



Friends of Portland Adult Education Fall 2025 Newsletter

Dear Friends:

These are the times that try our souls: attacks on immigrants, asylum seekers, and education funding sources. Political attacks during the past ten months have challenged our greater Portland community. More community members live in fear for their safety and our future than I can remember in my lifetime. Yet, our Portland Adult Education program continues to thrive. More than 1400 adults are enrolled and attend classes weekly. Hundreds have earned educational credentials and employment opportunities in the past year. More than 1000 potential students are on wait lists for future classes. PAE continues to thrive.

You, our friends & volunteers, are meeting hard times by stepping forward in new and old ways to help our students. You are hosting a weekly Tea & Talk for students and leading activities for PAE's first Wellness Day. You are continuing to offer conversation classes in person and online, as well as supporting students

on track to earn certification as nursing assistants.

Friends of Portland Adult Education continues to expand its support to the learners and staff. During this current year, FPAE is subsidizing a career advisor, a learning lab assistant, PAE course scholarships, college scholarship awards, staff development, technology acquisition, and social worker activities. FPAE also stands ready to provide emergency support if federal or state funds are unexpectedly rescinded. FPAE could not do this without our loyal donors and business partners. Thank you.

Please contact us at any time if you have any questions.



As always, thank you for your support!

Rob Wood
 FPAE Board Chair

School Year Showcase

Previous and upcoming events

Recent Events:

Health Workforce Summit, October 16th
 Abbie Yamamoto, Barbara Mascareñas, and Barb Stoddard presented

MAEA Conference, October 16-17th
 Attended by Kate Points and Barb Stoddard from NMRC, Miranda Newman from the PAE Workforce Department, and Kate Hersom, PAE's Assistant Director.

Gear Hub, October 10th
 25 students received donated bicycles

Greater Portland Health Optometry, October 23rd
 Provided free vision appointments for students

Ongoing & Upcoming Events:

Tea and Talk,
 Tuesdays from 2:30-3:00pm
 Fostering connection opportunities for students

Locker Project, Second Tuesday of the Month
 Free, fresh food in the PAE basement

Upcoming Events (continued):

Good to Know Series, Monthly Presentations from Community Providers
 One-hour presentations with Q&A

PAE's First Wellness Day, November 21st 9:00-11:30am
 A variety of activities focused on finding joy and managing stress



The Learning Lab at PAE

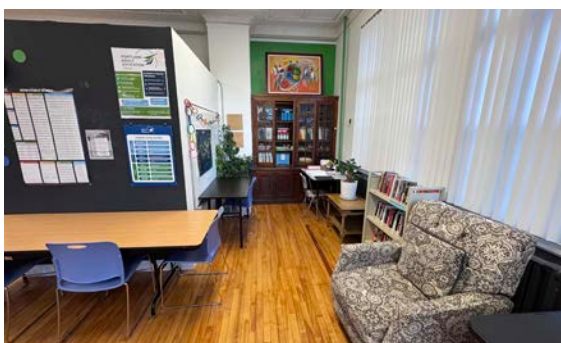
By Heidi Davidson

The Learning Lab at PAE, supported by FPAE funds, has been a hub of bustling activity since reopening in January of this year. We serve about 30-50 students per day and our students represent all parts of Portland Adult Education. Our largest group is ESOL students who are currently on the waitlist, and they are studying in the lab, building English skills while they wait for a spot in a class. Additionally, we currently serve 35 students actively studying for the HiSET (GED) tests. The structure of the lab allows students the ability to study at flexible times, helping with students' busy work and family schedules.



Increasingly, the Learning Lab serves more and more enrolled ESOL and Workforce students. Some students come to the lab for help on their homework. Others come to supplement their English studies or to prepare for the CASAS test.

With the addition of Carlos, our Learning Lab Assistant, we can now stay open during all main office hours, giving students more opportunities to access support. Being fully staffed also allows us to better meet student needs. For example, students can take practice CASAS tests to ease test anxiety and prepare for re-testing. New students can visit the lab after their intake test to begin studying. Carlos provides orientations in Portuguese, helping ESOL Level 1-3 students feel comfortable and supported.



This past summer, the Learning Lab was open Monday through Friday, and many new and returning students took advantage of the extra study time. We also offered two conversation classes each week, giving students the opportunity to practice their English speaking skills while the rest of the school was closed. We plan to continue offering a wide variety of programs and to remain a stable, consistent study resource for students.

Naturalization Test Changes & Citizenship Class Successes

By Moey Burchenal

This fall the United States Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that the citizenship test, which applicants are required to pass before getting naturalization, will be changing to a longer and more difficult exam.

At the end of October, applicants will now need to know 128 civics and history questions instead of the 100 questions on the previous test. In order to pass the civics and history portion, applicants previously had to answer 6 of 10 questions which were randomly selected.

Now, applicants will need to answer 12 out of 20 questions correctly. The reading and writing part of the test has not changed, although the USCIS announced that other changes to the test

will be coming. If applicants have sent their naturalization application prior to October 20, 2025, they will take the “old” test of 100 questions. If they send the application on or after October 20, 2025, they will take the new 128 question test. Most students in PAE’s citizenship class have elected to try and send their applications before the test changes to 128 questions.

Recently, there have been many reasons for celebration in the class. One student passed in March 2025 and this fall four others have achieved the same goal of gaining citizenship. One student (M) has been attending the Citizenship Class since it was online in 2021 during the pandemic. She is in her late seventies and grew up in South America. A few years ago, she

was not successful in 2 interviews and thus had to start the entire process again by submitting another application and going through the waiting process for another appointment.

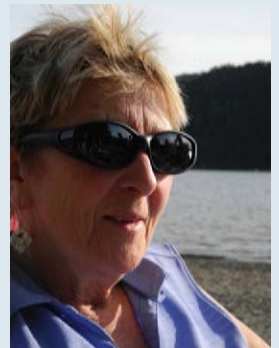
This week former citizenship teacher, Mary Bloom, M’s former ESOL teacher, two of the volunteer classroom aides, and I attended her ceremony at the USCIS facility in South Portland. M is a wonderful example of determination and grit. She never gave up on her dream and she never stopped working at it. Everyone in the class was so thrilled at her success.

Congratulations to all the students who achieved this important milestone!



Unexpected Support to FPAE

By Rob Wood



During this summer, we received one of the largest donations FPAE has ever received. It came from Val Healey, a treasured PAE volunteer for years. Val passed away in the late spring but remembered us in her will.

Her partner, Lois Winter, wrote,

“Val was a special education and elementary education teacher throughout her professional career. When she retired, she volunteered for a number of years at PAE and was deeply appreciative of the mission, the dedicated students, and the passionate instructors and administrators that make PAE

thrive. I know that Val was honored to trust that a portion of her legacy would live on with your important work.”

As we all know, Portland Adult Education inspires learning for all of us.



Youthful Students at PAE

By Alison Perkins

A growing group of young adults at PAE is adding their youthful vibe to the building. These students all began in Portland public high schools, but aged out prior to graduating. It is Maine law that a student can't turn 21 during the school year. We warmly welcomed 42 students of this group in September, our largest cohort ever.

In addition to these students, we have many students of this group who are in year 2 or 3 with us. These more experienced students are living young adult lives, juggling work, school, and family obligations. They have proven to be fabulous mentors.

All PAE staff have worked closely with Alison Perkins over the past 5 years to create a warm welcome and put in extra support for their transition. Though adults, they are still young. Support begins with

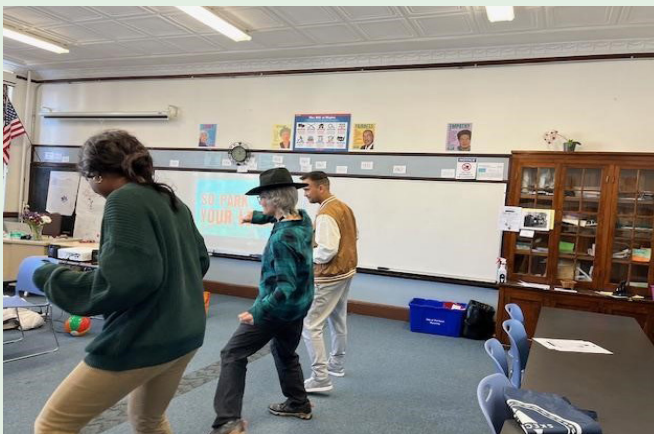
introducing them to the multiple opportunities available to them at PAE. This happens through multiple visits to the high schools, coordinated with Guidance and Street Academy.

In the spring, these seniors complete CASAS reading tests and placement into PAE levels. Additional young adult (YA) supports include an orientation before school starts and an assisted registration process. Anja and the Front Office team have been gently steering them to independently navigate our many systems. It takes a minute for them to adjust. PAE teachers throughout the school have been especially patient in keeping them motivated throughout their language acquisition process, and helping them integrate into the new adult world they have entered.

New this year, PAE significantly

enhanced student support. Melissa McStay, our PAE Social Worker, has added her social emotional touch through establishment of a weekly Youth Group meeting. The focus is on stress management techniques, games, and connecting. It is also a time when Alison does academic advising and support and connects students to PAE resources. She is also happy to challenge any of the YA's to a serious ping-pong match.

Friends of PAE has supported this effort by providing snacks for the Young Adult Group and the End of High school/Beginning of PAE celebrations. Our youngest students have both the critical mass and support to be thriving at PAE. We are so grateful for the team effort!



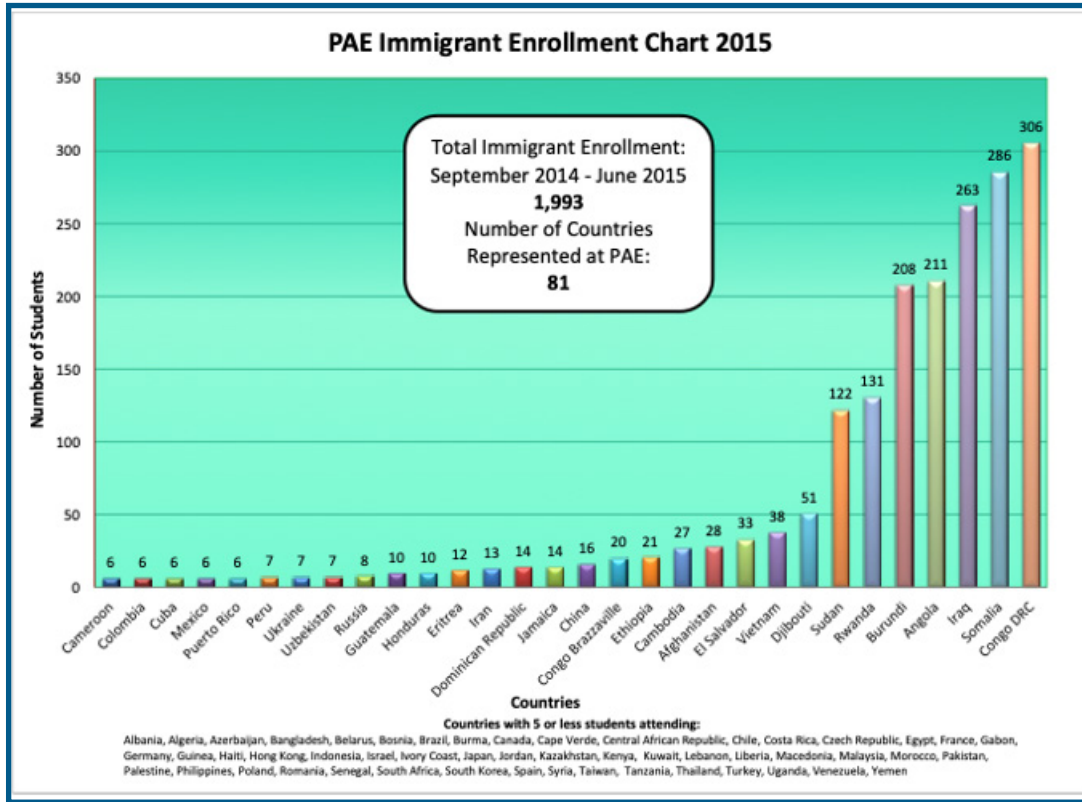
Alison teaching Texas Two Step



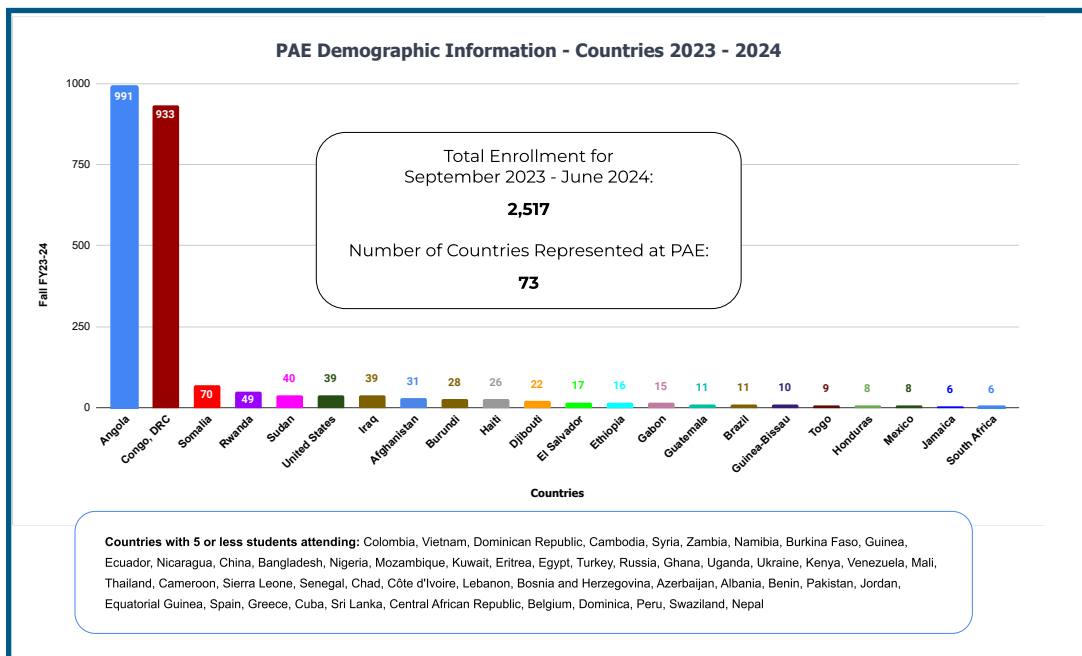
Ping Pong at Young Adult Group

Immigrant Enrollment at PAE

School Year 2014 - 2015



School Year 2023 - 2024



Expanded Testing Supports Growth

In recent years PAE has strengthened and expanded academic assessments to support academic, workforce, and career guidance programs. Under the direction of Abdi Abokor, testing has become a full-time component of our academic program.

During the past year, the assessment staff have conducted 2950 pre- and post- CASAS (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems) reading tests. These are essential to diagnose and assess English reading abilities.

The results help to determine course recommendations and often suggest more specialized curricula.

Last year Abdi contributed to a tripling of HISET (GED) graduates when compared to three years ago. This high school credential is often very useful to gain postsecondary acceptance or to document English competency. The assessment staff has encouraged many prospective students to document their advanced competencies and consider more

immediate college enrollment.

Finally, expanded assessments have supported workforce courses such as Certified Nursing Assistant certificates and Healthcare Office. Executive Director, Abbie Yamamoto, has begun to discuss with area Human Resource departments the use of these academic assessments on a fee basis. The results could encourage better hiring and support services for new employees.

FPAE Addresses PAE Student Needs

At its September Board Meeting, FPAE authorized the PAE Social Worker, Melissa McStay, to expend up to \$1,000 a month to address immediate PAE student needs. This action recognizes that there are many unforeseen barriers that prevent students from

attending classes. They need to be addressed immediately without formal applications or deliberations. These needs can include transportation costs, (single bus passes), emergency medical bills, book or application fees. The board decided not to authorize rent, utility or legal

fees. The Social Worker will seek other financial support possible before accessing the FPAE funds. It is hoped that this resource will prevent students from interrupting their learning program.

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PAE Alumnus Achievement: Three Diplomas in Five Years

By Anja Hanson

Narciso Miguel arrived at Portland Adult Education in 2019 with a degree from the International University of Management in Namibia. For most of us, achieving that level of education is enough, but Narciso understood that schools offer students networks of possibilities. As a newcomer to Maine, he sought out those networks and revealed his flexibility in navigating new systems.

To maximize his time at PAE, Narciso took courses in accounting and Microsoft Office while he was meeting diploma requirements. He also volunteered in the Learning Lab, demonstrating his skill in managing people, time, and ideas. When COVID-19 shutdown stressed PAE's systems, it revealed Narciso's strengths. He was incredibly adept with remote learning, and pressed ahead with his educational plans.

Immediately upon earning a high school diploma at PAE in 2020, he completed an online course with Central Maine Community College and worked in the bookstore at Southern Maine Community College. As that job was ending, we offered him a role at PAE, but his schedule at SMCC was not compatible with the position. He chose his priorities wisely. He landed on the Fall 2020 Dean's List, and in two years he graduated from SMCC. In June 2025 he earned a Bachelor's Degree in Management from University of Southern Maine. An alumnus of three Maine schools, he now has extensive local networks to add to his international connections.

Narciso's broad networks enable him to help other newcomers. Like so many PAE students during the pandemic, he worked the night shift, manufacturing test kits at Abbott Laboratories. Abbott swiftly recognized his talents and he soon began supervising others and coaching them to grow. He continues at Abbott and has just risen to the role of Senior Training Coordinator.

During five of the most challenging years to be an immigrant and an adult student, Narciso completed two degrees and garnered multiple promotions at Abbott. Narciso reveals what is possible when we support education so that adults can build networks of opportunity for all of us.



Narciso Miguel, PAE Graduate,
SMCC, and USM



Donations are always welcome

Your gift empowers adult learners to achieve their educational, professional, and personal goals. To donate, you can:

- **Mail a check** to FPAAE, P.O. Box 3185, Portland, ME 04104
- **Donate online** through PayPal at [friendsofpae.org](https://www.friendsofpae.org)
- **Donate a gift of stock.** Contact Rob Wood at friendsofpae@gmail.com

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