Background Paper for *One Step Forward* Initiative
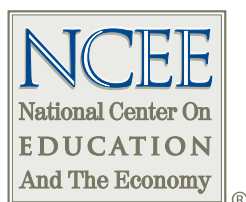
Background and Supporting Evidence for Adult Education for Work

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This paper was drafted by Forrest Chisman of the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) and edited by Jackie Kraemer, Mary Clagett and Ray Uhalde of the Workforce Force Development Group (WDSG) at the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). It was developed as a foundation document for the work of the WDSG's *One Step Forward* Initiative funded by the Walmart Foundation. The *One Step Forward* Initiative was funded to create a set of quality indicators for Adult Education for Work—programs geared to helping low-skilled workers acquire the basic skills they need to succeed in the 21st century workplace and to enhance U.S. businesses' competitiveness.

Two guides to Adult Education for Work—one for practitioners, administrators and policymakers, and one for employers—were created based on this document.

For more information or copies of the guides, please contact NCEE at 202.379.1800.

One Step Forward Initiative

In Fall 2007, the WDSG at the National Center on Education and the Economy received a grant from the Walmart Foundation to identify a set of quality indicators for Adult Education for Work—programs geared to helping low-skilled workers acquire the basic skills they need to succeed in the 21st-century workplace and to enhance U.S. firms' competitiveness. The purpose of identifying the elements of Adult Education for Work programs is to:

(1) Inform the adult education field and its practitioners about the key components of effective programs;

(2) Stimulate excellence and guide quality improvement in programming in support of Adult Education for Work; and

(3) Steer new public and private investments into expanded and transformed programming.

This paper on Adult Education for Work is one of the products produced by the *One Step Forward* Initiative.

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Table of Contents

What is Adult Education for Work?

Adult Education for Work, in this paper, means the education and training low-skilled adults need to become prepared for post-secondary education or training, and for family-sustaining employment and career advancement.

INTRODUCTION

The American economy faces a serious challenge. The 21st century has been characterized by economic turbulence and constant churning, driven by a knowledge-based, technology-driven global economy that demands more agile, skilled and innovative workers. Yet a frighteningly large segment of our workforce is not prepared for this eventuality because they do not possess the basic and work readiness skills required by business to succeed in the workplace of tomorrow.

While about 25 percent of today's jobs require a college degree or postsecondary credential, it is projected that about 45 percent of all new jobs over the next decade will require a college degree or postsecondary credential.[1] Other projections of business' demand for skilled workers suggest that our economy could experience a simultaneous shortfall of millions of workers with at least some college and a surplus of three million high school dropouts.[2]

More than 12 million adults without a high school credential are in the labor force today, and more than 1 million young adults drop out of high school each year. While we lead the world in the share of working age adults who completed high school, our advantage is rapidly eroding because we now rank only ninth among 29 member countries of the OECD in the percentage of young adults age 25–34 with a high school credential.

In fact, we are the only highly-developed democracy where young adults are less likely to have completed high school than the previous generation.[3] And while a high school credential is an important gateway to further education and training, it is no longer enough on its own. Far too many Americans (as many as 93 million) score at the lower levels of national assessments of functional literacy skills and many are unprepared to enroll in the postsecondary education or job training programs that can prepare people for current and future jobs.[4]

To meet the nation's basic education and work readiness skill needs, and provide greater educational and economic opportunities in this global environment, there is a growing consensus about the need to reform our Adult Education and workforce development systems. Of particular concern is the capacity to better enable low-skilled adults, including those without high school credentials, to pursue further education and ultimately family-sustaining employment. Indeed, the National Commission on Adult Literacy recently concluded that our current Adult Education system is "ill-equipped to meet 21st-century needs" and recommended that the Adult Education and literacy system in this country be

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[1] Arlene Dohm and Lynn Shniper, "Occupational Employment Projections to 2016", *Monthly Labor Review*, November 2007, table 5. The Bureau of Labor Statistics characterizes a college degree to include two-year, four-year, and graduate diplomas. BLS describes a postsecondary credential as vocational programs lasting from a few weeks to more than one year, leading to a certificate or other award, but not a degree.

[2] Anthony P. Carnevale and Donna M. Desrochers, *Standards For What? The Economic Roots of K–16 Reform*, Educational Testing Service, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 48.

[3] Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 2008, table A1.2a, and National Commission on Adult Literacy, *Reach Higher, America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce* (New York: National Commission) 2008, p. 4.

[4] Thirty million adult Americans score at "below basic" literacy level and another 63 million adults can only perform simple literacy tasks, according to the National Center on Education Statistics, *National Assessment of Adult Literacy*, (NAAL, 2003), U.S. Department of Education, 2005.

transformed into an Adult Education and workforce skills system, with the new mission of attainment of postsecondary and workforce readiness.[5]

This is not an indictment of the current system. It is a recognition that Adult Education programs must play a new role in today's economy and join with other partners to create a comprehensive system of learning for adults that works for the current context. Today, far too few adults are enrolled in Adult Education programs, and of those who are enrolled, few ever make it through the progressive levels of the system and on to the postsecondary education and training they need to prosper economically.

The current Adult Education system was simply not designed to meet this goal. For many decades, its major purpose has been to provide basic literacy instruction, English language instruction for immigrants, and preparation for the GED and other high school equivalency examinations. Most Adult Education programs consider workforce readiness and career preparation to be one of their many goals, but their classroom curricula reflect many other priorities. Also most programs are not designed to help participants transition into the higher levels of education and training increasingly required for success in today's workplace. And perhaps most critical, the task of preparing tens of millions of adults who currently lack the functional literacy skills needed for a highly competitive global marketplace is well beyond the financial means of a system that is currently funded to support less than 3 million adults.

The Purpose of this Paper

These challenges suggest the need to develop and implement what we call Career Pathways systems of learning that move low-skilled adults through workforce-oriented Adult Education programs on to postsecondary (degree and non-degree certificate) programs.[6] The purpose of this paper (and its accompanying guides) is to recommend specific steps that Adult Education programs can take to make the necessary transformations to do just that. What we recommend is consistent with the National Commission's policy recommendations and is intended to jumpstart the process of transforming the system from the program level.

Our recommendations involve stepping up service delivery to provide individuals with literacy and English language deficits the basic and work readiness skills they need to succeed economically. A transformed Adult Education system will also provide American employers with the workers they need to remain competitive in a global economy.

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[6] This conclusion is shared by a broad range of national organizations focused on these issues, and our work draws on their work. These groups include: Jobs for the Future's and the National Council on Workforce Education's *Breaking Through Initiative*; The Joyce Foundation's *Shifting Gears Initiative*; the National Commission on Adult Literacy's working including their report *Reach Higher, America* and the background papers on which it was based; papers written by the Workforce Strategies Center including "Building a Career Pathways System"; papers written by the Center for American Progress including "Lifelong Learning: New Strategies for the Education of Working Adult" by Brian Bosworth; the work of the Center for Law and Social Policy; and the work of The Working Poor Families Project.

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[5] National Commission on Adult Literacy, op. cit., p. vi and p. 15.

The steps suggested are not abstractions. They are based on extensive research and on what a number of innovative Adult Education programs are already doing to prepare their students to succeed in further education and training, work, and careers. We call this approach ***Adult Education for Work***.

The underlying assumptions of Adult Education for Work are the following.

- Work readiness and preparation for postsecondary education and training for all adults is a core mission.

- There is a clear connection to the economic and workforce development strategy of the region.

- There must be a commitment to creating pathways, programs and policies to accelerate learning and move adults through the system as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- It is critical to partner with other providers in the community to offer the supports adults need to stay enrolled and succeed in Adult Education for Work programs.

One caveat: We are not suggesting work readiness and preparation for postsecondary education and training should become the only purpose of Adult Education. There is clearly a role for family literacy, citizenship training, life skills, and other kinds of programming in Adult Education. These are worthy goals and individual programs must shape their focus to fit their populations and the needs of participants. We are proposing creating a new approach within the Adult Education umbrella.

This paper is divided into three sections. First, it briefly reviews how the basic skills problem in this country affects our economy and explains why the present response of the Adult Education system is inadequate to overcome that problem. Second, it presents an overall vision of how a more comprehensive Career Pathways learning system that meets our nation's education and skill needs could be constructed, and the role that an Adult Education for Work system should play in that broader system. And third, it details specific measures Adult Education programs can take (through the identification of quality elements) to make that vision a reality. This section is the heart of the paper.

The Adult Education Context

For the last 40 years, federal and state funding has provided modest support for an Adult Education and Literacy System in the United States. The principal components of this system are local programs that provide Adult Basic Education (ABE) instruction in reading, writing and elementary mathematics for adults whose skills in these areas are below the high school level; Adult Secondary Education (ASE) preparation for passing the GED or other high school equivalency tests; and English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending spoken English for non-native speakers of the language.

Collectively, these components teach adults with low levels of education and/or limited English proficiency what are often called "basic skills." The skills are "basic" in the sense that adult educators and others consider them to be the minimum literacy and language skills (and in the case of ASE, the minimum level of educational attainment) required to function effectively in American social and economic life. They are also considered "basic" in the sense that they constitute the foundation required for further education of various sorts—such as postsecondary education or job training.

Most Adult Education programs are designed to teach the basic skills of literacy, numeracy, and English language acquisition by helping adults to advance through a continuum of proficiency in each skill. These continua are usually organized as a sequence of skill "levels"—beginning with little or no ability in ABE and ESL and progressing to high school-level proficiency in ASE. Some states have developed "content standards" that define what basic skills

should be mastered at each level. Although these differ in some respects, they are most notable for their similarity. This exemplifies the fact that there is widespread agreement among adult educators about what "basic skills" programs should teach and the sequence in which they should be taught.[7] However, increasingly, as illustrated in the recent report by the National Commission on Adult Literacy, we are recognizing that Adult Education programs in this country are not currently adequate to lift the millions of individuals in need of basic and work readiness skills to further education and to good jobs.

The Basic Skills Problems of Our Workforce

Both adult educators and policymakers have long believed that our Adult Education system for teaching basic skills should serve many goals. Among these are the personal enrichment of low-skilled adults, helping them to meet the literacy and English language demands of everyday life (life skills); increasing civic participation (by, for example, creating a better-informed electorate); and helping parents contribute to the educational development of their children (by reading to them and helping them with homework).[8] In addition, both practitioners and policymakers have agreed that increasing the

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[7] Links to many state content standards for Adult Education can be found at the "Standards Warehouse" maintained by the U.S. Department of Education: www.adultedcontentstandards.ed.gov.

[8] These goals, and the goal of work readiness, are not only cited repeatedly in the Adult Education literature, but they are also stated in various terms as the goals of Adult Education in both the legislation authorizing federal aid to Adult Education, "Adult Education and Family Literacy Act," Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, and in the authorizing legislation for Adult Education service in most states.

workforce readiness and incomes of low-skilled adults should be a goal of the Adult Education system.

Without prejudice to the other goals of the Adult Education system, this paper proposes building a core strand of Adult Education (called Adult Education for Work) that has as its primary goal: Helping low-skilled adults attain the basic and/or English language and work readiness skills they need to successfully progress on to postsecondary education or training and in high-quality, family-sustaining employment.

As described in the introduction, the reason for focusing on these goals is that a large and growing portion of the American workforce has very limited basic skills, which poses an acute threat to our nation's economic well-being. In 2007–2008 alone, three blue-ribbon study groups concluded that:[9]
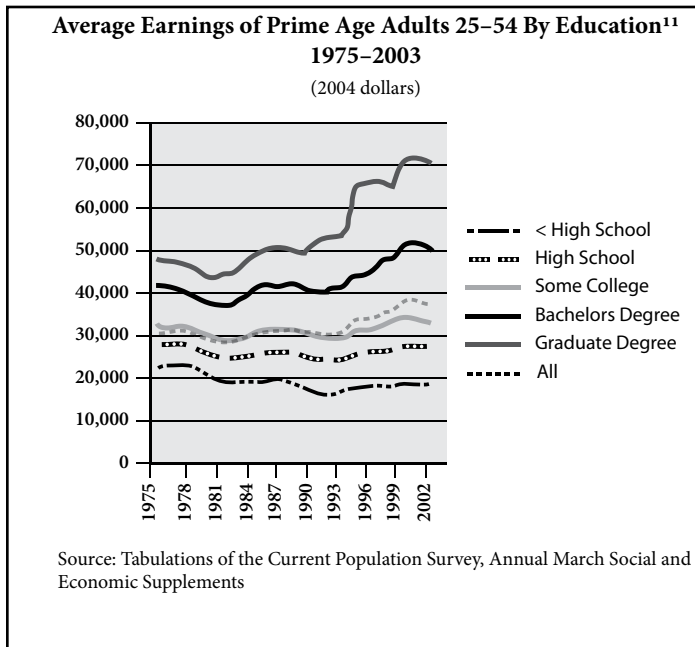
- Large parts of our workforce lack the basic skills employers need to build an internationally competitive economy. For example, 90 million adults scored at the lowest levels of the federal government's 2005 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (which measured applied reading and math skills), 18 million adults have no high school diploma or equivalent, and 18 million adult immigrants living in the United States report that they speak English less than "very well" (roughly half of our immigrant population).

- Improving our schools alone will not solve the basic skills problem. The number of adults already in the workforce is far greater than the number of school-aged children, and school reform is not succeeding with rushing speed. An estimated 65 percent of the American Workforce in 2020 is already beyond the reach of our school system. For the most part, the workforce of the foreseeable future in the United States is the workforce of the present.

- The basic skills problem is becoming more serious due to demographic changes. Among these is the continuing influx of immigrants with low levels of education and limited English proficiency. It is estimated that immigrants will make up most of the net growth in our workforce in coming decades. In addition, the retirement of the baby boom generation and with them the skills on which our business and industry depend will place increasing pressure on the American workforce to develop the skills required by a high-productivity economy.

- Inadequate basic skills are a major cause of low wages and stagnant incomes. Between 1975 and 2003, the already low average earnings of adults aged 25–64 that did not possess a high school credential fell another 15 percent when adjusted for inflation. Americans with low basic skills are far more likely to be trapped in low-wage, dead-end jobs. Jobs requiring more skills tend to pay more, even among those with the same level of educational attainment. Among high school graduates, recent research suggests that occupations requiring the highest degree of basic skills competency pay on average 50 percent more than those demanding the least basic skills proficiency.[10]

[9] National Center on Education and the Economy, *Tough Choices for Tough Times: Report of the* New *Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass) 2007. National Commission on Adult Literacy, *Reach Higher America: Overcoming Crisis in the U.S. Workforce* (New York: National Commission) 2008. Irwin Kirsch, Henry Braun, Kentaro Yamamoto, and Andrew Sum, *America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007). The specific points and statistics in the next four paragraphs are drawn from *Reach Higher America*, 2–10, available at www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org.

[10] Ray Uhalde and Jeff Strohl, *America In the Global Economy*, A Background Paper for the New Commission on the Skills of the

As the chart below illustrates, the returns for increasing levels of education are significant and growing. And a high school degree is no longer enough.

Average Earnings of Prime Age Adults 25–54 By Education[11] 1975–2003

(2004 dollars)

Source: Tabulations of the Current Population Survey, Annual March Social and Economic Supplements

Solving the basic skills problem would benefit workers, employers, and the economies of regions and the nation as a whole. It would help to provide a foundation on which a high-wage, high-productivity economy could be sustained. Other countries, notably the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, have recognized this connection between skills and economic prosperity. They have designated improving workforce readiness as a major goal of their Adult Education systems and have reconfigured their systems to meet this goal in a variety of ways.

The government of the United Kingdom, for example, has launched two large-scale programs aimed at upgrading adult skills. *Nextstep* provides free education services to adults over the age of 20 who want to learn new skills, retrain or gain new qualifications and improve their career prospects. *Nextstep* is specifically targeted to adults who have yet to get their first full Level 2 national vocational qualification. The Level 2 qualification is equivalent to what British students earn before they can enter further education. They must take Advanced (or A-level) exams after earning a Level 2 qualification in order to apply to selective institutions of higher education. A Level 3 qualification signifies that an individual has passed two A-level exams.

Train to Gain is a national effort designed to encourage employers to train low-skilled employees and give them paid time off work for training. The service targets hard-to-reach employers and encourages them to provide their employees free training toward achieving Level 2 national vocational qualifications.

These programs are part of a well-funded action agenda to meet the national government's ambitious goal to be a world leader in skills by 2020.[12] Their vision is:

- 95 percent of working-age population to achieve functional literacy and numeracy skills;

- Exceeding 90 percent of adults qualified to at least Level 2;

- 68 percent of the adult population qualified to Level 3;

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[11] American Workforce, (National Center on Education and the Economy, December 2006), pp. 12, 23.

[12] *Train To Gain: A Plan for Growth, November 2007–July 2011*, (London, UK, Learning and Skills Council, 2007), Section V.

- Increasing the number of apprenticeships in learning to 400,000 a year by 2020; and

- Over 40 percent of the adult population qualified to Level 4 and above.

The United States has no similar official goals or action agenda of comparable consequence. The recent recommendation by the National Commission on Adult Literacy to serve 20 million adults annually by 2020 and to transform the Adult Education system into an Adult Education and workforce skills system, with the new mission of attainment of postsecondary and workforce readiness, should help spur Congress and the states to action in this area and to shift the focus of the system.

The Adult Education Response

Regrettably, America's current Adult Education system is not adequate to solve the nation's basic skills problem in a way that meets our economic needs. A primary reason is the woefully inadequate funding provided for Adult Education in this country. In 2008, total funding for Adult Education and Literacy programs in the U.S. equaled only approximately $2.1 billion, with only $500 million of that coming from the federal government. The current system served only 3 million adults in 2008.

In addition to inadequate funding, there are other fundamental issues about the Adult Education system's design that make it difficult for the current system to respond adequately to the workforce needs of the country. First, as mentioned, workforce readiness is not the primary focus of the current system. Most Adult Education programs emphasize "life skills." In these programs, the student is seen as the primary "customer," and the content of instruction consists largely of applying literacy, numeracy and English

language learning to the wide range of tasks most people want and need to perform in everyday life (such as reading a newspaper or balancing a checkbook). In many programs those tasks include at least some employment-related activities (such as filling out a job application or reading workplace safety instructions), but life skills programs cover such a large number of tasks that it is virtually impossible to provide very extensive employment-related content.

Second, because the student is considered the primary customer in these programs, there are often no special expectations about what levels of proficiency they should obtain—students advance as far as their personal needs and interests dictate, and then leave the programs. In practice, few students in life skills programs advance very far beyond their initial level, and few reach the highest levels of proficiency in the basic skills continuum. These programs are either not tied to any particular outcome, or they are structured to lead to enrollment in ASE and then to high school completion or a GED as an endpoint. The result is that most Adult Education students never achieve a GED, much less a postsecondary education credential—the key to success in today's economy.[13]

The same studies that have identified the economic importance of basic skills have also examined the skills employers want and adults need to enhance business competitiveness and personal economic advancement.

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[13] This can be seen from the fact that, nationwide, enrollments in ASE are less than 10 percent of the enrollments in ABE and ESL combined. See the various annual versions of the "Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Report to Congress" produced by the U.S. Department of Education, at www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/resource/index.html. See also John Tyler, "The General Education Development (GED) Credential: History, Current Research, and Directions for Policy and Practice" Chapter 5 in *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy 2005* (Cambridge: National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy, 2005.

If employers are also recognized as customers of Adult Education programs, the skills their workers must have to build an internationally competitive economy include:[14]

- The highest levels of basic skills along the traditional Adult Education continuum, and experience in applying these skills to common tasks in particular areas of employment, and ideally to particular jobs;

- A high level of proficiency in "work readiness skills"—sometimes referred to as soft skills—which include thinking and reasoning skills such as problem solving and critical thinking, team work, following instructions, and good work habits such as punctuality, diligence, effective communication, and appropriate dress and behavior; and

- At least some postsecondary education or training that results in a high level of both basic skills and applied technical skills required by a particular occupation or occupational area as evidenced by some form of generally recognized certification, such as a technical certificate or postsecondary degree.

Together, these form the "new basics" of Adult Education. To meet these standards for workforce readiness, Adult Education programs will have to ensure that their students achieve higher levels of basic skills than most students presently achieve, as well as work readiness skills. We use the term "work readiness skills" broadly to refer to the application of basic skills and the additional cognitive and behavioral

soft skills that have been described by various groups as necessary for success in the workplace. Adult education programs will also have to prepare students for smooth transitions to and success in postsecondary education and training programs.

The importance of preparing students for these transitions to further education and work cannot be understated. This imperative is underscored by seminal research on the earnings of Adult Education students conducted by the state of Washington (through its I-BEST program) and related studies.[15]

That research shows that most Adult Education students achieve significant near-term earnings gains only if their basic skills instruction is followed by at least one year of college and/or completion of a program of specialized technical training ending in a certification. Washington's I-BEST program refers to this as the "tipping point"—the time at which students begin to see such earnings gains as a result of their educational achievements.

The reality is that preparing adults to transition to postsecondary is not a function that most Adult Education programs have traditionally considered to be part of their missions. As a result, instruction provided by most programs is poorly articulated with requirements for entry into college or specialized technical education and training programs. Students who have completed even the highest levels

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[14] U.S. Department of Labor, Secretary's Commission On Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS): *What Work Requires Of School* (Washington, D.C., 1991); see also the foundational competencies at www.careeronestop.org/competencymodel; and learning skills in *Learning For the 21st Century* at www.21centuryskills.org.

[15] *A Skilled and Educated Workforce: An assessment of the number and type of higher education and training credentials required to meet employer demand*, December 2005, a joint report by the Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, Olympia Washington, www.wtb.wa.gov/Pubs/2005_Related_SEW-1.pdf. See also David Prince and Davis Jenkins: *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students*, (New York: Community College Research Center, 2005).

of Adult Education, including those who obtain high school equivalency certificates, are far more likely than other students to be placed in college developmental or remedial education courses because they lack the skills required to succeed in postsecondary education. They are also far less likely than other students who enter college to complete postsecondary certificates or degrees.[16]

As a result, adult educators must work with postsecondary education and training programs to identify the skills students need to transition to their programs, and must make changes in their programs accordingly, to ensure that their students have those skills. Adult Education programs should also teach workforce readiness skills and take into account the career goals of their students as important parts of their missions.

In short, if Adult Education programs are to truly help their students achieve financial well-being, as well as overcome the basic skills problem that threatens our nation's economy, they must expand the scope and content of their education offerings and provide students with access to clearly defined pathways to further education and/or progression in employment.

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[16] See Stephen Reder, "Adult Education and Postsecondary Success," Policy Brief for the National Commission on Adult Literacy (New York: National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2007). See Also Julie Strawn, "Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment." Policy Brief for The National Commission on Adult Literacy (New York: National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2007). Both Briefs contain analyses by the authors together with summaries of the more important primary research of other researchers and references to it. Both are available at www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org.

Elements of a Comprehensive Career Pathways System

To meet the nation's skill needs and provide greater educational and economic opportunities for all of America's workers, especially those with the lowest skill levels, we must develop new Career Pathways learning systems in every state and economic region of the country. Adult Education for Work programs should be the cornerstones of these new systems. While the global economy presents a national challenge, it is at the regional level where U.S. competitive success will ultimately be determined.[17]

It is critical, therefore, that effective regional approaches that enable low-skilled adults to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for success at work be incorporated as an integral part of more comprehensive strategies for workforce development and regional growth. This is as vital for promoting the prosperity of whole communities, regions, and the nation as it is for advancing the well being of adults with limited skills.

In a comprehensive Career Pathways learning system, Adult Education for Work would be fully aligned with postsecondary education and training (degree and non-degree technical certificate programs), workforce and supportive service activities, and economic development strategies, so as to meet the skill needs of existing and emerging regional employers as well as the needs of low-skilled adults. Under such a system, seamless Career Pathways would be developed and offered that make it far easier for adults—especially those with limited basic skills—to advance through progressive levels of the educational system as quickly as possible and gain education and workforce skills of demonstrated value at each level.[18]

Education and training at every level would be closely aligned with jobs and industries important to local and regional economies. Every level of education and training would afford students the ability to advance at work or in school, with assessments and intermediate certifications articulated to the requirements of the next level of education and employment. Adults could move easily between the labor market and further education and training in order to advance in their careers and upgrade their value added in the workplace. Here is a diagram of such a Career Pathways system, with Adult Education for Work as its cornerstone.

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[17] See, for example, *Innovate America: National Innovation Initiative Summit and Report*, Council On Competitiveness, Washington, D.C., 2005, p. 59; Michael E. Porter, *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*, New York, NY, Free Press, 1990, p. 159; and Joseph Cortright, *New Growth Theory, Technology, and Learning: A Practitioner's Guide*, Impresa, Inc., 2001, p. 19. By "region" we mean a geographic area, economically interdependent as a result of a shared labor market, commuting patterns, commerce and industry, often extending beyond political boundaries, such as a metro area.

[18] "Career Pathways" is a term for a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector, and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector. An early exponent, from whom this definition is drawn, is the Workforce Strategies Center; see their 2002 report *Building A Career Pathways System: Promising Practices in Community-College Centered Workforce Development*, by Julian L. Alssid, et al. The report is available at: www.workforcestrategy.org.

Career Pathways System
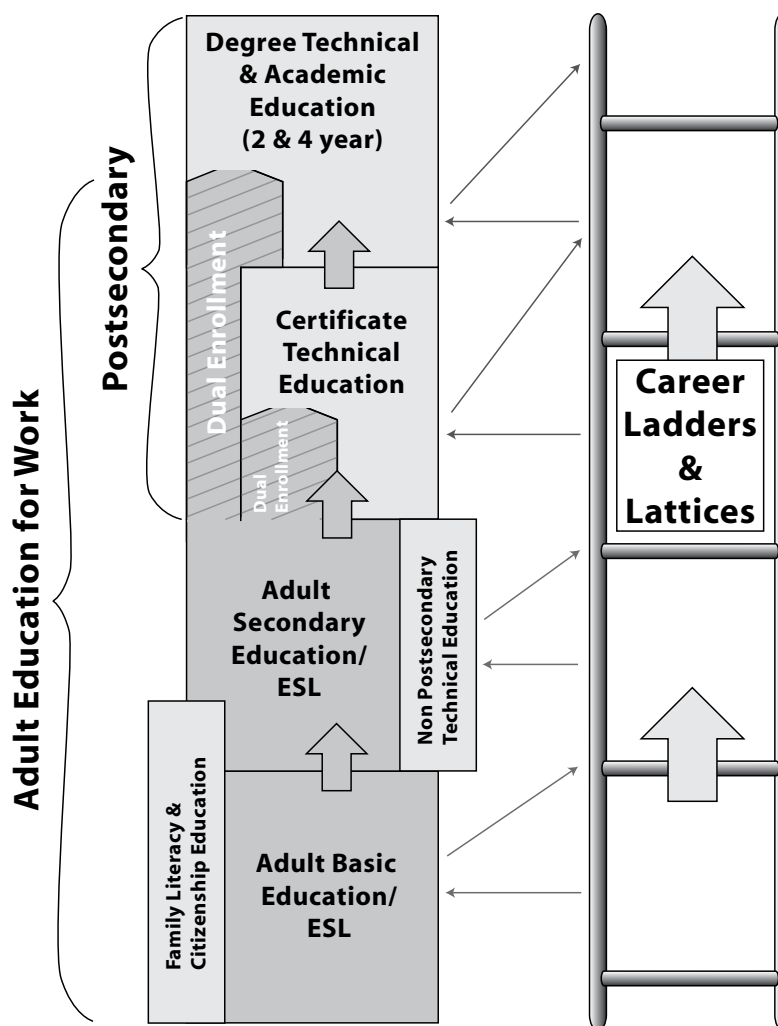
As shown in the chart, the education levels in the Career Pathways system include:

- The continua of ABE/ASE and ESL basic skills instruction that form the core of the present Adult Education System, revised as envisioned in this paper, and referred to as "Adult Education for Work";

- Non-degree postsecondary technical education and training with certification in occupational specialties that may or may not require admission to postsecondary credit programs (including non-credit extension programs offered by community colleges, programs offered by vocational institutes, registered apprenticeship programs and others); and

- Postsecondary education at the two- and four-year degree level.

At present, these three levels of education are poorly articulated. It is needlessly difficult and time consuming for low-skilled adults to progress from Adult Education to postsecondary education or technical training without enrollment in extensive remedial courses.

The new Career Pathways system should knit these three levels together. It should ensure that adults achieve the requisite skills and recognized credentials upon completion of each level, with the ability to progress to the next level without extensive remediation, possibly with the help of a short "bridge" course when necessary. As a result, Adult Education for Work students should be able to obtain the skills required to directly enroll in postsecondary programs at either the technical non-degree or degree levels, making the transition to these programs much easier.

In a Career Pathways system, progress through these levels would not necessarily be linear. For example, the system should provide support in improving basic skills to postsecondary students who need it. Likewise, some parts of technical training may count toward college certificates or degrees, and some college students may enroll in non-credit technical education courses. Moreover, pre-apprenticeship remedial programs often preface registered apprenticeship programs, and registered apprenticeship programs increasingly incorporate dual enrollment with two-year technical education degree programs. Despite these complexities, the overall purpose of the system should be to help students improve their workforce readiness regardless of the education pathway they choose, as quickly and easily as possible.

Building the Career Pathways System

Constructing such a system will require that Adult Education administering agencies, individual Adult Education providers, postsecondary and technical institutions (especially community colleges), and partners (including Workforce Investment Boards, One-Stop Career Centers, social services agencies, community-based organizations and others that provide or facilitate adult and postsecondary education and supportive services programs) agree upon the structure of a system.

These providers will need to: identify the skills required for transitions from one level to the next; form articulation agreements that ensure instruction in these skills, and ensure that such skills attainment will be honored by each program for purposes of transitions; and ensure that adequate support services are provided to help students persist in and successfully complete Adult Education for Work and other Career Pathways programs.

To be successful, Adult Education for Work and Career Pathways learning systems will also require a partnership between educational providers, employers, unions, economic and workforce development agencies, and local, state and national occupational certifying agencies to ensure that the skills taught at all levels meet the workforce needs of regional employers. As a result of regional differences, the precise form of Career Pathways programs will differ among states and communities.

Building a system like this will require leadership at the community and regional levels. Currently, no particular individuals or institutions are assigned the responsibility for organizing the many elements that would make up a Career Pathways system in most communities. It is extremely important for the leaders to be designated to organize this effort and for the leadership of each partner institution to commit to a common vision and to clearly understand the benefits of working together. This collaboration will require more than a commitment to a common vision: the partners will also need to agree upon financial and operational models for working together.

The recipients of federal and state funds for Adult Education—typically community college systems or school districts—are not necessarily required to coordinate with other providers in their community currently. Building a new system that will meet the needs of adults and employers in a community will require mapping out what programs and services currently exist; surveying employer needs and analyzing the population in need of Adult Education services; and then designing a coordinated system that transparently serves adults. It will also require communities to simplify access to the system through One-Stop Career Centers or other well-publicized portals. We recognize that this will be a tall order in many communities.

As we see it, an Adult Education for Work program will function differently from traditional Adult Education in the following ways:

- Regardless of the level at which they enter Adult Education programs, students would receive extensive and on-going career guidance and explanations of how they can use the pathways system, as well as how it can benefit them.

- The workforce readiness component of the Adult Education curriculum will be contextualized to include far more applications of job-related tasks, and it will use instructional methods that are best-suited to teach work readiness skills.

- Programs will establish the levels of basic skills students must attain before they are ready to make transitions to degree or non-degree postsecondary technical education and training programs offered in their communities based on the entry requirements of these programs.

- Preparation for the GED or other high school equivalency diplomas will continue to be offered. There is evidence that these credentials have value in improving employability, and these credentials are required for admission to some postsecondary institutions and are prerequisites for some professional certifications. As most evidence indicates that the skill levels of GED recipients are not adequate for them to enter postsecondary education without remediation, however, high school equivalency preparation will not be the highest level of instruction offered.[19]

- The highest levels of Adult Education programs will be designed to teach the skills required to enter postsecondary certificate or degree programs without the need for remediation—or at least to minimize the amount of remediation required.

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[19] Julie Strawn, "Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment." Policy Brief for The National Commission on Adult Literacy (New York: National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2007).

- Students will require far less time to move through the continua of programs than they do at present. They will be aided by policies aimed at encouraging accelerated advancement and new kinds of programming like high-intensity programs, dual enrollment options and programs that integrate basic skills and technical skills.

- Programs will be developed that provide short, high-intensity "bridge" courses to help students make transitions from Adult Education to postsecondary programs. These courses will differ from traditional developmental education courses both in that they will target students who do not require extensive remedial education (for example, ESL students who are highly proficient in most English language skills but need some help in comprehending English spoken as rapidly as it is in college classrooms) and in the sense that that they will primarily focus on workforce basics.

At present, few if any institutions or communities provide comprehensive Career Pathways systems of the type described. Nevertheless, many of the elements of such systems have been incorporated into exemplary programs in various parts of the United States.

QUALITY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE ADULT EDUCATION FOR WORK PROGRAMS

In this section, we identify quality elements of Adult Education for Work programs divided into seven focus areas: Program Design; Curriculum and Instruction; Assessment and Credentialing; High-Quality Teaching; Support and Follow-Up Services to Encourage Access and Retention; Connections to the Business Community; and Monitoring and Accountability Systems.

These elements are meant to describe the kind of programs that can help adults effectively and efficiently prepare for postsecondary education and training, and work. We recognize that this list is a tall order that goes well beyond the capacity of any single program provider to create.

That actually is the point. Building these kinds of programs is, by necessity, a community-wide effort that requires Adult Education to work together with system partners in the development of Career Pathways learning systems that provide the full range of services and supports adults need to succeed. These quality elements can be used by policymakers and practitioners to develop and implement high-performing Adult Education for Work programs. They can also be used by students, businesses, community-wide partners, and other stakeholders to identify high-quality programs that will prepare low-skilled adults for further education, work, and careers.

Focus Area #1: Program Design

Benchmark: Adult Education for Work programs provide clear pathways for participants, regardless of their skill level at the point of entry, to advance as quickly as possible to postsecondary programs, and ultimately to family-sustaining employment or progression in their careers.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should:

1-A. Work with all partners to define the role of Adult Education for Work programs in the broader community-wide Career Pathways system.

Individual Adult Education for Work programs and providers should have a clear understanding of how they fit into a broader Career Pathways learning system for students. Each provider should know their students' education and career goals and understand how each step along the education continuum—and the content of each course—will contribute to the career progression of the student. Providers should be knowledgeable about the programs their students transitioned from and what program options they have as they move ahead. Efforts should be made to align course content and to make transitions seamless.

Classroom instructors should connect students with counselors to help provide the necessary range of counseling and career supports. Instructors should offer counselors feedback on students' progress in the classroom and relay information about needed academic or social supports.

Some communities are beginning to define this broader system and the role of Adult Education within it. Oregon's Pathways to Advancement Initiative focuses on helping adults transition into community college to prepare for jobs in growth industries. As part of this initiative, each community college in the state is developing occupational roadmaps in growth industries that explain for students, faculty and advisors what jobs are available in different industries. Information includes salary levels and descriptions of what the jobs entail, what education, training, certifications or degrees are required for these occupations, what career progression in the industry is, how long this training takes, what is required to enter it and where to go to get more information and to get trained.[20]

For example, Portland Community College (PCC) has a roadmap for a computer education program that describes the training information and courses needed, the certifications available and labor market information for the certified occupations. The entrance requirements include admission to the college with a "map" starting at GED/

high school diploma level or below GED/high school diploma level.

For those without an entry credential, PCC's adult basic education, ESL and GED preparation programs are the starting point. In one area, five community colleges collaborated to develop 29 occupational roadmaps as tools for students, faculty and advisors in their five-college region.[21] These are precisely the kind of tools that are needed in every community.

1-B. Provide all students an orientation to Career Pathways.

Many students do not know about the education and training options that are available to them. Many also have barriers to participating in education and training programs, or do not understand what participation entails or the benefits of such participation. It is critical that these adults be counseled at the beginning of their involvement with the Adult Education system so as to make the most effective and efficient use of their time and motivation.

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[20] For examples of these roadmaps, see www.worksourceoregon.org/index.php/component/content/127?task=view

[21] *Working Together: Aligning State Systems and Policies for Individual and Regional Prosperity* (Workforce Strategy Center, December 2006)

At present, most Adult Education programs provide only short and unsystematic orientation services to students, and those services primarily focus on administrative issues (such as where and how to register, class schedules, and materials required). They rarely do more than mention the economic gains students can achieve if they persist in Adult Education. As a result, too few students are aware of the different ways in which programs can benefit them, and too few have very clear or far-reaching goals. Many Adult Education professionals believe that this lack of a clear understanding of the substantial benefits that come from participation in Adult Education programs is one reason why many students do not persist in programs for very long.

Adult Education for Work programs should develop orientation strategies that provide students with information about the regional labor market; career options in growth industries that would provide family-sustaining employment; and education and training pathways to prepare them for those jobs. Staff responsible for advising adult students need to be well versed in this information and have user-friendly materials available for students. All states gather and disseminate labor market information that identifies occupations and industries in demand at the state and local level. Adult Education for Work programs should access this information for their students. They need not develop it on their own.

Orientation information can be provided in different ways: short courses or modules for students entering or interested in Adult Education for Work courses; one-on-one counseling sessions with career advisors providing information about careers and Career Pathways; user-friendly written or on-line information for adults that provide comprehensive information. This broad introduction is critical for adults to make informed decisions about their own career goals and to help them stay motivated enough to persist in education and training.

1-C. Help each student develop a "Career Pathway Plan."

Once students have identified an occupational goal, they need to make decisions about how to prepare for that goal. All Adult Education for Work students should have what we call a "Career Pathway plan."

This plan would detail the steps a student has to take to reach his/her career goal. It would require an initial assessment of a student's skills and would compare these to what is needed for the certification or degree that is required for work in the chosen occupation. The career plan would specify the sequence of Adult Education and other courses that students must complete, estimate how long it would take to pursue this program of study and identify what certifications or credits would be awarded at various points along the way.

All efforts would be made to map out the most efficient and accelerated pathway possible for the student. The plan would establish interim milestones that might include progressing from one level to the next in Adult Education; attaining an assessment score necessary for admission to a training program; attaining a GED; or finishing a certain set of technical courses. Including interim milestones may be important as a motivator for adults who often do not persist long enough in Adult Education to attain the credentials needed for career attainment or progression.

In addition to mapping out an education and training pathway, a counselor would assess what additional supports (such as counseling, financial aid, childcare, transportation, or academic tutoring) a student might need to be successful along this pathway and the counselor would be responsible for connecting that student to these supports. Each plan should be revisited regularly to evaluate progress, reassess the pathway, and identify additional supports as needed. Students would need to work with a career counselor to develop a Career Pathway plan.

We recognize this would involve an enormous effort from the Adult Education system since rarely is this level of counseling support and labor market expertise provided to students. But it is key to helping motivated low-skilled adults make informed decisions about their education and career goals and to helping them navigate what is now a very difficult system to sort through.

1-D. Offer a continuum of instruction from basic skills (including English Language) to readiness for postsecondary education and training and work.

Adult Education for Work Programs should offer a continuum of instruction for students that range from basic skills (including English language) to the knowledge and skills needed to be ready for postsecondary education or training. This means that the end point of Adult Education for Work should not be the GED. Research suggests that passing the GED does not ensure that students have the skills needed for success in postsecondary education or the workplace.

There are two reasons for this. First, the content knowledge students need in order to pass the GED does not necessarily enable them to place out of developmental education on the "gatekeeper" tests (like AccuPlacer or Compass) used by colleges to determine the need for developmental education. Second, passing the GED does not necessarily address what we have called the work readiness skills that are needed to succeed in postsecondary education and training or work.

Adult Education for Work programs and postsecondary institutions must work together to ensure that skills attained through Adult Education align with entry requirements for postsecondary programs without the need for developmental education. Adult Education must also keep abreast of the skills needed for success in the workplace and consider their attainment key goals of their programming.

Some leading programs have recognized this issue and have begun to rethink how the upper levels of Adult Education are structured. A few programs (notably in the state of Kentucky) administer "gateway tests" to their higher-level Adult Education students, and build the curricula of their higher-level courses to include the skills required to pass these tests.[22] In these programs, passing the "gateway" tests is effectively the exit criterion for Adult Education.

Some programs in Oregon report that they encourage students to remain in GED preparation courses until they can pass the GED with a score that is high enough that it indicates the students will be able to directly enter academic studies.[23] Other Adult Education programs, like those in the states of Kentucky and Arkansas, offer students opportunities to work towards a WorkKeys credential, based on assessments of work readiness developed by the ACT.[24] These are promising developments that hopefully will lead to more systematic rethinking of the structure of programs.

1-E. Provide programs and supports to ensure a smooth transition from Adult Education for Work programs to postsecondary education and training.

Many adult students fail to make a smooth transition from Adult Education to postsecondary programs. Even though many indicate that this is their goal, only a small percentage actually enroll in postsecondary programs, and many of those who do are placed in developmental courses and/or do not complete academic programs. Indeed, at most 30 percent of GED holders ever actually enroll in postsecondary and only about 8 percent earn a Bachelor's degree in their lifetime. Only about 12 percent of GED holders who enroll complete one year of postsecondary by the time they are thirty.[25]

A key design element of Adult Education for Work programs should be to assist students in making smooth transitions to postsecondary education and training. In addition to rethinking course objectives within Adult Education to incorporate additional skills and knowledge needed for postsecondary entry, certain programs have developed innovative strategies to help transition students at the top level of Adult Education into postsecondary education and training.

[22] Forrest P. Chisman, *Adult Education and Literacy and Community Colleges in Kentucky* (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004).

[23] See Sharlene Walker and Clare Strawn, *Oregon Shines: Adult Education and Literacy in Kentucky Community Colleges* (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004).

[24] See For KY's Employability Certificate: http://kyae.ky.gov/nr/rdonlyres/2d5eca6b-50a7-4fff-b09c-1d0a97bc49b6/0/emplyrsguidekecgenericbro.pdf and for AK's WAGE Certificates: http://ace.arkansas.gov/AdultEd/wagefastfacts2008.pdf

[25] Strawn, op. cit., p. 4

These programs target students who are almost ready for postsecondary but have specific gaps in their academic skills or the soft skills and supports needed to succeed in a college environment. These include: 1) short bridge courses that focus on filling in specific gaps in academic/basic skills content; 2) college preparation courses that focus on "soft" skills, counseling, and learning about college procedures/expectations and how to navigate them; and 3) transition courses that focus on both specific basic skills and soft skills needed for college.

- **Bridge Courses**

  The overall rationale for bridge courses is that it is much more efficient and effective to address specific gaps in basic skills than to ask students to repeat whole levels of Adult Education or to take development education courses at college. There are different kinds of students who fit the profile for bridge courses, so the courses themselves differ in focus. For example, many ESL students have a fairly high degree of proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking English, but have difficulty understanding English that is spoken as fast as most vocational or college faculty speak it. They would need an intensive English course to practice listening to English. Other students might need an intensive mathematics course in order to place into credit courses at college.

  Some colleges offer specific courses while others provide individualized instruction. In the Jefferson County Kentucky Adult Education Program, many students take

these bridge courses during the summer so they do not miss a semester and are ready to enroll in the fall.[26] Some bridge courses focus on skills needed for a specific technical course. For example, a review of the literature reveals many courses with titles such as "bridge to bio-tech" or "bridge to construction."[27] To be most effective, these types of bridge programs enroll students who have a foundation in the basic and soft skills required for technical training at various levels (such as a certain level of proficiency in prose literacy, or the ability to use various forms of applied math).

Many of the colleges participating in the "Breaking Through" initiative (administered by Jobs for the Future and the National Council on Workforce Education) provide "bridge" courses to technical and/or postsecondary education, and both the Kentucky New Model Standards for Adult Education and similar initiatives in other states emphasize "bridge courses."[28] Colleges that have implemented bridge programs generally find that students who complete these courses progress more rapidly, persist longer, and succeed at higher rates in further education than their counterparts.

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[26] Chisman, *Adult Education and Literacy in Kentucky*, op. cit.

[27] See Sharon Seymour, op. cit.

[28] See www.jff.org for information on the "Breaking Through" colleges.

- **College Preparation Courses**

  College preparation courses address the lack of soft skills and general knowledge required to be successful in postsecondary education. For example, students may not understand registration procedures, how grades are assigned, course sequences, or how to use research tools. They may also face barriers in their personal lives (such as the lack of childcare, adequate transportation, or health problems) that make it difficult to attend college. Some organizations have developed comprehensive college preparation courses to help these students.

  The best-known models for this type of service have been developed by the National College Transition Network and have been implemented in many New England states and elsewhere.[29] The essence of the model is an individualized case management approach. Programs that implement this type of transition module identify the specific academic and personal barriers that each student faces, and design a program of instruction and counseling that systematically addresses each barrier.[30]

At Bunker Hill Community College, for example, a module on college preparation is part of the instructional sequence in a transition program offered to higher-level Adult Education students.[31]

1-F. Provide accelerated pathways for students to move ahead as quickly as possible.

Many Adult Education students face a long pathway to postsecondary education and training and to family-sustaining jobs, particularly those who enter with limited English skills or low basic skills. It is critical for Adult Education to build faster pathways and programs for students who can and want to move more quickly.

Adult Education for Work programs should offer accelerated pathways allowing students to move ahead as soon as they are ready to higher levels of Adult Education, and on to postsecondary education or training that leads to employment in good jobs and progression in a career. While the goal is acceleration, programs should also be clear about realistic timelines and goals that can be met.

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[29] Information on the Network and its services is available at: www.collegetransition.org.

[30] Stephen Reder, "Adult Education and Postsecondary Success," Policy Brief for the National Commission on Adult Literacy (New York: National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2007). Elizabeth Zachry and Emily Dibble, "Bunker Kill Community College" in *Torchlights in ESL: Five Community College Profiles* (New York, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Suzanne Leibman, "College of Lake County" in *Torchlights in ESL*, op. cit.

[31] See Elizabeth Zachry and Emily Dibble, "Bunker Hill Community College," in Torchlights in ESL, op. cit.

Accelerated pathway strategies include: high-intensity programs; programs that integrate basic skills with college-level technical skills training; dual enrollment/dual credit programs where students are co-enrolled in adult and postsecondary education or training concurrently; and technology-assisted, self-paced programs.

- **High-Intensity Programs**

  To move students more quickly through the Adult Education component of a Career Pathways system, Adult Education for Work programs should create instructional units of sufficient intensity and length that students can progress through the ABE/ESL continuum as quickly as possible. At present, most Adult Education programs meet 3–6 hours per week, and the standard instructional unit is one semester. This means that classes that provide instruction at each Adult Education "level" begin anew at the beginning of what would be one semester at a community college, or one-half an academic year in the K–12 system, and they rarely meet over the summers. Students are usually only promoted to the next highest level at the end of each unit.

  Most research shows that it takes ABE and ESL students about 100–120 hours of instruction, on average, to master the skills of each level—if they attend on a regular basis, complete homework assignments, and otherwise fulfill the requirements of classes.[32]

At the rate of 3–6 hours of instruction per week it would take low-skilled students many years to progress to the highest levels of the standard Adult Education sequence—the point at which they have the skills to make transitions to postsecondary education. And it would also require many years for them to reach the somewhat lower levels where transitions to non-degree technical programs are possible. This problem of the time it takes to complete the Adult Education sequence is particularly acute for ESL students, because the vast majority of these students begin at the very lowest levels of English proficiency and prior education.

Some programs have addressed this problem by providing high-intensity instruction to all or some of their students. For example, Seminole Community College in Florida offers classes that meet from 16 to 20 hours per week, and the "accelerated" program at Yakima Community College in Washington meets for 16–18 hours per week.[33]

Adult Learning and Literacy, 2007 (Cambridge: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2007). Maggie McHugh, Julia Gelatt, and Michael Fix, *Adult English Language Instruction in the United States: Determining Need and Investing Wisely* (Washington: Migration Policy Institute, 2007). Claudia Tamassia, Marylou Lennon, Kentarto Yamamoto, and Irwin Kirsch, *Adult Education in America: A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007). Allene G. Grognet, *Performance-Based Curricula and Outcomes: The MELT Updated for the 1990's* (Denver: The Spring Institute, 1997) available at: www.springinstitute.org.

[33] Sandy Ares and Beth Larson, "Seminole Community College" in *Torchlights in ESL: Five Community College Profiles* (New York, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007).

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[32] See, for example: John Comings, "Persistence: Helping Adult Education Students Reach their Goals," Chapter 2 in *Review of*

As a variant on this model, Lake County Community College in Illinois combines three levels of instruction in a single course that meets nine hours per week for one year.[34] Other programs, such as the system managed by the above-mentioned Jefferson County Public Schools in Kentucky, offer short, high-intensity "bridge" courses (called "EES"—Educational Enrichment Services") that allow students to fill gaps in their mastery of particular skills in a fairly short period of time.[35]

It might be expected that very few Adult Education students would be able to take the time to attend high-intensity programs, but the programs just mentioned and others are filled to capacity and may well be expanded. One reason for this is that these and most other high-intensity programs are targeted at students who wish to improve their employment prospects by making transitions to postsecondary education or technical training as quickly as possible—and these are the students who tend to select high-intensity programs when they are offered.

Although none of these institutions have completely articulated Career Pathways learning systems, a significant number of

students are willing and able to devote large amounts of time to Adult Education classes if those classes provide the skills needed to make transitions as quickly as possible.

Another strategy to accelerate instruction is full-year programming. Many Adult Education programs do not operate during the summer. Adult Education for Work programs should consider offering classes during summer sessions. A review of the ESL program at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) concluded that it should be structured as several short "half-semesters" (five 12-hour-per-week sessions) including a summer session. This would allow a student who attended continually to progress from the lowest to the highest level of ESL (as CCSF defines levels) in about 18 months.[36]

- **Integrated Basic Skills and Technical Skills Instruction**

  Integrated technical courses provide students with instruction in the basic and work readiness skills required for a particular occupation at the same time they are receiving instruction in the technical skills for that occupation. In most cases, their aim is to prepare students for certification in the occupation.

  Integrated vocational programs have been established by a growing number of community colleges in recent years.

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[34] See Suzanne Leibman, "College of Lake County" in *Torchlights in ESL*, op. cit.

[35] See Forrest P. Chisman, *Adult Education and Literacy and Community Colleges in Kentucky* (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004). Kentucky's Adult Education places special emphasis on these kinds of short term "bridge programs," See Kentucky's "New Framework for Adult Education": http://kyae.ky.gov/nr/rdonlyres/5d218e65-a7ce-4536-b77b-2d101638a341/0/anewframeworkforadulteducation.pdf.

[36] See Steven Spurling, Sharon Seymour, and Forrest Chisman, *Pathways and Outcomes: Tracking ESL Student Performance* (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Available at: www.caalusa.org.

Probably the best-known example of these kinds of programs is the Washington State I-BEST initiative—which presently includes 128 different integrated programs at 34 colleges in fields that include various forms of allied health, office work, computer applications, welding, HVAC, child development, and customer service.[37] At colleges in other states, integrated vocational programs in various areas of allied health (and in particular Certified Nurses' Aides) are most common.

Whatever their occupational focus, integrated technical programs are almost always partnerships between Adult Education and technical programs, and their particular structure takes different forms. In some cases, students begin by taking a pre-vocational course that combines instruction in the basic and work readiness skills specifically required by that vocation (often using curricular materials drawn from the particular field of work) with career orientation and counseling.[38] They then progress to a course that either alternates basic skills classes with technical skill classes or integrates technical with basic skills into a combined class.

In addition to tailoring basic and work readiness skills instruction to the needs of particular technical studies, integrated technical programs make it possible for students with fairly low levels of basic skills in the standard Adult Education continuum (sometimes as low as sixth grade) to directly enter programs of technical studies that result in certifications that improve their workforce readiness. Some programs, including I-BEST, provide a high enough level of instruction that students receive academic credit toward the completion of postsecondary certificates or degrees.

- **Dual Enrollment**

  Dual enrollment reduces the time it takes to move Adult Education students through the education continuum and on to postsecondary education. This allows students to receive college credit while they are still working on their basic skills in the Adult Education system. The I-BEST program described above is also an example of this strategy, as students are able to receive college credit for technical courses while they are mastering basic skills. Kentucky's Remediation Bridge Pilots to Career Pathways allows students dual enrollment in Adult Education and Community College technical programs in Healthcare and Manufacturing if they score below the 12th-grade level in reading, writing or math.[39]

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[37] For one of the many descriptions of I-BEST, see Strawn, op. cit. For more information see one of Washington's I-BEST websites: www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentsuccessprograms.aspx.

[38] See, for example, the description of VESL Programs at Lake County Community College in Suzanne Leibman, *College of Lake County*, op. cit. See also, Strawn, op. cit. See also Amy Blair, Peace Bransberger, and Maureen Conway, *Sector Initiatives and Community Colleges: Working Together to Provide Education for Low-Wage Working Adults* (Washington D.C., The Aspen Institute 2007). Available at www.aspenwsi.org/publications/07-009.pdf.

[39] Community Research Partners, *Ohio Stackable Certificates: Models for Success* (Columbus Ohio, February 2008). www.communityresearchpartners.org/uploads/publications//Ohio_Stackable_Certificates_Models_for_Success.pdf

- **Technology-assisted, Self-paced Programs**

  Self-paced, technology-assisted basic skills programs are another strategy that allows adults to move forward as quickly as they are able and motivated. See the discussion in 2-E for examples of such programs.

1-G. Accommodate work and other adult responsibilities.

Logistical problems are a major barrier to persistence. Adult Education for Work programs should offer classes in accessible locations at times that accommodate the needs of working and non-working adults and employers. For working adults, classes offered before, during, or after work at the worksite in collaboration with employers can increase attendance, reinforce the relevance of instruction to work, and engage the interest of employers in the programs and their students. The experience of "workplace education" programs once sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and others suggests that many employers appear to be receptive to this idea.[40]

Community-based organizations have also played an important role in providing Adult Education and related services. These organizations customize programming to their clients' needs. In addition to worksite and community-based organizations, Adult Education classes have been successfully offered at alternative locations such as One-Stop Career Centers, social service agencies and childcare facilities for welfare recipients, public housing sites for their residents, public libraries, and churches—all of which may increase accessibility and expand participation.

Likewise, some community college extension courses construct the equivalent of high-intensity programs by combining instruction over weekends with instruction offered during the week. Adult Education programs should consider adopting this model for at least some of their working students.

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[40] See James Parker, *Workforce Education: Twenty State Perspectives* (New York: National Commission on Adult Literacy, 2007). Available at www.nationalcommissiononadultliteracy.org.

Focus Area #2: Curriculum and Instruction

Benchmark: Adult Education for Work programs adopt curricula and instructional practices that support adults as they prepare for family-sustaining jobs and career advancement. Among the strategies necessary to achieve this include: 1) ensure that curricula covers the full range of basic and work readiness skills needed for entry into and success in postsecondary education and training, as well as in the workplace; and 2) use a range of resources and instructional techniques that optimize both educational gains and work readiness.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should do the following.

2-A. Make postsecondary education and training and work readiness the goal of the curriculum.

The end goals of Adult Education for Work programs should extend beyond attainment of a GED, including preparation for and entry into postsecondary education or training without remediation. This means creating Adult Education curricula that are aligned with the entry requirements of postsecondary education and training programs and provide the skills needed to succeed in postsecondary and in the workplace.

Adult Education for Work programs must begin by partnering with postsecondary programs to define the skills required for students to succeed. They must then design the curricula for Adult Education to ensure that students can master those skills. This does not mean only a redesign of the higher end of Adult Education. It requires rethinking each

level of Adult Education to ensure that students are taught successive levels of these skills.

For example, the design of even the lowest levels of Adult Education curricula should be informed by an understanding of what skills students will need to make transitions at higher levels. This "backwards design" of curriculum is a different method than most Adult Education programs use. Curricular frameworks are not usually developed with an "end goal" of readiness for postsecondary and the workplace. Developers first identify the life skills that need to be taught to the lowest-level learners and then identify additional skills needed by successively more proficient learners.

The lack of attention paid to mathematics at the lower levels of Adult Education is also a problem. The mathematics instruction in ABE and ESL programs is at the elementary level, and often does not provide instruction in mathematics that exceeds applied arithmetic. Since many adults leave Adult Education without progressing to the higher levels of instruction, this means that they do not obtain the skills in mathematics for either postsecondary education or a family-sustaining job.

Moreover, many students who do progress to the higher levels of Adult Education are often woefully unprepared in mathematics. Indeed this is the area where most Adult Education students really struggle on the GED and college gateway exams. Shortchanging mathematics instruction also fails to meet the needs of most employers. Employer surveys indicate that lack of skills in mathematics among their workers

is a greater problem than lack of skills in reading, writing, or English proficiency. Adult Education for Work programs should make mathematics instruction a priority.

2-B. Make work a central context for the curriculum.

Work readiness preparation should be an integral and explicit part of the curriculum in all Adult Education for Work programs, not just an add-on. A key strategy for doing this is to focus the curriculum on the workplace or a particular career area. This provides relevance to learning, context on a chosen Career Pathway, and an opportunity to learn both academic and work readiness skills concurrently to make the student more employable.

The curriculum of Adult Education for Work programs should make abundant use of vocabulary, materials, tasks, and procedures common to most workplaces, particularly those in growing industries. Virtually all Adult Education instruction is contextualized to some extent since higher-level skills are taught by having students apply them. As a result, classes are structured around specific content. This content is reflected in the reading materials, writing tasks, the contexts of the math problems, and the subjects ESL students discuss.

In most Adult Education classes, this content consists of various "life skills" such as writing a letter to a friend, reading a menu, or asking/understanding directions to a particular location. In Adult Education for Work programs, learning should be more contextualized based on the needs of the workplace and of particular career areas, with a significant portion of the curriculum using materials used by local businesses or based on tasks employees commonly perform. To the degree possible, such learning opportunities should be tied to the specific occupations or careers identified by individual students in their Career Pathway plans or to industries or occupations that are in high demand in the region.

Many adult educators already consider using "authentic materials" a best practice. This is because they believe students are more motivated if classes focus on real-world activities.[41] In Adult Education for Work programs, the use of workforce content is a means to motivate students by showing them that they are improving their workforce skills even before they make transitions, and it should prepare them to perform at least some of the tasks required by technical courses. Even if students do not make transitions to further education, the use of authentic workforce materials may improve their employment prospects, because they will be able to demonstrate to employers that they can perform tasks of value to them.

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[41] See, for example: Elizabeth Zachry and John Comings, "How Do You Teach Content in Adult Education?", an Occasional Paper of The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, 2006. Available at: www.ncsall.net.

While many life skills-oriented Adult Education programs make use of at least some authentic workforce materials or teach students to perform some common workplace tasks, few programs make a systematic effort to define what the workforce content of curricula for students seeking to improve their employability should be. The use of authentic materials can also be extended to preparing students for the postsecondary programs critical to success in the workplace. The literacy, numeracy, and language tasks required for success in most colleges are fairly well defined. They are the tasks taught in developmental education or pre-collegiate courses of various kinds. As a result, they should be incorporated into the curricula of the higher levels of Adult Education. For example, students should practice writing term papers, reading college-level research material, and making cogent classroom presentations.

2-C. Use instructional strategies that help students to learn by doing.

The instructional methods teachers use are critical to developing the thinking and reasoning skills that employers value and are needed for success in postsecondary programs. Classroom instruction for both basic and work readiness skills should be based on up-to-date adult learning theory.

Adults learn best when information is relevant and practical and the objectives are clear—and they learn best by doing. Successful instructional strategies should not only provide students with the content they need to learn, but it should give students guided practice in applying this content to real problems and projects—and then allow them to consolidate this learning by discussing it with their peers and teachers. Best practice strategies like project-based learning and student study circles do just this. They offer students opportunities to learn to "think aloud" with their peers about how they are using information to solve problems. In addition to being an effective way to help students improve their basic skills, this approach allows students to practice working in groups, communicating with their peers and teachers, and using other types of higher-order thinking skills.

In project-based learning, teams of students undertake a particular task that requires the application of multiple skills. The literature on this instructional method contains abundant examples—from conducting research on how to access healthcare systems, to writing local histories, to organizing events.[42] Whatever the projects may be, this instructional method teaches work readiness skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, organizing sequential activities, and initiative. Optimally, such projects can be related to the occupational areas for which students are studying.

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[42] Pamela Ferguson, "Yakima Community College" in *Torchlights in ESL*, op. cit.

Many of the same skills are taught through study circles. This technique involves small groups of students helping each other to complete classroom assignments.[43] Students act as teachers to their peers. Because students at the same general level of proficiency have different strengths in particular skills (such as vocabulary or grammar), they can help each other to overcome the difficulties of a particular assignment. Not only does this motivate students by highlighting their strengths, but it may also result in more individualized assistance than a teacher can provide during the time allotted for a class.

These and other forms of "active learning" have become fairly common in Adult Education programs. Some programs, based on strategies developed by Paulo Freire, consist almost entirely of instruction based on projects students select.[44] In other programs, these kinds of strategies are less widely used. Pairing these instructional strategies with content focused on work and specific occupations should be central to the design of Adult Education for Work Programs.

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[43] In ESL, see *Standards for ESL/EFL Teachers of Adults* (Washington: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Forthcoming).

[44] For a summary description of the strategies of Freire and other learning adult ESL learning theorists see Joy Peyton and JoAnn Crandall, "Philosophies and Approaches in Adult ESL Literacy Instruction," *Center for Applied Linguistics Digest* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1995). Available at www.cal.org/esl_resources/digests/PEYTON.html. For an detailed description of a program based on Frereie's strategies, see Pamela Ferguson, "Yakima Community College" in *Torchlights in ESL*, op. cit.

2-D. Manage the classroom in ways that develop readiness for postsecondary education and training, and for work.

The most common format for Adult Education course organization is an "open entry/open exit" design. This allows students maximum flexibility to enter programs at any time and to work at their own pace, but this program design also presents serious challenges for teachers and students. Coupled with the high absenteeism typical of much of Adult Education, "open entry/open exit" programs often have a different mix of students in each class session. This makes it difficult for teachers to create structured classroom environments and to teach lessons that connect and build on one another. Another approach to organizing classes is "managed enrollment." In managed enrollment classes, students only enter a class at one or a few specific times during any semester or other specific timeframe and students are expected to stay for the entire timeframe. This allows teachers to plan and encourage students to learn a coherent "chunk" of material. In addition to considering alternative program structures, classrooms should simulate a workplace environment where behaviors expected in the workplace (e.g., timeliness, assignment completion, proper attire) are required.

The managed enrollment approach is used by Seminole Community College's non-credit ESL program.[45] In that program, students can only enroll in class at the beginning of each semester. This structure allows them to set a high bar for class participation, and in this sense simulates the demands of the workplace and of postsecondary programs. Students are allowed a certain number of absences, but if they exceed that number they are dropped from the program. Students who arrive late are marked absent. Assignments are graded, and students whose grades fall below a certain level cannot advance to the next level of instruction. The college dress code applies to all students. At Mira Costa Community College the Adult Education classes adopted managed enrollment for their high-intensity classes, as this was determined to be the best way to deliver sequential, enriched, high-intensity instruction.

An increasing number of programs are adopting managed enrollment as an option for students. The Kentucky Department of Education recently released a brief about "Strategies for Developing a Managed Entry Model in Adult Education."[46] Many programs are reluctant to adopt the approach because they fear students will not persist in such rigorous classes. However, at Seminole Community College the rate of persistence in the program is about as high as that in most other high quality Adult Education programs.

One reason may be that many of Seminole's students have the goal of postsecondary education. As a result, they may value the experience of being enrolled in Adult Education courses that seem like authentic postsecondary courses. It may be, therefore, that managed enrollment is particularly applicable to Adult Education for Work programs where students are focused on the goal of postsecondary education and entry into family-sustaining jobs.

2-E. Make extensive and appropriate use of instructional technology.

Adult Education for Work programs should incorporate technology for instruction as a key tool to engage students in their own learning, develop independent/self-directed learning/work skills, and where appropriate expand educational offerings through distance learning.[47] The use of instructional technology can also help students improve their work readiness skills and their ability to work independently. It can help them improve their ability to solve problems in using technology systems, and ask for assistance at appropriate times. Some technology-based programs also teach progressively more complex computer applications throughout the curriculum,

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[45] Sandy Ares and Beth Larson, "Seminole Community College" in *Torchlights in ESL*, op. cit.

[46] Kentucky Department of Education, "Strategies for Developing a Managed Entry Model in Adult Education", Research Brief No. 1, May 2007

[47] There is an enormous literature on technology for Adult Education instruction. A valuable overview is provided by: Mary McCain, *Leapfrogging Over the Status Quo: E-Learning and the Challenge of Adult Literacy* (Boston: Jobs for the Future, 2002). Another valuable source of information and research findings is the Support Center (at the University of Michigan) for Project IDEAL, a multi-state consortium of states working to develop distance education programs for adult learners. See www.projectideal.org.

both as a learning aid and to foster computer literacy, an essential workforce skill.

Most Adult Education programs incorporate instructional technology in some way—often through referring students to learning labs as after-class assignments—but most programs consider technology to be an instructional aid, rather than a central component of basic skills or other workforce preparation courses. Even so, the role technology can play in teaching low-skilled adults has expanded dramatically in recent years. The development of sophisticated and accessible (low-cost or free) CD-ROM and Internet-based options for interactive and experiential learning allow new learning technology to provide voice, image and text-based learning that has many of the features of the best classroom instruction. Appropriate use of technology can provide individual attention for particular learning styles, opportunities to work and solve problems in groups, exposure to the world of work and employers, and a progressive but not intimidating learning experience. When used in conjunction with face-to-face instructor/mentor support, the resulting blended learning experience has been proven to be as effective as an instructor-led, classroom-based experience alone, and sometimes more effective.[48]

One of the foremost examples of such a program is, *English for All*, a free Web-based multimedia system for adult ESL students.[49] The program is calibrated to a number of widely used curricular guidelines—including California's Model Standards for ESL. The system includes:

- Four stand-alone videos (on the Internet or CD-ROM), containing real-life stories in twenty, fifteen-minute episodes. Each episode features a Wizard, who explains language and skill content throughout each story;

- Interactive student activities and assessments;

- A course management system for teachers to track student progress;

- Print materials downloadable in PDF format; and

- Guides for teachers, including information on the competencies addressed in each episode.

The lessons in *English for All* track to the student's answers as well as the episodes, which become progressively more difficult. The student may review his/her answers with those that are correct and view the videos and lessons repeatedly.

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[48] Mary McCain, *Leapfrogging over the Status Quo: E-Learning and the Challenge of Adult Literacy*, (Boston, Jobs for the Future, 2001).

[49] See www.myefa.org.

Focus Area #3: Assessment and Credentialing

Benchmark: Adult Education for Work programs use effective diagnostic assessments of student proficiency and progress for determining students' basic and workforce readiness skills to help them enter and advance along Career Pathways as quickly as possible. In addition, both personal and academic barriers to progress are identified to enable the design of individualized instructional interventions and needed support services.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should:

3-A. Use appropriate assessment tools, including assessments of postsecondary and work readiness, to place students, help them develop Career Pathway plans, and periodically assess their progress.

Most high quality Adult Education programs use multiple strategies to assess student proficiency and learning gains.[50] This is because these varied programs have different program structures, different curricula and different goals for their students. For example, the curricula of life skills programs offered by different institutions are segmented into different learning levels.

Consequently, many adult educators do not believe that standardized assessments designed for Adult Education adequately measure the performance of their students or programs. As a result, most Adult Education programs make use of standardized ABE and ESL tests (such as the TABE, CASAS, and BEST Plus), but they also make use of assessments they have developed to reflect the specialized nature of their programs, such as portfolios of student work, as well as the professional judgments of teachers (often in evaluating portfolios) to determine student progress and needs.

Adult Education for Work programs can use the tools described above, but should also use tools that measure postsecondary and work readiness to ensure successful transition into postsecondary education and work. For postsecondary education and training, programs may consider making use of the "gateway" tests (like Compass and Accuplacer) that are commonly used by colleges to determine developmental education needs. There is no national "pass" score for these tests since individual colleges set their own scores, but they can provide a guide for Adult Education about a general level of readiness for postsecondary programs.

In addition, the SAT and ACT tests might be another way to measure postsecondary readiness. For work readiness, programs can use tests designed to measure work readiness, like ACT's WorkKeys, CASAS' Workforce Skills Certifications and Road to Work Readiness Transcripts, and the National Work Readiness Credential assessments based on the Equipped for the Future standards.

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[50] See Mellard and Anderson, *Challenges in Assessing*, op. cit. See also Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, *Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL* (New York: Council For Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007), pp. 43–47.

These standardized assessments can be valuable tools to guide student placement, planning, and progress in Adult Education for Work and Career Pathways learning systems. At the point of entry (or re-entry after an absence) the education and work readiness skills levels of all students should be determined for purposes of placement in classes that will best meet their needs. Counselors and/or teachers should use an array of assessment tools to determine whether individual students are making progress in completing the steps in their Career Pathway plans on the timetable projected. If students are not making progress, teachers, counselors, and other staff members should determine what special educational interventions (such as supplemental tutoring, assignment to different levels, enrollment in classes with different learning styles, or enrollment in bridge programs) will be helpful, or if the student's learning goals and overall plan should be amended. If the student's problems are personal, supportive services should be provided. This issue is discussed in more detail in Focus Area #5 below. In general, students should have the realistic belief that everyone in the program wants to do whatever they can to help them succeed.

3-B. Base advancement policy on assessments of skills and knowledge.

In Adult Education for Work programs, students' transitions to higher levels in the Adult Education continuum and to further education including postsecondary education or training should be based on frequent assessments designed to determine if they have mastered the necessary skills for such advancement. Transitions should not be made only based on a certain number of hours of instruction or semesters of attendance.

At present too many Adult Education programs assess and advance students only at the end of semesters. Assessments should be frequent enough that students can move as quickly through the Adult Education continuum as possible based on their attainment of education and workforce competencies, not their attendance time. Furthermore, frequent assessments should make it possible for students to make transitions whenever they have achieved the necessary skills. Research on at least one large Adult Education program suggests that many students who have mastered ESL levels waste a great deal of time waiting for semester breaks before they can advance.[51]

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[51] Steven Spurling, Sharon Seymour, and Forrest Chisman, *Pathways and Outcomes: Tracking ESL Student Performance* (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Available at: www.caalusa.org.

Advancing students when they are ready allows students to progress at their own pace, and to balance work and other competing demands. It is a challenge, however, to structure a program to accommodate this. As explained in section 2-D, the "open entry-open exit" format of many Adult Education classes means that teachers must deal with a continuing influx of new students and makes it difficult to prepare a coherent series of lessons.

One approach to managing this is to structure Adult Education into short mini-semesters that last a month or a few weeks. This strategy encourages advancement based on assessed competency and allows students to progress as quickly as possible, while still providing a more managed classroom. In short, to help students improve their workforce skills as quickly and efficiently as possible, the traditional demarcations of the academic year must not necessarily be adhered to. Programs would have to experiment to determine how many "early advancers" need such accommodations.

Focus Area #4: High-Quality Teaching

Benchmark: Instructional staff in Adult Education for Work programs have specialized educational training in adult learning and workforce preparation and have the ability to apply such knowledge and skills in the provision of high-quality instruction. Teachers have ongoing professional development opportunities and classroom supports.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should:

4-A. Require high standards and recognized teaching credentials for Adult Education teachers.

Adult Education is a highly specialized profession, and workforce preparation is a specialization within it. Teachers should have specialized professional preparation for teaching in Adult Education and Career Pathways programs, just as K–12 teachers must have degrees in elementary and secondary education and certifications in their area of specialty. Regrettably, many states have no professional qualifications for Adult Education teachers, and most of those who do, require only a K–12 teaching degree.[52]

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[52] JoAnn Crandall, Genesis Ingersoll, and Jacqueline Lopez, "Adult ESL Teacher Credentialing and Certification," CAELA Brief (Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics 2008). Strictly speaking, this research applies only to adult ESL teacher qualifications, but teacher qualifications (or the lack thereof) are the same for ABE/ASE and ESL in most states.

In the ESL field, most high-quality programs require full time teachers to have at least an MA in Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL), Applied Linguistics, or a related field.[53] Experience teaching English overseas in the Peace Corps, U.S. AID, or other programs is also highly valued. There is no professional degree however that is as widely recognized in the ABE/ASE field, although some Education Schools offer both BA's and MA's with a specialization in Adult Education. In general, Adult Education for Work programs should require the highest possible level of professional qualification for full time staff, and this should ideally be a graduate degree for teaching Adult Education in their area of specialty.

Establishing the educational qualifications for part-time teachers, who comprise the majority of the Adult Education teaching force, is more difficult. This is because the wages paid to part-time teachers are usually so low that they have little incentive to invest in obtaining specialized degrees or to seek out other professional development. Some programs do require that part-time teachers take courses in their specialty of Adult Education and/or work toward an academic certification in that specialty. Many such programs provide both tuition reimbursement and a certain amount of release time to make this possible.

For example, Lake County Community College in Illinois has established a six-course TESOL certification program for the benefit of its own part-time teachers and high school ESL teachers.[54] It requires all of its part-time teachers to either have this certification or be working toward it, and provides them with free tuition. Similar arrangements can and should be made by all Adult Education for Work programs—probably through partnerships with Teacher Education Schools. In addition, some organizations such as the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) provide structured professional training for Adult Education teachers.[55] CAL's programs are for ESL teachers. Finally, a few states have made notable efforts to provide a wide array of professional training options. Among these are the Massachusetts SABES system as well as the California OTAN and Calpro systems.[56]

Programs should require part-time teachers to take full advantage of these opportunities and establish standards for the education they must acquire. Standards of this sort may result in a shortage of part-time teachers, however, unless programs raise salaries or provide release time as a means of encouraging part-timers to meet these requirements.

[53] Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, *Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL* (New York: Council For Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007), pp. 43-47.

[54] See Suzanne Leibman, op. cit.

[55] See www.cal.org.

[56] See www.sabes.org, www.otan.us, www.calpro-online.org.

There appear to be no formal academic training programs or certifications for Adult Education teachers who specialize in workforce preparation. This is a key issue as teaching Adult Education for Work represents a new kind of job description. In the absence of such programs, Adult Education for Work programs should partner with Teacher Education Schools or with state or other professional development providers to create programs of this kind. Some state and other professional development providers, however, do provide workshops and materials on this specialty.

Adult Education for Work programs should also partner with their local workforce investment system and One-Stop Career Centers to identify resources that may be available for training in workforce education in their areas, as well as to learn from the One-Stop staff. Teachers who lack specialized experience in workforce education should work under the supervision of faculty or program specialists who have this experience. This is sometimes referred to as the "Master Teacher" approach to staff development. In addition, many Adult Education programs have initiated peer-mentoring programs for new teachers, whatever their professional qualifications may be.[57] In the absence of formal education programs, Master Teacher and peer mentoring systems can and should be implemented for adult and workforce education teachers.

4-B. Provide ongoing professional development opportunities and classroom supports for teachers.

Regardless of how advanced their credentials or skills may be, all teachers and counselors need continuing professional development to keep up with the state of the art. As a result, programs should also provide on-going and extensive professional development for teaching and counseling staff on the most current and innovative curriculum and instructional strategies, including technology advances for teaching ABE, ESL, GED preparation, and work readiness skills to adults.

There are abundant opportunities to do this through professional seminars and training sessions provided by public and private agencies. These include but are not limited to expert consultants, peer learning from colleagues in other programs at professional meetings and elsewhere, Internet resources, training offered by vendors, and professional literature. Staff also learn innovative instructional and management approaches when they are called upon to develop new curricula, or work on grants from private foundations or government agencies to evaluate new approaches to adult learning. Because the development of Adult Education for Work programs will require extensive curriculum development by most programs, administrators should see this as an opportunity to involve as many staff members as possible in this form of professional development.

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[57] For example, see Pamela Ferguson, op. cit.

Finally, at some Adult Education programs based at colleges, Adult Education staff members have the opportunity to apply for research grants in the same way as other faculty—often in conjunction with curriculum development. All institutions with internal funding for research or those which are eligible to apply for research grants should encourage Adult Education faculty to pursue this route to professional development.

In most states, Adult Education programs are required to provide at least some professional development to teachers, and at times to other staff members. However, these requirements and the paid release time offered are often minimal, with professional development opportunities not exceeding a few days per year. Further, many staff members find it difficult to obtain reimbursement for the travel costs of attending their relevant professional association meetings, where professional development is often offered.

Adult Education programs, and especially Adult Education for Work programs, cannot operate at the state of the art unless there is recognition that improving the knowledge and skills of their staff is an essential part of their job description. Without question, they must provide significantly more time and funding for this purpose.

At City College of San Francisco and some other institutions, Adult Education teachers participate in "reflective teaching" programs where they identify problems they have difficulty solving in the classroom and work with their colleagues and administrators

to address them.[58] As evidenced by the low compensation and limited support they receive, most Adult Educators appear to work in this field out of a strong personal commitment to helping students. As a result, most teachers would like to do a better job and are probably less reluctant than teachers in other fields to admit their need for technical assistance.

Focus Area #5: Support and Follow-Up Services to Encourage Access and Retention

Benchmark: Adult Education for Work programs provide comprehensive supports to students to reduce personal barriers to retention and progress.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should:

5-A. Make high-quality counseling a priority.

Counseling is critical in Adult Education for Work programs to help students decide on a Career Pathway and to enable them to persist in a continuum of programs and make successful transitions along the way. A national survey indicates that few Adult Education programs provide their students with any formal counseling services.[59]

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[58] Sharon Seymour, "VESL Immersion Program (VIP) at City College of San Francisco" in Chisman and Crandall, op. cit, pp. 148-153.

[59] See Strawn based on Claudia Tamassia, Marylou Lennon, Kentarto Yamamoto, and Irwin Kirsch, *Adult Education in America: A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 2007).

In programs operated by community colleges, Adult Education students often have access to the college's counseling staff, but few counselors have extensive experience with or knowledge of Adult Education or workforce development programs. In practice, most counseling in Adult Education programs is provided by teachers, who usually do not have enough time or training to carry out this task in addition to their other responsibilities.

All Adult Education for Work programs should ensure that their students have access to counseling services. While it would be optimal for programs to have full-time professional counselors on staff, it is unrealistic to expect that all Adult Education programs will be able to do this. In these situations, programs should contract with qualified counselors through individual or community-wide Career Pathways partnerships.

Counselors should have college degrees and experience in working with low-skilled and limited English proficient adults. They should be staffed from or willing to work with One-Stop Career Centers and use labor market information to help students define their career focus. They will also need skills at arranging for the supports (with public and private organizations) that students need to succeed. In programs where there are a large percentage of students with low levels of English proficiency, bilingual counselors should be employed.

Counselors or other program specialists should also have the responsibility and qualifications to help students create "Career Pathway plans" and to monitor their progress toward meeting the goals and benchmarks established in these plans. Counselors should be qualified to convene teachers and administrators and to intervene when students are experiencing difficulties. Professional counselors are essential to guiding students through this process, supervising their progress, assisting with transitions, and arranging for assistance where necessary. These staff members may be counselors who also provide other forms of guidance to students, or they may be program specialists who have these functions as their primary responsibility. If teachers serve as counselors, programs need to ensure that they are qualified to perform this function. Whoever the counselors are, they too will need on-going professional development to remain current in career planning.

At Seminole Community College, these functions are performed by several program specialists whose overall task is to troubleshoot problems with student progress that are identified by teachers, assessment data, administrators, or the students themselves.[60] Programs that are too small to employ counseling staff or other program specialists may form partnerships with local colleges or One-Stop Career Centers to perform these functions. Alternatively, they may wish to invest in developing the expertise of teachers to provide counseling services. In one example, South Texas College (in McAllen) arranged for 80 teachers to be trained in a model

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[60] See Sandy Ares and Beth Larson, op. cit.

for providing comprehensive support to low-income students.[61]

5-B. Partner with providers in the community to provide case management services to students, including social and academic supports.

Most Adult Educators believe that the personal barriers adult students face (such as long work hours and the need for childcare, transportation and health services) are among the major reasons why these students do not persist longer in basic skills programs or make transitions to further education.[62] However strong their motivations may be, the responsibilities of adult life make it difficult for many low-skilled students to engage in educational activities for very long.

This problem is compounded by the fact that low-skilled students usually have limited financial means. As a result they cannot afford to take time off work for education or pay for supportive services (such as child care, transportation, etc.). Additionally, personal crises may greatly disrupt their lives.

Because Career Pathways learning systems require years of commitment to education on the part of most students, programs cannot succeed unless they make more systematic efforts to help students overcome personal barriers. Addressing these barriers through

intake assessments and in individual Career Pathway plans (as recommended above) is necessary. In addition, any measures that allow students to complete Career Pathways more quickly (such as high-intensity instruction and dual enrollment initiatives) can help adults to persist and successfully complete such programs.

Even those individual programs that have taken the initiative to provide comprehensive support services (often referred to as "wrap around" services) through intensive systems of case management cannot possibly provide a full range of services alone. Among those who have made notable efforts are the Adult Collaborative for Cape Cod; Capital IDEA College Prep Academy in Austin, Texas; and Dorcas Place in Providence, Rhode Island.[63]

Because many individual Adult Education programs do not have the resources or the expertise to address the range of personal barriers that their students face, it is critically important that Adult Education for Work programs develop and maintain partnerships within the community with organizations and agencies with expertise in the delivery of counseling and supportive services. Adult Education programs should develop a systematic method for referring students to these partners, and ensure that they receive the services they need.

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[61] See Amy Blair, Pierce Bransberger, and Maureen Conway, *Sector Initiatives and Community Colleges: Working Together for Low Wage Working Adults* (Washington D.C., The Aspen Institute 2007).

[62] See Strawn, op. cit., and Amy Blair, et al. *Sector Initiatives*, op. cit.

[63] For a description of these and other programs that provide "wrap around" support systems, see www.collegetransition.org/profiles/profiles.html.

In most communities, there is a wide range of public and private agencies that provide almost every conceivable service. Agencies include: One-Stop Career Centers (e.g., labor market information, career guidance, information on eligibility for other federal programs, occupational skills training, and job placement services); TANF programs (e.g., income support and a wide range of other social services for eligible individuals); public social service agencies with specialized goals (e.g., public daycare centers and child care supports); community-based organizations such as YMCA and Goodwill; faith-based agencies such as Jewish Vocational Services and Catholic Social Services; organizations that specialize in serving the needs of immigrants; postsecondary institutions (for information on courses of study, admission requirements, and financial aid); employers (for information about job opportunities and their requirements, scholarships, and on-the-job training opportunities).

Although few, if any, Adult Education Programs have an extensive network of partnerships with social service agencies, examples of ad hoc partnerships suggest that this can be highly beneficial in achieving workforce readiness goals. One such example is City College of San Francisco's VIP program,

operated in partnership with the city of Oakland's TANF program.[64]

The college provides welfare recipients with very low levels of English proficiency 20 hours per week of high-intensity ESL instruction, which is coordinated with workforce preparation services offered by the TANF program. Like other TANF beneficiaries, students in this program receive income supports and a "wrap around" package of other social services. Research by the college indicates that VIP students advance far more ESL levels in far less time than do comparable students in the college's regular ESL program. In addition, almost 30 percent of them continue their ESL studies after they have completed the program—which, in most cases, is after they have been placed in entry-level jobs.

Excel Philadelphia is another example of a beneficial partnership between Adult Education and the One-Stop Career Center system. In 2004, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board established Excel Philadelphia, a partnership with the Philadelphia Literacy Coalition to address the fundamental misalignment between the skills of the workforce in Philadelphia and the needs of our increasingly knowledge-based economy. Excel Philadelphia is designed to raise awareness about the importance of literacy for employers, employees, and the

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[64] See Sharon Seymour, "VESL Immersion Program (VIP) at City College of San Francisco" in Chisman and Crandall, op. cit, pp. 148–153. For information on other TANF related programs, see James Parker, op. cit., and Amy Blair, et al. *Sector Initiatives* op. cit.

community; increase investments of time, talent, and resources in advancing adult literacy; inform employers about workforce literacy programs available to their employees; and increase the number of employers offering workplace literacy programs customized to specific employer skill sets. With funding from the Verizon and Annie E. Casey Foundations, as well as public funding, the initiative had several phases: completing innovative research comparing the literacy levels of residents to the needs of the local economy; developing a formal business plan for leaders in Philadelphia's literacy provider community; and partnering with local literacy providers and CareerLink (WIA One-Stop) centers to help initiate, study, and document pilot projects to embed literacy services in PA CareerLink centers.

Philadelphia's CareerLink centers have always provided referrals to literacy services, but these services were only provided upon request and were greatly underutilized. To ramp up their use, the Philadelphia WIB, the PA CareerLink system, and the PA Adult Education System (ABLE) launched a range of intensive models to fully embed literacy services in PA CareerLink centers, as they are key to ensure that workers advance into stable, good-paying jobs with benefits. The Philadelphia WIB obtained additional funding to hire a project manager to document the process, provide technical assistance, and support related activities. Expansion of these models is underway, which includes developing and strengthening workplace competencies in specific industries to better align the services with the needs

of business. Information has been collected on all aspects of the projects with the goal of identifying best practices and developing replicable models. They have formed Advisory Councils comprised of industry representatives, as well as workforce and literacy providers. And results are promising. Learners on average have increased the equivalent of two grade levels in both reading and math; more than 50 percent secured employment with employment retention rates at 10 percent. The project is now working to facilitate agreements with the Commonwealth of PA to implement the pilots on a broader scale at multiple sites.[65]

Finally, an often-overlooked source of support is labor unions. Not only can they provide opportunities for students to enter apprenticeship programs (and provide information about how to do so), but some unions, such as those associated with the Consortium for Worker Education in New York, provide extensive job training and personal supports as well as Adult Education to even their lowest skilled members.[66] Adult Education for Work programs should establish connections to union training programs that can provide additional supports and opportunities for students who are union members and ensure that union members have access to the training available through the public system.

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[65] For further information on Excel Philadelphia, see: http://pwib.org/initiatives/excel_philadelphia.php

[66] For information on the Consortium for Worker Education and its members, see www.cwe.org

Focus Area #6: Connections to the Business Community

Benchmark: Adult Education for Work programs ensure that they are meeting local and regional workforce needs by working with individual employers, employer associations, economic development agencies, business and industry to identify the skill needs of regional employers and ensure alignment between those needs and Adult Education for Work programs and services in their communities.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should:

6-A. Focus instruction on the skill needs of industries and occupations in which there is strong demand for workers.

Adult Education for Work programs should be based on an understanding of the particular skills required for employment in industry sectors or companies where adult learners are most likely to find career opportunities. An understanding of these skills and employment opportunities should provide the raw material from which program structures and curricula should be constructed.

As discussed in the Curriculum and Instruction focus area, Adult Education for Work programs will be most effective if the instruction in basic and work readiness skills is contextualized to the needs of particular occupations or industry sectors. Students will learn best if the content of basic and soft skills instruction includes applications to particular workforce situations. These applications will

differ depending on the occupations or sectors on which the program focuses.

In addition to contextualized instruction, students need to be oriented to these industries. They need to know what jobs are in these industries, what functions these jobs include and what level of education and training is required for each step on a career ladder.

To the extent possible, programs should build student motivation by focusing on areas of employment individual students wish to pursue. However, in classrooms where students have a wide range of occupational goals, a more realistic approach would be to focus contextualized instruction on the occupations or industry sectors for which there is the greatest demand for workers in a particular location or region. These are the occupations/sectors in which students are most likely to find jobs, and employers in these occupations/sectors are the principal customers of Adult Education for Work programs. By emphasizing the basic and work readiness skills content of these areas of employment, programs will give students a "leg up" in both finding entry-level employment (and possibly promotions beyond the entry-level) and into technical or postsecondary education within these areas to which they may make transitions.

To construct contextualized Adult Education for Work programs, adult educators must understand workforce conditions. They must know what occupations or industry sectors are in greatest demand in their region, what types of jobs are available in those areas of employment, what types of tasks those jobs

entail, and what basic and work readiness skills are required for those tasks.

To obtain this information, Adult Education for Work programs should align their programming with other institutions in their region that specialize in understanding workforce conditions. These include Workforce Development Boards, One-Stop Career Centers, Chambers of Commerce, community colleges, local economic development agencies, and labor unions. These entities specialize in providing information on the local labor market, high-growth sectors of the local or regional economy, and the basic skills requirements of employers in those sectors.

Most importantly, programs must form partnerships with local employers to understand their basic skill needs. Employers whose workforce needs are growing are often more than willing to identify their skill needs as they understand them and to participate in structured task analyses to determine those needs for particular jobs or levels of employment in a systematic way. A benefit of reaching out to individual employers in this way is that those employers may be more likely to "buy into" Adult Education for Work programs and recognize students of Adult Education for Work programs as good candidates for employment, internships, or advancement.

6-B. Develop partnerships with employers.

Many examples of partnerships between Adult Education programs, institutions with labor market expertise, and local employers are

found in the literature on workforce education. For example, in a statewide survey of Adult Education programs in California, 58 percent of respondents reported partnerships with local businesses, and more than two-thirds indicated that they interacted with local One-Stop Career Centers, although the survey did not identify the results of these interactions.[67]

There is no research that indicates how often these types of partnerships result in contextualized Adult Education for Work programs that have extensive or well-defined curricula. However, various studies have identified a number of programs that have translated partnerships with the business community into sophisticated contextualized programs. While each of these programs has achieved this level of sophistication by somewhat different approaches and with different results, an important common theme is that, in many cases, the process of developing these programs was initiated by requests from employers for assistance in upgrading the skills of their workforces. This suggests that there is a substantial perceived need for Adult Education for Work programs in the business community, and that Adult Education programs both can and should form close partnerships with employers in meeting this need.

Successful Partnerships

Developing partnerships with employers is a key strategy in creating programming that meets the needs of employers. These

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[67] See James Parker, op. cit.

partnerships can vary in focus and how they are organized. They can be a partnership between a community college or other provider and a particular company, industry organization, or chamber of commerce. They could also be with labor management partnerships or partnerships with a local workforce investment system. The employer partner can help design curriculum or assessments, provide teachers with appropriate technical skills, train teachers, provide internship opportunities for students, give employees time off to participate in education and training, provide training at their worksite, or assist in planning Career Pathways within a field. Four somewhat different programs provide models of how partnerships with the business community have translated into contextualized Adult Education for Work programs.

- **Owensboro Community College**

  In Owensboro Kentucky, the local Chamber of Commerce identified allied health professions as a leading growth industry.[68] The Chamber approached the Continuing Education division of Owensboro Community College to request assistance in ensuring an adequate supply of workers with the skills needed to enter and advance in the allied health field. This led to a partnership between the college's Adult Education program and the regional hospital center to assess the workforce skills of both new

hires and incumbent workers using the WorkKeys system.

Based on these assessments, the college developed a number of basic skills training programs contextualized to the allied health field. Some of these provided instruction in both basic and soft skills aimed at helping incumbent workers attain the competencies required for various allied health occupations. These included occupations in which the workers were already employed but for which they lacked the requisite skills to function effectively or advance, and occupations for which they wished to find new employment.

In most cases the Owensboro allied health programs took the form of "bridge" programs—filling the gaps between basic or soft skills employees had, relative to the skill levels required for particular occupations. Because the programs were based on WorkKeys assessments, their goal was to help students attain the nationally recognized skill standards for each occupation, as well as to fill gaps in basic and soft skills identified by the medical center. Development of the program required extensive consultation with managers, supervisors, and workers to develop curricula that would teach both the skills for each occupation identified by WorkKeys as well as meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders in the workplace.

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[68] See Forrest Chisman, *Adult Education and Literacy in Kentucky*, op. cit.

The resulting Workforce Basic Skills program consisted of a combination of small group classes and individual tutoring, depending on the needs of particular workers. The duration of instruction varied. Instruction lasted as long as it took workers to attain the skills they lacked for particular occupations. The medical center used this program to improve productivity, screen employees for promotion, and eventually to evaluate new hires.

In addition, some participants in the program used it as a foundation for making transitions to new occupations in the allied health field. In some cases this required additional technical training. Because the medical center had an extensive technical training system, it provided most of the transitional training, and hospital officials reported that they used the achievements of students in the Adult Education program as one method of identifying which workers would be eligible for this training. The initial contact between the college and the Chamber led to further discussions about local workforce needs and to the development of programs targeted at improving the supply of workers with the basic skills required for employment in the other employment sectors.

- **Texas LEARNS**

  In 2005, Texas LEARNS (the state's Adult Education agency) partnered with the state's Workforce Commission to conduct a survey of what it characterized as "…Texas industries that provide entry level as well as career advancement opportunities for adult workers."[69] The results of this survey were disseminated to local programs and have been periodically updated. Based on this survey, Texas LEARNS has subsequently partnered with the Workforce Commission, higher education institutions, employers, and local programs to develop what it describes as "…demand-driven, industry related curricula appropriate for use with Texas's English language learners" in three industry sectors: healthcare; manufacturing; and sales and service.

  An important part of this developmental process has been establishing industry skill standards for each cluster by consulting prior research completed by industry groups and others, conducting task analyses of occupations in particular firms, and initiating extensive consultation with employers and employees. Texas LEARNS has also developed staff training modules for Adult Education program managers and staff on how to use labor market information and partnerships with local employers to develop and deliver workforce related basic skills instruction.

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[69] For information on Texas LEARNS, see www-tcall.tamu.edu/ texaslearns/docs/aerespondworkfrc.html.

To date, the curricula that have been developed are for entry-level positions in each of the three industry sectors and they are designed for students who enter programs at the high-beginning or low-intermediate levels of English proficiency. Each curriculum consists of four modules (representing progressively higher levels of applied skills), each of which is sub-divided into five lessons. Each lesson has four components: contextualized ESL, math, technology, and employability (soft skills).

Class time alternates between explaining the various functions performed by entry-level workers in each industry sector and applying these instructional components to each function. For example, in the healthcare sector one function might be taking and recording temperatures. Students would be shown how and why this is an important function in entry-level health careers, and most class time would be devoted to developing the ESL, math, technology, and employability skills related to it. Texas LEARNS estimates that it would take students approximately 50 hours to complete each module, and 200 hours to complete each entry-level curriculum. Although the curricula are primarily intended to prepare students for entry-level positions, Texas LEARNS believes that they should provide the foundation for transitions to technical or postsecondary education in the industry sectors and expects to develop systems that will facilitate such transitions by students who complete the entry-level curricula.

After several years of piloting these various components, Texas LEARNS scheduled their dissemination to Adult Education programs across the state in 2008. Another important feature of this initiative is that the state's 20 regional Education Service Centers, which primarily provide technical assistance to the K–12 system, have been enlisted in the effort to encourage and assist local Adult Education programs in forming partnerships to create new curricular offerings based on local labor market demand and industry partnerships.

- **Vocational ESL at Lake County Community College**

  The nature and importance of programs that integrate basic and technical skills was discussed in the Program Design section. Contextualized instruction is at the heart of these programs, because it gives students the basic and work readiness skills they need to complete technical courses that often result in certifications. Integrated technical programs are invariably developed through some type of partnership with the business community, because both the technical programs on which they are based and the Adult Education skills they teach will only be of value to students if they meet the needs of employers.

  An example of how partnerships with business shape integrated technical programs and the contextualized instruction that results is provided by one of the integrated programs offered by Lake County Community College.

This is a Vocational ESL (VESL) certificate program in landscape management.

The college created this program after several large Chicago-area landscaping firms informed the college's Horticulture Department that they faced a shortage of skilled workers for the many specialized functions professional landscapers must perform.[70] The problem was compounded by the fact that many front line employees in the industry had limited English proficiency.

In response, the college developed a five-course program leading to a certificate in Landscape Management that teaches English and landscaping courses in tandem. Each of the courses is a three-credit offering, and the subject matter ranges from tree identification to small engine repair. Several of the courses prepare students to attain state certifications in areas such as "pesticide application" and "arborist." The course charges a small amount in tuition, and it is open to anyone who wishes to enroll. For the most part, however, the college discourages students from enrolling who test below the Low Intermediate level of ESL.

The ESL faculty member responsible for developing the course worked closely with members of the Horticulture Department and employers to define its structure and content. Evidence of the success of the program is that employers pay the tuition of most students who are enrolled. In addition, credits earned in some of the vocational courses can be applied to degree and certificate programs in Applied Science at the college, and a number of students have made this transition.

In this program, the five technical courses are taught entirely in English. Basic English language and other workforce readiness skills are taught in an ESL "support" class that meets immediately following each meeting of the technical classes. The "support" class teaches the English language basic skills (such as vocabulary, writing, and language comprehension) and applied skills (such as telephone etiquette) required by each technical class. ESL instruction is contextualized by using the instruction offered in the technical class in English as the content for instruction. The skills taught in "support" classes are planned in advance by a thorough review of the technical course's lesson plan, but they are also adapted on an ad hoc basis to meet any unanticipated problems with ESL skills that students encounter in a particular technical class.

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[70] This description of the College of Lake County's Landscape Management program is based on a description of the program drafted by Suzanne Leibman as a working paper for CAAL's study of exemplary community college ESL programs in 2006. At present it is an unpublished manuscript, but is Available from the Director of the CAAL project at: forrest@crosslink.net.

Lake County also provides integrated vocational programs developed in much the same way in automobile technology, office administration, allied health and HVAC.[71] In fact, many community colleges that provide Adult Education offer an array of integrated vocational courses created at the request of employers and developed in collaboration with them.

City College of San Francisco reports that it has 35 integrated ESL courses of this kind. City College's former ESL Department Chairperson cautions, however, that programs should conduct their own market research before responding to employer requests to devote the considerable resources required to create integrated programs.[72] In one instance, the college developed an integrated ESL program for waiters in local restaurants in response to repeated requests from the local restaurant industry. The program may have been excellent, but no students enrolled.

- **Employer-specific Training**

  Perhaps the most common way in which Adult Education programs offer contextualized Adult Education for Work instruction is by providing employer-specific basic skills instruction. Most employer-specific Adult Education instruction is limited to helping workers acquire basic or work readiness skills they require to perform particular tasks on the job at an individual firm. The tasks as well as the line of business, organization of work, corporate culture, employment policies, and other characteristics unique to each firm provide the content around which skills instruction is contextualized.

  The state of Kentucky has placed special emphasis on firm-specific basic skills training and estimates that as many as half of the Adult Education students it serves are enrolled in courses of this sort. Many of these courses are fairly short (6–8 hours in duration).[73] Usually, programs develop generic courses that address specific workforce skills problems many employers face and then customize them to the needs of individual firms that request assistance. Many of the courses teach work readiness skills such as teamwork, time management, problem solving and the etiquette of dealing with customers. They also teach basic skills applied to particular workforce situations such as reading safety instructions or product manuals, or accurately recording telephone orders. They also provide instruction in elementary computer applications. The continuing high demand for these courses testifies to their value to employers.

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[71] See Suzanne Leibman, op. cit.

[72] Personal communication from Sharon Seymour to Forrest Chisman, June, 2007.

[73] See Forrest Chisman, *Adult Education and Literacy in Kentucky*, op. cit. See also Kentucky's "New Framework for Adult Education," op. cit.

Kentucky's Adult Education programs also provide more extensive firm-specific basic skills instruction—often in response to the need for employees to obtain the basic skills required to study for industrial or state certifications of various kinds.

Many of the larger Adult Education programs report that they provide firm-specific instruction of this kind. In many cases, firms pay a fee for this service. In Kentucky, firm-specific Adult Education services are free (although firm-specific training provided by community colleges and other public education agencies is not), and are supported by a separate state budget allocation.

Nationwide, community colleges appear to be particularly active in developing firm-specific Adult Education services. At many colleges, as in Kentucky, developing customized training for firms (whether in Adult Education or other fields) is a major function of their Extension programs, and this specialization is often a major profit center for the colleges.

In a sense, the Owensboro health careers program discussed above fits the firm-specific model, because it focuses on the needs of a single employer (the regional hospital center) and is not designed to articulate with transitions to technical or postsecondary education. What makes it distinct, however, is the large number of healthcare occupations for which it provides Adult Education supports and the use of basic and work readiness skills instruction to prepare employees for possible promotions or transitions from their present occupations to other areas of the healthcare field.

Although most firm-specific programs benefit only the employees of a single company, they sometimes provide the foundation for contextualized Adult Education for Work programs that serve multiple firms in an industry sector. For example, the Austin, Texas-based CBO Capital IDEA initially developed an Energy Technician program for low-skilled workers at a particular electrical generating company.[74] Working with business partners and Adult Education providers, it was expanded to other electrical companies.

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[74] See Amy Blair, et al., *Sector Initiatives*, op cit.

Focus Area #7: Monitoring and Accountability Systems

Benchmark: Adult Education for Work programs establish strong monitoring and accountability systems to document, evaluate and improve student and program outcomes on a continuing basis.

Quality Elements: To do this, Adult Education for Work programs should:

7-A. Develop customer-friendly performance information.

High quality Adult Education for Work programs should "market" to their customers: potential adult students and employers. Programs should identify what data matter to students and to employers and then present it in simple and understandable ways. These data should also help adult educators understand what they can do to build an Adult Education for Work program focused on improving the educational attainment and workforce readiness of participants.

Adult Education for Work programs should broadly disseminate easily understood performance information in a user-friendly consumer format to their students, local employers (including employer organizations), partners, and the larger community. Publicizing performance information is one way to ensure that programs will act on it. If others can assess their performance, it gives programs a clear incentive to improve.

More importantly, both students and employers are more likely to make use of Adult Education for Work programs if they have a complete and reliable understanding of what those programs actually accomplish. All stakeholders will have greater confidence in programs that have built-in mechanisms for monitoring and improving their performance. This confidence can take very tangible forms. In Kentucky, Massachusetts and Washington, thorough independent evaluations of program performance of Adult Education programs, recommendations for specific improvements or innovations, and a commitment to make those improvements led to substantially greater funding from the state legislatures.[75]

It is important to recognize, however, that it is very difficult to construct meaningful monitoring and accountability systems for Adult Education for Work programs unless those programs are designed in such a way that they can be monitored and evaluated. This requires that these programs have clearly defined measures of success for the attainment of basic and work readiness skills and for the content as well as outcomes of integrated technical, bridge, and other related programs.

Programs should also specify measures of success for students who make transitions to technical and postsecondary programs (such as completion of certificates and degrees,

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[75] See Forrest Chisman, Adult Education and Literacy in Kentucky, op. cit. Martin Leibowitz, *Adult Education and Literacy in Community Colleges in Massachusetts* (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004). For information on funding in Washington and elsewhere see Strawn, op. cit.

employment outcomes, and earning gains) as well as to upper-level programs in the Adult Education continuum. At the same time they should have clear expectations about alternative routes students can take through Career Pathways systems (as identified in students' Career Pathway plans), and metrics for how long it should take students to reach various goals from the different levels of competence at which they begin. Finally, they must have in place assessment systems suited to evaluating and reporting data on the initial competencies of students and their learning gains, and these systems must be adapted to the particular needs of Adult Education for Work programs.

7-B. **Track longitudinal data on learning gains and on employment outcomes.**

Since it often takes multiple years to attain career goals, Adult Education for Work programs and Career Pathways systems should track student progress over several years. In the long run, this will provide much more helpful information about what kinds of strategies and programs serve students best and it is the only way to accurately reflect student outcomes and performance.

- **Learning Gains**

    Many Adult Education programs measure and report the progress of students in at least some of their program components on an annual basis. For example, they are required by state authorities and the federal National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education to report how many of their students advance one or more standard Adult Education levels, as measured by specified standardized tests.

    However, these and other annual measures of student progress are of limited value in Adult Education for Work and Career Pathways learning systems, because the overriding purpose of these systems is to help students attain technical and academic credentials that lead to employment and increased earnings. For the vast majority of low-skilled students, this cannot be accomplished in a single year. It requires multiple years and transitions through the Career Pathways learning system components.

In addition, annual progress reports fail to take into account the fact that students often change their goals, typically setting more ambitious goals the longer they are enrolled, and may have to leave the program for periods of time. As a result, it is impossible to draw meaningful conclusions about the success of individual students or of programs without tracking the progress of students for multiple years from the point of their first enrollment. It is also impossible to draw conclusions about success without tracking the progress of Adult Education students in technical or postsecondary programs, and determining their employment and earnings outcomes after they have completed various program components.

Under the existing federal NRS accountability requirements, many states match various administrative records with Adult Education student records to measure annual outcomes for high school completion, entered postsecondary education, entered employment, and retained employment. About half the states have linked Adult Education student records with postsecondary administrative records to measure entry into postsecondary education on an annual basis, while 33 states have matched unemployment insurance (UI) wage records with Adult Education student records in order to measure student employment outcomes.[76] These data, however, do not provide individual program administrators with information they need on the learning gains and education progress of students over multiple years.

- **Employment and Earning Outcomes**

Longitudinal data on employment and earnings outcomes is more advanced, but this capacity is primarily used for specialized studies at the state level—not at the program level. States such as Florida, Washington, Texas, Wyoming and Connecticut have created a long-term commitment and capacity for matching UI wage records with postsecondary education data, while at the same time protecting the confidentiality and privacy of individual students and employers.

The Wyoming Department of Employment, for example, produces an annual report on the labor market outcomes of graduates from the state's seven community colleges to measure the contribution to workforce development of the State's community college programs. Wyoming has access to UI wage records using agreements with nine neighboring states to track students' social security numbers and the dispersion of the system's graduates in those states by matching inter-state records with enrollment and graduation records.

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[76] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, *Adult Education Annual Report to Congress Year 2004–05*, Washington, D.C., 2007, p. 13.

On a regular basis, the state higher education system and individual colleges measure the employment success of their graduates, the earnings of vocational graduates by industry, the transfer rate of academic and vocational graduates and other topics of special consideration. A recent report, for example, examined how much of Wyoming's investments in nursing programs has resulted in net additions to the healthcare workforce within the state and how many nursing graduates migrate to other states. Oklahoma issues a similar annual report designed to demonstrate the value of both two-year and four-year public colleges in the state. They publish annually, for example, the employment rates and average salary of graduates by degree level, field of study, and industry of employment one year and five years after graduation.

- **Program-Level Analysis**

    Unfortunately, the kinds of analyses just discussed do not inform Adult Education program administrators. In principle, it should be fairly easy to incorporate and analyze longitudinal data on Adult Education students into such reports, particularly those administered by community colleges. While many states have both the databases and the analytical systems required for longitudinal analysis, most use this capacity for specialized studies at the state level. They rarely provide longitudinal analyses of student progress in individual programs on a routine basis, and they have not established the analytical capacity to do so.

Researchers believe the primary reason why longitudinal analysis at the program level is rarely carried out is that it simply has not been established as a priority by most states and programs.[77] Other forms of student data analysis are required by state and federal agencies, but longitudinal analysis is not. To provide an adequate foundation for monitoring and accountability of Career Pathways systems, all states should make longitudinal analysis a priority—a routine form of reporting on their programs conducted annually. They must develop the capacity to conduct longitudinal analyses of student progress in each program and a system of reporting this information to programs in a form programs can use to assess their performance.

Until states take up this challenge, individual programs may wish to require their Institution Research departments to conduct longitudinal analyses. A recent study of the ESL program at City College of San Francisco indicates that this is well within the capacity of at least the larger Adult Education programs and can be accomplished for a fairly modest cost. In fact, because Career Pathways programs may differ in significant ways, individual programs may wish to conduct longitudinal analyses of selected aspects of their Career Pathways programs as a supplement to any state data that is provided. In the City College study mentioned above,

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[77] See Strawn, op. cit., and Spurling, Seymour, and Chisman, op. cit.

querying longitudinal data resulted in recommendations for improvements in virtually all aspects of the ESL programs.

7-C. Use data to improve programs

If programs are able to collect data both on student performance in the program and after leaving the program, they should adopt total quality management practices to analyze the data and use it to improve programming. Many programs collect data only to report to various funders and have little time to analyze what they have and to collect data that is useful for program improvement.

CONCLUSION

This paper describes the economic urgency of skilling up the American workforce to meet the increasing demands of a global economy. This sense of urgency is magnified by the fact that this country faces an alarming challenge that a large and growing portion of our workforce lacks the critical basic skills and work readiness skills they need to succeed economically. To address this concern, we urge the transformation of the current Adult Education system in this country to an Adult Education for Work system that provides the education and training low-skilled adults need to become prepared for postsecondary education or training that will lead to family-sustaining employment and career advancement.

In this paper and its accompanying guides we identify a set of quality elements for Adult Education for Work programs. These are intended to provide practitioners, policymakers and employers with the tools they need to begin this transformation of the Adult Education system that would result in:

- A new focus on work readiness and preparation for postsecondary education and training for all adults as a core mission of the program, with a clear connection to the economic development strategy of the region;

- A commitment to the creation of Career Pathways systems that accelerate learning and move adults through the continuum of education and training as quickly and efficiently as possible; and

- Partnering with other providers in the community to offer the supports adults need to persist and succeed in adult education for work programs.

Constructing such a system will require substantial changes. To be successful, Adult Education for Work and Career Pathways learning systems will require community-wide partnerships between adult education, postsecondary, workforce, and social service providers, as well as employers, unions, and economic development agencies to ensure that the skills taught at all levels meet the workforce needs of both workers and of regional employers. The development of this system will be worth the effort. It will provide greater education and economic opportunities for America's workers, and the skills that the nation's employers and regional economies require to be competitive into the future.

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