



# ESL MiniConference

## A New Development Strategy for Lamar Loss of AEFLA Funding Prompts Creativity



**Cheryl Hart, Monty Thompson, Amy Jaime,  
representatives of LCC Adult Transition Services**

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Spring 2012

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This week I heard from friends and former colleagues in Lamar, Colorado, that the Adult Transition Services department at Lamar Community College would be closing. During the ten months that I spent at Adult Transition Services in Lamar, I became aware of a local network of sensitive, competent, and determined individuals, at the College and in the surrounding community, who worked together on behalf of large numbers of under-educated and under-employed men and women in the Prowers County area.

High school graduation rates in Prowers County are among the lowest in the state of Colorado. Poverty rates are among the highest in the state. Lamar is a bilingual community, with 40 percent of its residents speaking Spanish in addition to English. Much of the Mexican heritage of southeastern Colorado comes from original settlers from Mexico who helped to establish this state more than 100 years ago.

Lamar citizens pride themselves on their independence and tend neither to boast of their accomplishments nor complain when things are not going well. You are not going to hear a lot of whining or people blaming others for their lot in life. These are straightforward individuals who say it like it is and deal with things directly.

It is unfortunate that there are others in the state who are sometimes more interested in maintaining status and power than they are in doing what is right. When you speak to a resident of Lamar, you will get an honest answer without any embellishments. As you move further west across the state, people are a little more sophisticated and their explanations and motivations more complex.

I remember several years ago when Lamar Community College was in the process of unifying the operations of career development, ESL, GED-prep through Adult Transition Services, and counseling and tutoring services through the Learner Support department, together with the anticipated move of the state employment services office into the same building with transition service and support services at the College.

This is the type of collaborative vision that is typical at Lamar Community College, and it had the support of all key stakeholders in the local community of Lamar, to make LCC an engine of opportunity for adults seeking alternative routes to high school equivalency, career training, and employment.

One narrow-minded individual from outside the community, but with the status and influence to stop progress, put the screws to that project. I was very angry about that, but you should have seen the staff and leadership at the College. They just put their heads down and got busy on the next plan for improving options on behalf of prospective students and unemployed adults.

The last time the state office of adult education, which administers and allocates the federal AEFLA monies for Colorado, visited the Adult Transition Services program at Lamar Community College, for a two-day complete review, the program passed with flying colors and the review team commented on the strong sense of shared purpose across the campus and throughout the community on behalf of the goals and objectives of the transitions program, aligned with the pertinent state and national goals and standards.

[Download the Colorado AEFLA Standards](#)

With the loss of AEFLA funding, a vital collaboration between the local school system and LCC to offer ESL instruction to Spanish-speaking parents of schoolchildren will stop. Adult Transition Services at the College stepped in several years ago to strengthen that service when the schools lost federal funding that had previously supported it. I assisted at registration for that program in the fall of 2010, and observed classes there as well. One does not soon forget the positive attitude and

enthusiasm for learning in the faces of parents hoping to set examples and help guide their children towards greater success in life. I also remember Adult Transition Services using its AEFLA grant to support offering free ESL classes to temporary summer migrant workers in the nearby town of Granada.

There are so many persons of good will in the Lamar community that I know in my heart new answers are going to be found for promoting education and career development opportunities in an economically--but not spiritually--depressed region. I strongly encourage anyone who wants to make a real difference to contact the administration at Lamar Community College or directly interact with local business and education advocates, including Amy Jaime, [Monty Thompson](#), Pamela Reed, Anthony LaTour, Connie Jacobson, Gerry Jenkins, Wendy Buxton-Andrade, Dorothy Choat, or many others who are working selflessly every day to bring greater opportunity and growth and a brighter future to their community.

Long live Lamar, Colorado, and the people of Lamar!

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