

# Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models

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NCSALL Occasional Paper  
December 2006



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*NCSALL Occasional Papers* are funded by the Educational Research and Development Centers program, Award Number R309B960002, as administered by the Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement), U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents of *NCSALL Occasional Papers* do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the Institute of Education Sciences, or the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



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## Acknowledgements

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the many adult educators who contributed to this study. They are listed at the conclusion of this paper. In addition, several people reviewed earlier drafts of this monograph and provided substantive comments on it.

Hunter Boylan, National Center for Developmental Education

Forrest Chisman, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

John Comings, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

Reno James, Nellie Mae Education Foundation

Cheryl Keenan, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education

Lennox McLendon, National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium

Nan Poppe, Portland Community College Extended Campus

Cristine Smith, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

Ronna Spacone, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education

Sally Waldron, World Education, Inc.

We would also like to acknowledge the main funders who make our work possible:

Lumina Foundation for Education

Nellie Mae Education Foundation

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Lumina Foundation or the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, their officers or their employees.





## Abstract

While the majority of adults who take the General Educational Development (GED) test do so in order to continue their education, few go on to enter postsecondary education (Tyler, 2001). Yet, these same adults stand to make substantial economic and personal gains when they use their adult secondary credential to move from the ranks of high school dropout to postsecondary graduate, with the possibility of going from low-wage jobs to careers with a livable wage and benefits. Unlike transition services for high school graduates, which are well-established, the transformation of adult basic education (ABE) programs to include transition services for adults is an emerging area of concern for the field of adult education (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2004). Identifying adult education models that help adult learners avoid cycles of remediation at the beginning of their college careers is more likely to produce students who can persist and obtain a postsecondary education credential.

In the first five years of adult transition work done by staff at the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education, Inc., the team noticed distinct models emerging in the field. To capture and categorize these models, NELRC surveyed adult education centers with transition components from around the United States, guided by the question: Do ABE-to-college transition programs fall into discrete models and, if so, what are the key features of these models? Through the development of program snapshots and four state profiles, the team discovered commonalities, allowing for an extension of an earlier typology of adult transition programs (Alamprese, 2004) now to include five models: Advising, GED-Plus, ESOL, Career Pathways, and College Preparatory. In addition, analysis of the aggregated data produced a series of themes and recommendations that other states contemplating adult transition services might find helpful.



## Introduction

While many college access and retention initiatives address the needs of high school students in their transition to college (Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success, 2006), transition to postsecondary education is an emerging effort for adult education programs (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Recognizing this gap in the educational continuum, the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) at World Education, Inc. has been working since 2000 to create a coordinated infrastructure of college transition programs throughout New England with support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. The New England ABE-to-College Transition Project currently comprises 25 adult education centers partnered with more than 40 postsecondary institutions (mostly community and technical colleges) across the 6 New England states.

Increasing numbers of adult education centers with adult secondary education (ASE) components, such as General Educational Development (GED) preparation, adult diploma programs (ADP), the external diploma program (EDP), or more advanced levels of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), are finding ways to provide some type of college transition services. Over time, NELRC received numerous inquiries from around the country requesting information or technical assistance around transition of adult learners. Based on that interest, NELRC/World Education launched the National College Transition Network (NCTN) with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, World Education, and Lumina Foundation for Education. The goal of the NCTN is to support ABE staff, programs, and states in establishing and strengthening ABE-to-college transition services through technical assistance, professional development, collegial sharing, research, advocacy, and increased visibility for this critical sector of the adult basic education system.

The goal of this study is to review existing transition programs and develop a typology of ABE-to-college transition programs. We hope that this typology will guide programs planning or offering these services. This paper includes:

- the benefits and challenges of postsecondary education for adult learners;
- the methods and limitations of this study;
- description, analysis, and discussion of the five program models;
- description and discussion of adult transition initiatives in four states; and
- recommendations aimed at moving the adult transition field forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Adult basic education, used here synonymously with the term adult education, refers to the continuum of education that extends from basic literacy and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) services through adult secondary education (ASE), which includes adult high school diploma and GED preparation.

## Benefits of Postsecondary Education and ABE Learners

Although research on the benefits of postsecondary education tends to focus on broad student groupings, such as “nontraditional” college students, low-income or low-skilled students, or students in college developmental education courses, few studies focus specifically on students transferring from adult education centers. ASE and ESOL learners are members of these larger groupings but may experience unique benefits and/or barriers not identified in the broader studies that begin this discussion. Likewise, where colleges do not require any secondary credential (referred to as “open enrollment” or “open access” institutions), adult education students may choose to apply to the college before completing an adult diploma or GED.

**Fact #1:** The U.S. workforce is becoming more diverse.

**Fact #2:** The racial/ethnic groups that are the least educated are the fastest growing.

**Impact:** If current population trends continue and states do not improve the education of all racial/ethnic groups, the skills of the workforce and the incomes of U.S. residents are projected to decline over the next two decades (Kelly, 2005).

Broad benefits from postsecondary education accrue to individuals, their families, and society, although most research tends to focus on the economic impact of educational attainment through the lens of employment. The income differential between a high school dropout, GED-holder, or high school graduate versus someone with an associate or bachelor’s degree is significant. For example, full-time workers age 25 and over with less than a high school diploma have median weekly earnings of \$337, as compared with \$490 for high school graduates (includes equivalency certificates), \$607 for some college or associate degree, and \$841 for a bachelor’s degree (Fronczek, 2005). Therefore, ensuring a successful transition to college has the potential for a high rate of return in income to the individual, as well as tax payments to federal, state, and local governments based on higher income.

As educational attainment increases, so does access to jobs with benefits and employment stability – with unemployment rates of 8.4% for individuals with less than a high school education compared to 4% for those with an associate degree and 3.3% for those with a bachelor’s degree (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2005).

These figures gloss over important differences for segments of the population. For example, returns on education are generally higher for men than for women (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Median Earnings of Workers by Educational Attainment and Sex for the United States: 2004.**

SELECTED CHARACTERISTIC	MEN		WOMEN	
	Yearly	Weekly	Yearly	Weekly
LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE	\$21,760	\$418	\$13,280	\$255
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION, INCLUDING EQUIVALENCY	\$31,183	\$600	\$19,820	\$381
SOME COLLEGE OR ASSOCIATE DEGREE	\$37,883	\$729	\$25,235	\$485
BACHELOR'S DEGREE	\$52,242	\$1,005	\$35,195	\$677
GRADUATE OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE	\$68,239	\$1312	\$46,004	\$885

Source: Adapted from *Income, Earnings, and Poverty From the 2004 American Community Survey*, U.S. Census Bureau, 2004.

The benefits of education ripple out beyond the student to family members and society at large. Along with improved health through access to such benefits as health insurance, children of educated adults are more likely to go on to obtain a postsecondary education. Society reaps the benefits of an educated citizenry because these individuals are more likely to vote, make charitable contributions, and contribute to economic growth as their level of education rises (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2004).

“Fact Sheets” produced by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) highlight similar correlations between levels of education and a variety of personal and societal factors. For example, rates of smoking are lower for individuals with more education. Individuals with higher levels of education require fewer dollars spent on social programs. The poverty rate among children under age 6 decreases from 62.5% for parents with less than a high school degree to 15.2% for parents with some college. (See NIFL Fact Sheets at [www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/facts.html](http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/facts.html).)

As our economy continues to shift from manufacturing to knowledge-based industries, higher-paying jobs in areas such as business services, education, and healthcare require postsecondary education and credentials (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2001). Policymakers frequently address future workforce needs through K–12 or K–16 reform but this will not help the bulk of the workforce – older workers in need of more education and a growing number of immigrant adults who are mastering English.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (Stoops, 2004), 85% of the population of people 25 years and over reported having graduated from high school but only 53% reported having attended college and only 27% having obtained a bachelor’s degree or more. Again, these rates describe a national perspective but obscure differences between states. For instance, in this 2003 dataset, Texas has the lowest percentage of high school graduates at 77% and New Hampshire has the highest at 92% of the population 25 years and over. These are important figures when considering current and future workforce needs.

In a recent literature review titled, *Building America's Future Workforce: Employers, Immigrants and Skills* (Hamm, 2004), the “new” immigrants (those arriving in the United States in 1990 or later) were found to account for more than 50% of the growth of the entire civilian workforce, and immigrants currently account for 14% of the total workforce (or approximately 20.3 million workers). Using work by Andrew Sum and others, Hamm noted that “one third of the new immigrants lack a high school diploma” (p. 5).

States profiled in this study (Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, and Oregon), like many states, link the education of workers to economic development. This has sparked much of the current interest in transition to postsecondary education for adults. For example, the Maine Economic Growth Council found that “the long-term economic competitiveness of Maine is directly linked to skill and educational attainment” and its workers’ need of postsecondary education in order to “meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy” (Lachance, 2001/2002). The Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act of 1997 was designed to be a catalyst for economic development by providing educational opportunities to both traditional students and adults.

### Challenges to Postsecondary Education and ABE Learners

Postsecondary education poses challenges for all students, even traditional students. For example, only 54% of traditional students with the goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree reach that goal within five years of enrollment in college (Choy, 2002). These students enrolled full-time immediately after finishing high school, depended on parents for financial support, and either did not work during the school year or worked part time.

#### Nontraditional College Students

ABE learners are considered “nontraditional” students and are less likely than traditional students to reach their educational goal. A nontraditional student is one who has any of the following characteristics:

- Delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- Attends part time for at least part of the academic year;
- Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid;
- Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); or
- Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

(Choy, 2002, p. 3)

According to a special analysis on nontraditional students in *The Condition of Education 2002* (Choy, 2002), almost three quarters of all undergraduates in 1999-2000 had one or more of these characteristics. Child care and scheduling classes around work hours are just two of the barriers that nontraditional students may encounter based on these characteristics. In addition, students going to college very part time (e.g., taking one course at a time) may not qualify for financial aid.

The degree to which a student is “nontraditional” plays an important role in calculating the likelihood of completing a degree. Students were considered “minimally nontraditional” if they had only one characteristic, “moderately nontraditional” if they had two or three, and “highly nontraditional” if they had four or more. For those students with a goal of obtaining a bachelor’s degree, 42% of minimally nontraditional, 17% of moderately nontraditional, and 11% of highly nontraditional students reached their goal (compared to 54% of traditional students noted above). The results were similar for the associate degree but the gap closed between traditional and nontraditional students for those completing certificate programs.

Some additional findings and concerns of the report point out that nontraditional students are more likely to: (1) place an emphasis on work – consider themselves as employees who are going to school rather than students who are working; (2) leave postsecondary education without a degree; and (3) leave during their first year, regardless of their degree objective. Finally, of the students who came to college without a traditional high school diploma: 78% were financially independent, 59% delayed enrollment, 59% attended part time, 46% worked full time, and 28% were single parents (Choy, 2002, p. 6).

### College Students with a GED

Adults obtaining their GED recognize their need for continued education, but do not necessarily follow through. In a statistical report from the GED Testing Service (2005), *Who Passed the GED Tests? 2003 Statistical Report*, 63% of those who passed the GED said they took the test in order to qualify for further education. Very few GED holders go on to complete even a year of postsecondary education, however. Reviewing studies of large, national datasets as well as a few smaller studies, Tyler (2001) noted that “even though college pays off for GED holders, only 30 to 35% obtain any postsecondary education, only 5 to 10% obtain at least a year of postsecondary education, and very few (between 0.5 and 3%) acquire even an associate degree” (p. 42).

In a review of the recent research literature on the economic benefits of the GED, Tyler (2001) noted that “postsecondary education and training are fruitful but little used routes to economic success for GED holders” (p. 33). These same conclusions were reached in an earlier comprehensive literature review commissioned by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) of the U.S. Department of Education (Boesel, Alsalam, & Smith, 1998).

Access, persistence, and completion of a postsecondary credential appear to hinge on an array of knowledge and skills that adult learners must acquire. Comparing adult

literacy and postsecondary students in developmental education, Reder (1999) found that college persistence (described as completion or still working toward the credential at the five-year point) was higher for students with high school diplomas compared to GED recipients: 54% compared with 28% respectively at two-year institutions and 75% compared with 51% for four-year institutions.

Reder also noted that “students with the GED were more likely (22% versus 15%) to participate in remedial courses while in postsecondary education. The same pattern was true for remedial reading, writing, and math courses” (p. 141). Along with lengthening the time to college completion, this additional coursework increases the economic burden of postsecondary education for adult learners who must use financial aid or personal funds to pay for these below college-level courses.

### Underprepared College Students

“Underprepared” college students form a general pool of students in need of remediation before they begin college-level work, regardless of their status as nontraditional or traditional. Adelman (1998) examined the critical relationship between remedial coursework and college completion. He found that the amount and type of remedial work are particularly important. “Among students who had to take remedial reading, 66% were in three or more other remedial courses, and only 12% of this group earned bachelor’s degrees. Among students who were in remedial reading for more than one course, nearly 80% were in two or more other remedial courses, and less than 9% earned bachelor’s degrees” (pp. 1-2). This makes it particularly important that adult education programs prepare their students to enter college at the highest level possible (e.g., college-level or at the very least, the highest level of developmental/remedial education) so that students do not use precious financial aid dollars on remedial coursework or “fatigue out” at the start of their postsecondary career.

#### College Placement Tests

Many colleges, but particularly “open enrollment” or “open access” institutions like community colleges, test students as part of their admissions and/or orientation process. Typically, all students are tested regardless of whether they have a high school diploma, GED, alternative adult diploma, or no credential at all. Results from these tests help the college advisor locate where the student might make a successful start in the sequence of courses offered at the college. Students who place below the skill level needed to begin college courses enter a tier of below college-level courses referred to as developmental (or occasionally, remedial) education.

Finding out about the placement test administered by institutions where your students apply is an important activity for practitioners. Most colleges use commercially designed tests (e.g., ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS) that assess reading comprehension, writing skills, and math. Additional assessment activities, like producing a writing sample, may be additions designed by the college. While students can usually access financial aid at the college to pay for most developmental courses, these courses do not count toward their degree. Better preparation while students are in adult education may be an important factor in building long-term success and reducing the need for extensive below college-level coursework.



Our experience in the New England ABE-to-College Project strongly suggests that the level of academic preparation that a typical ASE graduate requires in order to succeed in college-level courses should not be underestimated. For example, the level of math covered in many ASE programs ends at pre-algebra while colleges require mastery of algebra for placement into college-level math courses. Most ASE programs do not teach students how to research and write a term paper or how to use a computer for these activities. Students also need to learn strategies for reading dense college textbooks and study skills, such as note-taking, that are not routinely taught in ASE. Adults who enter college without these skills are at the highest risk of dropping out in their first year.

In summary, while adults with GEDs or other nontraditional diplomas stand to benefit from postsecondary education, very few actually go on and those that do are rarely successful. While there are few detailed studies of the challenges to access and persistence in postsecondary education that adult learners experience, especially those with family and work responsibilities, several areas of concern have been documented. They include:

- Inadequate academic preparation, particularly limited exposure to college-level reading and algebra, use of computers, and writing research papers, (Santos, 2004, academic vocabulary for ESL students; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nunez, 2001);
- Financial constraints due to limited knowledge of and/or access to financial aid for part-time learners, lost wages if full-time workers need to curtail hours, and the hidden costs of college, such as transportation for those not living in dormitories, and childcare costs for parents (ACE, 2004; Bosworth & Choitz, 2002; Cook, King, Carnevale, & Desrochers, 2004);
- The need for effective strategies to manage the competing demands of work, family/relationships, childcare needs, and school (Gooden, Matus-Grossman, Wavelet, Diaz, & Seupersad, 2002);
- Difficulty navigating the new and confusing institutional environment, including understanding the academic learning environment, college culture, and complex processes (e.g., applying for financial aid that has a federal, state, and institutional component) (Brickman & Braun, 1999); and
- Personal and psychological barriers, especially lack of confidence in one's ability to succeed as a college student and a need for significant levels of personal and career counseling (Hill, 2004).

While adult learners face significant challenges, they can succeed in college. Boesel, Alsalam, and Smith (1998) found that although the grades of GED recipients are initially lower than those of high school graduates during the first year of college, this difference becomes statistically insignificant after that.

### **Previous Work on Strategies or Models of College Transition**

Like the limited research available on learners moving from adult education programs to college, information on specific transition models for adult learners is scarce. The Office

of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) at the U.S. Department of Education has recognized this gap in research and practice and has begun gathering baseline information on the transition of learners from adult to postsecondary education and training. Their web pages devoted to this topic ([www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/transition.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/transition.html)) attest to this concern.

Along with this federal interest, several foundations, such as the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Lumina Foundation for Education, and research centers, such as Berkeley Policy Associates and the Council for the Advancement of Adult Learning, are collecting baseline data on access to and persistence in postsecondary education for adults, especially adults with low-incomes and/or low-skills. Much of the research is qualitative and can be divided into two main categories: descriptive studies that provide a snapshot of existing programs and research initiatives that develop a broader research agenda on adult transition. As adult education centers consider providing new services, information about program designs and strategies is extremely important.

### Descriptive Studies of Models of Adult Transition

In a document prepared to guide grant writers for a Request for Proposals on postsecondary transition programs in Massachusetts, Brickman and Braun (1999) described nine programs from around the United States. A summary of the findings included a description of “successful programs,” common barriers experienced by students, and notes on funding and research in the field. The document was designed to broaden thinking and made no reference to specific models. A similar type of document created the same year targeted ESOL and other transition programs primarily in Massachusetts (Schwendeman, 1999), and noted essential features of successful programs and strategies but did not present a specific typology.

In a “Transition” issue of *Focus on Basics*, a journal published by National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), two of the authors of this paper – Spohn and Kallenbach (2004) – produced a chart titled “Pathways to College for Academically Under-prepared Students.” This moved the discussion to an inventory of transition practices that have been the focus of some research on the broad category of nontraditional students. It included:

- developmental/remedial courses in reading, writing, and/or math;
- developmental courses linked with college survival skills;
- courses on study skills, such as note-taking, time management, and stress reduction;
- learning communities and cohort models;
- dual enrollment in adult education and developmental education, depending on placement process; and

- college transition courses that bridge the academic gaps between adult education and college-level courses.<sup>2</sup>

To date, we are not aware that these practices have been systematically compared or evaluated in adult education college transition programs.

In the same issue, Alamprese (2004) described three “approaches” to ABE transition to postsecondary education: awareness and orientation, counseling and referral activities, and the comprehensive program. The author notes that programs’ use of these approaches evolve over time “as ABE staff try new strategies, test them with groups of learners, and then refine them based on learners’ reactions and the availability of new information” (p. 26).

In Alamprese’s typology, the “awareness and orientation” approach focuses on dissemination of information about the typical processes for college admission. Most information is provided to an entire group of students but some effort is made to ensure that individual students connect to the college systems. “Counseling and referral” is described as a more individualized approach that includes some mechanism to help students assess their strengths and weaknesses in relationship to the challenges of college. The student receives assistance in accessing college services that can help address weaknesses. Last, the “comprehensive program” is described as including most of the features mentioned above with specific academic preparation and a study skills component. The New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, discussed toward the end of this paper, is described by Alamprese as a comprehensive model.

Lastly, as the number of strategies or models grows, organizing our understanding of pathways is important. The Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) has initiated the National Academic Pathways to Access and Student Success (APASS) project, an inventory of academic pathways (see the APASS Web site at [www.apass.uiuc.edu/APASS/](http://www.apass.uiuc.edu/APASS/)). Directed toward the transition from high school to college, to date this project has identified 15 pathways, including one labeled “General Educational Development (GED) in College Settings.” This pathway is found in 43 states and is defined as “a pathway within a college which not only assists students to pass GED examination, but also seeks to affiliate students with a college curriculum and the option for attending college. These programs are typically found within community colleges” (APASS, 2004). Several other pathways in the inventory might be applicable to adult transition, such as the Tech Prep program. In this program, funds available through the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1998 are used to assist local educational agencies and community colleges in the development of academic and technical skills of secondary and postsecondary students who elect to enroll in career and technical education programs.

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.ncsall.net/?id=183](http://www.ncsall.net/?id=183).

### Research Initiatives on Models of Adult Transition<sup>3</sup>

In 1993-94, the U.S. Department of Education supported English Language Literacy Grants in Massachusetts, Virginia, and Texas (Comings, 1996) aimed at conserving financial aid dollars by helping underprepared ESOL students *before* they entered college. This initiative supported additional levels of ESOL, development of Individual Educational Plans, small group workshops with a bilingual program counselor to address academic goals and overcome barriers, and support with the college admission and financial aid process.

A model examined in several recent studies is the Career Pathway or Career Ladder model that couples instruction in literacy skills and college-level (rather than developmental-level) postsecondary vocational coursework. Based on a collaboration between workforce development and education, these pathways have been in existence for some time. They help connect entry-level workers in sectors like healthcare or information technology, with high-skill, high-paying jobs within that sector. One example is a national project called *Breaking Through: Helping Low-Skilled Adults Enter and Succeed in College and Careers* (Liebowitz & Taylor, 2004) created by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and the National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE) and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and others. Key strategies in this model include contextualized learning, curricula that is “chunked” into units that translate into certificates recognized by local employers, and a clear connection to further higher education.

In an extensive two-year study of adult education/literacy and community colleges, the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) identifies two governance models that may have an impact on service provision:

1. Building a coordinated network between adult education, postsecondary education, and workforce development through collaboration, alignment, and shared performance goals (see *Adult Education & Literacy in Community Colleges in Massachusetts* by Martin Liebowitz, 2004);
2. Combining or blending adult education and community college into one system within a “postsecondary department” that integrates adult, developmental, and degree programs at the college (see *The Illinois Community College System & Adult Education* by Knell and Scogins and *Adult Education & Literacy and Community Colleges in Kentucky* by Chisman).

In addition, this study generated a framework called the *National Opportunity System for Adults*, a set of roles and responsibilities for collaboration between community college, adult education, and state and federal government. This collaboration or

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<sup>3</sup> At least one other initiative is underway at this moment. To read more about an initiative currently underway among the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), Berkeley Policy Associates and MDRC, titled *Adult Basic Education to Community College Transitions Project*, visit [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hs/factsh/cctrans.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hs/factsh/cctrans.html).

linkages, while not specifying any one model, provides an important list of considerations as states grapple with supporting adults at the point of transition to postsecondary education.

## Methodology of This Study

The goal of this study is to review existing transition programs and develop a typology of ABE-to-college transition programs. The research question driving this study and the development of our typology is: Do ABE-to-college transition programs fall into discrete models and, if so, what are the features of the models? To answer this question, we needed to locate and describe existing programs.

### Criteria for Program Selection

In order to select programs that were firmly rooted in adult education, the following criteria were chosen by the authors. Programs had to be:

- nonprofit;
- part of an ABE or ESOL program;
- funded without charging students tuition or fees beyond a nominal amount; and
- currently in existence (several programs initially found in the program search process seemed to have closed down).

This excluded, for example, developmental education at college – the pathway typically offered by colleges to underprepared students. Developmental education consists of “a continuum of courses and services ranging from tutoring and advising to remedial coursework on college and university campuses” (Boylan, 2004). Developmental programs “are designed for students who have high school diplomas or equivalents but lack skills needed to participate in the college curriculum” (Saxon, Boylan, & McBroom, 2006).

Students in developmental education are almost always charged tuition. Academic credit for these classes does not apply toward graduation because the work is deemed to be “below college-level” but the courses are accepted as “institutional credit” which allows students to access federal financial aid. Developmental education, along with charging tuition, has not necessarily recognized ABE students as potential college students, even when the ABE program resides on the college campus. And, as can be seen in the research by Adelman (1998) mentioned at the start of this paper, students requiring extensive remediation at college rarely complete a degree. Development of the type of strong linkages between college and adult education suggested in the *National Opportunity System* put forth by CAAL may help to alleviate this problem, by better aligning adult and postsecondary education.

Similarly, there were programs that fell outside our selection criteria but clearly reflected the “spirit” of ABE-to-college transition models. One such program is the GED Scholars Initiative, a federally funded project of the Ohio Literacy Resource Center at Kent State University. This program provides peer mentors and awareness activities for students who come with a GED to the university (Kilgour Dowdy & Golden, 2004). This fell outside of our criteria because the program does not begin through a connection to adult education and students must traverse a considerable amount of the transition landscape (e.g., the admission and financial aid processes) before they receive a mentor.

Another transition resource available to adults that fell outside the scope of this paper is the federally funded Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC) Program. These centers “provide counseling and information on college admissions to qualified (low-income) adults who want to enter or continue a program in postsecondary education.”<sup>4</sup> In reality, this modest description translates into a wide variety of services. EOCs provide free academic advising, personal counseling, career workshops, tutoring, mentoring, and assistance in completing applications for college admissions, testing, and financial aid. A few transition programs we interviewed did refer students to EOCs and one program, Sumner Adult Education in Maine, collaborates closely with the Maine EOC, incorporating their services into the transition program. While EOC staff travel extensively to provide services, states such as Connecticut, Maine, and Oregon have only one center.

#### About ODWIN

One program that does not fit our selection criteria is ODWIN, a privately funded program in Boston, Massachusetts, that requires students to pay a portion of the program costs through tuition. Established in 1964, ODWIN (Opening Doors Wider In Nursing) was originally designed to help minority high school students succeed in a nursing curriculum. In 1975, it broadened its mission to serve students preparing for any professional-level career that requires a college education. Key components of the program are:

- diagnostic testing developed by ODWIN in basic math, English grammar, writing, speaking, listening, reading, and study skills;
- individualized education plan based on the student’s educational goal;
- carefully sequenced coursework using “customized textbooks” for adult learners,
- help in applying to college; and
- long-term follow-up.

Study and time management skill development are rolled into the academic learning. Foundation courses (basic math, English grammar, and reading/study skills) are individualized, open-ended, and ungraded. Advanced courses in algebra, biology, chemistry, composition, pharmacological math are offered in conventionally structured classes. Classes meet two to three times a week for one and a half to two hours. Fifty-five to sixty-five percent of students complete the ODWIN program. Approximately, 90% of students who complete their educational plan with ODWIN go on to graduate from college in their field of interest.

<sup>4</sup> For more on EOCs, see [www.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/index.html).

## Survey Development

The surveys we developed for this study were based on our understanding of adult transition programming developed over a six-year period in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project and through discussions with other practitioners and researchers in the area of adult education and transition to college. It is similar to those elements of model building and replication identified by Racine (2004). They typically include:

demographic information on participants; intensity and duration of programming; the content and flexibility of activities; key transition points for participants; the presence and types of requirements and incentives for participation; performance expectations for participants and staff; staff qualifications and configurations; characteristics of the organization that operates the program; and the program's relationship to other organizations and agencies. (p. 1)

Our survey included demographic information on the program and population served; characteristics of the organization that operates the program and its relationship to other organizations and agencies; program design and intensity; requirements and expectations for participants; qualifications, expectations, and configuration of staff members; and information on funding (see Appendix A). The survey was piloted by the authors with three programs and then revised based on the pilot program feedback.

We located programs through a review of the research literature, web searches, inquires to state adult education leaders, and through a snowball technique. Snowball sampling is a technique for finding research subjects. One research subject gives the researcher the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Vogt, 1999). In this case, transition program staff members were asked about other college transition programs about which they were aware. This was particularly helpful in locating ESOL programs, which were less likely to turn up from other search methods. In all, we completed 23 program surveys. In addition, we drew on our extensive knowledge of the 25 programs of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

The authors completed the surveys through phone or face-to-face interviews with transition program coordinators, occasionally accompanied by other staff. We returned completed surveys to the interviewee for review and correction. Using the survey, the authors then wrote narratives about the program, which were, again, returned to the transition program staff after review by the authors. During this process, the authors met to discuss their findings and noted similarities and differences between programs. Several possible models emerged. As a model emerged, one of the authors would take the lead on that model, investigating further examples of programs that fit the model and creating the final draft of that section of the paper.

As part of our search for programs and ongoing work for the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project and the NCTN, we had an opportunity to collect information on several state-level initiatives to enhance this study. The importance of

state-level efforts of adult education in developing college transition programs emerged as we saw the impact that systemic factors had on the development of services by individual programs. Addressing key concerns, such as stable funding and formal development of collaborations between adult education and postsecondary education, might be advanced for all adult education programs through state-level agreements.

A survey with more open-ended questions was created to describe the state-level initiatives (see Appendix B). These surveys were also conducted through phone and face-to-face interviews. The four states featured in this paper – Connecticut, Maine, Kentucky, and Oregon – were chosen to represent a variety of approaches and configuration of resources. For example, two states have initiatives build around specific models. Oregon’s initiative has committed to a Career Pathways model while Maine’s initiative focuses on a College Preparatory model. States differ by the amount of time they have been working on adult transition. While Kentucky has set goals for GED college-going rates since 1998, Connecticut is just beginning to examine ABE-to-college transition. The states also have different administrative structures which dictate the way in which collaborations between adult and postsecondary education occur. For example, Maine Adult Education is part of the State Department of Education while Oregon combines Adult Education with the Department of Community College and Workforce Development. To gather a historical perspective for this study, surveys for most states had several contributors. The surveys were then developed into a narrative and returned to all contributors for feedback and finalization. The final narratives are presented in this paper.

## Limitations

There are three major limitations to this study. First, because this is a relatively new segment in the educational continuum, with little formal recognition, there was no readily available way to locate transition programs. This means that the typology is based on a small sample size. For example, when we conducted our original search we thought we might find a “case management model” in which students would receive individualized personal support and counseling that would follow them throughout their transition process. While many programs provide case management services, we did not find a program that relied solely on that mechanism. With such a small sample size it is difficult to tell if that model might exist elsewhere.

A second limitation concerns the limitations that may result from considering programs through a framework of models. A model is a representation of a more complex system. It allows us to depict our ideas about how things work. Thinking in terms of models has several advantages. Models can help clarify complexity, assist in decision-making and budgeting of resources, and address potential replication issues (particularly important to state-level personnel). Models are human constructions that help us understand and focus on specific elements but thinking in terms of models can also have disadvantages. Models might:



- oversimplify complex elements and processes;
- identify arbitrary differences and overlook important elements;
- lead to confusion between what is reality and what is the model;
- lack the ability to accommodate local differences; and
- cause premature closure in our thinking.

For example, in looking at the examples described in this study, it may be that one or more strategy within a model might prove effective without instituting that entire model.

Lastly, the effectiveness of each model is not part of this study and this may limit its usefulness. To gauge any one program's effectiveness would have required a research effort well beyond the scope of this paper.

## College Transition Models

Our analysis of the program data yielded five models of college transition programs (see Appendix C and Appendix D):

1. Advising
2. GED-Plus
3. ESOL
4. Career Pathways
5. College Preparatory

While there is considerable overlap in the services provided in each model, each has a distinctive postsecondary goal and relies on a few key features.

### Advising Model

The goal of the Advising model of college transition programs is to raise students' awareness of postsecondary education options and admissions processes. Key features of this model include: (1) dissemination of information through presentations and workshops that students may choose to attend; (2) individual advising rather than class or cohort advising; and (3) wide variation in the intensity of services from program to program. From our experience, adult education programs often begin developing transition services by disseminating information about postsecondary education to their students, both formally and informally. This model of individual advising coupled with optional presentations and workshops is similar to the admission services offered by many colleges to prospective students.

The Advising model represents the widest variation in intensity of college transition services of the programs we examined. Contact with students may be one short session or may take place over several months and culminate in a well-planned "hand-

off” of the student to the college. Given that most programs offer a relatively limited intensity of awareness-building, advising programs may best serve students who are already fairly well prepared academically and able to complete the admissions process on their own.

Advisors based in ASE and ESOL programs typically make presentations to graduating or advanced level classes that are followed by individual counseling sessions upon the student’s request. Generally, students meet two to three times with the advisor. At the ABE Transition Program at Rio Salado College in Phoenix, Arizona, for example, the first meeting addresses the student’s goals, motivation, and academic preparedness for college, including setting up placement testing. The second visit usually includes a visit to the college,<sup>5</sup> assistance with admission, and help with the financial aid process. The transition advisor also helps the student with class selection. Many students meet with their transition advisor again to continue to explore the support systems available on the college campus. The Pima College Adult Education Program in Tucson, Arizona follows a similar advising model, but tours of the college campus are not a standard feature of the program, to date.

Individualized advising is typically complemented by optional college success workshops on topics such as financial aid, admissions, time and stress management, and study skills or academic courses. The Pima College Adult Education Program, for example, runs a College Success Skills class that covers these topics in two-hour sessions over eight weeks. Pima Adult Education also offers a pre-algebra class that can accommodate nine GED graduates, among whom the advisor selects the “strongest candidates for college.” These students receive a scholarship that pays for the course. The Adult Education Program stays in contact with this cohort and collects data on their academic performance after they have transitioned to college. In 2003, 77% of these students persisted through their first year in college. The program does not keep similar data on the students who participate in advising or more short-term workshops.

The Rio Salado Transition Program offers a 15-week writing workshop as a “practice college-level experience” in essay writing. The program at Rio Salado College reports that over the five years of the program’s existence, there has been a “dramatic and consistent decline in the drop/withdrawal rates and a corresponding increase in the pass rate for their students that have enrolled in college.” There has also been a significant rise in the number of students receiving federal aid and other grants or scholarships, a direct result of information students have gained through participation in the transition program.

All GED and ESOL students from Rio Salado’s ABE Program who decide to take part in the Transition Program can apply for a Transition scholarship. The scholarship is based on financial need and pays for one class the first semester (usually 3 credits but sometimes more) and, upon completion of the first class with a C or better, one class the

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<sup>5</sup> “Visit” is a somewhat relative term. ABE-to-college transition program may be “housed” on the college campus but not be integrated into the day-to-day activities of the college so “visiting the college” may begin by walking over to the college Admissions Office.

second semester. In addition, the scholarship will pay for a third class in college success skills for GED students who wish to have more support.

In adult education Advising programs that operate under the umbrella of a community or technical college, the advisors tend to have access to students' college placement test results, are able to process college admission forms, and in some cases, register students for college courses. Being part of the college also places certain restrictions on the college transition programs. For example, in some cases, advisors cannot be called "counselors" even if they function as such, presumably due to contractual issues. The college may restrict the provision of free courses that might compete with the college's fee-based offerings.

Another intensive Advising program is the Post-Secondary Transition Program at Springfield Technical Community College (referred to as Springfield Tech or STCC) in Massachusetts. The college receives funds from the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE). It originally paid for counseling provided by a staff member dedicated to that task from the college's admissions office. The program includes a significant amount of outreach and transition services to students coming to the college from Massachusetts DOE-funded adult education programs in the region. The program typically follows students until they have completed their developmental coursework. While some changes to the program have been made as part of a recent refunding process, the overall model remains based on one-to-one advising and counseling.

Initially limited to serving 25 students per year, the program can now serve more students but with a focus on quality over quantity. The STCC program begins with an in-depth individual interview. Orientation meetings are conducted in a one-to-one format to inform students about college resources, and students are directed to college workshops/seminars on topics of interest. These workshops/seminars may pertain to one or all participants in the transition program, depending on the topic (e.g., the college financial aid process versus time management). While in the project, students receive from one to two hours of service per week, though this does not typically fall into a uniform weekly pattern but matches the timing of key semester activities. Of special note is the counselor's availability to help students trouble-shoot through brief, problem-solving meetings. Although classes in any form have not been a standard part of this program, tuition waivers for pre-algebra or the "College Success" courses have occasionally been used to encourage students to address these important areas. In the future, the program coordinator hopes to offer a "Basic Keyboard Skills/Intro to Internet & Email" course with a tuition waiver for Transition Program students.

One of the expected changes in the STCC program is the participation by the Transition Program counselor in the orientation process at one of the large ABE centers in the city. The counselor will present to potential students before they enroll in the ABE program "to pass along the idea of college as the next step after a GED." She will then visit the ABE center monthly or bimonthly to meet with students who are signed up to take their GED test within the next month or two. This creates an extended period of

contact for the student since the program coordinator typically follows students until they complete their developmental education.

Keeping in mind the limited number of programs surveyed, the strengths and limitations identified by the authors and reviewed by the program staff interviewed are listed in the table below:

**Table 2. Advising Model Strengths and Limitations**

<b>ADVISING MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires less of a time commitment from students than classroom-based transition programs and may therefore appeal more to adults who want to be on a fast track to college;</li> <li>• Tends to be open entry, which allows advisors to serve students at any point during the semester or year rather than making students wait until a new session begins;</li> <li>• Is less expensive for programs to provide than more intensive classroom-based models;</li> <li>• May be incorporated into already-funded counseling hours;</li> <li>• Provides individualize counseling that can be customized to students' needs; and</li> <li>• Reaches and accommodates more students than classroom-based models.</li> </ul>
<b>ADVISING MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic skills development is commonly limited to short-term workshops;</li> <li>• Academic deficits are addressed in tuition-based developmental education;</li> <li>• Advisors' case loads can be high;</li> <li>• Students may chose to opt out of important experiences when offered a menu of voluntary workshops;</li> <li>• The open entry nature of the program can make it difficult to recruit a critical mass of students for particular workshops; and</li> <li>• Students do not typically get the benefit of a learning community or cohort as part of the transition experience.</li> </ul>

### GED-Plus Model

The goal of the GED-Plus model is to accelerate learning for adult education students interested in pursuing postsecondary education. Key features of this model include: (1) some alignment of the GED curriculum to include academic and/or student success skills needed for entry into postsecondary education; and (2) concurrent preparation for the GED and postsecondary education and/or dual enrollment in adult and postsecondary education. This model covers a wide variety of activities and services ranging from programs that address academic skill development, educational counseling, and college survival skills, to programs that add stand-alone workshops on the college admissions process. The GED-Plus model may use strategies seen in other models, such as the workshops seen in the Advising model or classes seen in the College Preparatory model. However these programs are specifically for students enrolled in GED classes. Currently, this model may be the most feasible to institute because, in theory, it aligns two existing systems rather than requiring new educational segments. The following programs demonstrate the range and intensity of the GED-Plus model.

The Highland Community College GED-Plus program in Freeport, Illinois is designed to help students transition from their GED program into college courses. Students in the GED program have the option to attend workshops offered by the college's Career Center, designed to help students understand the college admission process. Students get help setting up appointments with the college's advising staff for course selection and career advising. The program offers two free computer classes, in "Keyboarding" and Microsoft Word. Students can take those classes while preparing for the GED or after they pass the GED. The program's major funding source is a grant through the Illinois Community College Board.

To increase the number of GED recipients entering postsecondary education at West Kentucky Community and Technical College (WKCTC), a local workgroup was established between the college and regional adult education providers. This workgroup aligned the existing developmental education course curriculum at WKCTC with the GED content and scores.<sup>6</sup> Students participating in this dual credit program work toward credit for developmental education while completing their GED. A student who receives dual credit for a specific course is not required to retake the course when she or he enrolls at the college.

Upon enrollment at the college, students who have successfully completed their GED will receive credit for designated developmental education courses. Students must receive a grade of A, B, or C to complete successfully a course for dual credit. Grades are determined by GED test scores. For example, at the time of this writing, GED completion with scores in Social Studies, Science, and Language Arts—Reading resulted in grades of 500-599 = C, 600-699 = B, and 700-800 = A for Developmental Reading (RDG 101). The developmental education coordinator reviews the scores annually and makes modifications that are deemed necessary to ensure that the GED scores are comparable with the student outcomes in the developmental education courses. Program participants are not charged tuition for credit in these courses.

The New Haven Adult Education Program, in partnership with Gateway Community College in Connecticut, offers what might more accurately be considered an ASE-Plus program. Students attending New Haven Adult Education, who are close to completing the GED or the adult diploma, are invited to enroll in the Advanced Adult Education Program (AAEP). Students in this program are dually enrolled at New Haven Adult Education and Gateway Community College. The AAEP program helps students attain their GED or adult secondary diploma. Students take the College Placement Test and, based on academic need, can concurrently take developmental education courses earning institutional credit. All students take a study skills/career exploration course for college credit. Developmental education courses are conducted at the adult education program but are taught by college faculty. All developmental education courses are free for the students in the AAEP program. Students in the AAEP enter Gateway Community

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<sup>6</sup> The state of Kentucky has been a center of innovation for ABE-to-college transition, funding and/or piloting several transition models. The work at WKCTC was a regional effort, unrelated to the state pilots and using no additional resources.

College academically prepared for college-level courses. The AAEP program is funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and state funds.

The Urban League of Greater Hartford in Connecticut runs a GED-Plus program that, in addition to a basic GED preparatory program, offers three academic college transition classes. To participate in the academic college transition classes in reading, writing, and math, the GED students must have a ninth grade-level equivalency. These classes cover critical thinking and inquiry, algebra, and study skills. The classes are designed to bridge the gap between the skills needed to obtain a GED and the skills needed for college-level course work. In addition, the instructor conducts a fifteen-hour unit on preparing for the College Placement Test. The college transition classes are funded with incentive funds through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The program also receives grant funds from a local bank for the advisor.

The Urban League also receives funding for a college transition advisor. This allows the program to run three or four college fairs each year. The fairs are attended by all Urban League students. The advisor helps students access information on the programs at all of the community colleges in the greater Hartford area. Students receive support in the college admissions and financial aid process.

Major strengths and limitations identified by the authors and reviewed by the programs staff interviewed are listed in the table below:

**Table 3. GED Plus Model Strengths and Limitations**

<b>GED PLUS MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accelerates learning for students who have the goal of attending postsecondary education;</li> <li>• Has the potential to have an impact on a large number of nontraditional adult learners because the GED is an established educational pathway for adults;</li> <li>• Is less expensive for programs than the college prep model;</li> <li>• Integrates additional academic content, such as critical thinking skills and algebraic concepts, into the GED curriculum; and</li> <li>• Responds directly to the increased emphasis on access to postsecondary education under current WIA Title II guidelines.</li> </ul>
<b>GED PLUS MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional academic objectives may be viewed as irrelevant by students who do not have the goal of attending postsecondary education;</li> <li>• The requirement of the new GED tests for more direct instruction may limit the amount of time instructors can spend on college transition objectives;</li> <li>• The GED, like the traditional high school diploma, is not well aligned with college placement requirements, reducing its effectiveness as a way to prepare for college, particularly in the area of critical thinking and math; and</li> <li>• Places additional requirements on GED teachers.</li> </ul>

## English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Model

The goal of the ESOL model is to reduce the time and expense of additional ESOL/ESL<sup>7</sup> coursework at the start of the student's college career. Key features of this model are: (1) a focus on advancing language skills required for academic settings with little or no math preparation; (2) high program intensity; and (3) a well-articulated curricula with clear academic benchmarks for admission.

About one in four students in community colleges is an immigrant, and the numbers are increasing. ESL programs are the largest and fastest-growing programs at many colleges (Crandall & Sheppard, 2004). The higher-level, academic ESOL classes tend to be tuition-based due to funding constraints. Given that ESOL learners must learn oral as well as written English, they may require several years of ESOL before they are ready for college-level courses. If they attend fee-based ESOL classes, they have to use either their own funds or financial aid and may well deplete these resources before they ever enter college-level courses. This is why some community colleges and community-based ESOL programs offer college transition classes designed to build non-native English speakers' academic reading and writing skills, including grammar and vocabulary. This instruction is often offered in discrete classes, such as "Reading and Writing for College," and "Listening and Speaking."

The ESOL students' prior academic preparation ranges from advanced degrees received in their native country to limited or no education in the native country. While students need to have reached a certain level of English proficiency in order to qualify for ESOL transition classes, they may have limited preparation in other content areas and study skills, depending on their prior education. If students with no high school credential choose to obtain a GED or an adult diploma, they then become part of the ABE/GED student population and may end up attending a transition class designed for that population, if one is available.

While tuition-based ESOL classes abound in community colleges, free ESOL transition programs or classes are much less common. In keeping with our criteria for this paper, we sought out those programs that do not charge tuition. Such programs rely primarily on scarce public funding.

The Cape Cod Community College adult education center offers a free ESOL transition program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education. Its goal is to prepare students to place into college-level "Beginning Composition," so that students can bypass tuition-based ESOL classes and begin accumulating credit toward a degree. The Asian American Civic Association's (AACA) ESOL transition program in Boston has this goal and is also funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education. The AACA classes are held in its learning center. Vermont Adult Learning (VAL)

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<sup>7</sup> There does not seem to be a firm convention on the use of the terms ESL and ESOL (or a number of similar terms). Generally speaking, in this paper ESL is used to refer to programs that are part of postsecondary education at college or below-college level and ESOL is used to denote those programs that serve an adult education population.

collaborates with the Community College of Vermont (CCV) to offer a free College Essential Skills ESOL transition program funded by Vermont Department of Education. The classes are offered on campus with college success skills workshops and advising provided by CCV.

The ESOL Transition program at MiraCosta Community College in Oceanside, California offers its ESL 899: Reading and Writing for College class 12 hours a week, supplemented by study skills workshops. These offerings are funded through state funds for community colleges and federal WIA Title II funding distributed by the California Department of Education. The noncredit ESL program of City College of San Francisco offers a Reading and Writing for College class with a similar public funding mix as MiraCosta. Their free noncredit ESOL program is now under the same department as the college-level ESOL credit program, which facilitates communication among faculty.

Many ESOL transition classes are quite intensive: The “ESOL Transition to College Writing” class at MiraCosta Community College meets 12 hours per week for a total of 108 contact hours. The ESOL transition class run by the Asian American Civic Association meets for 144 hours in 18-week cycles and a 6-week summer cycle.

Unlike college preparation programs for native English speakers, ESOL transition programs, do not, as a rule, view math instruction as being within their purview. The Vermont Adult Learning College Essential Skills ESOL transition program is an exception in this regard. Their students have an option of taking free college prep math classes 2 hours a week over the 14-week semester.

The ESOL college transition programs tend to have clear admission criteria. At MiraCosta, a noncredit ESOL program, students need to score 224 or higher on CASAS and submit a writing sample in order to be placed into the “ESL Transition to College Writing” class. The Cape Cod College ESOL Transition students must score at least 8.5 on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) reading segment in order to be admitted into the program. Both programs attribute their high retention rates – 80% and 93% respectively – in part to their careful student screening process. Sylvia Ramirez, Coordinator at MiraCosta states, “If we have a strong curriculum and strong accountability, retention will take care of itself.”

Both MiraCosta and Cape Cod employ several retention strategies, including early intervention if anyone misses classes and frequent contact by staff via email. All students receive free email accounts as part of the class and check their email at the beginning of each computer class. The Asian American Civic Association has strict attendance requirements for its ESOL Transition class. Their Chinese-speaking counselor also actively supports students’ ability to stay in the class. They have formed an alumni association that meets on the premises, and the alumni are invited back to the classroom to speak to current students to motivate them to persist in their studies.

The ESOL Transition programs tend to have well-articulated curricula that may or may not be aligned with credit-based ESOL or Composition I courses. As noted by



Crandall and Sheppard (2004) in their review of ESL programs, “Even if community colleges offer a number of different ESL programs (credit, noncredit; vocational and academic; beginning through advanced), these may be administratively scattered and may not communicate or collaborate with each other. The programs may not articulate and students may not fully understand their options” (p. 17). Good alignment and strong communication are not necessarily a function of whether the program operates as part of a postsecondary institution. The MiraCosta program is working on aligning its ESOL transition classes with the credit-based classes. At the City College of San Francisco, students typically transition from the free ESOL classes to tuition-based ESOL classes for which they receive institutional credit, whereas most of the Cape Cod students place into regular college-level classes. The Cape Cod Community College program builds in opportunities for the ESOL students to interact with native English-speaking college students. Their computer skills class is an intentional mix of native and non-native English speakers. From time to time, they have been able to pair academic content in college-level English Composition with ESOL instruction.

Counselors or advisors facilitate the transition process, assisting students with admissions, financial aid, career planning and course selection. At some sites, such as City College of San Francisco, counseling is provided by the college but according to ESL Coordinator Sharon Seymour, “There are far too many students for the counselor to do what you’d expect the counselor to be able to do.” Most programs offer workshops on time management, study skills, and test-taking skills. The Cape Cod program has recently recruited alumni peer tutors to present three workshops on time management, study skills, and learning styles. The peer tutors receive college credit for the workshops and are supervised by the transition program coordinator. Participation in these workshops is required. The Asian American Civic Association collaborates with Boston’s Higher Education Information Center, which sends in a counselor once a week to assist students with admissions and financial aid processes.

Strengths and limitations identified by the authors and reviewed by program staff interviewed are listed in the table below:

**Table 4. ESOL Transition Model Strengths and Limitations**

<b>ESOL TRANSITION MODEL STRENGTHS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develops academic language skills for college;</li><li>• Lends itself to addressing curricular alignment with credit-based ESL or introductory composition courses;</li><li>• Tends to have clear academic benchmarks for admission to the transition-level classes; and</li><li>• Tends to monitor student learning gains closely.</li></ul>
<b>ESOL TRANSITION MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limits academic skills development to language arts and tends not to include math;</li><li>• Tends to have high caseloads for advisors; and</li><li>• Graduates of the transition classes often still need more ESL instruction in college and may use up financial aid for it.</li></ul>

## Career Pathways Model

The goal of the Career Pathways model is to get students with limited education into advanced training and college-level programs in high-wage, high-growth employment sectors. Key features of this model include: (1) teaching and learning of basic education and technical skills that are contextualized around a specific employment sector; (2) multiple levels of instruction; (3) curriculum that is “chunked” into clear steppingstones that are recognized by employers (e.g., specific certificates with increased job responsibilities and higher pay) and articulate to academic and career advancement pathways; and (4) intensive support services tailored to the expected challenges of the specific pathway (e.g., intensive support in math and sciences for high-tech careers). Career Pathways programs ideally work closely with area employers, municipalities, and community colleges to develop and implement contextualized curriculum relevant to prevailing employment trends. The model builds on short-term, academic steps for students and early successes in these steps are thought to increase long-term retention.

Career Pathways programs often have multiple levels of instruction. For adults with sixth to eighth grade skill levels, the curriculum focuses on building the basic skills needed to earn an ASE credential and enter a college-level training program. The students concurrently acquire general employability skills – those generic skills needed to get along with fellow workers and supervisors and to make sound decisions. In some cases, basic skills instruction is contextualized to a specific career pathway, for example, business technology, the allied health professions, and early childhood education. For example, the Instituto Del Progreso Latino (IDL) partners with The Westside Technical Institute, Richard J. Daley Community College in Chicago, Illinois and offers a 16-week intensive Manufacturing Bridge Program.

The Manufacturing Bridge Program gives students the skills to be successful in the manufacturing sector. To enter the program, a student needs an ASE credential and a minimum score of 8.0 in reading and math skills as measured by the TABE. The Instituto established a pre-Bridge program for students with limited English proficiency and lower academic skill levels that uses contextualized learning to teach workplace math, English, and computer skills designed to prepare students to enter the Manufacturing Bridge program. The Manufacturing Bridge Program has a high program completion rate: 65% of the students complete the program and 70% of program graduates obtain manufacturing jobs. The program was initially funded by an Empowerment Zone grant through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Current funding comes from Workforce Investment Act contracts, employer’s fees, and foundations.<sup>8</sup>

In most Career Pathways programs, students who possess an ASE credential and have an eighth to tenth grade skill level enter sector-specific training programs in a community college setting. These are typically certificate programs and students often earn “institutional” credit but typically not credit towards a degree. There is growing

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.idpl.org](http://www.idpl.org) for more details.

concern that while pathways articulate to associate, bachelor’s, and, in some cases, a master’s degrees, many of the students who eventually take the college placement test transfer to developmental education.

The Professional Enrichment Early Childhood Education (PEECE) Program is an example of a Career Pathways program that has established a seven-tiered model to help students move from a pre-ASE level through a master’s degree. PEECE, a federally funded project located in Boston, Massachusetts, is designed to address the educational and training needs of early childhood educators. By 2007, all Head Start teachers must earn an associate degree in Early Childhood; by 2014, Head Start teachers must have a bachelor’s degree and all teaching assistants must have a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. PEECE is a partnership among Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD), Head Start, LearningWorks, and the Urban College of Boston.

Students can enter the seven-tier education/training program without a GED and work towards a GED, then continue to earn a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. Through ABCD’s relationship with the Urban College of Boston, students can continue on to earn an Early Childhood Education certificate, then an associate degree in Early Childhood Education. Urban College has an articulation agreement with Lesley University, a four-year college where students earn a bachelor’s and/or a master’s degree.

**Table 5. Overview of PEECE’s Seven Tiers of ECE Professional Development**

<b>TIER</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>PREREQUISITE</b>	<b>CREDENTIAL</b>	<b>COURSES</b>
I	Volunteers, Parents	None	None	Basic skills, ESOL, ABE, Head Start procedures
II	Head Start Assistant Teachers, ECE Interns, Independent Child Care Providers, Volunteers, Parents	High School diploma	None	ESOL, college prep., Child Growth and Development, courses taught in other languages, mentoring
III	Head Start Teachers and Asst. Teachers, Independent Child Care Providers, Volunteers, Parents	High School diploma, Child Growth & Development	Child Devel. Assoc. (CDA)	CDA courses, 6 credit hour practicum
IV	Head Start Teachers and Assistant Teachers, Independent Child Care Providers	CDA	ECE credential	21 credit hours, school readiness courses
V	Head Start Teachers and Assistant Teachers, Independent Child Care Providers	ECE Credential	Associate Degree (AA)	60 credit hours, school readiness courses

TIER	PARTICIPANTS	PREREQUISITE	CREDENTIAL	COURSES
VI	Head Start Teachers and Assistant Teachers, Independent Child Care Providers	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Coursework varies depending on institution and degree program selected
VII	Head Start Teachers, Education Supervisors and Directors, Independent Child Care Providers	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Coursework varies depending on institution and degree program selected

Over 300 students are participating in the first year of the PEECE Program, of whom 16 students are pursuing a GED. Approximately 200 students are earning a CDA credential, a certificate in Early Childhood Education, or an associate degree in Early Childhood Education at the Urban College of Boston. Eighteen students are working towards a bachelor's degree and three students are earning a master's degree at Lesley University.

A grant from the U.S. Department of Education provides most of the funding for the PEECE Program. Additional funding is provided through Head Start, Child Care Choices of Boston, and Community Partnerships for Children, the Department of Transitional Assistance, and the Workforce Investment Act. Students in the certificate and associate degree programs in Early Childhood Education offered at the Urban College of Boston can apply for and receive federal financial aid through PELL Grants.

In addition to coursework, other components of many Career Pathways programs include comprehensive student support services such as career, personal, and academic counseling, academic support and monitoring, job development, and job placement. The Career Pathways Pilot Project in Arkansas is a partnership of providers that perform different and essential roles in the student's transition into and through college. The Southern Good Faith Fund, a multi-service, community-based organization, conducts the student outreach, recruitment, orientation, and extensive student needs assessment, including career exploration and supplemental service needs such as child care, transportation, and personal counseling. The Southern Good Faith Fund partners with Southeast Arkansas College (SEARK) to provide students with intensive, on-going counseling, academic support and monitoring, and job development and job placement.

As part of its career and academic counseling, the Southern Good Faith Fund provides students with detailed information on the various career pathways available to them and helps students select one that best suits their career interests and aptitudes. Students take the TABE to determine if they are ready to enter the Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE) College Bridge Program or if they can directly enter one of the Certificates of Proficiency programs offered at the program's college partner. Students who score below a ninth grade level on the TABE enter the WAGE College Bridge Program, in which instruction is geared to improve students' basic

academic skills through a contextualized curriculum that prepares them for one of the Certificate of Proficiency programs. The curriculum is not only contextualized to the skills needed to be successful in the Certificate of Proficiency programs; it is also contextualized to provide the student with the skills needed for successful employment in that field. For example, students interested in entering the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) Certificate of Proficiency program will learn basic skills in the context of the job tasks and knowledge needed for that profession.

The community college is responsible for instruction in the WAGE College Bridge Program and for all of the Certificate of Proficiency programs. Most of the certificates articulate to an associate degree offered through the college. The students continue to receive intensive support services, as described above, from the Southern Good Faith Fund while they are enrolled in the college. Funding differs for each program partner; the Southern Good Faith Fund receives the bulk of its funding from private foundations with some very limited government support. The Certificates of Proficiency programs at SEARK are funded by tuition.

A recent study by CAAL on healthcare Career Ladders (Chisman & Spangenberg, 2005) raises several cautionary notes about Career Pathway models not necessarily found in our examples: (1) Basic skills remediation may be quite modest in these programs; (2) While adults may be recruited into entry-level jobs in a particular sector, the extent of their progress in the sector is unknown; and (3) Adults with higher-level skills (described as reading at the ninth grade and above) appear to be able to make the greatest strides, while low skilled adults (defined reading at the fifth or sixth grade level) make little progress.

Strengths and limitations identified by the authors and reviewed by program staff interviewed are listed in the table below:

**Table 6. Career Pathways Model Strengths and Limitations**

<p><b>CAREER PATHWAYS MODEL STRENGTHS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides access to college-level occupational training for students who are not academically prepared for college-level courses;</li> <li>• Accesses resources for adult transition from public workforce development programs and private employers;</li> <li>• Makes instruction more immediately relevant to students' career interests through a contextualized curriculum (which likely improves retention);</li> <li>• Creates steppingstones to career preparation programs that can lead to an academic credential; and</li> <li>• Ensures the relevance of the curriculum to available jobs when accompanied by employer involvement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CAREER PATHWAYS MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can limit students' options to whatever sector-specific training is available;</li> <li>• May prematurely narrow students' vocational options; and</li> <li>• May not adequately prepare students for future college-level courses, which can inhibit ability to move from certificate-level programs into associate degree programs and beyond.</li> </ul>

## College Preparatory Model

The goal of the College Preparatory or “College Prep” model is to enable students to transition successfully into college-level courses or, at the very least, begin their college career at the upper tier of developmental education. Key features of this model include: (1) direct instruction to address the gaps between the knowledge and skills required to complete the GED and those needed for success in college; (2) a learning environment that teaches college success skills by simulating a college environment in terms of class format, expectations, scheduling, etc.; (3) a comprehensive counseling component; and (4) student cohorts or learning communities.

One example of the College Prep model is the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, designed and managed by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC)/World Education with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. This project, begun in 2000, comprises 25 adult education programs and their over 40 college partners in the 6 New England states. Participating programs must provide a minimum of six hours a week of direct instruction in reading, writing, math, use of computers, and study skills for a minimum of 14 weeks in an academic cycle. In addition, these programs offer educational and career counseling, mentoring, academic tutoring, and access to support mechanisms on the college campus. To participate, students must have a GED, an adult diploma, or they may have a traditional diploma. In the case of students with high school diplomas, the programs give preference to adults who have been out of high school for at least five years. Each program serves 10-15 students per semester. As of the end of 2005, 80% of program completers (1,381 students) had successfully entered postsecondary education through this project.

Another example of the College Prep model is The Transition Program at Bristol Community College in Massachusetts. This program is one of eight piloted by the Massachusetts Department of Education in 2000. Like the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, the number of students served at any one time is small, capped at 20, and students must have completed an adult education program with a GED or adult diploma. Courses, such as pre-algebra, reading, writing, and “Technology Tools for College Success,” are offered each semester based on the needs of the particular cohort of transition students.

Yet another program example in this category is Capital IDEA. The Capital IDEA College Prep program in Austin, Texas seeks to provide long-term education and training to place low-income, low-skilled adults into jobs that pay a living wage, and offer benefits and a career path. To support the attainment of this goal, Capital IDEA offers an exceptionally comprehensive college transition program where students attend classes in reading, writing, math, and study skills full time, Monday through Friday, for at least one 12-week cycle. The application process for this free program consists of several steps that take 4-6 weeks to complete, starting with an initial orientation, followed by career exploration and a meeting with the counselor to begin the development of an individual educational plan, including a financial plan. Applicants are also required to discuss their plans with their immediate family members, sign a contract to commit to

attending the program regularly, and finally to meet with the program's executive or deputy director before being admitted into the program. Students are also required to commit to giving back to the community after graduation by helping fellow students or by doing other volunteer work.

### **About Capital IDEA**

Capital IDEA serves 400 low-income adults a year in its ESOL, GED, and College Prep classes, on a budget of \$2.6 million, made possible by a diverse and extensive array of public and private funders. The City of Austin funds the program at \$1.5 million. This level of funding has come about as a result of effective organizing by a broad-based coalition of churches and community organizations driven by a clear mission. For planning purposes, Capital IDEA expects to spend \$6000 per student per year. This covers \$1,635 for tuition, fees, and books; \$820 for childcare (students are helped to access additional funding sources for childcare); \$130 for emergencies (transportation, etc.); \$2,815 for weekly meetings and case management for each student; and \$600 to cover administrative overhead.

Along with direct instruction within a semester format, the College Prep models provide personal, academic, and career counseling. In the New England ABE-to-College Project, the counselor's role includes developing relationships with key college staff in admissions, financial aid, advising center, and student support services. Counselors are responsible for developing the career exploration activities, developing a mentoring component, and working with teachers to integrate counseling objectives into the academic component of the program.

At the Transition Program at Bristol Community College, which provides ongoing support to students, career exploration workshops run during intersession in January. Workshops include the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Strong Interest Inventory, and an overview of the college career development software called SIGI-Plus. Many of the educational counseling needs of students are addressed in two courses – a study skills course and a “College Success” seminar. Each course carries one credit, and consists of 15 hours of class time. Academic coaching is offered in January and August.

The program at Capital IDEA is unusual in that its counseling support provides wrap-around services for students until they graduate from college. Once they are admitted to the program, Capital IDEA pays for tuition, books, fees, and even child care, and provides case management throughout the student's participation in the transition program and college. This long-term support is achieved by tapping public as well as private funding streams. Students are required to attend weekly peer support sessions called “Vision, Initiative, and Perseverance.” In the last semester of college, the focus of the counseling shifts to job placement. The program has partnerships with 86 employers in the area, which makes it possible to place nearly all graduates into jobs that meet the program's goal of providing a living wage with benefits.

Capital IDEA's comprehensive approach, coupled with a thorough application and orientation process and clear requirements, results in impressive outcomes: 90% of the students complete the transition program and most of them place into college-level classes in associate degree programs; 84% obtain their associate degree. Students place into jobs where the average hourly wage was \$13.50 in 2004.

Lastly, College Prep models capitalize, to varying degrees, on cohorts of transition students, a strategy found to increase retention in college. Learning together in the form of cohorts or learning communities<sup>9</sup> provides the social glue needed to encourage and motivate students. The Transition Program at Bristol Community College forms learning communities through linked courses. Students take both the writing and the "Technology Tools for College Success" courses together and the instructors integrate learning activities. For example, in the Technology Tools for College Success course, the instructor teaches word processing and addresses how to format a paper for college, skills needed in the writing course. This arrangement offers students a deeper understanding and integration of the material they are learning as well as more time for interactions between students and with teachers.

Strengths and limitations identified by the authors and reviewed by program staff are listed in the table below:

**Table 7. College Preparatory Model Strengths and Limitations**

<p><b>COLLEGE PREPARATORY MODEL STRENGTHS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides direct instruction to build academic skills, e.g., algebra, reading, and critical thinking;</li> <li>• Is designed to meet the multiple needs of adult students, including academic, psychosocial, and career development;</li> <li>• Lends itself to addressing curricular alignment between the adult education and postsecondary systems;</li> <li>• Helps students conserve personal financial resources and time in college by working toward direct placement into college-level coursework or the highest levels of developmental education;</li> <li>• Creates cohorts within the transition program;</li> <li>• May allow for dual credit for coursework; and</li> <li>• Encourages partnerships with other educational and social service providers and businesses.</li> </ul>
<p><b>COLLEGE PREPARATORY MODEL LIMITATIONS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May be considered too time-consuming by students, making them reluctant to sign-up for classes;</li> <li>• Requires instructors to align their instruction with academic requirements of the postsecondary institution;</li> <li>• Requires programs to meet a wide range of student academic needs which can be challenging in terms of instructional methodology and the learning community;</li> <li>• Has no clear ownership by the adult education or the postsecondary education systems;</li> <li>• Has no clear federal public funding stream and is the most expensive program type; and</li> <li>• Typically serves fewer students than other models.</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> A cohort is a group of people but in this context it takes on the supportive notion of companions. Learning communities tend to have learning themes, be interdisciplinary, and/or support curricular integration. For more information, see [www.collegetransition.org/promising/rp6.html](http://www.collegetransition.org/promising/rp6.html).



## Discussion of Program Survey Results

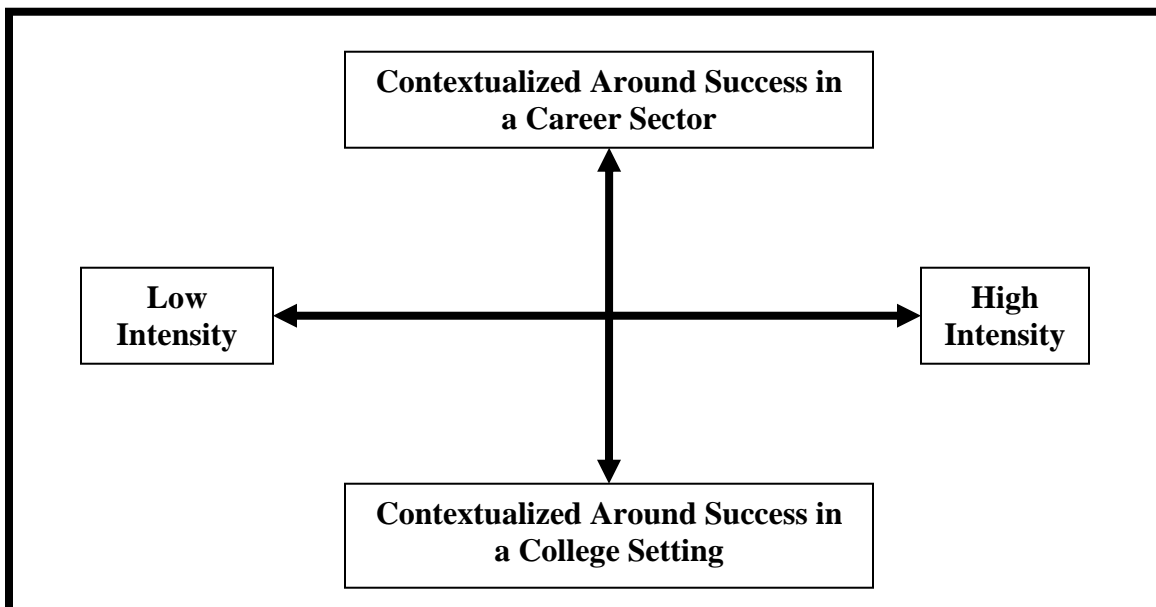
### Observations from the Data

Transition programs across all five categories share the goal of helping adults access and succeed in postsecondary education. The more comprehensive models typically articulate explicit goals about career advancement and economic gains or specify entry into postsecondary education at the highest level of developmental education or college-level. The programs that we interviewed were recognized for their transition efforts but we speculate that less intensive programs provide only brief contact with the student and a focus on imparting information on college admissions processes. However, it is important to keep in mind the modest scope of this study when making comparisons.

How the different models work to achieve their goals is largely a function of the variety and intensity of instructional and counseling/advising services they offer. For example, transition services in the Advising model may consist of as few as six hours of counseling whereas at the other end of the intensity continuum, in the College Prep model, students attend a minimum of 100 hours of instruction and counseling, and more in many cases. The Advising programs we surveyed tended to offer additional, optional workshops or courses on academic and college success skills that augmented the advising service, increasing their intensity.

A particular program could be plotted on a grid based on the intensity of services and the basis of their retention strategy – contextualized around success in career sector or college setting (see Figure 1). For example, most Career Pathways programs would fall in the upper right quadrant of the grid while College Prep and ESOL programs would fall in the lower right quadrant. Advising and GED-Plus programs would be on the lower half of the grid and, depending on the intensity and variety of services of the program, to the right or left of center.

**Figure 1. Adult Transition Program Grid**



While each program type has distinct features, they also share features. For example, College Prep programs, such as Capital IDEA in Texas, may have a very clear mission to train people for jobs that have benefits, pay a living wage, and provide career pathways. However, they work toward that goal with an intensive College Prep program that places people into certificate or associate degree tracks. Career Pathways programs also place students into job training or certificate programs that may lead to or articulate with an academic credential, typically an associate degree.

The genesis of the design for each program type has a unique history. Availability and source of funds and other resources are some key factors that determine the type of transition program that is affordable and feasible to offer. For example, a program might choose to focus on advising and counseling if funds become available for that position, resulting in the development of an Advising model. A prescribed division of roles and responsibilities between the adult education program and its partner college is also a factor that prevents certain transition programs from offering free services where similar tuition-based services are offered by the host college. Institutional culture may play a role, especially in the use of Advising models that mirror the traditional college service delivery style of assuming that adults will identify and access the services and supports they need. In the end, the clarity of the transition program's vision for what it should accomplish for its students serves as a driving force that overcomes obstacles through relationship building and collaborations with a wide variety of stakeholders (e.g., college partner, human service agencies, etc.).

Any attempt to categorize programs in such an emerging and evolving area as ABE-to-college transitions runs the risk of becoming rapidly outdated. Certainly, individual programs are likely to evolve into something other than what is described in these pages. The five program types represent our best judgment of how adult education programs were preparing their students for postsecondary education in 2005. It is safe to say that regardless of the type of transition services they offer, they are in a minority among adult education programs in the United States. The vast majority of adult education programs in the United States are not presently offering any substantive formal college transition services, according to a survey conducted by Morest (2004). We hope that this will change in response to policies and new funding streams that recognize the importance of this endeavor. The emphasis on developing a strong economy based on a skilled workforce, including current workers, clearly provides an impetus for many states to initiate statewide systems for transitioning adult learners to postsecondary education and training.

### How the Models Address Common Barriers

The risk factors that affect students' persistence in postsecondary education most often cited in literature are: delayed postsecondary enrollment; financial independence; part-time enrollment; working full-time while enrolled; having children or dependents other than a spouse; being a single parent; and coming to postsecondary education without a traditional high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). A typical adult learner graduating from an ASE program faces all or most of these risk

factors while most high school graduates who go directly to college do not. While adult education providers cannot remove these risk factors, they can prepare adult learners to succeed in spite of the barriers those risk factors generate. In fact, the high prevalence of these characteristics in our student population makes it imperative that our students receive additional preparation in order to have a chance of beating the odds against their success. This imperative brings up factors that all models must address.

*Gaps in academic preparation.* As noted in the beginning of this paper, the level of academic preparation that a typical ASE graduate requires in order to succeed in college-level courses should not be underestimated. Most ASE programs do not teach students strategies for reading dense college textbooks or how to research and write a term paper. The level of math covered in many ASE programs ends at pre-algebra while colleges require mastery of algebra for placement into college-level math courses. From our experience, adults who enter college without these skills are at the highest risk of dropping out in their first year.

If the goal of the transition program is to place students into specific occupational training, research indicates that instruction should be contextualized for that occupation or career cluster (Mazzeo, Rab, & Alssid, 2003). The Career Pathway model relies upon filling academic gaps by combining basic skills development with college-level technical training. Developing such contextualized transition or bridge programs requires a thorough understanding of the actual training program and time to develop curriculum that is fully aligned with it.

While Advising transition programs typically rely on the college's tier of development education to remediate academic gaps, several of the Advising transition programs interviewed are developing components that offer some level of academic preparation, such as writing skills workshops, math courses, and skill courses, such as keyboarding, to complement the core activity of advising. These more intensive programs become similar to the College Prep model but still primarily emphasize one-to-one delivery of services as their core activity.

*The need for intensive counseling.* All transition program models discussed in this paper offer counseling or advising aimed at helping students gain access to postsecondary education: how to apply to college; how to pay for college; and how to navigate the college culture. While some students coming out of ASE programs only need help with these mechanics of the transition process, many others need various forms of academic, personal, and career counseling.

Academic counseling typically includes helping students develop a clearer understanding of their course of study and the skills needed to meet their goals. For adults, personal counseling typically addresses problem-solving around the stresses and strains of juggling multiple roles and responsibilities. Career or vocational counseling has been highlighted by several researchers (Grubb, 2002a, 2002b; Jenkins, 2003) as an area of great importance to a successful career outcome at the completion of postsecondary education. Based on this research, it is important for students to have a

clear understanding of the type of education (e.g., which credential) is needed for successful entry into a particular occupation and the identity of local employers hiring graduates. Sometimes these counseling responsibilities fall on the shoulders of the ASE teaching staff members who are not trained or fully compensated for this work. Several of the adult education providers we interviewed located career counseling services for their students by cultivating relationships with local One Stop Career Centers and/or the college career services office.

*Assessment and outcomes.* There is no formal connection between the assessments used in ASE and the placement tests used by community colleges to gauge a student's skill level and ability to do college-level work. Transition programs that work with their college partners to align their assessment processes maximize the collection of important information about the learner while minimizing repeated testing of students. Several of the transition programs in this study administer their college's placement tests as a transition strategy. This provides the college and the ASE provider with the information needed to bridge more effectively the academic gaps between the two systems.

For example, some programs and at least one state have endeavored to align test scores. Kentucky worked with ACT to develop a crosswalk between the TABE and the COMPASS, the college placement test used in that state. The Rio Salado Community College Transition Program in Arizona correlated the skills measured by the TABE with the College English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA) to better prepare their students. The Workforce Alliance for Growth in the Economy (WAGE) program in Arkansas also uses the TABE to determine the basic literacy level a student has in order to see if the student is ready to enter a certificate-level program. If students score below a certain level on the TABE, even if they have a GED, they are referred to the WAGE Bridge Program until they have acquired the skills needed to enter a certificate of proficiency program at the partner college. Many of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project transition programs use pre- and post-scores on the college placement test as a measure of learning gains and indicator of the program's success. However programs that receive federal WIA Title II funding must use NRS-approved tests, such as TABE or GED, to report learning outcomes.

*Reaching and educating collaborators.* New transition programs routinely underestimate the amount of effort student recruitment demands. According to our experience with the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project and programs surveyed for this study, programs often need to recruit four times as many students as they eventually enroll. In order to run successful transition programs, adult education providers need to extend their existing networks in two directions. In order to recruit students, strong referral agreements with other education, training, and human service providers, and with One-Stop Career Center staff and employers are required. This often calls for raising the awareness of these providers of the importance of increased college preparation, not merely passive dissemination of information.

In order to pave the way for a seamless transition for their students, whether they were part of a postsecondary institution or not, the transition programs we surveyed needed to reach out to various departments and offices in the targeted postsecondary institutions. Ensuring student access to support services at the college required communication and agreements with a variety of student services. Aligning instruction with what is required at the postsecondary level called specifically for communication with developmental education faculty. The transition programs also formed relationships with staff in the admissions and financial aid offices in order for students to secure timely and sufficient support around financial aid and an appropriate placement. All this relationship building and communication takes time and effort that only the most enterprising programs can undertake on their own without additional funding or impetus.<sup>10</sup>

## State-Level Approaches to Adult Transition

This section describes the state-level efforts of adult education in developing college transition initiatives in Connecticut, Kentucky, Maine, and Oregon (see Appendix B). The importance of state-level initiatives emerged during our initial data collection as we saw the impact that systemic factors had on the development of adult transition services (e.g., the need for funding mechanisms for transition). This additional unit of analysis – the state – moves the discussion of access to postsecondary education beyond mechanisms to support individual students to address broader mechanisms of model development through systems change.

In terms of model development initiatives, Maine and Connecticut are moving toward a College Prep model, Oregon is focusing on Career Pathways, and Kentucky has a variety of models (depending on the local resources and interests, characterized by a fairly consistent component of dual enrollment of students in both adult education and college-level courses).

Price (2004) identifies two broad perspectives about the causes of and solutions to unequal access and success in college that address this discussion:

On the one hand, if individual behavior must change to improve college access and success, the solution is likely to be new program and outreach efforts in communities where significant numbers of individuals are not making the appropriate choices. On the other hand, if institutional behavior must change to improve college access and success, the solution is likely to be more systemic, focusing on state and federal policies as well as secondary schools and college practices. In reality, these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and sustainable solutions to unequal access must address both sets of assumptions. (p. 5)

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<sup>10</sup> See sample collaboration agreements at [www.collegetransition.org/promising/practice3.html](http://www.collegetransition.org/promising/practice3.html).

## Connecticut

Of the four states profiled in this study, Connecticut is the smallest, most densely populated, and most racially diverse. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, slightly over 16% of the population of people 18 and older do not have high school diplomas. This translates into 426,553 adults. According to *State Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population* (RTI International, 2005 (revised)), for the adult education target population of adults 16 and older, out of school, and no diploma, Connecticut has 393,744 adults (16.94 % of the population 16 and older and out of school). Of this target population, 358,690 were 25 and older.

Administratively, adult education is overseen by the Connecticut State Department of Education through the Bureau of Early Childhood, Career, and Adult Education. There is a provider network of approximately 75 agencies that consists primarily of local school districts, but also includes family literacy centers, work site programs, a small number of union-run, community- and faith-based programs, and one community college. Funding for adult education comes from local dollars, state subsidies, and federal funding for literacy development and program improvement (WIA Title II).

Interest in adult transition services has developed for several reasons. Echoing a theme found in all four state-level interviews and the literature review, Connecticut faces a labor market that requires the current workforce to upgrade skills to increase the pool of skilled workers. The State Department of Education recognized that:

- an increasing number of adult education programs see the need to help their students enter postsecondary education and training. The department and local programs want to have a formal mechanism to help these students achieve their goal.
- students often face several semesters of costly developmental education if they are not prepared for college-level courses.
- many of the ABE programs already provide informal college transition services by working with their local community colleges. Some community colleges use space in ABE centers to hold classes but without a formal relationships or any real integration of services between the ABE providers and the colleges. The department wanted to develop a model that would integrate and formalize these informal relationships to benefit specifically the adult education student.
- there was a strong federal focus on transitions, and the prospect of having transitions as a part of the Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) encouraged the state to position itself to be ready when that funding became available.

In response to these factors, Connecticut's College Transition Initiative began through WIA Title II funding made available to the state in 2004.

## *Transitioning Adults to College*

To begin, the state initiated a competitive request for proposal (RFP) process. The model for the transitions RFP was based on the program model at New Haven Adult Education called the Advanced Adult Education Program (AAEP), a program in existence since 1998 (see earlier discussion of the AAEP). The AAEP model was built on a firm partnership between the adult education center and the college. Nine transition programs were funded.

The RFP proposed the following criteria:

1. Written agreements between the adult education provider and its postsecondary partner(s).
2. Evidence of an institutional commitment and capacity on the part of all partners to enhance and expand their programs of study in keeping with the requirements of this priority area.
3. Establishment of a collaborative planning team comprised of local adult education program staff and students, postsecondary education personnel, and appropriate other agency personnel (e.g., Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, One-Stops, Workforce Investment Boards, etc.).
4. Creation of a transition program mission/vision with corresponding curriculum framework which included the necessary assessment criteria for entrance into postsecondary education.
5. Development of a student referral process for students who have 16 or more credits *or* students with a score of 2,500 on the Practice GED Test and/or other specifically defined program criteria.
6. Partnerships between adult education and postsecondary education and training programs that must provide at a minimum:
  - dual or concurrent enrollment for academic and technical courses;
  - academic and career-related counseling combined with other student support services;
  - academic assessments in line with the receiving institution to ensure student readiness for enrollment; and
  - facilitation of the admissions and financial aid process for transition students.

In addition to providing funding, the State Department of Education took an active role in supporting programs as they developed and implemented their transitions component. Department staff convened several meetings so that programs could share their successes and challenges. Programs received professional development and resources from the state professional development organization, the Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN). Using state leadership dollars for these activities was thought to strengthen the programs and send a strong message of state support.

While there were many important components to the Connecticut college transition initiative, participants noted the importance of the desire and willingness of both the ABE program and the community college to make the transition process work. This meant coming to the table with a flexible attitude and the shared belief that ABE students belong in college and can succeed there.

Recognizing the importance of student support services was another important component. The department viewed student support services as essential to student retention in transition and postsecondary education. This necessitated having the college identify instructors who understood and wanted to work with nontraditional adult learners. Key to this activity and the overall success of the initiative was the presence of a strong liaison at the college, a person in a policymaking position.

In thinking back over the process thus far, the Connecticut Department of Education adult education staff had several additional observations:

- The implementation of a college transition program is complicated and requires patience; it involves many layers of collaboration.
- The ABE system's perceptions and expectations of their students is very different from what community colleges expect from their students; this requires setting aside time and crafting activities that give staff opportunities to learn more about their partner's processes and services.
- In hindsight, the selection process to determine which ABE programs would receive funds would have been strengthened had more programs been encouraged to apply and had the proposed partnerships been evaluated through interviews with the lead ABE person and the community college liaison.

Connecticut next plans to align the transition curriculum with the entrance requirements of the state's 12 community colleges; identify a strong liaison at each community college; and improve retention rates for students transitioning into postsecondary education.

## Kentucky

Kentucky was one of the first states to address college transition for adults, beginning with state postsecondary educational reform legislation in 1997, followed by adult education reform in 2000.<sup>11</sup> It is a relatively large state with an even urban/rural split (48% rural) and little racial or ethnic diversity. According to *State Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population* (RTI International, 2005 revised), for the adult education target population of adults 16 and older, out of school, and no diploma, Kentucky had 753,888 adults (26.92% of the population 16 and older and out of school). Of this target population, 680,223 were 25 and older.

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<sup>11</sup> See report by Chisman, *Adult Education and Literacy and Community Colleges in Kentucky* (2004).



## *Transitioning Adults to College*

Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) is managed separately from the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) but the two entities are organized as part of the Council on Postsecondary Education (CPS), along with 4-year colleges and universities. To provide adult education services, Kentucky contracts with 120 providers including local boards of education, community and technical colleges, community-based organizations, education consortia, and correctional institutions.

Like Connecticut, interest in transition to postsecondary education and training for adults in Kentucky began as part of broader public policy development to better prepare its citizens for life and work. In 1997, the state set a goal to raise the per capita income to the national average. Increasing the level of education was one mechanism for achieving the goal and that necessitated educating adults because focusing solely on students coming to college from high schools would not have been sufficient given Kentucky's demographics.

This public policy agenda meant that KYAE became a critical partner in reaching the state's economic goal. Along with encouraging more people to complete high school, the adult education agenda focused on transitioning more adult education students into college. Their efforts have paid off. The college-going rate of GED holders increased from 12% in 1998 to 19% for the 2002 cohort, with over 90% attending Kentucky's community and technical colleges (King, 2004). One state-level initiative to support clients of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program included the following elements:

- a cross-agency workgroup with participants from multiple levels of the KCTCS and KYAE educational systems;
- a transition model with:
  - ⇒ transition advisors;
  - ⇒ a tool to correlate the TABE test and college placement tests; and
  - ⇒ a dual enrollment strategy allowing adult education students to take college-level courses in areas of academic strength while they completed work on a basic skill.

The joint transitions workgroup was staffed with representatives from both the Kentucky Community & Technical Colleges and Kentucky Adult Education and the Transition Coordinator's leadership team. The workgroup developed a model for a transitions initiative – working toward the goal of a seamless transition between adult education and postsecondary education.

While the establishment of transition advisor positions for TANF clients enrolled in ABE was the first key element of the model and the one truly state-wide element, because of the TANF funding stream, they could only work with the TANF population. TANF-funded work study for ABE transition students added another dimension that increased student motivation to stay and complete school.

The second key element of the transition model was the COMPASS/TABE Concordance Table as developed by ACT, the independent, not-for-profit national organization that provides assessment, research, information, and program management services in the areas of education and workforce development. Correlating the ACT's college placement instrument, the COMPASS, with the TABE was one of the key ways to reduce duplicative assessment of college-bound students. The Concordance was helpful but has been discontinued. The Office of Vocational and Adult Education found the Concordance Table inappropriate for generating National Reporting System (NRS) data, the system used to track learning outcomes for students in WIA Title II funded programs.

The third key element in the transition model was an ABE dual enrollment strategy. This strategy, seen in several program models described earlier in this paper, allows students who are low functioning in some areas to continue to get ABE support while they take college courses in areas of strength.

KCTCS and KY Adult Education jointly funded several transition pilot programs through shared WIA funds. Although lack of additional funding kept the transition pilot programs from continuing beyond their first year, several of the adult education providers and their community college partners have managed to incorporate transition model components and recommendations from the initial Transitions Workgroup as part of their services; no two arrangements are alike. One of the most comprehensive initiatives is a partnership between the Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) and Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education (JCPSACE). The program is designed to ensure a seamless transition for GED students entering college and to provide enrichment skills to college students through a dual enrollment strategy.

State-level staff members were key to encouraging adult transition through a series of presentations throughout the state. State-level KCTCS and KYAE administrators convened regional meetings where college developmental educators, academic administrators, and ABE providers were invited to talk about how adult education and developmental education systems work, and the complementary services each could provide. They found that both adult education and community colleges share students who are functioning below the 12th grade level, yet the two systems knew very little about each other.

Similar to the experience of Connecticut, in Kentucky, student success hinged on coordination by a strong liaison at the college – someone who is knowledgeable and well-connected to both the ABE and college systems. It is critically important to have someone who can speak with authority about the community college bureaucracy, especially someone who understands how complex the admissions process is for students.

From Kentucky's perspective, the development of effective transition models requires:

- bringing together the full range of people who need to collaborate (based on the entire adult education providers network and including the appropriate college academic administrators and developmental education faculty leadership);

## *Transitioning Adults to College*

- cultivating an attitude among college staff that welcomes and embraces adult students in college; and
- providing a wide range of advising, counseling, mentoring, advocacy, and other support services to students.

Currently, KCTCS is involved in a national data gathering initiative that will attempt to track the success of various cohorts of students entering its community and technical colleges, including GED recipients. This will generate important information by tracking student success over time.

### **Maine**

Maine, the third state profiled in this study, is slightly smaller and more rural (55% rural) than Kentucky. While Maine has the highest high school graduation rate of the four states, at 85.4% of persons age 25 and over, Maine residents are less likely to go on to college – placing behind Connecticut and Oregon in the percentage of residents with bachelor’s degrees. As more manufacturing jobs leave the state, this gap has sparked interest in raising the educational level of adults to prepare workers for the knowledge economy. According to *State Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population* (RTI International, 2005 revised), for the adult education target population of adults 16 and older, out of school, and no diploma, Maine has 136,259 adults (15.28% of the population 16 and older and out of school). Of this target population, 125,100 were 25 and older. Maine also has a small but growing immigrant community requiring ESOL services.

As with the majority of states in the nation, adult education is administered by the Department of Education in Maine. The provider network consists of 120 programs operating as part of school districts and located throughout the state in local high schools. Some programs have been in existence for over a century, like Portland Adult Education, which began in 1850, and have long histories of providing support to adults wishing to go on to college. Maine’s adult education goal is to pass legislation to institutionalize transition services for adults.

Maine has an advantage in terms of developing collaborations with college partners. Since 1989, Maine adult education programs, in collaboration with the University of Maine System, have managed nearly half of the 90 high school-based Interactive Television (ITV) sites offering college courses. Collaboration with these off-campus centers has given Maine adult education programs an important connection to higher education. In addition, since 1980, the Maine Technical College System (recently reorganized under a Maine Community College System) has collaborated with adult education through the state process for distributing discretionary funds from the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act. At least once a year, local committees that include secondary, postsecondary, and adult education representatives convene to discuss distribution of these funds. Through these relationships, adult education programs began providing placement tests for students applying to college.

In 2001, seven Maine adult education centers joined the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project (a College Prep model). With funding through the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and technical assistance through the New England Literacy Resource Center, these programs adapted the model to serve their students. This leadership, along with the Adult and Community Education Team of the Maine Department of Education and the Maine Adult Education Association (MAEA), has kept adult education at the table as Maine has developed a state-wide reform movement to “educate all citizens.” This state-wide reform effort by the Maine Compact for Higher Education includes educating the current workforce along with encouraging high school students to go on to college. In the words of Joseph F. Boulos (Harney, 2004), founding chair of the Maine Compact, “completing a college degree is a fundamental right and responsibility of all Maine citizens” – for both high school students and adults. This is to be accomplished through an action plan designed to help both high school graduates and adult students pursue a college degree.<sup>12</sup> To do this, Maine is developing a funding formula to provide services and a data collection mechanism to follow student progress.

In tandem with this process, the Maine Adult Education Association (MAEA) issued a “White Paper” in 2002 that called attention to the critical role of adult education as a bridge to higher education and specified an articulation agreement between programs and the emerging Community College system (Newell, 2003). Such an agreement was reached in 2003, and it featured a pledge to build a seamless bridge to higher education. A memorandum of understanding describes the rationale and essential components of the partnership.<sup>13</sup>

The MAEA White Paper contributed to the establishment of the Maine College Transition Initiative, one of the efforts developed by the Maine Compact for Higher Education to encourage participation in postsecondary education. Its goal is to help 7,000 to 10,000 additional Maine adults earn a college degree over the next decade with free preparatory courses provided by adult education programs. Now in its formative stage, the initiative is designed to institutionalize the College Prep model through a partnership between the adult education programs and their partner colleges. With the groundwork funded by Lumina Foundation for Education, this Initiative will:

- help adults who are studying to earn high school degrees to transition to college;
- provide preparatory support to adults who have a high school degree but are not academically prepared to take college courses; and
- provide counseling, mentoring and support services to enable these adults to successfully transition to college and earn degrees (Maine Compact for Higher Education, 2006).

In the spring of 2006, legislation to support the Maine College Transition Initiative received unanimous support from the legislative Education Committee and was approved by the Appropriations Committee at \$200,000 starting July 1, 2006. This is

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<sup>12</sup> See [www.collegeforme.com/action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.collegeforme.com/action_plan.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> See [www.state.me.us/education/aded/transitions.htm](http://www.state.me.us/education/aded/transitions.htm).

expected to fund six new adult transition programs at \$30,000 per program. Additional legislation may increase this amount (C. Newell, personal communication, April 6, 2006).

The efforts of the Maine College Transition Initiative to date have focused on collecting baseline data on persistence in college of students with GEDs and adult diplomas; holding discussions with college presidents to identify barriers to postsecondary education; and developing curricular alignment that prepares students for the state college placement test, the ACCUPLACER. The long-term goal is to create a comprehensive and seamless referral system, a common data collection system, joint marketing, articulated placement process and course content (including ESOL students), and the establishment of a mentor or cohort system.

## Oregon

Geographically, Oregon is the ninth largest state in the United States, larger than the combined areas of Connecticut, Kentucky, and Maine. Most of the population is clustered along the coastal plain from the Pacific Ocean to the Cascade Mountains with approximately 30% considered rural. According to *State Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population* (RTI International, 2005 revised), for the adult education target population of adults 16 and older, out of school, and no diploma, Oregon has 392,724 adults (16.76% of the population 16 and older and out of school). Of this target population, 331,828 were 25 and older. Approximately one half of the people served in adult education are non-native English speakers, primarily Spanish-speaking adults from Mexico. Funding for adult education comes from federal funds that are distributed through an open and competitive grant process, state funds in the form of full-time equivalency (FTE) reimbursement to community colleges, local tax dollars, modest fees paid by students, and other private, state, and federal grants.

In 1994, Adult Basic Skills Education (ABSE) in Oregon was administratively combined with workforce development into the Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (CCWD). Oregon community colleges are charged with providing broad, comprehensive programs in academic as well as professional technical subjects, including adult literacy services. Community-based, volunteer tutoring programs, and state and community correctional facilities partner with community colleges in order to take advantage of the college infrastructure and services.

The administrative partnership between adult education and the community colleges places the ABSE departments on equal footing with other faculty and staff at the college. In practice, this occurs at almost all institutions but not every one. Adult education students are considered college students and receive a student ID, use the college enrollment services, student advising services, computing services, library, etc. The college receives the same funds from the state (FTEs) for adult education students as it does for those working on credit coursework. In addition, Oregon adult education has a long-standing policy of managed enrollment as opposed to an open entry/open exit system, allowing for the formation of instructional units and groupings that mirror typical college coursework.

The seeds of adult transition took root in the recession of the 1980s when Oregon experienced high unemployment and a need to shift the economy from an industrial base to sectors requiring a more highly educated workforce (due primarily to the declining timber industry). The state response, Oregon Shines, created a vision for rebuilding Oregon's economy. To achieve this vision, the state strategic planning process focused on a model that required coordination and non-duplication of services at all levels of government. This brought ABSE to the table as a key state resource that provides services to low-skilled adult students in need of a secondary and postsecondary education.

Like the other states profiled, Oregon has engaged in a number of initiatives that directly affect transition services for adults. In 2003, Oregon became part of an initiative of the National Governor's Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices and FutureWorks to help states expand postsecondary access and attainment for working adults. This initiative has advanced the adult education discussion beyond a comparison with high school exit standards to include a focus on the requirements needed to transition adults to further education, employment and long-term career development.

As part of the state project known as Oregon Pathways to Advancement, the ABSE system inventoried adult learner transition barriers and state ABSE transition strategies in preparation for developing a statewide ABS pathways model.<sup>14</sup> A partial list of strategies included using:

- Oregon's Indicators of Program Quality, several of which directly address preparing students to meet postsecondary goals;
- Program Monitoring and Technical Assistance Visits to document quality instructional services including evidence that students are connected with support services needed to be successful in adult education courses as well as to transition to postsecondary education;
- identification of key regional labor market trends;
- the resources and databases shared within CCWD; and
- a place at the table that includes both education and workforce partners.

While Oregon is now working on a Career Pathways model, local ABS programs continue to use a variety of strategies to support adults transitioning to college: transition courses, counseling and advising, transition specialists, tuition waivers for GED and ESL completers, college success courses, etc.

Current areas of focus for the state include:

- addressing basic skills within an occupational pathway for students with skills below the eighth grade level;

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.oregon.gov/WORKSOURCE/PATHWAYS/about\\_us.shtml](http://www.oregon.gov/WORKSOURCE/PATHWAYS/about_us.shtml).

- redefining the credit-noncredit intersection to give credit for work completed as students move into postsecondary education;
- devising content standards and assessments for multiple pathways; and
- choosing an instructional model (e.g., occupational and adult education instructors who co-teach or one instructor with experience in both areas).

One of the biggest challenges noted in the survey was the amount of time it takes to create large-scale change at so many levels –instructor, program, institution, and state.

## Discussion of State Support for Model Development

Several findings emerged from the four state-level interviews. First and foremost is the recognition that increased education of adults was (and is) essential to the economic well-being of each state. In addition, preparation for and transition into postsecondary education through adult education was identified as a core mechanism to accomplish this state goal. To meet this challenge, adult education leaders:

- identified and/or developed resources to invest in the development of adult transition models;
- developed cross-agency collaborations and partnerships on state and local levels to connect key stakeholders and maximize resources;
- identified and disseminated local expertise and promising strategies through workgroups and pilot projects; and
- encouraged model development by creating systemic mechanisms to address key barriers.

Second, even in states where a specific transition model is currently being examined or scaled up, adult education leaders were well situated at the beginning of their state's transition initiative to harvest a wealth of information from local formal and informal transition programs. This was particularly important because convening local groups created fruitful dialogue between adult and postsecondary education for the first time, even between those under the same administrative structure. Along with increasing their familiarity with each other, conversations between stakeholders identified resources and strategies each stakeholder could contribute to further adult transition, especially identifying services for students.

Third, the state's RFP process was used to move the transition field forward by funding model development and requiring specific strategies, like mentoring or partnership development, as essential components of competitive grants. Once grants were issued, most states arranged for sharing and other professional development activities, and this was seen as a way to disseminate ideas and develop stronger programs.

Lastly, state interviews identified several of the strategies and processes used by the individual transition programs (described earlier in this paper) that might be easier to implement with state-level discussion and action. Chiefly these are:

- replacing labor-intensive “manual” student tracking systems with cross-systems or integrated automated student record systems;
- dual enrollment policies;
- long-term funding mechanisms; and
- curriculum alignment.

All of these may be accomplished in intensive but isolated partnerships between individual adult education programs and their postsecondary institutions, but they may be efficiently done at the state level (and some at the federal level), making them available to all adult education programs. It seems likely that action by state legislatures is required to accomplish some of these changes.

## Recommendations

Policy development at several levels – national, state, and program – is needed to ensure that transition services and supports are available to adult students. The following recommendations are beyond the scope of individual programs and are directed at state- and national-level decision-makers.

### Assessment and Outcomes

***Recommendation:* Set a system goal of adult education postsecondary readiness in absolute numbers and levels of readiness, rates of persistence and completion; collaborate in the development of data collection systems that can track students across the boundary of adult and postsecondary education.**

The question of which outcomes are measured is informed by how success is defined. In publicly funded adult education, outcomes are largely defined by the National Reporting System (NRS). When it comes to entries to postsecondary education, NRS defines a positive outcome as: “Learner enrolls in a postsecondary educational or occupational skills training program that does not duplicate other services or training received, regardless of whether the prior services or training were completed.” While this definition is somewhat open to interpretation regarding what does or does not duplicate ASE instruction, it does not direct states or programs to collect data on students’ level of placement into postsecondary education or training. Success here is defined as access. Research tells us that the level of placement makes a significant difference in student persistence and completion (Adelman, 1998). Students that place into college-level courses, or at least the highest levels of developmental education, have higher persistence rates than those who place lower.



When students' level of academic preparation for college becomes a part of the policy equation, the need for aligning assessments between the adult education and postsecondary systems becomes clear. If the postsecondary education provider agrees that a given GED or TABE score equals a placement score at a particular level this serves student interests.

Yet alignment often becomes a cause of tension for adult and postsecondary education when wound into a strategy of "seamless transition" through concordance tables. Such concordance tables could give teachers important information about student readiness, avoid burdening adult students with multiple tests, and facilitate more effective college placements.

## Funding

***Recommendation:* Assess the costs and economic benefits of funding transition programs at levels that support the attainment of the goal of an educated workforce and citizenry and make state-level funding available.**

As long as success is defined as access, it is possible to ignore the alarmingly low college persistence rates of GED recipients and to expect improved outcomes without substantial additional resources. If getting adult learners through the door of the postsecondary institution qualifies as success, encouragement with minimal advising or academic support can be deemed an adequate model for adult transition. If the impetus for placing students into postsecondary education or training is taken to its logical conclusion (i.e., the expectation that students complete their studies and obtain jobs that pay decent wages and benefits), the need for more substantial college preparation than what can be provided in the context of an existing GED class or an advising model becomes evident. Ultimately, policymakers need to determine the real cost of addressing the gap in the adult education continuum, and balance it against the cost of ineffective solutions that do not yield the long-term outcomes of an educated workforce and nation. The most intensive levels of academic preparation and support, such as Capital IDEA at approximately \$6,000 per student per year, also yield the best outcomes, with 84% of students obtaining associate degrees and jobs that pay a living wage with benefits.

## Professional Development

***Recommendation:* Fund and provide sustained, high-quality professional development to ABE and developmental educators.**

The adult education field is beginning to pay attention to the distinct professional development needs of instructors and counselors working in transition programs. Traditionally, our field has not looked to developmental education as a frame of reference for planning instruction and assessment. For transition programs, the appropriate goal is to align instruction with entry-level, credit courses (beyond developmental education) at the postsecondary education and training level. In order to do that, instructors will need time and training to become familiar with syllabi, textbooks, and requirements of the

courses into which they aim to place their students. They need to understand the content and cut-off scores of the college placement test used by the postsecondary institution. Many transition programs simulate the college environment in order to better prepare students for its rigors. Doing so requires familiarity with the college environment. Counselors need to hone their skills in career planning and advising. Program administrators would benefit from guidance in how to forge lasting partnerships with postsecondary institutions; whom to approach, and how to cultivate relationships with decision-makers and cement them into written agreements.

Conversely, college developmental education faculty would benefit from developing an improved understanding of the adult education system, and specifically their local collaborating programs, in order to be better prepared to serve the incoming adult learners. This calls for opportunities for networking and joint professional development.

### Collaborations

***Recommendation: Develop long-term partnerships between adult and postsecondary education and workforce development that result in agreed-upon goals, timelines, and operating principles.***

Multiple levels of collaboration at state, municipal, and programmatic levels are necessary to align effectively the two systems of adult and postsecondary education. Some exemplary collaborations have been documented in this paper. They have grown out of the recognition that the two systems share goals and a common constituency but need to develop understandings and protocols for an effective transition process that serves the interests of the student. This entails articulating the two systems' respective roles and responsibilities in supporting the transition and retention of adults. From this process, new models may emerge that represent a fusion of the two systems while preserving adult education as a program that is offered free of charge to the students. Institutional and public funding policies should support innovative collaborations that break new ground in serving students with an efficient use of resources. An excellent and comprehensive set of recommendations for the two systems and their funders have been articulated by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) in its paper, *To Ensure America's Future: Building a National Opportunity System for Adults* (2005).

### Further Research

***Recommendation: Develop a cost-effective research agenda that measures discrete models and strategies against the access, retention, and completion of a variety of postsecondary credentials by adults.***

There is much we do not know about how to best prepare adults in ASE and ESOL programs for postsecondary education: What are the most efficient ways to obtain learning gains? How effective are the different transition program models? The

persistent underfunding of adult education requires us to make strategic choices that should be informed by research.

Qualitative studies that help describe and analyze practices related to intake, instruction, assessment, and counseling can help build transition model components. Documentation of promising practices, as currently done by the National College Transition Network<sup>15</sup>, for example, help adult educators build on what others have learned rather than reinventing the wheel. Such documentation can also augment professional development, a need that is well established in our field and even more acute for college transition staff.

The transition program models documented in this paper are new and evolving. The field would benefit from quantitative studies of their effectiveness using agreed-upon definitions and criteria. Funding needs to be allocated for these longitudinal studies that track students coming out of transition programs with a control group of students who have similar academic and demographic characteristics but who did not receive additional preparation prior to enrollment. Given that ABE students are likely to take one course at a time, the longitudinal studies should be designed for tracking students for at least five years. To capture economic gains past graduation would require an even longer period of time.

Given the very real prospect of continued, inadequate funding for adult education that will preclude funding transition programs at an ideal level, comparison studies that focus on which kinds of interventions or additional services yield the most return for the dollar would help policymakers and the field make wise use of the limited funds. Research that focuses on discrete components and strategies might be most useful. For example: Would concentrating on reading strategies for college ultimately help students avoid “fatiguing out” in developmental education? How much money and time in developmental education courses can students save if they are dually enroll while completing adult education?

## Conclusion

Although the cost of providing transition services and supports may look daunting, many programs and states, like those studied here, find that the educational attainment of their students directly impacts the well-being of their communities. In the words of John F. Kennedy, “There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long-range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”

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<sup>15</sup> See Promising Practice and Research to Practice Briefs at [www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org).



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## Appendix A: Survey Questions on Emerging Transition Models

Name of Interviewer:

Date:

I. General Information

Name of transition program:

Address:

Contact: (Interviewee)

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Website:

When established: \_\_\_\_\_

Location(s) of postsecondary transition program:

Program mission and goals:

Program history:

Name of collaborating postsecondary(s):

Name(s) of other collaborating organizations or groups, if any:

Additional comments:

II. Student Population

Population served and student eligibility criteria:

Program size: (number of students served per year)

How and where is recruitment done? (Does the program use multiple methods and a range of venues?)

Additional comments:

III. Funding

How is your program funded?

IV. Program Design

What is the rationale behind your program design? What factors influence your design (e.g., experience with population, data from research, etc.)

*Staffing*

What is your staffing pattern?

What are the education and experience qualifications for your staff?

*Student assessment, intake, and orientation*

What process is used to assess a student for academic and psychological readiness for a transition program?

What instrument is used to assess academic preparedness and to measure academic gains?

Does the program have an orientation process? If yes,

- length
- content
- focus
- delivery

Additional comments:

Instructional Form

	Primarily as a class	In group workshops	Individually
Day/Night/Both			
Number of times per week			
Number of hours per meeting			
Overall length of program			

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Additional comments:

Academic Curriculum:

Course	Hours of instruction	Written curriculum?	Credit bearing?
Math/Pre-algebra			
Reading & writing for college			
Computers			
Technical or prevocational skills			
Other: specify			

Additional comments:

Educational Counseling:

Typical number of counseling hours per student:

Content of counseling:

- soft skills of time management, working in groups, etc.? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- career development? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- personal counseling? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- Other: specific:

If you provide counseling workshops, what are your typical topics?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Additional comments:

V. Program Outcomes

Do you collect data on your program? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_ If yes,

- on the recruitment process? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- initial and exit academic assessment? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- What instruments used?
- exit process for students that have stopped or dropped out? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- enrollment into postsecondary education? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- student evaluation of the transition program? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
- persistence in postsecondary education? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

What are the outcomes of your program? (Include transition program completion and postsecondary enrollment)

What, in your opinion, accounts for your outcomes?

What challenges has your program experienced? Why do you think that is?

#### VI. Retention Strategies

As we compile information in developing our understanding of transition models, we are interested in retention strategies used by programs. Are there retention strategies that you considered in designing your program? Yes\_\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_\_

How have you put them into practice?

#### VII. Collaborating College(s)

Name of collaborating college:

Highest level of college collaboration: (program director and dean, division chair, college president; counselor and admission's officer, etc.)

How do you collaborate with your college partner for placement testing?

What test is used? (ASSET, COMPASS, or other)

In what ways are your transition students exposed to the college prior to enrollment? (e.g., tours, shadowing, use of technology, use of space, number of visits, number of workshops facilitated by college staff, etc.)

Are there any other collaborating organizations and/or agencies? If yes, please list.

Additional comments:

#### VIII. Future

Where do you see your program being in 3 years (consider possible new directions, funding, stability, etc.)

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Any closing thoughts?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Our goal is to collect accurate information on your program so we will be in touch to share our write-up with you and get your feedback.





## Appendix B. Survey Questions for State-level Interviews

Name of interviewer:

Date:

### General Information

State:

Interviewee:

Address

Position:

Phone:

Fax:

Email:

Web site:

1. Why did your state decide to focus on transition to college for adults? Who is it designed to serve?
2. How did the process get started?
3. Who are the key participants and why/how were they chosen?
4. What role did your organization play in the development of the model/initiative?
5. What do you think are the key elements of the transition model/initiative?
6. What has surprised you about the institution of the transition model/initiative?
7. If you could go back and change one thing about the model/initiative, what would that be?
8. What advice would you have for other states if they wanted to replicate your model?
9. Where do you see this initiative in 3 years.



## Appendix C. Programs Surveyed by Model<sup>16</sup>

- |                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Advising Model        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pima College Adult Education/Eastside Learning Center, Tucson, AZ</li><li>• Rio Salado College Transition Program, Phoenix, AZ</li><li>• Springfield Technical Community College Transition Program Springfield, MA</li></ul>                                     |
| GED-Plus Model        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highland Community College GED-Plus Program, Freeport, IL</li><li>• New Haven Adult Education Program, New Haven, CT</li><li>• Urban League of Greater Hartford, Hartford, CT</li><li>• West Kentucky Community and Technical College, Paducah, KY</li></ul>      |
| ESOL Model            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ACCESS/Cape Cod Community College, Hyannis, MA</li><li>• Asian American Civic Association, Boston, MA</li><li>• City College of San Francisco, CA</li><li>• MiraCosta Community College, Oceanside, CA</li><li>• Vermont Adult Learning, Colchester, VT</li></ul> |
| Career Pathways Model | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Career Pathways Pilot Project, AK</li><li>• Instituto Del Progreso Latino, Chicago, IL</li><li>• Professional Enrichment Early Childhood Education Program, Boston, MA</li></ul>  |
| College Prep Model    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Capital IDEA, Austin, TX</li><li>• Bristol Community College, The Transition Program, Fall River, MA</li><li>• New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, Boston, MA</li><li>• ODWIN Learning Center, Dorchester, MA</li></ul>                                |

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<sup>16</sup> Additional programs discussed only under state initiatives, e.g., Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education in Kentucky, not included in this list.





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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

## **NCSALL's Mission**

NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort between the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement).

## **NCSALL's Research Projects**

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education, English for speakers of other languages, and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) learner persistence, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) professional development, and (4) assessment.

## **NCSALL's Dissemination Initiative**

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policy makers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners; *Focus on Policy*, a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports and Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. In addition, NCSALL sponsors the *Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative*, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs.

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