delivery services of adult education and family literacy (AE) programs in order to increase student outcomes. Core to A&R is an extensive effort to retrain adult educators with the knowledge, skills, and tools to redesign and deliver services based on research-based practices. This chapter will discuss A&R professional learning elements as a case study of Wyoming’s attempt to improve student outcomes. Included in this discussion are the underpinnings of A&R, the development of professional learning opportunities, and evaluation studies used to determine return on investment and impact of A&R’s professional learning on student outcomes.

AE is a federally-funded program designed to serve out-of-school youth and adults (16 years or older) who are least educated and most in need of basic skills to obtain a high school equivalency certificate. A new set of federal regulations, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, U.S. Department of Labor, 2014), replaced the Workforce Investment Act (WIA, US Department of Labor, 1998). Under WIOA, workforce development, AE, and vocational rehabilitation are required at state and local levels to partner and co-create innovative approaches to achieve greater outcomes for adults struggling to obtain and sustain long-term, life-supporting employment. A call to action from the United States Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE, 2016) encouraged states to go beyond “just moving the deck chairs” to innovating and rethinking every aspect of service delivery. The A&R initiative responds to the shifts and changes that WIOA requires for coordinated and improved community-based services.

In 2013, with the implementation of WIOA fast approaching, Wyoming’s AE state director took a proactive leadership role. As a veteran AE in the field, the director knew that Wyoming AE programs resembled the long-term models that AE across the U.S. had implemented since the early 1970s. Over several decades, the director repeatedly saw that attempts at incremental changes, targeted to a specific aspect of service delivery, did not increase student persistence or improve learning gains. Before 2014, Wyoming teacher training addressed the stated needs of Wyoming’s AE instructors and/or coordinated with national initiative trainings. Like most professional development in education, these traditional approaches did not demonstrate significant impacts or increases in student outcomes (Fullan, 2008).

Compared with other states, Wyoming is geographically large and has a small population. Seven community colleges and one cooperative education service center are hub sites for AE programs. Wyoming’s state-level AE had numerous leadership
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