

Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education Standards for Quality Working Conditions in ABE/ESOL Programs

Introduction

In its effort to support quality ABE services, MCAE is committed to improving the quality of working conditions for all program staff. To that end, MCAE has developed Standards for Quality Working Conditions in ABE/ESOL Programs. These Standards are a field-generated vision of quality that can be used to guide program improvement, advocate for policy change, and highlight the innovative practices of programs committed to improving the working conditions of practitioners.

The Standards were originally drafted by a joint MCAE/ MATSOL committee that defined the characteristics of programs with healthy, respectful working environments and fairly-compensated, benefited jobs. They have been recently updated by a reactivated MCAE Working Conditions Committee (made up of teachers, program managers, and professional developers) that is aware that:

- the demands on the field have continued to increase without corresponding increases in compensation or improvements in working conditions
- there is high turnover in the field and the aging of long-term, experienced educators
- the delivery of strong, consistent, quality educational services is impossible without the requisite supportive working/teaching conditions
- the ABE field, unlike the K-12 system, is expected to deliver quality services with part-time, contingent staff

The Standards are intended as a guide for program improvement and policy-making that will strengthen and stabilize the field. They can be used:

- by programs to assess their working conditions and plan for improvements
- by practitioners to assess their conditions and advocate for improvements
- by MCAE to advocate for policy change and increased funding to support quality conditions

The Standards articulate a baseline of quality for all ABE programs. Recognizing that the field is made up of diverse program types, with varying access to resources, it is understood that some programs are better able to meet the Standards than others. Nevertheless, the Working Conditions Committee offers this vision as a guide for funders and programs, anywhere along the continuum, that seek to support and retain a skilled and experienced workforce.

We are interested in your feedback and ideas about how to use this document to educate and bring about change in the field. We also welcome stories of how your program has made progress on any of the indicators (so we can disseminate creative solutions to the field). Please send questions and suggestions to either Andy Nash (Working Conditions Committee co-chair) at anash@worlded.org or Kenny Tamarkin (MCAE Director) at ktamarkin@mcae.net. Please also consider becoming a member of the MCAE Working Conditions Committee.

Standards for Quality Working Conditions in ABE/ESOL Programs (PT and FT staff)

Developed by the Joint MCAE/MATSOL Working Conditions Committee
Updated January 2007 by the MCAE Working Conditions Committee

Functional Work Environment

Standard: The program has a work environment that is safe and comfortable, with appropriate materials and equipment to perform staff functions.

Indicators:

- Access to appropriate books and materials
- Use of office equipment (e.g., copy machine, computers)
- Clean, safe, comfortable work area (e.g., appropriate temperature, ventilation, no rats, etc.)
- Bathroom and some kitchen facilities
- Dedicated classroom and desk space
- Secure area for teaching materials, administrative records and student portfolios, etc.
- An environment free of discrimination around gender, race, religion, sexual/gender identity, disability, age, class, or ethnicity.

Compensation and Benefits

Standard: All staff receive fair compensation.

Indicators:

- Compensation indexed to the DOE wage rate guidelines (see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/acls/abeguide.doc>) or to the Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard (MassFESS) for a single parent of two children (see http://www.weiu.org/Advocacy/MAFESS_SS2003.pdf), whichever is greater.
- Demonstrated effort to provide FT employment or increase the ratio of FT to PT jobs, including use of creative models that may include agreements across agencies.
- FT is 35-40 hour work week
- Paid prep time for all instructional staff (of at least 1 prep hour to 2 teaching hours) plus compensation for additional required tasks
- A pay scale that rewards experience, job duties, and education/licensure
- Higher hourly pay if personnel do not receive benefits
- Written contracts for all staff.
- Annual cost of living increases that at least match the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI)
- A minimum of two weeks notice for any change of hours, duties, or compensation.
- Compensation for cancellation of a course or class due to unforeseen circumstances (weather, lack of enrollment, etc.).

Standard: All staff receive paid benefits, pro-rated for part-time staff.

Indicators:

- Sick leave
- Vacation
- Group health/dental insurance
- Holidays
- Personal days
- Retirement plan

Job Description and Hours

Standard: Job responsibilities are clear and reasonable.

Indicators:

- Job responsibilities reflect the hours paid
- All jobs have written job descriptions
- An up-to-date personnel policy manual, including benefits, is provided
- Multi-step grievance procedures are in place

Program Support and Decision-Making

Standard: All staff are included in program decision-making, are recognized and supported, and are evaluated regularly

Indicators:

- Regular collaborative meetings with colleagues
- Recognition for quality work
- The opportunity to be included in hiring and decisions that directly affect working conditions, and to participate in other program decisions.
- Involvement in program evaluation
- New teacher orientations (to the program and to the field)
- Yearly individual performance evaluation
- Availability of substitutes for sick leave, personal days, and participation in professional development
- Demonstrated commitment to and support for staff diversity*
- Long-term commitment to the review and improvement of these standards and conditions

Opportunities for Growth

Standard: Professional development and growth are supported.

Indicators:

- Paid membership to a professional organization
- Paid professional development activities
- Career development and career ladders
- Opportunities for training on administrative tasks such as project management, program budgets and finance

* Promoting diversity in ABE means developing policies and practices within programs and throughout the field that promote and support the recruitment, retention, professional development, and advancement of staff that reflect the demographics (including race, class background, gender, immigration experience, age, disability, and/or sexual orientation) of the local community. This applies to program staff (teachers, administrators, counselors, and support staff) as well as staff developers, program specialists and leadership at all levels of the ABE system.