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California Employment Development
Department

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Subject: ELL Co-Enrollment Grant—Interim Findings Memo

Introduction

This memo summarizes interim findings from the evaluation of the English Language Learner (ELL) Co-enrollment Pilot grants (ELL pilots), awarded to the following four grantees:

- Los Angeles County Workforce Development Board (LACWDB);
- Richmond Workforce Development Board (RWDB);
- Workforce Investment Board of Tulare County (Tulare WIB); and
- Verdugo Workforce Development Board (VWDB).

The data presented below is based on five primary data sources:

- Data from CalJOBS as of August 7, 2020 provided by the Employment Development Department (EDD);
- Data from TOPSpro Enterprise (TE) as of September 2020 provided by CASAS;
- Data from grantee reports as of May 2020;
- Phone interviews with the coordinators of each pilot site conducted in May 2020
- Phone interviews with one adult education partner from each grant conducted in June 2020; and
- Pilot profiles with additional detail for each pilot are included for reference accompanying this memo.

Context

Geography and Urbanicity. Three of the four ELL Pilots are located in urban areas, while the fourth—awarded to the Tulare WIB—is focused primarily on serving the rural areas of northern and southern Tulare County. Of the three urban pilots, one is located in the City of Richmond in the San Francisco Bay Area; and the other two are located in cities within Los Angeles County—one in Glendale and the other in Pomona.

Staffing Structures. As noted in the previous section, all four of the ELL pilot grantees are workforce development boards (WDBs). In three of four cases, these WDBs employ an ELL pilot grant coordinator who serves as the ELL pilot's administrative lead. These WDBs share primary responsibility for operating the ELL pilots with the entities that operate their Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs. These latter entities typically employ the ELL Pilot navigators or case managers who work directly with ELL pilot participants.

Partnerships. Grantee WDBs all have strong relationships with multiple adult education partners, including community-based organizations (CBOs), adult schools and community colleges. These partnerships are discussed in more detail below.

COVID-19 and ELL Pilot implementation. In the remainder of the memo, we describe the implementation of the four ELL pilot models, including their:

- enrollment and co-enrollment results and processes;
- service delivery;
- partnerships and how partners work together; and
- use of grant funds and other funding.

However, before we launch into detailed descriptions of each of those aspects of the pilots, we want to note that each model has been profoundly affected and challenged by the shelter-in-place (SIP) orders, the social distancing requirements to combat the COVID-19 (COVID) virus imposed by the Governor, county and city health officials, as well as the need to preserve the health of participants and staff, beginning in March 2020. As we discuss below, although each pilot faced some challenges prior to COVID, they were all generally progressing well in their implementation until COVID struck and they all had to make rapid and substantial changes to their models to be able to continue operating. Consequently, in each of the subsequent sections below, we begin by describing each ELL pilot's initial model, and then provide a description of how that model has been adapted—or is in the process of being adapted—to work within the current COVID-19 environment.

Enrollment/ Co-Enrollment

Enrollment in the ELL Co-enrollment Pilot Grants. According to the CalJOBS report, 199 participants—across all four pilot sites—were enrolled in the ELL Co-enrollment Pilot grants from the grants' inception in summer 2019 through August 2020. [See Exhibit 1 below]

Co-enrollment in the following programs:

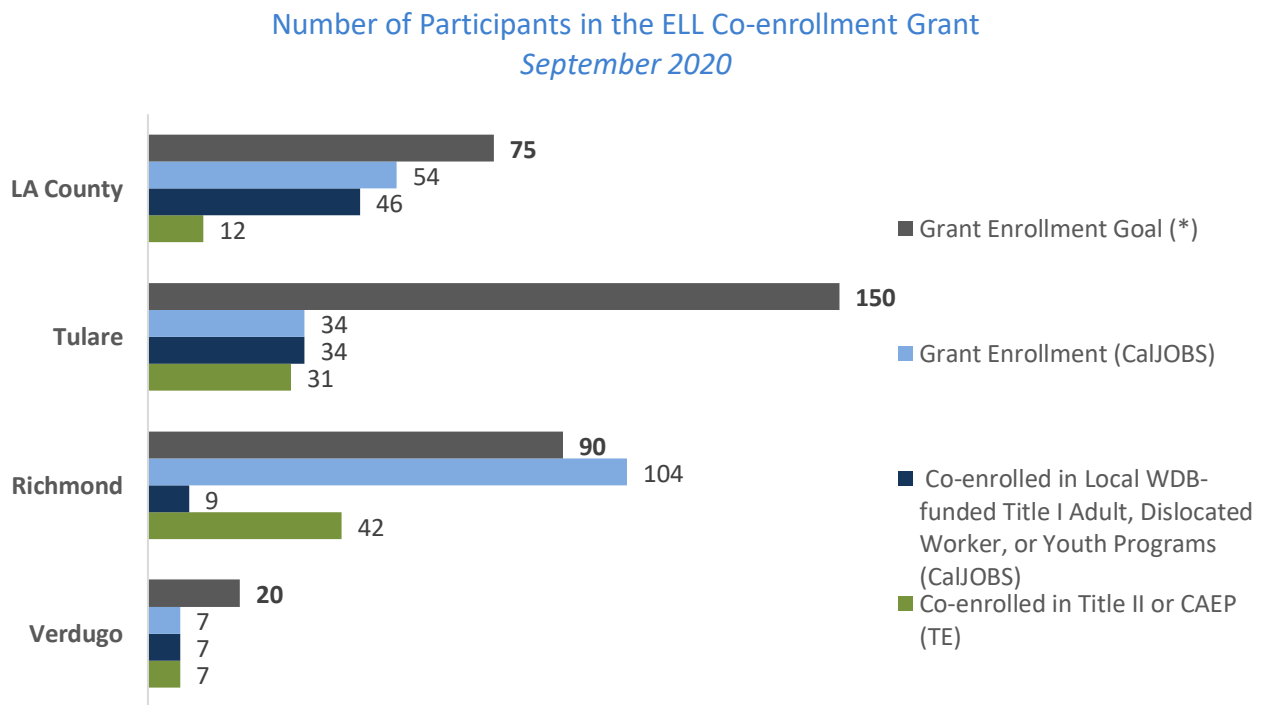
Local WDB-funded WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth Programs. Of those 199 ELL pilot grant participants, during that same time period, 96 were also reported in

CalJOBS as enrolled in one of the three locally-funded Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth) that operate in one of the four ELL pilot grantee local workforce areas.

WIOA Title II program and California Adult Education Program (CAEP). According to the TOPSpro Enterprise report (TE), the system of record for Title II and CAEP, 92 ELL pilot grant participants were reported to be enrolled in Title II or CAEP through September 14, 2020.

Timeframe for enrollment and co-enrollment. Most enrollment in the ELL pilot and co-enrollment of those grant participants in local Title I or Title II or CAEP programs occurred prior to COVID-19. Once SIP mandates took effect, enrollment and co-enrollment slowed considerably across all grantees.

Exhibit 1: ELL Pilot Grant Enrollment and Pilot Participant Co-enrollment in Local WDB-funded Title I and Title II or CAEP Programs



Source: CalJOBS Report, August 2020. Includes ELL co-enrolled participants through the end of September 14th, 2020.

Note: (*) Grantees may be revising grantee enrollment goals in the coming months.

Challenges to ELL Pilot Grant Enrollment

Non-COVID-Related Challenges. Grantees reported facing several recruitment and enrollment challenges that are generally unrelated to COVID.¹ One challenge reported by two of the four grantees during the first months of grant implementation was that potential participants were unwilling to enroll in the grant because they were concerned that receipt of grant services could negatively affect their immigration status as such services could be considered a “public charge.” Further, one of the four grantees reported that its difficulty in finding ELLs with “right to work” documentation had also created grant enrollment challenges. The grantee asserted that this enrollment challenge stemmed from the fact that it also planned to enroll all grant participants in one or more local Title I formula programs, but felt that it could not do so with undocumented participants because the Title I services these participants would receive would be “employment activities” that require verification of authorization to work documents.² Respondents from the Tulare WIB also reported having difficulty recruiting ELLs to participate in the grant because most ELLs in Tulare County are also migrant and seasonal farm workers who are not interested in enrolling in the grant due to the seasonal nature of their work and the fact that they typically travel to their home countries during the off-season when they are not employed.

COVID-19-Related Challenges. SIP mandates resulting from COVID-19 posed additional challenges to grant recruitment and enrollment. One such challenge related to grant enrollment was that SIP mandates and social distancing guidelines made it impossible for participants to enroll in the grant in the most common way that they had done so prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—by coming into a grantee office without an appointment and enrolling in-person. Instead, enrollment in the grant shifted to a primarily remote process, which occurred by appointment over the phone or via computer. In addition to making the enrollment process more cumbersome (especially for grantees with limited access to a computer with a scanner to scan in copies of their eligibility documents), the COVID-19 restrictions also limited the number of enrollments that could occur on any one day since only a small number of intake appointments could be scheduled on any given day. Although three grantees mentioned that some challenges related to remote grant enrollment were mitigated by the state's easing of in-person eligibility verification requirements and the ability of clients to upload their eligibility verification documents directly into CalJOBS, one of the grantees, LACWDB, requires collecting

¹ Note that although these challenges first emerged prior to the current COVID pandemic, they have continued into the present COVID period, but are less salient than the many specifically COVID-related challenges.

² Per EDD/California Workforce Development Board (CWDB) Directive WSD-1803.

“wet” signatures from ELLs as well as in-person assessments; requirements that have continued to make grant enrollment during the COVID-19 restrictions challenging.

Grant recruitment activities, including referrals from partners, have also been heavily affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. For example, COVID-19 SIP and social distancing restrictions have hampered the ability of grantees to conduct grant outreach activities such as career fairs or in-person presentations about services available to ELLs through the grant partners. Further, these restrictions caused many adult education partners—particularly adult schools and CBOs—that had previously referred numerous ELLs to grantees for enrollment to halt or severely limit their operations, thus eliminating a major avenue for grant recruitment.

However, in the coming months, all four grantees and their core partners reported that they are planning to restart low or non-contact outreach to ELLs to promote grant services. Planned activities will include targeted social media outreach, group texting via CareerHub or other platforms, distribution of printed materials, radio interviews, and virtual visits to virtual English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. In addition, at least one grantee expanded its outreach to Cantonese and Mandarin speakers to better support this population and hired a translator to work with navigators that spoke English and Spanish.

Challenges/Facilitators to Co-Enrollment.

As shown in Exhibit 1 above, as of August, 2020, ELL pilot grantees had co-enrolled several grant participants in local WDB-funded Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, or Youth) programs and Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) or CAEP-funded programs. However, despite these co-enrollment successes, grantees have faced a number of challenges related to co-enrollment. These challenges are described below.

Challenges Related to Co-enrollment Reporting Processes. Reporting data on co-enrollment of grant participants in local WDB-funded Title I programs and sharing data on co-enrollment in Title II/CAEP with adult education partners was a challenge for all four ELL pilots.

Challenges sharing data for co-enrollment with adult education partners. Because ELL pilot grantees and their adult education partners use different management information systems (MISs), referrals of ELLs for grant or Title II/CAEP co-enrollment are done via email or phone calls. Because these methods of data sharing are not systematic, this has sometimes resulted in ELLs not being properly recorded as co-enrolled in Title II/CAEP and the ELL pilot. Further, because ELL pilot staff have sometimes had difficulty identifying the specific individuals within their adult education partner organizations who have the ability to enter data into TE, information on the co-enrollment of ELL pilot grant participants in Title II/CAEP services

provided by those organizations has not been reported in TE. These reporting challenges have been exacerbated by the SIP and social distancing mandates issued to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which have caused many Title II/CAEP partners—especially adult schools—to close or operate at a limited capacity, making communication regarding co-enrollment even more difficult.

Inconsistencies in data reported in CalJOBS and grantee reports on grant participants co-enrolled in local WDB-funded Title I programs. Three of the grantees do not initially record data on grant enrollment or grant participant enrollment in Title I local formula programs directly in CalJOBS, the system of record for both the grant and WIOA local formula Title I programs. Instead, ELL pilot navigators at these sites initially capture, or have considered capturing, such data in separate Excel or Google worksheets, and those data are entered into CalJOBS later. In conversations with grantees, we heard that only a limited number of staff enter data directly into CalJOBS. This has sometimes resulted in differences between the data reported in grant reports on grant participant co-enrollment in local formula Title I programs versus the data in CalJOBS, often resulting in confusion regarding how many grant participants are actually co-enrolled in the Title I local Adult, Dislocated Worker or Youth programs.

Services

Employment and Career Services. Grantees and their partners provide a wide range of employment and career services to participants including referrals to jobs, career planning services (including career exploration via CalJOBS and aptitude and interest assessments), and career coaching.

Many of these services were interrupted to some degree after the COVID-19-related SIP mandate went into effect. In the immediate few weeks that followed, the ELL pilots reoriented their services to meet the immediate needs of grant participants, which included:

- providing supportive services, such as food, funding to pay utility bills and childcare, and providing computer equipment, including laptops and iPads;³
- providing information on how to access Unemployment Insurance (UI);
- providing information on available jobs via Facebook Live and Zoom;
- updating grantee websites to include job announcements; and
- providing virtual on-on-one job application assistance to grant participants.

³ Some of these supportive services were provided with leveraged funding rather than grant funding.

Grantees also adapted their means of communicating with grant participants to provide these services, shifting from a heavy reliance on in-person communication to communication primarily by phone, text message, e-mail and mail. All grantees, have also, however, retained some limited capacity for doing one-on-one in-person appointments that follow social distancing requirements when absolutely necessary.

Even though all four pilots are continuing to deliver employment and career services, these services are being provided over a longer period of time than before the COVID-19 restrictions were instituted. This is because agency staff dedicated to providing services for ELL participants across pilots is limited and some services that used to be provided in group formats or via a single one hour in-person appointment now require one-to-one delivery over multiple 15 to 20 minute phone or video conferencing appointments , which demands more of the staff time. For example, the navigators from one of the pilots mentioned that, before SIP, they were able to complete all required intake activities through one in-person appointment lasting about one hour. Now, at the participants' request, they sometimes need to set up multiple, shorter phone or video appointments over a period of weeks to complete those same activities.

ELL pilot staff have also been considering adapting additional services for virtual delivery (e.g., assessments and workshops). However, they had not done so as of the time of the data collection for this memo, likely because (as will be discussed in more detail below) many grant participants do not have access to the right equipment or level of Internet access or are unfamiliar with the digital tools and processes they would need to participate in such activities.

Educational and Training Services. Prior to COVID, ELL pilot adult education partners provided grant participants with multiple types of educational and training services, including ESL classes, citizen preparation classes, basic computer classes, adult basic education (ABE) classes, GED preparation classes, and vocational ESL training.

While some of these classes pre-COVID had few or no online components, others already provided students with comprehensive introductions to the use of technology, including some instructions on how to operate school computers, how to check and send emails (and an email account), and how to navigate Google Classroom and other online tools. Partly as a result of these pre-COVID differences, as well as due to whether or not they continued to operate at capacity after the SIP mandate went into effect, ELL pilot partners transitioned their education and training offerings to remote learning at different paces, with some moving much more quickly than others.

Another factor that adult education partners reported as easing the transition to remote learning included receiving clear institutional support from their districts in the form of training or support from IT personnel. For example, districts sometimes provided or supported teachers in receiving training on online learning. Some examples of such training included webinars from

CASAS, from the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN), from the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project (CALPRO), and from CAEP.

Finally, adult education partners have taken a slower pace in adapting certain types of classes or components of classes to online learning. These classes or components, which have included oral conversation classes and labs for vocational training programs, have proved harder to adapt to an online environment, so providers have moved much more slowly in rolling out virtual versions.

Barriers/Facilitators to the Provision of Services.

Lack of access to computer equipment at home. In the immediate few weeks after the SIP mandate was enacted, grantees and partners identified the lack of access to computer equipment at home as one of the most common barriers impacting grant participants' access to virtual services. For example, many participants did not own home computers, and although most do have cell phones, these devices typically do not have the capacity, or the functionality required to fully access virtual services. In other cases, even though grant participants did have computers at home—or in some cases were able to borrow a computer from their child's school—grant participants were unable to access these computers as much as needed because their children needed them to participate in virtual classes and complete schoolwork. Further, when the school year has ended, many of the grant participants who had borrowed computers from their child's schools have had to return that equipment and once again are without a computer at home. One way that ELL pilot sites and their partners have attempted to address this barrier is by obtaining additional computer equipment that they can lend to grant participants.

Lack of access to fast and reliable Internet services. Another key barrier to the ability of grant participants to access virtual services is their lack of access to Internet service that is reliable and has sufficient capacity to handle applications that require high bandwidth, such as video connections. For example, grant participants in rural areas often do not have access to broadband services. And while other grant participants do have such services available where they live, they often cannot access them because they do not have the resources to pay for that level of service. Further, having many family members in the same location trying to access the Internet at the same time can also exacerbate the problems of having a slow Internet connection. To try to address this barrier, some grantees and their partners have begun posting resources on their websites about how participants in their area can obtain access to public Wi-Fi or obtain low cost Internet services at home from organizations such as the United Way or from the California Emerging Technology Fund.

Lack of familiarity with computers and software. ELL grant participants' lack of knowledge and skills related to using computers (digital literacy) was also cited as another key barrier to their ability to access virtual services. For example, ELL pilot staff members reported that many grant participants do not know how to install, use, or update the software needed to participate in virtual services on their own. Addressing this barrier has been difficult for both grantees and their partners because ESL teachers and pilot navigators—who are the typical staff members who are called on to help participants with software-related issues—are not used to providing such assistance and may not know how to do so effectively.

Navigator Roles in Service Delivery. As discussed above, ELL navigators are the grant-funded staff members who work most closely with grant participants. These navigators carry out a variety of service delivery-related functions that begin with orienting grant participants to the array of services available from the ELL pilots, assessing participant needs, developing their service plans, and connecting them to (and sometimes providing) needed services. For example, navigators often help grant participants with completing job applications, preparing for job interviews, and accessing the supportive services—such as transportation and childcare—they need to go to work. Navigators also provide grant participants with case management and follow-up services as needed, coordinating services across partner programs.

Although navigators shifted their activities somewhat following the enactment of SIP mandates (e.g., they began providing more UI-related assistance, assisted more participants with accessing supportive services such as emergency food, etc.) these changes have not been major. One aspect of their work that has changed is that—due to social distancing requirements—they are providing one-on-one services with more frequency than pre-COVID. Moreover, given the large number of grant participants who were laid off following implementation of the SIP mandate, the demand for their assistance has also increased.

The current pandemic has also surfaced concerns about the health and safety of ELL grant participants—particularly those on the frontlines of service delivery or working in essential services—and grant staff. For example, earlier this year several employees working in food processing facilities in one of the grantee's service areas tested positive for the coronavirus. As a precautionary measure, one of their navigators who was working with ELL participants employed in those facilities subsequently self-quarantined. In another one of the pilots, navigators are also playing a critical role in communicating COVID related health and safety information to ELL grant participants. Specifically, navigators have been instrumental in communicating new social distancing protocols and what to expect when they need to meet with grant staff in person. The issue of worker safety will likely gain importance as more participants seek work opportunities in essential services or industries where the risk of contracting the virus may be higher.

Partner Collaboration

Partner Roles. Partners' primary roles on ELL pilot teams included conducting outreach and recruitment (including making referrals to the pilots), providing ESL instruction and vocational training, and supporting co-enrollment and co-case management. Adult education partners had some of the strongest relationships with grantee organizations, working closely with ELL pilot navigators to support participants.

Grantee and Partner Communication. Prior to COVID-19, communication between lead grantees and partners was generally informal in nature and took place through email, phone, or in-person. Teams typically met or spoke as the need arose. For example, if a navigator wanted to know about an ESL student's progress, he or she would simply get in touch with a contact at the partner organization. While this arrangement has continued mostly unchanged for some teams (with the exception that in-person interaction has been replaced by videoconferencing, other teams reported communicating more regularly, either through monthly videoconference meetings or via virtual town hall-style gatherings.

Some ELL pilot grantees and their adult education partners also reported facing challenges in maintaining communication with each other since the enactment of COVID-19 restrictions. These challenges have largely centered around shifting institutional priorities and a lack of time as agency staff members have focused more on meeting the immediate needs of their clients. For example, one partner noted a lack of clarity around expectations for communication and collaboration with his ELL grantee partner in this new context, while staff members from another grantee described initial uncertainty around knowing which of their education partners were open and offering services.

Role of Navigators in Communicating with Partners. Since the enactment of SIP, ELL Navigators have continued to play a key role in communicating with partners regarding services to grant participants. They reported that they continue to communicate directly with partner agency staff on a daily or weekly basis to coordinate service delivery and data collection efforts, follow up with clients, and provide case management services. One adult education partner reported that the ELL navigators in her area were especially critical in communicating social distance protocols for accessing educational services from her organization to community members. At one site, the ELL navigator is now co-located on a partner's campus to better support participants.

Grantee and Partner Data Sharing and Co-case Management. Data sharing and co-case management processes are generally informal. As discussed above, ELL pilot grantees and their adult education partners do not use the same MIS (grantees use CalJOBS, while adult education partners use TE), and so cannot share data on co-enrolled participants for co-case management purposes via these systems. As a result, grantee and partner staff members across all four pilots have developed informal processes to share information on these participants and discuss shared approaches to case management by email or phone. Due to the current uncertainty related to COVID-19 restrictions and potential budget cuts, some adult education partners

expressed a desire for more formal data sharing processes and clearer co-case management guidelines to developed.

Funding

Use of ELL Pilot Grant Funding. All four ELL Pilots planned to use the majority of their grant funds to cover the cost of pilot staffing, with the remainder of funds used to cover the cost of supportive services and training. However, as a result of COVID-19, three of the four pilots reported that they had already shifted their use of grant funds--or would likely need to do so in the near future. For example, staff members from one pilot reported that because of the looming budget deficit faced by their own organization, they had already had to shift grant funds to cover the costs of additional supportive services for participants as well as staffing. Similarly, the pilot coordinator for another stated that because of the longer time it has taken to connect pilot participants to virtual services (e.g., helping them to master basic use of computers and software such as Zoom; assisting them with filling out forms remotely; and mailing correspondence), her pilot may need to dedicate more of its grant funds to cover staffing costs. Finally, staff members from another pilot site reported that they had shifted grant funds originally budgeted for supportive services such as childcare and transportation to cover the cost of purchasing computer equipment for use by participants. Only one pilot reported that it did not plan to shift the use of its ELL Pilot funds because it planned to use funding from another grant to provide those services.

New Sources of Leveraged Funding. All four ELL Pilots reported receiving new funding as a result of COVID-19, some of which was for the express purpose of providing additional supportive services—that they were using to supplement their ELL Pilot grant funding to provide Pilot participants with access to additional supportive services, staffing, to cover the costs of training, or additional computer equipment. These new funding sources included National Dislocated Worker Grants (mentioned by two Pilots); the California Immigrant Resilience Fund (two pilots); and Additional Assistance Dislocated Worker grant funding—also known as the Keep LA Working Initiative (one pilot). It is important to note, however, that not all ELLs who participate in the grant were eligible for some of these additional funds because they were unemployed before the pandemic.

Next Steps for ELL Pilots and their Partners

As the ELL pilots and their partners contend with the shifting COVID-19 context, they have identified several strategies they plan to carry out to rebuild momentum and meet their grant goals.

Continue to adapt and improve services for remote and online delivery. Due to the long-term prognosis for COVID-related restrictions to continue through at least the remainder of 2020, a

primary focus for all of the pilots and their partners during the coming months is to continue to adapt their service delivery offerings to make them more effective in a virtual environment. For example, some adult education partners reported that they are currently focused on making online enrollment and registration processes for their programs more accessible. Other partners are planning to use the next few months to increase their students' digital literacy skills and overall familiarity with technology. Another partner reported that it is working on ways to better familiarize students with its new online learning management system.

Provide grant participants with access to computers and Internet services. Another focus for some pilots is to find ways to provide grant participants with access to computers even over the summer, such as by purchasing computers using grant funds and lending them to participants. Other pilots have curated and posted resources on their websites about how participants can use public Wi-Fi hotspots to access the Internet or how they apply to various organizations to obtain low cost Internet services at home.

Shift job development and placement focus to industries that are continuing to hire despite COVID-19. To better assist their grant participants in finding and maintaining employment despite COVID-19, staff members from two pilots reported that they plan to specifically target industry sectors that are continuing to hire despite the SIP mandate. For example, these grantees indicated that they are now focusing their job development and placement efforts on the food manufacturing, healthcare, and agriculture industries.

Concluding Comments

Pilot enrollment and service delivery is continuing, but at a slower pace, which may make achievement of grant goals infeasible within the planned period of performance. Even though ELL pilot models were seriously disrupted by the COVID-19 outbreak and the SIP directives that ensued, pilot teams have been largely successful in adapting their services to the new context. However, while service delivery is continuing, services are being provided to fewer participants and at a slower pace. Similarly grant enrollment and co-enrollment have slowed down, which may make it necessary for state partners to engage with grantees in a conversation about the feasibility of whether the pilots will be able to meet their current grant goals within the grant's original timeframe.

Co-enrollment data sharing and reporting continues to be a challenge. Across pilot teams, challenges have persisted in terms of properly identifying students and recording in the different systems of record grant participants who are co-enrolled in local formula Title I and in Title II or CAEP programs. Consequently, it will be important for technical assistance related to this topic to continue to assist grantees in developing clearer processes for data sharing to ensure that co-enrollment is accurately reported in both CalJOBS and TE.

Navigators are playing a critical role in assisting participants, especially in the current context.

Both pilot coordinators and partner staff members underscored the importance of ELL navigators and the key role they are playing in supporting grant participants within the current COVID-19 context. In addition, they noted that the increased need for navigators to provide one-on-one assistance to grant participants—whether to assist them in submitting an online job application or accessing UI benefits—has placed an additional load on these staff, which they may have difficulty meeting. Consequently, it may be useful pilot teams to consider ways to further augment the capacity of their navigator teams. Furthermore, it would be useful for navigators and other frontline grant staff, as key advisors for ELL grant participants, to become more knowledgeable about the most recent health and safety guidance as well as best practices and protections available for ELLs who are working or are seeking employment.

Support is critical in assisting grantees and their partners with making further improvements to their virtual service delivery.

As discussed above, even though most pilots and their partners have been able to successfully shift the mode for the bulk of their services from in-person to virtual, they are continuing work on improving the effectiveness of their virtual service delivery. Given that many pilot and partner respondents are new to providing services in a remote environment, continued technical assistance related to how to do so effectively would likely be of great use to both pilot sites and their partners.