



***POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS OF YOUNG ADULTS:
SYSTEM IMPACT OPPORTUNITIES IN ADULT EDUCATION
Findings and Recommendations***

30 September 2010

Submitted by

NATIONAL COLLEGE TRANSITION NETWORK

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This publication, *Postsecondary Success for Young Adults: System Impact Opportunities in Adult Education, Findings and Recommendations*, is available on the National College Transition Network (NCTN) website at www.collegetransition.org. The *State Profiles, Spotlights from the Field* and the *Executive Summary* are also available on the NCTN website.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for its generous financial support for the investigation and this paper. We are especially grateful to Steve Patrick of the Gates Foundation for his insightful guidance and support. We also owe a special debt of thanks to Adult Education Directors for their time and advice. This paper could not have been written without the thoughtful input they provided. We greatly appreciate all their hard work.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper describes and analyzes adult education college and career readiness efforts in over a third of the states in the U.S.¹, providing recommendations for state policies and practices that can significantly impact the number of young (and older) adults who successfully transition from adult education² to postsecondary education and complete a credential with labor market value. Funding for this investigation was provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as part of their Postsecondary Success initiative aimed at doubling the number of low-income adults who earn a college degree or credential with genuine marketplace value by age 26.

THE PROBLEM

Adults, both young and old, who come through adult education to postsecondary education are among the most under-represented students in college. Without a postsecondary education and credential, most of them will not be able to compete for jobs with a family-sustaining wage. These students are often not ready for college, however. In fact, most young adults enter adult education with below high school level literacy skills. This holds true for all adult education students regardless of age.

THE SOLUTION

We came away from this study with the sense that states have made significant progress in rethinking the educational endpoint of a GED or adult diploma for students. In the states that we interviewed, adult education is working in new and expanded partnerships that take the field from an isolated educational component to an onramp that makes a postsecondary credential a reality for students. State adult education leaders have learned from an experimental stage of pilots and short-term efforts and are well positioned to scale and test specific college and career readiness models and strategies that show promise. ***Adult education is ready for system-level change.***

This paper describes the policies and practices that 17 states are putting in place to move the college and career readiness agenda forward. It begins with a brief discussion of young adults in adult education as well as others who would benefit from extending these policies and practices. It then moves on to a description of the investigation and its findings and ends with specific recommendations for this emerging field. *State Profiles* and *Spotlights from the Field* mentioned in this paper are available on the NCTN website (www.collegetransition.org).

¹ Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Washington, and the six New England States: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

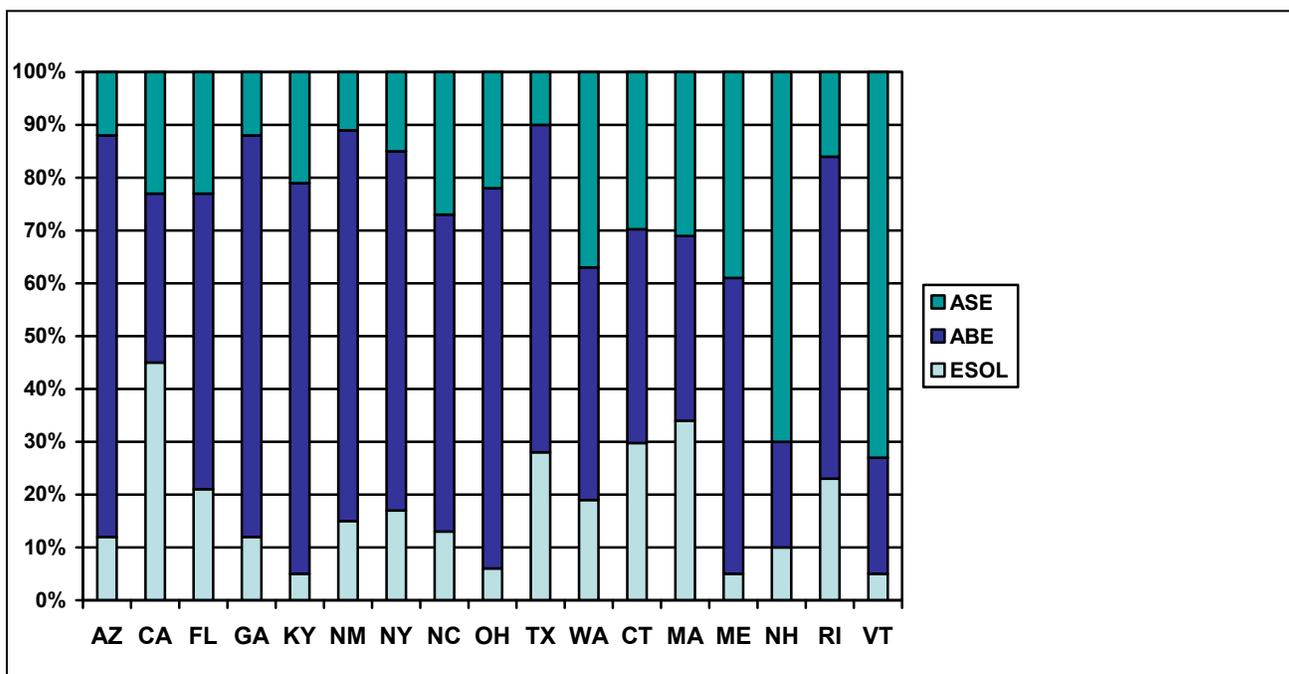
² This investigation uses the term adult education to refer to pre-college level education that ranges from Adult Basic Education (ABE) through Adult Secondary Education (ASE) and General Educational Development (GED) preparation, and English for Speakers for Other Languages (ESOL).

YOUTH IN ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education is considered the primary re-entry option for young adults without a high school diploma or GED. Of the 2,400,122 students served in federally-funded adult education programs in 2008-2009, over 36% or 871,573, were between the ages of 16 and 24 years (National Reporting System, 2009). According to the most recent data available on the National Reporting System (NRS)³, the accountability system for adult education programs, almost two and a half million people were served in adult education programs in 2008-2009. Overall program enrollment figures show that 44% were enrolled in English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), 42% in Adult Basic Education (ABE), and 14% in Adult Secondary Education (ASE). For participants, age 16-24 years, program enrollment figures showed fewer students enrolled in ESOL programs and more students in ABE and ASE programs: 23% in ESOL, 54% in ABE, and 23% in ASE.

Rather than needing just an “academic boost” or brush up before moving on to college or career, many of these young people need basic skills instruction because the majority have below high school literacy levels. Many, if not most adults at the ASE/GED level also need college and career readiness services in order to be successful in postsecondary education. Adult education is a primary vehicle for helping these young people catch up and move on (see Figure 1 Percentage of Youth, Age 16-24, By Program Type)

Figure 1 Percentage of Youth, Age 16-24, By Program Type in Study States



³ Footnote defining the National Reporting System.

Along with the adult education students that express the goal of entering postsecondary education, many other adult education students could benefit from a stronger and seamless connection between adult and postsecondary educations, including a number of important subgroups. In 2008 alone, that would have included:

- 49,613 adult education students who set the goal of entry into postsecondary education but did not reach that goal;
- 7,005 adult education students who did not set the goal of entry into postsecondary education but went on to postsecondary education without additional preparation or support; and
- 121,334 adult education students who set the goal of a GED or adult diploma but did not reach that goal during the year.

That would give a total of approximately 227,000 students within the adult education system who could benefit from college and career readiness policies and practices in just one year.

WHO ELSE COULD BENEFIT?

Those Currently Out of School

The population of all of those who could benefit from a closer alignment between adult and postsecondary education also includes individuals that are part of the adult education target population. This group is currently identified through information available via the 2000 Census and is comprised of those individuals without a high school diploma or GED. For young adults, age 16-24 years, this figure is almost 5 million people. Of that group, over 3,700,000 have completed between 9 and 12 years of school and would seem most ready to prepare for postsecondary education (see Table 2 Adult Education Target Population, by Years of Schooling and Age). A recent study of Washington State census data suggests that younger students from low income households are increasingly delaying coming to college, but later show up as older adults with low skills (Washington State Board for Community and Technical College (2006).

Table 2 Adult Education Target Population, by Years of Schooling and Age

Level of Educational Attainment	Number in Target Population	
	All Ages	Ages 16-24
Total	40,834,367	4,861,110
0-4 Years Completed	4,618,936	359,473
5-8 Years Completed	10,687,863	800,650
9-12 Years Completed	25,527,568	3,700,987
9 Years	5,265,010	743,186
10 Years	6,397,706	942,773
11 Years	6,186,503	1,027,733
12 Years, No Diploma	7,678,349	987,295

Adapted from *Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population: Information from the 2000 Census*, RTI International, Revised December 2005, p. 1-16.

GED Test-takers

Another group that could benefit from adult education college and career readiness services and supports include those individuals who did not seek help to prepare for the GED. Using a sample of 90,032 test-takers from 2004, the GED Testing Service found that 29% (26,109) prepared for the GED by studying on their own and 14% (12,064) did not prepare at all (McLaughlin, Skaggs, and Patterson, 2009). The GED Testing Service is currently designing a new version of the GED, the GED 2020, which aims to ensure that adult learners are career and college ready through: (1) academic alignment with the national Common Core State Standards (See www.corestandards.org) and (2) GED college and career readiness certification. GED candidates will, in all likelihood, need to reconnect to an educational program in order to be successful.

Lower Skilled Developmental Education Students

Lastly, collaboration and alignment between adult and postsecondary education would produce a stronger educational continuum by giving students more choices when they place into lower levels of developmental education. A referral network, made stronger through clarity on what is the skill level cut off for developmental versus adult education, would provide a choice for lower skilled students to develop basic academic skills in adult education without financial aid or loans.

ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION

Postsecondary Success for Young Adults is part of a larger *Postsecondary Success* initiative supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. As such, eight states were chosen based on their earlier participation in this broader initiative: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Washington. In most of these states, adult education is governed by postsecondary education. Also included are the six New England states which the NCTN has been guiding and studying for several years with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Two states (Kentucky and New Mexico) were chosen at the NCTN's discretion based on their postsecondary governance system and the experience with college and career readiness services within adult education.

Data were collected via phone interviews with the 17 adult education state directors. The in-depth interviews included an additional phone survey with the state director's postsecondary counterpart and 1-2 program directors recommended by the state director. The data analysis synthesized state-level interview data and supporting documentation to provide a clearer picture of the breadth and depth of state policies and practices for college and career readiness.

FINDINGS: *Adult Education Is Ready for Change*

The goal of the analysis of the state policies was to identify those policies and practices that hold the most promise for advancing adult education students to postsecondary credentials. As well, we looked for promising policies and practices related to serving young adults within the adult education system. The findings fell into the following overall categories:

- Planning and Partnerships
- Models of College and Career Readiness
- Assessment and Advising
- Comprehensive Supports
- Acceleration Strategies
- Funding Mechanisms
- Youth-specific Issues and Models

PLANNING AND PARTNERSHIPS

This section covers the policies, strategies, and practices that set state-level adult education-to-postsecondary efforts in motion. It follows a general pattern found in our state interviews: setting the goal of college and career readiness for the adult education system, convening state-level workgroups, developing state strategic plans, and beginning to address the issues of alignment and data tracking between systems.

Setting the Goal

Each state negotiates separate student outcome targets with the U.S. Department of Education, including the number of students who will meet attainment goals like postsecondary enrollment. These targets have been somewhat modest in past years, however, making the college and career readiness and enrollment in postsecondary education a system goal for adult education is gaining ground. All interviewees embraced this goal and aim to expand on it within their states. Some expressed concerns about stretching limited adult education resources to include this new goal but felt it was an important commitment on behalf of the students they serve. Ten of the states have made transitioning adult learners to college-level courses and certificate programs a stated priority. The other states supported the goal but do not yet have a formal policy.

In some cases, this new goal has meant reconfiguring the adult education system. In Georgia, the Department of Technical and Adult Education was renamed the Technical College System of Georgia, creating a partnership that joined adult education with Career/Technical Education and the Quick Start Workforce Training Program. In Ohio, Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) was transferred from the Department of Education to the Ohio Board of Regents.

State-level Workgroup(s)

The process of setting a new system goal was typically spearheaded by a high level workgroup convened by college or government leaders (e.g., the governor). Of the 17 states, 9 had convened joint planning groups that included adult education, though not always in a primary

role. Adult education is increasingly seen as an important sector to include in state-level workgroups on critical economic, educational, and workforce development issues. In the past, adult education typically was not included in cross-system efforts.

State Adult Education Directors increasingly provide proactive leadership on this issue by convening workgroups, institutes, and conferences, and improving data tracking of their students. In 2010, New Mexico's State Director of Adult Education secured technical support from the National Governor's Association (NGA) to convene a Governor's Forum as part of NGA's Postsecondary Credential Attainment by Adult Workers initiative. Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont have state-level planning groups to oversee the development and implementation of statewide adult college transition initiatives.

State Strategic Plans

In many states, transition and career pathway programs have become part of the state's strategic plan to improve economic competitiveness. Successful transition and career pathways are now part of multi-year state strategic plans in California, Georgia, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington State. In 2007, the Texas Legislature called for the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board "to develop and implement immediate and long-range coordinated action plans to align adult basic education and postsecondary education." Also in 2007, Kentucky's Council on Postsecondary Education, which includes adult education, released *Double the Numbers: Kentucky's Plan to Increase College Graduates*. In Georgia, the Commissioner of the Technical College System included transition to technical programs as a performance measure in the system's annual report card.

Federal, state, and foundation initiatives are important factors in bringing adult education to the table. Please refer to the section on Funding Mechanisms for a discussion of these initiatives.

Challenges and Opportunities

Without changes at the state level, many promising reform efforts will not be institutionalized and sustained over time. From our interviews, we found that local transition efforts can be significant but state policy changes or actions are needed to remove barriers or encourage wider use of promising practices and program models. Currently, many transition programs rely on a variety of local funding sources and the good will of local stakeholders. While individual community colleges may encourage and support programs, high degrees of institutional autonomy among community colleges make system-wide change difficult.

State-level goals, workgroups, and strategic plans are pivotal for the full inclusion of adult education in system reform efforts. State adult education agencies and professional groups often play a leadership role by convening transition workgroups, forums, and conferences to jump-start planning and program development. When state education report cards that publicize goals and encourage accountability include adult education, as in Kentucky, they show how adult education contributes to reaching state goals.

Data Tracking Within and Across Systems

Few states can track the transition of adult education students into postsecondary education. Most states are only beginning to grapple with this issue. Yet, some of the biggest payoffs will be gained by looking at system-wide data and student outcomes. The ability to track robust longitudinal data is seen as essential to adequately understand how to best support students from pre-college preparation to and through postsecondary credential programs that have labor market value. Without longitudinal data, adult education leaders recognize that they will not be able to make a compelling case for increased funding for specific program models and interventions.

Of the 17 states, 4 states track students across systems: Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Washington. Four additional states are specifically working on connecting adult and postsecondary data systems: Kentucky, Maine, Ohio, and North Carolina. Many of the transition pilots discussed in the state profiles are collecting data on program and participant outcomes.

In Washington State, rigorous system-wide data analysis has identified “achievement points” that, once accomplished, substantially improve students’ chances of completing degrees and certificates. There are four categories of achievement measures:

- Building towards college-level skills (basic skills gains, passing pre-college writing or math);
- First year retention (earning 15 then 30 college level credits);
- Completing college-level math (passing math courses required for either technical or academic associate degrees); and
- Completions (degrees, certificates, apprenticeship training).

(State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, n.d.)

Challenges and Opportunities

Developing a strong data system is complicated by several factors, including (but not limited to): privacy issues around student unit records; constraints of technology and administrative database platforms; ongoing expense of inputting and mining data to produce usable information; difficulty meeting the data collection needs of two (adult-postsecondary education), three (adult-postsecondary-workforce), or four systems (adult-postsecondary-workforce-social services); the level of detail needed to truly understand student progress (e.g., integrating placement test results, level of enrollment, course-taking patterns, etc); and lack of alignment among systems.

On the adult education side of the equation, the National Reporting System (NRS) currently disincentivizes programs from encouraging all but the most college-ready students to articulate college and career goals. This is because all student goals entered into the NRS must be achieved during the fiscal year to be considered as countable outcomes, regardless of when the goal was set or the student’s level of readiness. As many states are beginning to adopt performance-based funding in allocating federal and state adult education dollars, this may have unintended consequences. Students may be encouraged to set less ambitious goals that can be met in short periods of time or programs may reduce outreach to learners with more

challenges to their progress. Where entries into postsecondary education are achieved, neither state nor federal data capture key transition-related information, including who participates in college and career readiness services and what services are used, making it difficult to determine the effectiveness of targeted transition programming.

Developing a system that adequately addresses the data needs of so many stakeholders is clearly a considerable challenge; yet four states, could provide models of how this can be done.

MODELS OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS AND TRANSITION

A variety of transition models and frameworks are emerging in adult education. Most are designed to respond to conditions in a particular state. This section describes the ways in which these models and frameworks are being used to move the transition agenda forward.

State Supported Models

Of the 17 states, 7 are using or investigating a specific model or framework: Florida, Georgia, Ohio, Washington State, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Another 6 states are testing multiple models or are intentionally setting up a flexible framework that outlines components but allows for local creativity and partnerships to define the specifics: Georgia, Ohio, Texas, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Texas. Some models are developed through coupling systems. For example, in Florida, adult education provides the assessment for the state's work readiness credential through their *Ready for Work Credential* program. Adult education students can move into career pathways programs accessed through the state's One-Stop Career Centers.

Career pathways have the potential to help learners move out of low-paying employment by earning a credential in one of the state's better paying occupations. Our state interviews suggest there is high interest in career pathways models, such as Ohio's Stackable Certificates and Washington State's I-BEST model. Four states expressed interest in instituting I-BEST-type models (Arizona, Kentucky, New Mexico, and New York), an instructional model that places adult educators in the classroom with college-level technical instructors. The I-BEST model has longitudinal data that clearly demonstrates its effectiveness. To be practical, however, states – particularly states with rural populations -- are investigating a number of models.

Some states initiated transition model development in a bottom-up approach by issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to formalize and test local models. In New York, communities or neighborhoods are the defining feature of a Literacy Zone. Each Literacy Zone is geographically defined, must document poverty, literacy, and English language proficiency needs, must establish one or more Family Welcome Center to provide access to coordinated services, and must establish a guiding coalition of stakeholders.

Other states, such as Washington State, are using a top-down process that has identified elements of an effective local model that mandate through an Request For Proposals process. New Hampshire has struck a middle ground by having programs propose components selected from a comprehensive menu of services. The New England states have largely modeled their

programs on features of the New England ABE-to-College Project, which served as a testing ground for the region. Variation in New England, as elsewhere, is due to availability of resources, specifics of each adult education delivery system, and population needs.

Challenges and Opportunities

Evaluation of a model requires complex measurements and the lack of longitudinal data makes it difficult for state leadership to make recommendations. In addition, many models require additional resources and sustaining funding beyond the pilot period is difficult, particularly in times of economic downturn. Confounding model development is the fact that current adult education credentials (GED, Adult Diploma) are not aligned with entry into postsecondary education and career programs.

Three main challenges with I-BEST and career pathway models were identified in the interviews. Students may need career development and exploration assistance before committing to a field of study. For small adult education programs, it may be difficult to find adequate numbers of students to fill out a class for a specific technical career. Lastly, funding instructional time is complex and costly since students are participating in a postsecondary-level program and WIA Title II funding is designated for instruction below the postsecondary level.

These challenges are not insurmountable, however. Washington State is piloting Developmental Education, Liberal Arts, and Youth-focused I-BEST, along with their career and technical I-BEST programs. These additional programs give students more choices or time to consider a specific career pathway. Instructor time is paid with more flexible state funds and a lower funding formula is being examined as a way to make the program more affordable during hard economic times. In some classes, I-BEST students are combined with other students registered for the career pathways program. The model has shown that it can be scaled, at least in Washington State, with one or more I-BEST program in each of the state's 34 community and technical colleges.

ASSESSMENT AND ADVISING

Formal assessment and advising for college readiness is usually limited to academic assessment. In all 17 state interviews, however, adult learners were seen as needing advising and counseling to make sound decisions about their future in postsecondary education.

Advising and Counseling for Adult Education Students Transitioning to Postsecondary Education

Six of the states have policies or institutionalized practices that fund advising and counseling for adult education students transitioning into postsecondary education. Another seven states encourage advising and counseling but do not mandate it. Most collaborations are currently negotiated at the local level with college staff from admissions, financial aid, student services, career, and testing center departments providing aspects of educational advising and counseling to adult education students in programs located both on campus and in the community.

In Maine, 22 adult education programs participate in the Maine College Transitions Project. Advising is seen as a component of the programs, many of which rely on the Maine Educational Opportunity Center (a TRIO program) at the partnering college for college navigation workshops and advising. In several states, transition specialists and program coordinators serve as advisors for individuals interested in specific programs.

Through the *Shifting Gears* initiative, Ohio focuses on collaboration among adult education, workforce education, and community college services to set standards and provide comprehensive assessment, career exploration, and advising services for participants in all three systems. One of their goals is to create common assessments or crosswalks between assessments.

Challenges and Opportunities

Funds for advisors and counselors are very limited in adult education. Most counseling hours in adult education are used for personal counseling. Advisors and counselors may know very little about the details and challenges of postsecondary education. One solution is to use community college services but college advisors and counselors often have case loads of 1,000 students or more. Moreover, college advisors and counselors may be unfamiliar with the community social services adults may need.

Research by MDRC and others recommend that advising and counseling services be part of all program models considered for adult education students (e.g., mandatory counseling and case management improved retention for young, low-income, and academically unprepared students; MDRC, 2009). Currently, foundation dollars are being used to research and develop strategies for advising and counseling (e.g., *Breaking Through, Transition to College and Careers*). Once robust strategies are identified, ongoing support needs to be found through additional funds, repurposing of funds, or careful braiding of resources across organizations to provide services and adequate professional development to train staff on the models.

Career Awareness and Planning for Adult Education Students

Only four states currently have policies or institutionalized practices that provide career awareness and planning for adult education students: Florida, Ohio, Vermont (youth programs but plans are made for extending services to all students), and Washington. Nine other states support these efforts but do not have specific policies in place. States with career pathways, I-BEST programs, or special initiatives, like Ohio's transition framework, stackable certificates, Ohio Skills Bank, and ABLE Innovation Grant, often include career planning and counseling.

Most career planning and advising services for adult education students come through resources available from the One-Stop Career Centers or college career service offices. Programs commonly use online formats where students work through a variety of assessments to better understand their skills and preferences in specific career clusters. For example, in Florida, adult education students have access to the Choices™ career planning system with adult education staff receiving training to be proficient in using the system. In New Mexico,

adult education students have access to the ACT's Discover™ career planning system. In North Carolina, students can use the state's JobsNow assessments and services.

Challenges and Opportunities

Career One-Stops are often seen as the place for adults to get career counseling but these centers are often focused on helping individuals find employment. For students whose interests lie outside of high demand occupations or students who do not fit the eligibility criteria for training vouchers may find it difficult to get career advice or locate additional resources to underwrite their education.

Intensive career planning and counseling is an added expense for adult education programs that provide it as a service to their students rather than referring students to other locations. It requires additional staff training and staff time to deliver effectively. The *Transition to College and Careers* project, piloted in six adult education centers in New England, delivers career planning through a curriculum that integrates activities and adult education instruction, and includes one-on-one advising and career counseling.

COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORTS

Adults are seen as needing different supports than those needed by traditional students because they face additional responsibilities balancing school, work, family, and financial obligations. Comprehensive student support services help students deal with nonacademic issues, such as childcare, housing, health care, work, and transportation. While most states identified these services as critical, adequate funding is typically not available.

Equal Access to College Supports for Adult Education Students

As a matter of equity, adult education students need equal access to the services available on their college campus. This includes access to academic advising, library and tutoring services, career counseling, health and wellness services, and the other counseling and supports available to traditional college students. Of the 17 states, 2 states (New Mexico and Washington) reported that adult education students have equal access to services, including receiving a college identification card. Interviews from the remaining states showed that this level of services was available on specific college campuses but not statewide (see *Spotlight on the Field: Project LEARN's Transition Counseling* on the following page). At the local level, enterprising programs have found ways to secure some support services for their students from private and public funders, including WIA Title I for young adults.

Challenges and Opportunities

Providing equal access to college supports for adult education students may require offering services and supports beyond the traditional academic day and at locations that are off the main college campus. When available, students need to be informed of the services and encouraged to use them. This may include working to change attitudes about accepting help by identifying the use of academic and nonacademic services as ways that “students in the know” strengthen their likelihood of success. Community colleges have a wide array of student

supports. Offering these services to their adult education students is a concrete way to say “welcome” and “you belong.”

SPOTLIGHT ON THE FIELD
Project LEARN’s Transition Counseling

Project LEARN of Summit County, Ohio, is the sole adult education provider for the county and serves 2,000 students per year at 26 sites in greater Akron. In 2009, it became the only adult basic education program funded by the Ohio Board of Regents.

Transition options are introduced to all students during orientation when students are asked to consider their goals beyond ABLE. Project LEARN admissions counselors are charged with promoting postsecondary education options with all students and work with classroom instructors to continually monitor and encourage realistic student goals. In addition, all students are invited to attend career and college transition related workshops, guest speakers, and college-for-a-day events, regardless of the skill level or stated interest.

In addition to the activities offered to all students, Project LEARN serves over 250 students per year with four targeted transition programs to help students further their education and training. To enroll in transition specific courses students must place at an NRS level 5 or 6 on the TABE test. All four programs include both academic skills and student support service components, the latter of which are typically provided by a partnering organization. The four programs are:

- GED Plus program for enrolled GED students who are close to completion and interested in postsecondary education;
- Achieving College Success, a bridge program for students who already have their high school diploma or GED or have started at the University of Akron and have not succeeded;
- Supplemental academic support for students enrolled in vocational training programs at the Portage Lakes Adult Career Center; and
- Gen Y, a program targeting students under age 24 who are preparing for the GED in order to enter postsecondary education.

The specialized Gen Y approach includes greater integration of technology, additional field trips, and instructional techniques, such as graphical novels for reading and blogging for writing assignments. Students are encouraged to supplement classroom-based instruction with distance learning geared toward GED preparation.

Wraparound Supports

The term, wraparound supports, comes from a human service practice model that aims to create a set of comprehensive, personalized supports and services around the needs of the individual. For adult learners, these supports and services might be available directly in the educational setting or through collaboration with other providers. For example, childcare may be available on the community college campus with a slot that is reserved for a student's child. Or, a student may be supported to locate and apply for a slot in a community-based childcare program. Along with specific types of supports and services is the notion that a knowledgeable counselor/case manager helps the student identify gaps or problems that could derail progress and then supports the student in finding solutions.

Of the 17 states, 3 have policies or institutional practices for helping students access wraparound services: Maine, Ohio, and Washington. In Washington State's I-BEST model, student service personnel must be part of the career program team, beginning with the application process, and are responsible for helping students identify and mitigate barriers. In North Carolina's *Pathways to Employment* program at Central Piedmont Community College, the college partners with the County Department of Social Services to provide a full-time social worker. Vermont's High School Completion Program for youth has implemented a "high-touch" case management approach that many see as a critical component.

New York's Literacy Zones is an emerging model for mobilizing resources in high poverty communities or neighborhoods with a concentration of individuals with limited English language proficiency. Each zone offers comprehensive services for all low-income members (infants to seniors) with masters level case managers in One-Stop Career Centers. Education is given importance and is seen as key to residents' long-term economic success. Transition to college and/or advanced training is part of the vision for all community members.

Challenges and Opportunities

There are three main barriers to providing wraparound services. The first is difficulty locating the additional funds needed to keep counselors' caseloads low enough to allow adequate time with each student. The second is adequate training models so that counselors learn about college as well as community-based services, can help students identify gaps, and can effectively refer students to appropriate services when needed. The third is an effective outreach strategy so that students feel comfortable accessing services and supports.

Student-level Financial Incentives

Several states have programs that provide small stipends or vouchers when students reach certain milestones to motivate students and help relieve some of the costs of staying in school. Of the 17 states, 5 identified financial incentives as a state policy or practice. For example, Georgia's *Hope GED Grant* provides a one-time \$500 voucher to residents who completed the GED after 1993. The voucher can be used toward educational expenses at eligible postsecondary education institutions. There is no minimum number of credit hours so students can also use it when enrolled less than part-time. As part of a one-time pilot, New Mexico

provided a \$1,000 attendance-based stipend distributed in three parts for transportation, childcare, books, etc. Currently, the Texas Intensive Bridge program provides a \$400 stipend for traditional students. It is hoped that this will be extended to include the GED Intensive Bridge program. In Vermont, some tuition can be paid through the High School Completion Program and the Community College of Vermont offers a free course to Bridge to College students.

The Rhode Island Higher Education Assistance Authority established a new aid program in 2009 providing financial assistance for adult learners enrolled in college courses for less than five credit hours. These funds are available to students for up to four semesters and may be used toward classes, books, fees, childcare, transportation, or any other college-related expense.

Challenges and Opportunities

Finding the funds for student incentives is difficult in hard economic times. If states can demonstrate effectiveness, however, legislatures may be more likely to set aside funds. For example, MDRC (through its Opening Doors project) has developed a research agenda around performance-based scholarships for low-income college students. In one pilot study, students who remained enrolled at least half-time and maintained at least a 2.0 (C) average were paid \$250 upon enrollment, \$250 at midterms, and \$500 at the completion of the semester. Participants were more likely to enroll in college full-time, register semester-to-semester at higher rates, pass more courses, and earn more college credits than the students in the comparison group (see http://www.mdrc.org/project_31_91.html).

ACCELERATION STRATEGIES

Acceleration strategies typically include instructional practices and program design. Here we widen the definition to include alignment between systems.

Adult to Postsecondary Alignment

Because adult and postsecondary education are not well aligned, the system is inefficient and results in duplication of effort on the part of students and staff. Aligning adult education with postsecondary education is complex and multi-faceted, however. It includes aligning academic skills and knowledge, assessment instruments and procedures, data collection systems and reporting structures, and cross-system professional development. Of the 17 states, 3 (Florida, Kentucky, and Washington State) identified curricular alignment as an activity supported by state policy and another 9 states encourage and support efforts without a formal state-level policy. Four states are studying or planning to study alignment in the near future.

While most alignment efforts focus on determining what it means to be “college ready” through academic skills assessment, there is a “gray area” where levels of academic skills and preparation among adult and developmental students are about equal (Boylan, 2004). In systems where adult education operates under postsecondary education, alignment would seem to be less difficult to arrange. Generally speaking, however, policy formulation around aligning adult and postsecondary education is at its beginning stages in most states, including “community college states,” and progress falls along a broad continuum.

Georgia has set a statewide minimum college placement test score has been established for admission. The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) has standardized curricula for the developmental course sequences but individual colleges can determine which courses are offered on their campus. Other states may require placement tests, use the same placement test statewide, and/or designate a common cut score that identify college-level placement. Of the states we interviewed, these include Connecticut, Florida, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Texas. At the other end of the spectrum, California community colleges are autonomous and no uniform placement exam or score is anticipated. In Florida and Texas, the adult education system is waiting to see what alignment decisions are made between the Elementary and Secondary Education system and higher education systems.

Referrals between adult education and developmental/college education seems like an important process to standardize but no state requires that students be given referral information. Many people interviewed did know of local referral arrangements between college and adult education partners. In North Carolina, for example, some colleges have adopted the policy of referring students testing at the eighth grade level or below to adult education.

Challenges and Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges to alignment is that adult education is accountable under a set of federal requirements while community and technical colleges respond to state and local requirements. For example, the three placement tests most commonly used by community colleges to identify student academic skill deficiencies -- the COMPASS, ASSET, and ACCUPLACER -- allow individual institutions to establish locally calibrated cut scores to fit their institutional academic requirements. This individualization complicates comparisons between college placement test scores and learning gains measured by the tests required by the U.S. Department of Education for adult education.

A second challenge to aligning adult and postsecondary education is the general lack of familiarity and uniformity across systems on the purposes and processes of adult, developmental, and college-level education. This includes how and when each system might most effectively serve a student. One of the interesting features of the I-BEST model is that it simultaneously places the instructional resources of both adult and postsecondary education at the student's disposal.

Dual Enrollment

In our interviews, dual enrollment was used as a general term with the degree of postsecondary enrollment falling along a continuum. At one end is access to campus resources; students may be considered dually enrollment by receiving a student ID and access to the college library. At the other end, students may be enrolled in college-level career programs while continuing to receive adult education services, such as completing their GED or adult diploma.

Five states have policies that promote dual enrollment and another six states allow dual enrollment without a formal state-level policy specifically for adult education students. Three of the dual enrollment policies are part of formal program models; see Vermont's Bridge to

College (students have access to campus resources), Georgia's *JumpStart* transition initiative (students can enroll in a postsecondary technology program prior to finishing their GED), and Washington State's I-BEST program (students have both basic skills and career faculty planning and delivering a college-level career course). Both Ohio and New Mexico have a general policy that allows any student to be enrolled for up to 12 credit hours without a GED or high school diploma.

Challenges and Opportunities

Historically, one of the biggest challenges to dual enrollment has been the lack of a clear policy from the U.S. Department of Education. Recently, this was addressed in a memorandum from the Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education, dated June 8, 2010, acknowledging that there is no specific policy forbidding dual or co-enrollment for adult learners so long as federal adult education funds are used to support only the portion of instruction that is geared below the postsecondary level.

One caution regarding dual enrollment identified in two interviews is that students had trouble balancing the double workload and focused heavily on their college-level courses at the expense of completing their GED. The interviewees expressed concern that students could fail to get the high school credential ultimately needed to proceed with postsecondary education.

Lastly, dual enrollment often means applying for financial aid to cover the cost of college-credit courses. This starts the federal "financial aid clock" (the number of semesters students are eligible for financial aid once they begin college). Some worry that students in long, complex technical programs will not complete their schooling before they exhaust their federal financial aid. This challenge can be offset by offering a college-credit course through a waiver or scholarship arrangement that does not require using federal financial aid for the first one or two college-level courses.

In spite of the challenges, dual enrollment provides a valuable opportunity for students to become familiar with postsecondary expectations before leaving adult education. If successful, students can accelerate their time to a credential by earning college-credit while still in adult education.

GED Plus or Integrated Instruction

Some states integrate preparation for the GED or Adult Diploma with preparation for postsecondary education. Often referred to as "plus" models (e.g., GED Plus, ASE Plus, Diploma Plus), these programs accelerate learning for adult education students interested in pursuing postsecondary education. Key features include adding some academic preparation and student success skills to the adult secondary curriculum.

After several years of piloting transition models, Rhode Island is now piloting the *Adult Secondary Education for College and Careers* program for students performing at the high adult secondary education (ASE) level, as set in the Common Core State Standards. To accelerate the program further, distance learning is included. North Carolina's legislature approved the

creation of a Basic Skills Plus program in June 2010, funded by redirecting 20% of the existing state adult education allocation. Connecticut's college transition program model offers academic- and career-related counseling combined with other support services to adult education students who are nearing completion of an Adult High School Credit Diploma, External Diploma, or GED, in what might be called "GED Plus" or "Diploma Plus."

Challenges and Opportunities

The major challenge is that the GED and high school diploma (Adult Diploma, along with the traditional high school diploma) are not well aligned with entry into college-level work. GED instructors typically express concerns about adding more to the GED student's plate. Instructors may not have adequate experience teaching some topics, especially math and college success skills, and may have few opportunities for the professional development that would help them teach these topics to their students.

One of the most important systems change opportunities is the upcoming changes in the GED test. The GED Testing Service recognizes that changes in educational standards and the skills needed for employment require an updating of the current GED test. They are committed to increasing access to and attainment of postsecondary education credentials for adults not currently enrolled in the traditional education system. Their plan is to create a new test that aligns with the Common Core State Standards and certifies not only high school equivalency but college and career readiness (GED Testing Service, 2010).

Contextualized Instruction

Adult learners are considered to be more goal-driven than traditional students and prefer learning that is highly relevant to their goals. Adult education traditionally contextualizes instruction around the life skills adults need as workers and as family and community members. For college and career readiness, contextualized instruction refers to integrating basic reading, math, and language skill development with industry/occupation knowledge. It is considered an acceleration strategy because the content gives adult learners a head start in their career pathway. Low-income adults have financial pressures to complete their studies as efficiently as possible. Research suggests that students who see a clear connection between their career goals and instruction persist and complete degrees at higher rates.

Washington State's Integrating Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) is one example of contextualizing instruction around career goals. At the local level, LaGuardia Community College in New York developed contextualized GED preparation for three programs: GED Bridge to Business Careers, GED Bridge to Health Careers, and GED Bridge to Professional Careers Programs. Instruction focuses on using interdisciplinary texts and primary source materials. (See <http://www.lagcc.cuny.edu/Home/newscontent.aspx?id=10737418713>).

The New England Transition to College and Careers (TCC) demonstration project funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation provides academic college preparation and advising along with a contextualized, online Health Science course that prepares interested students to enter training for health care careers.

Challenges and Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges is finding the resources to contextualize the curriculum. This requires financial resources as well as knowledgeable adult and career education faculty. A second challenge is finding adequate numbers of students interested in the same career sector. This is often more difficult in rural areas with smaller student populations or for students that are interested in career pathways that are less common.

Washington's I-BEST provides one of the best examples of a model for professional development that brings adult and postsecondary career program instructors together for planning and simultaneous teaching. In addition, enhanced career planning – that includes internships and career mentors and uses technology for contextualized online instruction -- may be able to bring more contextualized resources to the student.

Modularization and Chunking

Modularization or chunking of the curriculum is an acceleration strategy because it recognizes progress in smaller units and is presumed to motivate students to persist in their studies. There are several ways that curriculum can be broken into smaller units. One form provides intensive mini-courses which allow the student to demonstrate a specific skill in a short period of time, such as a weekend. A related technique is “chunking” of existing programs and courses into small steps that have educational and/or labor market value at each step of the way.

In 2009, Ohio Board of Regents decided to create three stackable certificates at the pre-college level: entry level, intermediate, and advanced in career pathways such as health, welding, and advanced manufacturing. Ohio's ABLE Stackable Certificate approach focuses on removing barriers adults face to college success by connecting pre-college academics to career-technical coursework for those between a sixth grade and high school credential (Community Resource Partnership, 2008).

Challenges and Opportunities

Like many acceleration strategies, modularization and chunking take faculty leadership and expertise to develop curriculum and make program changes, institutional flexibility and support, and strong employer involvement. While this strategy holds as much promise for adult education as it does for postsecondary education, it is not yet being implemented in the adult education systems of the states we interviewed, with the exception of Ohio.

Preparing for the College Placement Test

For adult education students, developing familiarity with the college placement test is a very important acceleration strategy. Students can place into low levels of developmental education if they are unfamiliar with the test and/or taking tests on a computer.

We found that most program models include referral for college placement testing as students near completion of a GED or adult diploma. We also found several local programs that administer the college placement test to gauge academic readiness. North Carolina's Achieving

College or Career Entry (ACE) program aims to improve college placement test scores for students with scores below the eighth grade equivalent and Davidson County's Adult Diploma program requires that program recipients pass the college placement test before they are eligible to graduate. Programs in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project provide direct instruction on taking the college placement test and several programs administer the placement testing on behalf of the college.

Challenges and Opportunities

While instructors are concerned about condensing education to "teaching to the test," there is general acceptance that students need direct instruction about the importance of the college placement test and how to prepare for it. Clearly, one way for adult education students to assess their academic skills before they leave adult education is to take the college placement test. Then, students could work to fill gaps in their learning before they move on to college.

FUNDING MECHANISMS

In a comparison of programs (e.g., Youthbuild, Job Corps, etc), conducted by the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education (NCSDAE), using effectiveness data from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), WIA Title II-funded programs had the lowest cost per GED/High School diploma completers and placement into postsecondary education (typically tens of thousands of dollars less than other programs), as well as the highest rate of placement into postsecondary education (Ruiz-Wamble, 2007; see Appendix A: Program Comparisons).

Adult education has found innovative ways to pilot transition components for students. Most strategies highlighted here do not tap adult education's base funding but use discretionary funds, special initiatives, or private foundation grants to lay the foundation for college and career services and supports. To grow these preliminary efforts, however, ongoing funding mechanisms need to be developed. As the U.S. Congress moves ahead with the reauthorization of the *Workforce Investment Act*, policy changes or actions could remove barriers that limit the blending of funds between programs. In addition to policy changes, funding levels need to increase so adult education can provide new services and supports to the growing number of adults who need postsecondary skills and credentials.

The list that follows is a sample of the funding mechanisms identified in our interviews. The list is not exhaustive.

Federal Incentive and Leadership Funds

Many first excursions into developing and piloting college and career readiness components are underwritten by federal funds triggered by state performance or state leadership projects. North Carolina used its WIA Title II incentive funds to provide grants to 10 programs piloting college readiness strategies. In Florida, adult education received \$6 million of federal money due to an incorrect federal funding calculation in previous years. The state used this, along with incentive funds, to support a transition initiative that began in April, 2010. Connecticut uses its WIA Title II basic funds to support its GED/Diploma Plus program and leadership funds to provide professional development and coordination for the programs.

OVAE Initiatives

The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) in the U.S. Department of Education has funded several initiatives that increase the number of students who go on to postsecondary education and training. One of the few targeted specifically for youth is OVAE's *Ready for College* initiative (October 2007-September 2009). This initiative supported four projects focused on improving the quality of adult secondary education so that young adults enrolled in adult education could successfully transition into postsecondary education. Of the states we interviewed, North Carolina Community College System received \$733,865 to fund five Basic Skills programs. Each program implemented at least one strategy for college readiness, such as contextualized curriculum, enhanced counseling, etc. Results are still pending. (See <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/factsh/fs-ready-for-college-11-19-07.pdf>)

In the *Policy to Performance: Transitioning Adults to Opportunity* initiative (February 2010 – August 2012), \$1.8 million has been set aside to provide eight states with targeted technical assistance and customized coaching. The initiative helps adult education state directors to connect adult transition policies to larger policy initiatives in their states, and to implement dissemination strategies (see <http://www.policy2performance.org/>). Of the states we interviewed, the following are participating in this initiative: California, Massachusetts, New York, and Texas. Since the initiative is in progress, results are pending.

State-level and Performance-based Funding

There are several ways state funding can contribute to transition programming. States where adult education is part of postsecondary education may use a full-time equivalent (FTE) model that reimburses adult education using a formula established by the state legislature. For example, instructional costs for faculty in I-BEST programs are paid with state dollars. In addition, technical courses at the college-level are funded through tuition dollars that the student accesses through traditional federal/state financial aid programs.

The Maine legislature sets aside funds for adult transition programs as a separate budget line item. Rhode Island began with a state earmark to pilot college and career readiness services and now includes transition funds as part of general adult education state funding. Massachusetts Department of Education funds 12 community college-based adult education transition programs. The New Hampshire Department of Education uses an allocation for a statewide adult education transition initiative that is not legislated through a separate budget line item.

Local District Funding

As states that run their adult education services through school districts, Maine and Connecticut adult education benefit from local district matching formula legislated for all adult education services. Maine's enabling legislation allows local education agencies to use direct tax base and state subsidy to reimburse programs for college and career readiness services. In Vermont, enabling legislation for high school completion requires that the funding follow the

student from high school to adult education so that adult education programs can bill for customized services they provide to youth, age 16-21 years. In Texas, students can now be served using public education dollars until age 26 and local adult education programs can contract to provide these services for out-of-school youth.

Private Funding

Funds provided by private foundations and associations are some of the first dollars used to underwrite college and career readiness services for adult education students and to develop the state policies that follow successful pilots. Several of the states in our interviews have participated in these demonstration projects and policy development initiatives. For example, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (NMEF) funded the *New England ABE-to-College Transition Project*, a collaboration between 25 adult education programs and their college partners in the six New England states. Adult education programs were funded to provide a one- to two-semester-long transition component for GED completers and adults who had been out of high school for three or more years. To sustain the state level policy and capacity-building work initiated during the eight-year demonstration project, NMEF issued \$40,000 action planning grants to four states in 2008-2009.

The Joyce Foundation launched the *Shifting Gears* initiative in 2006 to help six Midwestern states address the mismatch between the current skills of workers and the skills needed for emerging occupations. The six industrial states are: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. In Ohio, portions of the effort focus on creating statewide standards for assessment, advising, and career exploration for adult education as well as workforce training and community college services.

In several instances, foundations have joined together to work on initiatives. Community colleges in California, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, and Washington State are participating in the *Breaking Through* initiative⁴. This is a multi-year and multi-faceted demonstration project to promote and strengthen the efforts of innovative community colleges across the country to help low-literacy adults prepare for and succeed in occupational and technical degree programs. *Breaking Through* is funded by the C. S. Mott Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), and the Ford Foundation. Jobs for the Future (JFF) serves as the intermediary, and together with the National Council on Workforce Education, provides capacity-building and evaluation services for this initiative.

Challenges and Opportunities

Adult education faces two challenges related to funding. The first is acquiring the funds to design, pilot, and evaluate college and career readiness/transition models. The second is identifying funding mechanism(s) states can draw on to sustain services over time. To date, while the expectation is that programs will develop the components needed to transition more

⁴ Breaking Through identified four high leverage strategies for assisting low-skilled adults: integrated institutional structures and services, accelerated learning, labor market payoff, and comprehensive supports.

adult education students, funds have not been added to account for developing or delivering this additional level of instruction and counseling hours.

Identifying the actual cost of providing college and career readiness services is difficult since most instruction and counseling are delivered through existing adult education programs and informally integrated within other programs such as GED preparation programs. Stand-alone transition components are relatively rare in adult education. A study of youth-focused programs provided outside the adult education system showed that they can cost between \$1,200 and \$25,000 per student per year (Bozell and Goldberg, 2009). And while adult education frequently partners with community-based organizations and social service providers, mandating that services for adult college and career readiness services are constructed solely by braiding existing resources from other entities (e.g., TANF, WIA Title I) will probably not be sufficient, especially in the current economic conditions faced by states.

There are several opportunities going forward, however. The first is the emergence of political will around supporting transition to postsecondary education for adult education students. In our interviews, there was universal agreement that adult education students, particularly young adults, need to be prepared for postsecondary education. This is seen as tied to the long-term well-being of individuals, their families and communities, and the U.S. economy.

Along with political will is an equity agenda, particularly for young adults. The yearly expenditure per pupil in public elementary and secondary schools for 2007-08 was \$10,041 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Young adults who resume their education through adult education should have access to education services and resources that are funded at levels comparable to high schools. Similarly, when adult education is part of community college systems, its funding should parallel the postsecondary side.

YOUTH-SPECIFIC ISSUES AND PROGRAMS

In all 17 states, young adults learn side by side with older adults and not as a separate cohort. This is not surprising since the WIA Title II funding is targeted at all adults age 16 and older. The prevailing sentiment among the state adult education directors interviewed for this report is that adult education need not be age-specific (or, perhaps cannot afford to be age-specific) and that younger and older adults can learn from each other. Youth-specific issues and programs do exist, however.

High School Completion Policies

One of the most important milestones for young adults is graduation from high school. Many students, particularly low-income students, do not reach this goal. One of the overriding concerns about nontraditional credentials, like the GED, is that they may be seen as a quick fix for students who are disinterested in traditional high school learning, have academic trouble and fallen behind their peers, or are circumventing rising graduation standards.

In Florida, high school students must now pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in 10th grade. If students are unable to pass the test in three tries, they can take the ACT

as the entrance exam for Florida colleges. Students can also withdraw and enter a GED or adult diploma program but they still must meet nearly all high school graduation requirements. This is similar in Texas. In North Carolina, public schools now require a senior capstone project in addition to final exams. These requirements are thought to cause many students to leave high school and enroll in adult education.

Challenges and Opportunities

One of the first challenges in serving young adults is crafting policies that encourage students to return to traditional or alternative high school, if they can, while allowing others to move on, if they cannot. A single solution will probably not serve the diverse situations that young adults face. Young adults need positive educational choices on which to build a strong foundation for their adult life. Age, by itself, is probably not a sufficient determinant of educational choices.

While the recent delay in releasing the next version of the GED allows the GED Testing Service to design an up-to-date credential, this delay has left GED preparation programs uncertain about which content and skills to emphasize. The GED Testing Service plans to align the new test with the Common Core State Standards and certify college and career readiness (in addition to high school equivalency).

The overall thrust of recent changes in high school graduation age, graduation requirements, and GED alignment is to create students that are better prepared for postsecondary education and employment. This is an important goal for all students but there may be unintended consequences for lower skilled students. Struggling students may feel they are even less likely to meet these new standards. Enhancing GED completion programs may be a prime way to move more youth into postsecondary education.

Youth-focused Programs

Of the 17 states, only 4 states are piloting or using a program model specifically designed for youth as part of the adult education system. In most of these, programs are only available in a limited number of locations. Among the states that are governed by the postsecondary system, youth programs include North Carolina's Ready for College Initiative (see *Spotlight on the Field: Backpacks to Briefcases* on the following page) and Washington State's Youth I-BEST program. Among the New England states, this includes Rhode Island's Youth Vision Initiative and Vermont's High School Completion Program (See State Profiles for program details).

Key features of young adult programs include increased interagency cooperation and collaborative case management; shared youth accountability frameworks that allow participating service providers to document service and progress for multiple systems; comprehensive support services; and specialized training for front-line case workers. Providing these services requires funds above the adult education cost per student. States have used one-time grants, special state appropriations, and two states allow K-12 funding to follow the student into adult education (Vermont and Texas). WIA Title I Youth funds, while limited, are often also tapped.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE FIELD

Backpacks to Briefcases

Backpacks to Briefcases is one of five North Carolina sites funded by OVAE's Ready for College initiative at Davidson County Community College, with one on-campus site and three satellite sites. The program serves 18-24 year-olds who are within 6-8 months of graduating with a GED or adult high school diploma, and have consistently high attendance records.

Students in this program receive assistance with admissions, financial aid, career planning and goal setting, study skills, test-taking skills, and general college knowledge. The program introduces students to five certificate programs offered by the college, each one being featured on a different day: Automotive Technology, Medical Assistant, Pharmacy Technology, Heating and Air Conditioning, and Early Childhood Education. In addition, students tour the college and meet with deans and program directors. Upon entering the program, students receive a backpack and upon completing and enrolling in college, they receive a nylon briefcase.

Backpacks to Briefcases served 76 students in 2008. Seventy-six percent completed the program and enrolled in postsecondary education or training. The program is in its second and final year, ending September 30, 2010. The college has committed to continue funding the program. For a more detailed description, visit the Promising Practice section of the NCTN website at <http://www.collegetransition.org>.

Challenges and Opportunities

One of the biggest challenges for the majority of youth in adult education is their low literacy levels. Many strategies identified in the college and career readiness research literature have limited data on their success with students below the adult secondary education (ASE) level. And within adult education, there is an ongoing pedagogical question of whether it is better to serve youth within the general adult education population where older adults serve as role models or separate young adults to better focus on their developmental needs.

While few youth-focused programs exist in adult education, one strategy for states to explore is to make the funds and/or opportunities available to youth enrolled in traditional high schools also available to young adults enrolled in adult education. In Florida, for example, high school juniors can take the college placement test and, if they need remediation, are offered specially designed "catch-up" courses in math, reading, and/or writing during their senior year. These courses are designed by the college so that high school students with a C or better in the courses do not have to take developmental education when they get to college. These courses are not currently available to adult education students due to policy restrictions that prohibit postsecondary education activities in adult education programs.

Many states use dual enrollment as a transition strategy for high school juniors and seniors, yet this strategy is not typically part of the adult education menu of options. In terms of equity alone, denying opportunities to young adults of similar age (and often greater need) seems to go against the grain of an educational system and society that is trying to increase access to postsecondary education for all.

Technology and Youth

Technology, considered emblematic of youth, is mentioned in descriptions of only two youth-focused programs. North Carolina's GET REAL program at Davidson County Community College makes extensive use of web 2.0 applications. Washington State's Youth I-BEST sees young adults as more tech savvy which may widen instructional possibilities. Generally speaking, however, adult education is looking at technology and distance learning as a potential avenue to improve and accelerate learning for all students, not only young students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Young adults who come through adult education are among the most under-represented students in postsecondary education. In most states, when a young adult leaves high school and enrolls in adult education, the value placed on his or her education drops six-fold or more, as measured by a cost per student per year. Both systems share the same goal of graduating the young person with a secondary credential. Both systems suffer from a misalignment of curricula and assessments with postsecondary education. Similarly, in most states governed by postsecondary education system, adult education students are not funded or recognized as full members of their institution's community. According to our interviews, this is beginning to change.

In keeping with the Gates Foundation's Postsecondary Success initiative, we recommend strategies to help students maintain academic momentum from adult education to and through college to a postsecondary credential. These strategies are aimed at addressing critical junctures ("loss points") when students are most apt to quit and that adult education can address: transition from adult education to college level or the highest level developmental courses or certificate programs and completion of the first year of college. Both require the adult education system to extend its mission and services "beyond the GED" to help students become college and career ready. In addition, we suggest that adult education examine the way it serves young adults to ensure that it provides an effective entry point back into education for students leaving the Elementary and Secondary Education system without a high school diploma.

The following recommendations are aimed at state and national adult education leaders and private and public funders. The adult education field's efforts to date suggest that significant reform efforts can be initiated at the state or regional level or spearheaded by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education at U.S. Department of Education, the federal funder of adult education.

1. Advocate for increased awareness and support for adult education system among college and workforce leaders and policymakers. At present, the adult education system has been largely invisible to many college leaders and policymakers, and grossly underfunded. Yet, this system is the first point of re-entry into education for most youth who have left school prematurely. Advocacy that translates into system-level support manifests itself through policy changes and resources.

Partnerships: Adult education must be a full partner in federal, state and local policy initiatives and boards or workgroups that spearhead reforms in employment and education. More than token representation, this means that such policy initiatives take into account the key features that shape the adult education system, such as prevailing standards, accountability structures, staff capacity, and of course, funding. Substantial change is not possible without partnerships among institutions and systems that are committed to closing completion gaps for all students.

Strategy: Design and deliver a communication strategy for college and workforce leaders and policymakers that conveys the value of college and career readiness for adult education students, their communities and the local economy; include formats and templates that can be easily individualized for each state.

Research: Conduct a Return on Investment (ROI) study to describe the impact of a seamless pathway from adult education to and through postsecondary education on individuals, families, communities, and employers in order to inform public awareness campaigns and advance the public policy agenda; include comparisons other programs with similar goals.

Funding: Institute equitable funding formulas that support the provision of services that prepare students for college and careers, including both academic and nonacademic services. While most states invest a greater proportion of funds than the federal government, the current funding levels for adult education simply do not make possible the implementation of effective college and career readiness services. There is evidence from several states that an effective advocacy strategy can yield increased state appropriations for adult education, even during the economic downturn.

2. Identify and scale effective delivery models. While one program model may not serve all adult education students in all communities, strategies have been identified that increase the likelihood of student success. The most effective college and career readiness delivery models aim to align the adult and postsecondary systems and accelerate student progress while providing academic and non-academic supports. What tend to vary are specific acceleration strategies.

Partnerships: With support from key state-level leaders, adult and college educators need to partner to design clear and realistic college and career readiness pathways and postsecondary options that can be scaled and further tested. Such pathways encompass referral protocols and system-wide agreements about what demarcates adult and developmental education.

Strategies: Implement program models that focus on system alignment and use a combination of acceleration strategies, such as dual enrollment, contextualized learning, modularization, integration of college and career readiness instruction with GED or adult diploma programs, and interactive technology that engages learners. Such program models should also include career planning and wraparound support for students on campus and in the community.

Research: (1) Conduct research to understand how acceleration strategies can be best implemented with different adult education populations and levels akin to the series of studies on promising strategies to accelerate success in community college being conducted by the Community College Research Center. (2) The field would also benefit from research that addresses the pedagogical question of how best to serve young adults – through distinct youth-oriented strategies and programs or within traditional adult education or some combination of both.

Funding: (1) Calculate the cost of implementing the recommended college and career readiness acceleration strategies so that adequate funding can be sought. (2) Institute funding policies that promote co-enrollment in postsecondary education and access to career planning and WIA Title I employment services for adult education students.

3. Assess attainment of college and career readiness within the adult education system and completion of first year of college. One of the most challenging and frustrating aspects of transitioning adults to postsecondary education, for both students and educators, is the lack of a clear definition of what it means to be ready for college. We recognize that operationalizing a more nuanced definition (beyond level of placement in college) is challenging. However, emerging student-level benchmarks of success, such as those developed in Washington State, could be used on a national level (see p. 9). What we propose here are some short- and long-term solutions.

Partnerships: (1) Work with college partners to provide access to the college placement test (COMPASS, ASSET, ACCUPLACER) as a measure of academic readiness while students are still in adult education so they can complete their preparation if they are not found to be academically ready. (2) Institute peer learning among state adult education directors for them to learn from those who have successfully developed and implemented data tracking across systems.

Strategies: (1) Define college readiness as more than academic readiness to recognize the complex career and personal readiness needed for adults to be successful, and use this definition to inform practice. (2) Reformulate the National Reporting System (or at least data collection at the state level) to track goal attainment across fiscal years and reflect key milestones in adults' readiness and enrollment in postsecondary education with data for those receiving college and career readiness services disaggregated from other students.

Research: (1) Study whether the reliance on current college placement tests as an academic readiness measure predicts students' ability to succeed in college. (2) Investigate how the adoption of the GED 2020 and/or the possible adoption of the Common Core State Standards would impact adult education.

Funding: Fund the development of aligned assessments and longitudinal data tracking capacity at the state level.

4. Build the capacity of program staff to implement this systems change agenda.

Approximately 80% of adult educators nationwide work part-time, typically without many benefits, and receive most of their adult education training while in-service. The implementation of effective college and career readiness services requires ongoing professional development for teachers, counselors, and administrators. Our investigation suggests that intensive professional development is needed to both build capacity and inform the field. While adult educators need to learn more about college and career readiness, many pedagogical strategies used in adult education are ones that postsecondary educators can learn

from, such as competency-based learning, differentiated instruction, and intentional use of multiple persistence strategies.

Partnerships: Provide joint professional development for adult and postsecondary educators and opportunities for learning across institutions.

Strategies: Provide learning opportunities for adult educators using multiple strategies and venues, including online courses and communities of practice across institutions and states that entail peer sharing and mentoring. Structure professional development by creating a National College and Career Readiness Specialist and/or Program certification, based on the results of a feasibility study.

Research: Identify the knowledge and skills a College and Career Readiness Specialist needs and how competence should be assessed. Or, alternatively, identify College and Career Readiness program standards and quality indicators. Investigate certification options that include incentives for adult educators and programs to pursue such a certificate.

Funding: Fund the development of a National College and Career Readiness Specialist or College and Career Readiness Program certificate program. Build career pathways and improve working conditions to retain adult educators and administrators in the adult education field and motivate them to pursue further training in the pre-college and college and career readiness field.

Given that the ultimate success is measured by completion of a postsecondary degree or certificate by adult education students, reforms in other parts of the education system, particularly community colleges, and policy environment will need to take place concurrently in order for adult education to do its part toward the end goal.

Adult education is poised to benefit from an infusion of support for system level reform. The national legislation that shapes it, the Workforce Investment Act, will be reauthorized over the next year. All signs point to the new legislation containing much greater emphasis on college and career readiness and pathways. Several states have developed and are piloting models that hold great promise. As a full partner in system reform across the education spectrum, adult education stands to deliver its part in the college completion process for the benefit of tens of thousands of young and older adults who currently fall through the cracks of that process.

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Appendix A: Program Comparisons

Table 1 GED/High School Diploma Attainment and Cost Per Completer

Program	Percent of Completers	Cost per Completer
WIA Title II-funded Programs (2004)	51%	\$3,081
WIA Title I Youth	36%	\$97,603
YouthBuild	33%	\$60,024
Job Corp	48%	\$73,212
National Guard/Challenge	55%	\$15,113

Table 2 Postsecondary Placement Rate and Cost

Program	Percent of Completers	Cost per Completer
WIA Title II-funded Programs (2004)	34%	\$10,525
WIA Title I Youth	3%	\$577,292
YouthBuild	Data not available	Data not available*
Job Corp	11%	\$318,965
National Guard/Challenge	16%	\$52,482

Both tables taken from Ruiz-Wamble, L. (2007, June). White House Gives Adult Education Highest Marks. *Literacy Links*, 11(2). Retrieved from <http://www-tcall.tamu.edu/newsletr/jun07/jun07b.html>.

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The National College Transition Network (NCTN) at World Education, Inc. supports adult education staff, programs, and states, and regional and municipal agencies in establishing and strengthening college transition services. We accomplish this through technical assistance, professional development, collegial sharing, advocacy, and publications that focus on the needs of the field. We connect policy and research and practice in order to build the capacity and expertise in adult education.

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