



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TO
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
TRANSITIONS SYMPOSIUM
PROCEEDINGS REPORT**

Adult Basic Education to Community College Transitions Symposium

Proceedings Report

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U.S. Department of Education

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Secretary

Office of Vocational and Adult Education

Troy R. Justesen
Assistant Secretary

November 2007

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Message from Assistant Secretary Troy R. Justesen

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings issued an *Action Plan for Higher Education* to improve higher education, keep America competitive, and address the challenges students and families face when planning for college. The secretary calls on states, institutions, and the federal government to work together to carry out the recommendations and findings of *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* the final report of the Secretary's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Secretary Spellings established this bipartisan commission in 2005 to develop a comprehensive strategy for postsecondary education that will better serve Americans and address our nation's economic future.

The secretary's *Action Plan for Higher Education* is designed to extend quality higher education to students of all backgrounds, including minorities, low-income students, and adults. The plan raises awareness and mobilizes higher education leadership to address adult literacy as a barrier to national competitiveness and individual opportunity. The secretary's vision includes working with Congress to expand the principles of the *No Child Left Behind Act* by investing in strategies that close the achievement gap and help students with diverse backgrounds and needs reach uniformly high standards. Her plan calls for alignment of high school standards with college expectations. It also includes development of a federal research agenda for adult literacy to identify strategies, models, and programs that improve the transitions of adult students to postsecondary education. The number of nontraditional students continues to increase as more Americans of all ages seek additional degrees or attend college for the first time.

I am pleased that the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) continues leading initiatives to improve student transitions from secondary to postsecondary education. OVAE sponsors the College and Careers Transitions Initiative, which already is strengthening community colleges' role in connecting secondary and postsecondary education. OVAE is refocusing adult basic education (ABE) to support the transition of nontraditional students to college and careers. OVAE's ABE Career Connections project further supports state and local ABE programs by developing strategies to extend current pathway models to the ABE system. This will produce a manual with tools and resources for ABE programs to strengthen secondary-to-postsecondary transitions using programs of study organized by industry sectors.

Last December, I welcomed Patricia Stanley as our new deputy assistant secretary to lead our efforts to increase the key role that community colleges can play in education and workforce development. Stanley brings to OVAE a strong background in workforce development and adult education. She is focused on OVAE's community college mission, including promoting the transition from adult and vocational education programs to postsecondary learning. One of her top priorities is to ensure that the community college perspective is included in discussions of secondary and postsecondary education within the Department of Educa-

tion. She will continue to reach out to diverse groups to generate a national dialogue on all matters related to postsecondary transitions.

This publication recaps an OVAE-sponsored ABE to Community College Transitions Symposium held in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 14, 2006. The symposium recognized the importance of adult learners and the educational needs they present as they pursue college and careers. We were privileged to hear more than a dozen experts on adult and postsecondary education discuss our common mission—to create ways for adult students to transition effectively from secondary education to postsecondary education and employment.

Our intent in this report is to continue the national dialogue on postsecondary transitions. We want to help make higher education a reality for every American who chooses to pursue it and to help provide all students with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in our country's future.

Troy R. Justesen
Assistant Secretary
Office of Vocational and Adult Education

Executive Summary

A college education is becoming more and more of a necessity in today's competitive economy. Ninety percent of the fastest-growing jobs require postsecondary education or training. On average, college graduates earn almost twice as much as workers with just a high school diploma. Sixty percent of Americans have no postsecondary credentials at all, and less than a third of Americans have bachelor's degrees. U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has called on states, institutions and the federal government to work together to carry out the recommendations of *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, the final report of the Secretary's Commission on Higher Education, in order to make postsecondary education more affordable and effective.

The Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) has a significant role in implementing Secretary Spellings' vision of postsecondary opportunity for adult students who lack both basic skills and the resources to attain them independently. OVAE administers the *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)* [Pub. L. 105-220] that authorizes grants to states to fund local programs providing adult education and literacy instruction. The law calls upon states and local providers to measure the outcomes of this federal investment not only in terms of students' learning gains but also based on the extent to which students who want to go on to college make the transition to postsecondary education.

Assistant Secretary for Vocational and Adult Education Troy R. Justesen called together leading thinkers in the field of adult education to generate a national dialogue on postsecondary transitions with regard to adult basic education (ABE) students. Nationally recognized adult education experts shared their ideas in a September 2006 *ABE to Community College Transitions Symposium* about how to help adult learners transition successfully to postsecondary learning.

The symposium was organized into two roundtable discussions. The first roundtable, "Why Are We Here? The Challenge of ABE to Community College Transition," focused on challenges faced by ABE programs in promoting transitions to community colleges and identified student, organizational, and policy challenges. Student challenges ranged from ABE learners' difficulties in acquiring basic skills to their lack of college readiness. Organizational challenges, according to participants, exist in workplaces, ABE programs, and postsecondary institutions. Challenges include a lack of employee release time for education and differences in mission, instruction, and curriculum between ABE and postsecondary education systems. Participants also discussed several policy factors hampering the transition process, including a lack of awareness of the transition issue among policymakers and a financial aid system not designed for nontraditional learners.

Panelists for the first discussion were: John Comings, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (now with Harvard Graduate School of Education); Davis Jenkins, Community College Research Center, Columbia University; Israel Mendoza, Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; and Jerry Rubin, Jobs for the Future (now with Jewish Vocational Services of Greater Boston).

The second roundtable, “Where Are We Going? Promising Approaches to Promote ABE to Community-College Transition,” focused on organizational and academic approaches to making ABE more successful in promoting college transitions. Participants suggested several approaches, such as sharing instructors among ABE, English as a Second Language (ESL), and postsecondary education; expanding career pathways to adult learners; and providing college instructors with professional development to enable them to serve nontraditional learners more effectively. Panelists and participants also recommended making academic counseling and peer mentoring available to adult learners. They noted some federal and state policy changes are needed as well, including holding ABE programs and postsecondary institutions more accountable for their transition rates; creating a flexible financial aid system to support part-time students; and using data to show policymakers the relationship between human capital development and economic development.

Panelists for the second discussion were: Johannes (Hans) Bos, Berkeley Policy Associates; Debra Bragg, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Ding-Jo Currie, Coastline Community College; Silja Kallenbach, New England Literacy Resource Center; and David Seith, MDRC.

Judith Alamprese of Abt Associates, who observed the discussions as they occurred, provided a summary as well as the recommendations that participants made for next steps. Potential next steps included:

- Creating a system of lifelong learning that promotes the concept that learning is an ongoing part of adults’ lives and that many adults will need to develop new skills or knowledge as they grow older.
- Clearly articulating and systematically coordinating the components of career pathways to include academic training, career awareness and planning, and the provision of support services.
- Building the awareness of incumbent workers about opportunities for participation in postsecondary education and the payoff in the workplace from their development of new or enhancement of existing skills.
- Continuing to educate community colleges and state policymakers about the issues of ABE learners’ transition to community college.
- Conducting rigorous experiments to test promising approaches to facilitating ABE learners’ enrollment in and completion of postsecondary programs.

Cheryl Keenan, director of OVAE's Division of Adult Education and Literacy, provided closing remarks calling for further research and demonstrations projects to assess conclusively the practices that promote and sustain postsecondary transitions among ABE students. She urged participants to share in the responsibility to help create more robust adult secondary education programs that would give students the tools they need to understand and navigate postsecondary systems.

Introduction

The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE), sponsored a symposium on issues related to the transition of adult education students to community colleges, on Sept. 14, 2006. Despite increasing economic returns and social benefits associated with postsecondary education and training, research indicates that only 30–35 percent of General Educational Development (GED) diploma recipients obtain any postsecondary education; only 5–10 percent obtain at least one year of postsecondary education; and only 3 percent complete an associate’s degree (Murnane, Willett and Tyler 2000). According to *America’s Perfect Storm* (Kirsch et al. 2007), however, nearly half of the expected job growth over the next 25 years will be positions requiring higher education and skill levels. Adults at these higher levels also will have greater earning potential. Currently, adults with associate degrees earn, on average, 25 percent more than those with a high school diploma do, and this gap is expected to widen by 2030.

The symposium gathered a diverse group of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from adult education, workforce development, and postsecondary education to share their ideas about:

- The challenge and payoff of ABE to college transitions.
- The research, policy, and practices that could enable more ABE students to make a successful move to postsecondary education and training.

The symposium was the culminating event of the ABE to Community College Transitions Project, a three-year initiative funded by OVAE and conducted by Berkeley Policy Associates (BPA) in partnership with MDRC. The project, which is summarized in the appendix, called attention to a set of practices and strategies identified by ABE and college staff that, to the extent they are transferable, can offer guidance to ABE programs, postsecondary institutions, and adult education policymakers seeking to promote and support the transition of ABE learners to postsecondary education.

The goal of the symposium was to advance the national discussion on ABE to postsecondary transitions. It began with a presentation on the ABE to Community College Transitions Project and continued with two roundtable discussions: (1) “Why Are We Here? The Challenges of ABE to Community College Transitions” and (2) “Where Are We Going? Promising Approaches to Promoting ABE to Community College Transitions.” Each discussion began with a presentation by panel members, followed by a discussion among the participants. The appendix contains biographical information on the panelists and presenters, as well as a list of all participants.

Adult Basic Education to Community College Transitions Symposium

Edited Transcript of Roundtable Discussions

The overall discussion is presented here as an edited transcript, followed by a brief summary of the roundtable discussions by Judith Alamprese of Abt Associates Inc. and concluding remarks by Cheryl Keenan, OVAE's director of the Division of Adult Education and Literacy.

The following is an edited transcript of the two roundtable discussions held at the Adult Basic Education to Community College Transitions Symposium. The transcript has been edited to turn speech into prose. In the interests of clarity and readability, some material has been omitted or consolidated. The discussions do not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE), and the U.S. Department of Education.

First Roundtable: Why Are We Here?

The Challenge of ABE to Community College Transition

The first roundtable focused on the challenges faced by adult basic education (ABE) programs in promoting transitions to community colleges and identified student, organizational, and policy challenges. Student challenges ranged from ABE learners' difficulties in acquiring basic skills to their lack of college readiness. Organizational challenges, according to participants, exist in workplaces, ABE programs, and postsecondary institutions. Challenges include a lack of employee release time for education and differences in mission, instruction, and curriculum between ABE and postsecondary education. Participants also discussed several policy factors hampering the transition process, including a lack of awareness of the transition issue among policymakers and a financial aid system not designed for nontraditional learners.

Panelists for the first discussion were: John Comings, National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (now with Harvard Graduate School of Education); Davis Jenkins, Community College Research Center, Columbia University; Israel Mendoza, Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges; and Jerry Rubin, Jobs for the Future (now with Jewish Vocational Services of Greater Boston). The discussion moderator was Christopher Coro. Members of the audience asked questions and commented, once the panelists had spoken. These members are identified in Appendix B.

OPENING REMARKS

JOHN COMINGS: Let me first talk about basic skills in reading, writing, and math and their importance in college placement tests. The questions on these tests involve both difficulty in text and difficulty in task. For adult learners, the text itself presents a vocabulary challenge. It's a kind of vocabulary that adult learners don't usually use and the kinds of words that GED students need to know to succeed in postsecondary education. They are words that are hard to learn because students are not using those words in their everyday life.

The same thing is true with math and writing. The kind of math and writing skills required to be successful both on the placement test and in classes are very different from the kind of math and writing adult learners are used to doing in their everyday lives. Quite often, GED students have not had an opportunity to acquire this vocabulary or these math and writing skills, so it's very difficult and time consuming for adult learners to acquire them.

There's also an issue of self-efficacy, the belief that they can be successful at applying these kinds of skills and knowledge to the task of passing community college courses. The students we're talking about may have little or no exposure to postsecondary education. The little bit of research available on factors that contribute to nontraditional students' being successful at postsecondary education is focused on their academic and social engagement. On the academic side, examples include asking questions in class, going to the professor's office hours, and taking advantage of support services. Some examples on the social engagement side include getting involved in social activities at the college, going for coffee after class, and so forth. The knowledge and the self-efficacy about how to engage in these kinds of behaviors are things you wouldn't normally expect our students to have.

JERRY RUBIN: I want to say how much I appreciated the information from the ABE to Community College Project. The research very much resonated with the work that we've been doing in this area for the last several years.

I'm going to comment about ABE student barriers from two perspectives. One is a set of issues Jobs for the Future has heard repeatedly in the 23 colleges we're now working with across the country in what's known as the *Breaking Through* initiative (Jobs for the Future 2006), designed specifically to improve outcomes for low-skilled, low-literate adults moving into occupational college credit and certificate programs. Then I want to talk about the barriers facing incumbent working adults who lack basic skills. Much of the work JFF is doing now is in the healthcare arena. We will be working with a couple of dozen collaborations of higher educational institutions and healthcare institutions nationally with front-line workers, almost all of whom have basic skills needs. There are some particular barriers at the workplace that I think are interesting to look at.

Some of the observations from *Breaking Through* fall into two basic categories:

(1) students' not being ready for college, and (2) life presenting a set of challenges.

In the area of college readiness, I think one barrier is students may not believe that college is a real option—that meeting the time commitment, life challenge, expense, and academic difficulty is not possible for them. That perception is a huge barrier for many students. A second problem for them is lacking a motivating educational and career goal that is clearly defined in order to keep them moving along this path. Several others barriers include: intimidation by the college environment; poor previous experience in school; lack of study skills; limited computer skills; and, potentially, learning disabilities.

In the category of life challenges, barriers include: not enough money and the lack of available financial aid. Even with low-cost programs, the hardship of paying has an enormous impact on people's abilities to stay with the program and move into a credit program. Time is also a barrier. It is money and time, given work and childcare responsibilities. There's an array of other personal issues, such as transportation, particularly for rural programs. Another obvious one is lack of stable housing. Illness is also an issue, particularly for families with children in urban areas, where illness causes great difficulty in obtaining education.

Let me also say something about incumbent workers and their particular challenges in gaining adult basic education services and transitioning into college credit programs. These challenges are particularly germane to the healthcare field because of the peculiarities of healthcare requirements around certificates and degrees but also relevant to at least another half-dozen careers with large numbers of entry-level employees and advancement opportunities requiring basic skills and either a certificate or a degree. The major challenge, in our experience, is that most workplaces can be what I would consider "learner unfriendly." We have put a tremendous premium on programs that are workplace oriented because of the amount of time people spend at the workplace. But the distance that most workplaces need to go to get rid of the barriers in a learner unfriendly environment is enormous.

I'll just mention several solutions, for example, release time—not simply time to attend classes but having sympathetic supervisors who understand how to slot other employees in when a student is attending a class. This is an enormous disruption for employers, but there are employers who have figured out how to do it. Education at the basic, certificate or degree level does not work unless working employees have flexibility at the workplace. Supervisory support is an enormous challenge. If supervisors do not consider education and training a benefit to their employees and to the company, it won't happen. On-site delivery of services is another enormous challenge, which we'll talk about later when we get into the institutional issues.

Other workplace solutions include: career coaching and educational coaching, which can help people without formal educational experiences navigate a fairly complex set of challenges; contextualization, which connects learning to the workplace; work-based learning, which gives credit for work taking place in the course of a job; and connecting advancement and rewards directly to educational advancement, which is not commonly done.

DAVIS JENKINS: There is also a lack of awareness of the possibilities. For example, look at studies, like those done by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (Tornatzky, Cutler, and Lee 2002), of the profound lack of understanding Latino families may have about postsecondary education. For example, what's the difference between the community college and a four-year college?

What's an associate's degree? Beyond that, few English language learners may know what an occupational certificate represents.

Studies also show a lack of awareness by low-wage workers about advancement opportunities. Because of their pressing need for employment, people in low-wage work may hesitate to speak up for themselves. But in higher-skilled work, skills aside, employees are expected to identify problems. You're supposed to be a learner. I think there's a difference in expectations there.

Finally, let me point to some research by Pat Windham at the Florida Department of Education. Recently she did a study showing that community college students who take "student success courses" do better in terms of completion, transfer, and persistence than do students who do not take such a course. This suggests that students like the ones we're talking about today lack clear goals for college and careers and also lack college success skills (Windham 2005).

ISRAEL MENDOZA: I'll offer comments about some of our research (Prince and Jenkins 2005) and some of the characteristics of our students, in terms of how badly they really are doing in transition. Adult basic education is part of the community and technical college system in Washington State. We're a fortunate system because we're viewed as a very important part of the mission of the community and technical college system. We decided we would take a look, as a system, at low-income people and find out what is happening to them and try to get to the bottom of why they are having trouble making the transition and succeeding in community colleges.

We went back five years—we have a very good data system—and looked at everyone who was of working age, age 25 to 49. We also included those in the age 18-to-24 group who did not have a high school diploma or did not speak English well. We tracked them to find out what happened five years later. When we saw the data and what was going on, we pretty much stepped back and said we've got to do something about this.

What I share with you today is focused on adult basic education. But I will share a couple of statistics on vocational and academic transfer students.

One thing we found in looking at these 35,000 students who entered our system at all levels was what we called a "tipping point," which was if they got a certain amount of education, they began to see an increase in their wages. This was substantially different from any other point in their educational process. Basically, once they earned a year of college credit—on a quarter system, that's 45 credits for us—and a certificate, they hit that point where it made a huge difference in their wage gains throughout the later years.

For example, somebody who started in ESL and hit that tipping point earned \$7,000 a year more than an ESL student who didn't quite get there. Somebody who started in our ABE or GED programs and got to the tipping point earned \$8,500 a year more than students who started there and didn't get that same amount of education. Folks who entered our programs with a GED already earned \$2,700 more a year, and people who entered our system with a high school diploma—remember, it didn't matter which track they were on—earned \$1,700 more a year.

We began to see this as the point to which we want to get all of our students. But, guess what? Only 13 percent of our ESL students actually went on and got any kind of college credit over a five-year period. Less than a third of our ABE GED students actually earned a college credit within the five-year period. Of that group, only 4 percent either gained a year's worth of college or got a one-year certificate. Remember, you need both to get to the tipping point.

Another thing we found was that nine out of ten of our ABE and ESL students over those five years really made modest gains. They either got a GED or they got their adult high school diploma, but they really didn't make it to the tipping point. Of the 1 percent who did, 70 percent entered our basic skills programs already having a high school diploma, but they tested well below the competency levels.

We saw that students who get financial aid versus students who don't are three times more likely to succeed or complete a program. Of the 70 percent with a high school diploma, guess what? They were eligible for financial aid. Less than one-fourth of them knew about it or accessed it or were told about it.

We also looked at our students who got a one-year certificate versus those who made it to the tipping point, meaning a year of college credit in addition to the certificate. They didn't do too well either. Those that got the certificate earned \$3,800 less a year than those who made it to the tipping point. Those who started in basic skills and got a one-year certificate earned \$6,000 less a year than they would have if they obtained a certificate and one year of college. Two out of three vocational students who started with a GED didn't earn even a one-year certificate, let alone a two-year degree in that same five-year period. These are considered college students.

Oh, by the way, six out of ten of those who were on the academic track also did not complete either one year of college credit or a one-year certificate before dropping out over the five-year period. This is a pretty sad state of affairs for education for low-income adults. We'll talk later about some of the things we began to do to turn this around.

CHRISTOPHER CORO: So far, we've heard from the panelists some of the challenges students face as individuals: lack of academic readiness and lack of self-efficacy. We've also discussed issues in the workplace. Are there other areas that we have not touched on?

ON SECONDARY-POSTSECONDARY ALIGNMENT

CHRISTOPHER MAZZEO: The panelists spent a lot of time on personal barriers. I'd like them to address a specific policy issue that may or may not be a barrier, and that's the issue of alignment. I do a lot of work on the issues of transition between K-12 and postsecondary education. We have some significant barriers to students' success in making the transition from high school to college. Those are barriers with respect to what kind of curricula students are taking in high school relative to college, for example.

How much of a barrier is it for adult education students who are hoping to transition to college if the GED and postsecondary curricula are not aligned? Is that a significant barrier? We can talk all day about student responsibility, but ultimately, this is a responsibility that the systems have.

ISRAEL MENDOZA: This is huge. I think that, as an adult basic education system, we have the wrong goal in mind. If we think we're a success when our students test out of educational functioning levels or get a GED or a high school diploma, we're kidding ourselves. Look at all the students in K–12 who get their diplomas and have to take developmental education for up to a year, sometimes two years, before they're ready to take college-level courses. There's a huge misalignment.

A lot of people think developmental education is a bad thing. However, in some cases, developmental education bridges that gap. We have to rethink what we really call success for our students. Is all that we are trying to do is get students to a level from which—at least in my state—one-third of them can't go on to college-level courses without some remediation?

JOHN COMINGS: Most of our students come into programs with an employment goal. For example, take a student coming into an ABE program—a high school dropout who wants a career in the health profession—studying for and getting a GED, going to community college, doing developmental education, and then getting an associate's degree. Even if it is focused on a particular job category in the health profession, it's a pretty inefficient way to design a program.

The way to design it is to look at not only the entry-level job they'll get but also the progression they'll make over the life of their careers. Then go back to the community college, the placement test, and the ABE program and ask, "How do we align so that we get the person into that job as soon as possible and provide them with additional education credentials along the way, so that they can move up within that career?"

JERRY RUBIN: Programs are structured exactly that way. What they do is "work-arounds." In some ways, that's the challenge, both in terms of financial structure and delivery. They're cobbled together, and it's highly inefficient. But they are actually organized in that way. Moving to kind of a "GED plus," or a GED with college prep, is certainly being tried in lots of places, but there are all kinds of barriers that get in the way, starting with money. There are restrictions about how dollars can be used. It's very, very tough. The deck is stacked.

ISRAEL MENDOZA: There's a debate in some states about whether the purpose of adult basic education is to get people ready for developmental education or to get them college ready. If it's college ready, we don't share a vision between our system and the postsecondary system of how they really do or do not link or how we make that connection.

ON STATE SYSTEMS CHANGE

ROBERT BICKERTON: What I want to put on the table is that we're focusing on students and programs. Missing for me are the challenges at the state level, the state policy context in which this actually can be supported or not. Our state, Massachusetts, has been trying to get better transitions to higher education to work since the early 1990s. We still have as many obstacles to that working successfully as not. For me, at the heart of this, it's not a program issue; it's a systems change issue. There's a larger scope of the problem than simply thinking, "If we just do these two or three things differently at the program level, we're going to succeed." It's not just the adult education to college transition; it's just as true for the high school to college transition. If you look at the curve of people who enter high school, graduate, and enroll in and complete college, the curve looks like a ski slope. It's worse for adult education but not that much worse.

The second piece is the range and variables. In a systems change environment, how do you make these things happen when you don't have self-motivated leaders at every location across your state? I find that particularly vexing because this is a system-wide problem.

Another side of it is the depth of the partnerships that are needed. For example, I thought Jerry used a graceful construction to talk about two issues. One, are students college ready? Two, can they manage life and what it's throwing at them? If you deconstruct those two pieces, you already have a large set of issues.

I want to add another issue that hasn't come up. Is the college ready for the students? When so much is focused at the ABE level, you don't see a lot of examination across the entire faculty of the college about whether they are trained for the students we're sending their way. Let me give you an example. Take a limited English proficient student who has learned English to a certain level. Put him in a class in which the professor is facing the board—whiteboard or blackboard—rather than facing the student and then goes off on seemingly unrelated tangents. These are teaching methods that will lose a student whose second language is English when that student might be able to follow the same content presented more directly and face-to-face. It's kind of a marginal issue, but there are systems change issues in readiness for the institution as well.

ON TRANSITIONS IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

DAVIS JENKINS: One gap is the failure to talk about this in economic terms, both for the individual and for local economies in the state. I was part of the study that Israel was describing. They took the data not just to their board but also to the legislature. Some of those numbers were not pretty. But they presented this issue as an economic development issue, which could be supported by legislators from across the political spectrum. If we start to think about it in those terms, of what it would take to convince policy makers to provide the necessary support

for these sorts of programs, this is an important step toward thinking about the kind of systems change that needs to happen.

ISRAEL MENDOZA: One of the other data pieces we used when we took this message to the legislature and the governor's office was that the working-age, low-skilled adult population in our state is the same size as all the high school graduating classes from the year 2000 through the year 2011. We're very complimentary about all of the K-12 reform that's going on, but we can't ignore the working-age adult group. We never pit ourselves against K-12 reform because that's inappropriate, but we urge them not to forget the adults either.

The other thing we told them was that, in the year 2030, one in five workers is going to be a member of this working-age group. You can't just say, well, they had their chance. Let's write them off, and let's fix it in K-12, and from here on life will be good. That isn't going to happen. By the way, one-third of our high school students don't graduate anyway.

It's using the data. I think it helps raise it to the state policy level. Repeating the message is one way to raise it to the policy level.

JERRY RUBIN: I completely agree with you. We have a governor's race going on in our state, but I have not heard this issue discussed once in the campaign. This is Massachusetts, which depends on the skills of its workforce. We're a high-cost state. Because of the costs, we can be at a disadvantage in so many ways, compared to other places, in trying to build or design or create anything. Yet, this issue, particularly for the working-age adult group, has not been discussed.

In some sense, it's all about leadership, because to the extent that state policy recognizes the relationship between human capital development and economic growth, terrific. That's a first step. But then to actually look beyond four-year and graduate institutions and think about two-year institutions, that's a huge leap that most leaders don't make. Then to go beyond that and think about the relationship between non-college-ready and college-ready students, it's a huge way to go.

ON NEW EDUCATIONAL MODELS

STEPHEN REDER: One of the things that comes to mind from some of the research I've been involved in, following adults who are transitioning over long periods of time, is that, when we start talking about scope and systems change and alignment, basic skills development takes time. The pipeline models that we're used to thinking about and building—where we front-load training so people get across some threshold and then they're college ready or they're workforce ready—doesn't actually match very well the patterns of development we see when we follow adults over time. In fact, they need both sustained support and periodic support as their context in the workplace or in higher education changes.

Jerry mentioned that a lot of workplaces aren't very learner friendly. Unfortunately, a lot of institutions of higher education aren't either. In fact, instead of just thinking about remedial com-

ponents, we need to look at educational models that integrate basic skills and language support with content courses on a concurrent, as-needed basis. This is a much better model that actually fits the learning experiences that most adults in our populations have.

ROSE BRANDT: We've talked about defining success, but I think we need to define who our students are. To what extent are we talking about the same group of students? Is there a profile of the students we typically serve?

In Pennsylvania, we're doing a pilot on transition, and we have one site that is working with a university and with individuals who want to go into nursing. They're doing higher-level math. Yet when our evaluators went there, one of the comments they made was that the group they interviewed is not a typical ABE group. Who are the students we're focusing on? Is it feasible to think that someone who comes into our system, let's say, at an intermediate ABE level, is in fact going to persist, develop the skills, vocabulary, self-efficacy, and so on, and hang in there—for how many years?

JOHN COMINGS: This is a really good point, because there are three million people in the ABE system. It may be just a few hundred thousand—given the kinds of resources we're willing to provide—who would be able to prepare themselves to be successful and transition into postsecondary education. For that group of people, I think an economic analysis would show a pretty high rate of return, particularly for those who are young, because they'll have increased income over a long period of time. As we move down the scale into ABE, particularly at the lower levels or ESL, students have very low literacy skills or no literacy skills in their native language, we're talking about a huge investment that might not be recouped. I think the economic argument works really well for a portion of our students, but the economic argument breaks down once you get past that initial group.

ROSE BRANDT: In a time of level or decreased funding, it's not like we have additional funds to bring in a new group. If we are serving a new group, we are expanding services to provide for this group, and it's important to acknowledge that we are doing that and look at the consequences for students we are not serving because we are directing resources elsewhere.

ON ISSUES FOR THE CUSTOMERS

ROB IVRY: We've heard a lot of perspectives on the diagnosis of the problem from the systemic perspective, from the institutional perspective, and from data analysis. One perspective that hasn't been represented yet is the customer's. What are the students themselves saying about the factors that affect whether or not they can successfully transition and persevere? At MDRC, when we first started thinking about doing work on the issues of transition and persistence in community colleges, we decided to run a series of focus groups in about 15 colleges around the country, where we talked to two different groups of students (MDRC 2003). One group was almost all low-wage working students, single parents, many of whom previously had been in

the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. We tried to understand from their perspective what factors were contributing to their success or ability to persevere and if they were on a trajectory in which they were likely to finish and earn a credential. For those who had dropped or stopped out, we asked what factors seemed to contribute to that?

Many issues that the students raised reaffirmed what all the members of the panel have said. But I want to point out two in particular that came up repeatedly. One is this kind of interlocking issue between time and cost. For low-wage workers, especially single parents, there are just not enough hours in a day to take more than one class. And if they're only taking one class, then they don't qualify for financial aid. The likelihood that they're going to be able to earn credits within a reasonable amount of time to earn a credential is really low.

One question we heard repeatedly from students, both those who had dropped out and those who were persevering, was, "How could you rethink financial aid to provide scholarships for low-wage workers that allow them to reduce their work hours, so they could take at least two classes at a time, qualify for financial aid, and be left economically whole?" Isn't there a way to think differently about the incentive structure of providing financial aid? Jerry mentioned release time, and there's some employer reimbursement. But it's rarely for the low-wage workers. It's usually for people at the middle or higher end.

The other big issue was support. The students who persevered had found some advocate within the college who wouldn't let them fail, even if a crisis came up or they were really struggling with their developmental math class. It could have been a faculty member or a counselor, or somebody in the financial aid office, but somebody wouldn't let them fail. And repeatedly for students who dropped out, a crisis had occurred. They stopped going to class, and when they tried to come back, they were so far behind that they got completely frustrated and decided they were going to take time off. No one ever acknowledges that they drop out. It's always "stopping out."

When you think about the investments that community colleges make in counseling and the resources available, it's really limited. There's usually a ratio of one to a thousand. Somebody mentioned earlier the intimidation factor of going to college, not knowing how to navigate your way around. People's lives are complex and fragile. When something goes wrong and there's nobody to intervene and deal with early warning systems that suggest somebody is not succeeding academically or is likely to drop out, then it's no great surprise that it happens.

JERRY RUBIN: I want to comment on the issue of support services. Both the data on learning communities from MDRC and the information we've been able to get from the colleges involved in *Breaking Through* seem to suggest over and over again that a wide range of support services has an enormous impact on retention and success. These range from the simple but creative peer mentoring approaches, which are low-cost but still require somebody to get involved and think about how to set it up, to the much more expensive academic counseling programs, and everything in between. Yet, getting to the policy issue, it's a dismal situation. Even in some of the most progressive states, in terms of the community college system and its links to adult basic education, dollars for nonclassroom supports continue to be eaten away. Basically, everything gets lumped into administration in the legislative debate, including counseling. From a legisla-

tor's point of view, funding for administration is a nonstarter. We know it's critically important, but the dollars aren't there.

One of the institutional issues at the top of my list is whether or not the issue is a priority for the college. This isn't only about transitioning from ABE, because I think the issue is less about what the program is than who the customer is. The customers are non-college-ready students who are adults, but the issue is whether the two-year institution takes this challenge seriously amidst the many demands on its resources and its multiple missions. Similarly, on the side of the adult education providers, is college transition part of their core mission? Where is the leadership?

A second issue is the disconnection of programs and the lack of transparency for students. I had an interesting experience visiting several colleges when I began seeing the "learning center syndrome," in which the basic skills programs are physically located in a non-college environment. I understand the point, making it accessible and giving it special attention. But I walked into many of these learning centers, and you would have no idea that you were in a community college, even though they were part of the community college. No signage, no information about the college. It's physically isolated. There's a complete dislocation physically, a dislocation of information and programs, and a lack of information about transitions. From the customer's point of view, the lack of transparency has got to be overwhelming.

We talked about lack of curriculum alignment and lack of assessment alignment. That's an enormous issue—the complete dysfunction of different assessment tools and what that does to keep students from progressing.

Another issue is time. It just takes too long, so people stop out and drop out. There are a lot of reasons, but linear delivery does not match up with the demands of the customers.

We talked about support services. Not only is funding not available, but services also are, from a policy perspective in many institutions, not available for the exact students we're talking about. Even if the dollars were there, policy says a part-time student or an ABE student doesn't qualify.

I spoke a bit about the lack of a strong connection between course delivery, skill delivery, and labor market payoff. What's the incentive? Having a structured delivery system at the workplace or is it about what happens at the educational institution? Is it a worker friendly educational institution as much as it is a learner friendly workplace?

ISRAEL MENDOZA: Sometimes even when you think you have a solution, it creates another problem, so I'll talk about that problem. In those integrated programs described earlier, we knew these folks needed support services or wrap-around services. These programs started hiring coordinators or aides, and they were providing support services and following the students. Then all of a sudden we had a "shadow" student services structure within a structure that has a formal student services structure, which is also way overburdened. What that points out for me is that I get to wear two hats. I am the state director of adult basic education, but I am a community and technical college person in a community and technical college system. The sooner the two cultures come together and try to talk about it, the better it's going to be, because when one side tries to fix it without the other, we create more problems.

ON INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

JOHANNES BOS: A lot of the interventions to improve outcomes in K–12 are focused on the teachers—teacher professional development to make teachers more effective in the classroom. We’ve talked a lot about institutional issues and things that the colleges can do or not do and about individual student barriers. We haven’t said very much about the people who teach adult basic education at that level. I’ve not done a lot of fieldwork in adult education settings, but I haven’t been terribly impressed with most of the adult education classrooms that I’ve seen. Can you comment on how the actual instruction in the ABE classroom might be contributing to the lack of successful transitions?

ISRAEL MENDOZA: When you look at the data, it’s clear that we have a problem with instruction in the classroom. Figuring out how to solve that is another deal.

I wanted to share with you an observation about what some of our instructors have gone through in some of these programs mentioned earlier. Most of our ESL teachers have a master’s degree, and almost that many in adult basic education also have some advanced degree. Vocational teachers, however, do not have that rigorous training in how to teach. For vocational teachers, their primary goal is to teach how to weld, how to do auto body work, how to be a nurse, or an information technician. When you start partnering teachers, it probably does more than any staff development can to help teachers to see that interaction start working and what results.

To tell you the truth, I don’t think we’re going to make much progress until teachers begin to re-think how they teach. For all the reasons mentioned, about how long it takes to get people from here to there, whether or not the campus is friendly, whether or not the classroom is worker-friendly, it comes down to that.

JERRY RUBIN: One challenge you face with a delivery system that varies enormously from volunteer programs to college-based programs in which ABE teachers are college faculty and are paid and trained the same is, what’s the goal of instruction? There are many wonderful ESL teachers that I’ve worked with over the years who are not oriented toward teaching precollege skills. That’s not their goal. That’s not what they do. But they’re wonderful teachers. So, to a large degree, it’s an issue of what are we trying to achieve and then who is delivering it?

JOHN COMINGS: Another aspect of instruction is technology. Colleges and universities are moving more to putting a lot of the classroom work online and having students do discussions online. Along with not having enough money for teachers and teacher training, the system doesn’t have enough money for technology. It’s another programmatic area that’s going to need investment, so that students learn how to use this technology.

MIRIAM BURT: I’m going back to John’s first comment about vocabulary. With adult ESL learners, of course, the vocabulary issue is huge—the difference between the 100,000 words required when you’re starting your academic career compared with what might be 2,000 to 7,000 words that the English language learner has. But even more than that, there is a huge differ-

ence between the good ABE or ESL class and the academic class. The good ESL teachers are nurturing, and their concern is communication. They're helping the students, often those with beginning literacy or no literacy at all in any language, to be able to express themselves and be understood. Whereas, when you go into an academic field, it's a sea change. There's a need for accuracy, syntax, grammar—the words must be correct. I think that must be an incredible jolt to the student. That's a problem I'd like to see addressed.

JOHANNES BOS: Where we see a lot of individualized ABE instruction, we're wondering whether that adequately prepares students for classroom-based college instruction. Can anyone comment on that? Is that indeed something perceived in the field as a barrier to a successful transition?

DAVIS JENKINS: Compare the teaching and curriculum in the ABE and ESL programs to college-level occupational programs and to college-level transfer programs, and they are three different worlds. Yet, for students successfully to make the transition from one to the next, they have to be somehow connected for the student. None of them serves the student very well. The academic track doesn't do much for students in the near term when they need a job and job advancement. In the vocational track, too often, very few students who get occupational certificates go on to get any kind of degree. The problem is that they're all operating according to tradition, rather than looking at the customers and what they are trying to achieve. What students are trying to achieve—or at least they need to achieve—is *both* credentials and improved job skills and prospects.

In terms of faculty development, maybe the challenge is how to engage the teachers from all three areas to add value. In many community colleges, the English and math faculty teach developmental education. And in many colleges, math and English faculty are required to have master's degrees in math and English, but they don't have master's degrees in teaching. The teachers themselves say they're not trained to deal with low-literacy students. They're trained to teach college math, but they're teaching arithmetic and basic grammar to adults.

HAL BEDER: Problems also exist in the adult literacy programs attached to public schools. Many adult literacy programs, the majority of them, are attached to public schools, and the public school culture pervades the program. Public schools are in the business of getting people secondary credentials, and when they get their high school diplomas, they're done. That's the mission. I think that pervades adult education programs, which have the notion, once someone gets a GED, the program is done. So, the concept of transition being part of the mission is absent. It's very difficult to get that across without changing some organizational culture.

Another problem, I think, is that adult education programs are warm fuzzies. No one wants anybody to fail. If you come in late, that's fine. If you miss a class, that's all right. ABE teachers are very concerned about their students' self-efficacy. When those students get to a community college, there's a huge disconnect, because if you miss two classes, you can get an F. If you don't do homework, you can get an F. In adult education classes, if you do any homework at all, it's voluntary. The differences between how adult education programs operate and what the expectations are in postsecondary education have to be examined.

ON TEACHER TRAINING

JODI CRANDALL: I'd like to go back to the question of training teachers and the amount of time needed for students to get from ABE through any other kind of program, whether that would be vocational certification or the academic program. I think there are some models that address both of these at the same time, models in which there students are co-enrolled.

Co-enrollment with, for example, ABE and ESL deepens the quality of ESL and provides greater relevance for the students in terms of why they're in the ESL program. In some programs, teachers are trained to teach in both areas, so they automatically know in their ABE classrooms how to adapt instruction to address the issues of English language learners. And the ESL teacher knows how to deepen the cognitive investment in ESL, so that they're addressing things beyond some of the more basic life skills, increasing the academic or the vocational component. Co-enrollment, especially in programs with ESL and vocational training, also allows the vocational teacher to learn a lot from the ESL teacher about how to teach vocational courses to English language learners still engaged in ESL. Because the investment in time in these programs is almost always from the ESL teacher, it's the ESL teacher who sits in on the vocational training classes who needs to be able to understand the vocabulary and the basic concepts, the tests, and the tasks. That teacher, then, becomes an incredible resource for the students.

We can deal with two issues at once in many of these programs. We're providing training for teachers, cross-training, and at the same time we're increasing the academic relevance of the instruction for students and shortening the time they need to be in the program.

One of the hardest issues is scheduling, getting the registrar and people in the institution to understand that you can't run these programs if you don't put people in classes that are contiguous. Planning time is very difficult. Usually there's not sufficient support. The successful programs provide release time for teachers to co-plan and to develop appropriate integrated curriculum, so that they're getting language and academic skills in the vocational training. I hate to see this silo effect that says vocational training programs are not academic programs. They have a lot of the same features.

Another problem is just sheer lack of people power. You need to have enough people to do this. It's very unusual to assign a part-time ESL instructor to this kind of a task. As you know, most ESL faculty at community colleges are part-time. There is a real effort to increase the number of full-time faculty, because ESL teachers become coaches and they become the person to whom everyone turns. They may be a little bit too nurturing sometimes, but that nurturing quality is one of the things that keeps people enrolled.

ISRAEL MENDOZA: If you are on a funding formula, no matter what it is, you traditionally pay for one teacher for a certain number of students. Now you're paying for two. How do you fund that? That's another huge problem. When students move on from these integrated programs, we know they are likely to stay. For example, if students go directly into some of the healthcare programs at the college level, they can go two quarters, maybe three, before they ever have to deal with blood or other body fluids. People will go two quarters and then drop out as

soon as they learn what the program involves. They've wasted two or three quarters because they didn't realize what they were going to have to do. In some manufacturing programs, incoming students didn't realize it was going to be dirty and dusty. They can waste up to a year before being oriented enough to those occupations to know that they aren't for them. So remember that two out of three vocational students don't even get a one-year certificate in five years.

JOHN CHADWICK: On the integrated programs, it also takes a lot of collaboration among deans. You have to deal with the dean of basic studies, the dean for general education, and the dean for allied health. Collaboration among departments—course coding, financial aid, everything—takes a lot of work.

I have two concerns. One is the interim final rule for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which states that our students in Work First programs have a maximum of 12 months in which to get their skills training. That means we don't want a student to leave our college without having at least a GED, if not a high school diploma, if they're on TANF. How do you get your GED, complete skills training, and get your certification? It's really difficult. Also, there are no provisions for second language speakers. As it stands now in our state, students in ESL have 12 months. Their ESL has to be coupled with vocational skills training, and that's it. We have many classes in which, for pre-literate students, those not literate in any language, it's impossible.

Another concern I have is about ESL students with learning disabilities. There are few tools for diagnosis and screening, so that's a real problem for us. Our teachers are working with the student, and they say, something is not working here. If we could up the resources in that area, that would be really helpful.

JOHN COMINGS: On classroom instruction, generally, students at the GED level in the United States are in individualized group instruction, with each student working on a workbook or maybe a computer terminal. The teacher is going from person to person. Sometimes they draw a group of students together to work on a particular issue, but it's really individualized instruction done in a group. That is very different from what they're going to find in community college. One way to approach this is to change the individualized group instruction to group instruction. The other thing we could do is to have the community college instructors take a look at the individualized model, which grew up organically around the needs of the student population. There might be some elements in the way in which ABE is providing its services, including being very supportive and not allowing people to fail, which could be incorporated into at least some community college classes that might lead our students into success.

ON POLICY ISSUES

CHRISTOPHER CORO: Are there other policy implications or challenges that we haven't spent enough time on?

JERRY RUBIN: There isn't a financing model that encourages alignment and co-enrollment. So what ends up happening in the financing arena is that states creatively figure out how to get together a variety of federal, state, and sometimes discretionary funds and make that work.

CHRISTOPHER MAZZEO: The one commonality I've seen is that, at the policy level, states that have made a major difference have done so for the simple reason that there's been a concentrated commitment through state policy, a formal goal, and the allocation of resources and incentives. That seems to be the only thing if you look at the evidence that seems to make a difference.

We probably need to know more about different financial systems and the different issues of financial aid. That's an important piece that we shouldn't forget. But, first and foremost, we need to think about the policy issue at the level of goal setting, preferably connected to the larger economic issues discussed here.

FORREST CHISMAN: For me, the irreducible minimum is that transitions are a major goal of adult education. Transition should be a specific priority for which there are guidelines, a plan to make it happen, and money to back up the kinds of changes that you're talking about. It does take money. You're talking about planning and systems change at the state level, at the program level, and across programs. You must make it a priority, have funding streams attached to it, and have mandates to actually do it. Don't just talk about it. You have some motivated program directors or college presidents, but some are not. One way to get them motivated is say it's part of their job descriptions. Creating a policy structure centered on transitions seems to me to be a prerequisite for pretty much everything else happening at any scale. Taking it to scale is going to require that kind of policy structure, and it's not available.

ISRAEL MENDOZA: I would add that the adult education system could never accomplish by itself what you're saying. This means that we cannot be the only ones accountable for transition, unless the places people transition to . . . are also committed, and the policy and the wherewithal and the funding are there for them as well. It has to include the destination systems because those systems have to value transition as well. Transition needs to involve all the partners, because one entity can't do it alone.

ROBERT BICKERTON: We don't set our sights very high regarding what our students need and deserve, but we set them very pragmatically. This discussion of resources fits that minimalist model quite well.

We've just had a visit from a delegation from Norway, a decade ago a delegation from Sweden, about 12 years ago from Thailand. In the two Scandinavian countries, if adults go back to school, they will get a free education and a stipend for at least a year that relieves them of the burden of working. But in America, forget that, in this context

FORREST CHISMAN: In terms of that mandate to all of the system, it would work better in states where community college and adult education governance are unified or at least brought to the same table, as they are in Kentucky.

I commend OVAE for taking this initiative, because, strictly speaking, if you look at the law and what they've been doing historically and what people expect them to do, this is on the margins of the adult education mission.

CHERYL KING: The recently released *Measuring Up: The National Report Card on Higher Education* (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2006), reports that the nation's colleges and universities have become less affordable since the early 1990s. Of the 50 states, 43 of them received an "F" in affordability reflecting the deterioration of college affordability. College tuition rates have gone up 375 percent in relation to families' ability to pay since 1984. Coupled with limited financial aid that is available for part-time students, adults will find it more and more difficult to attend and persist in college. It's getting more and more expensive. There's very little to support our students.

It seems that financial aid and scholarship and grant opportunities are increasingly awarded based on merit, rather than financial aid. Colleges want good students, and they're willing to provide grants and scholarships for them. Adult students enrolling with a GED rather than a high GPA are at a distinct disadvantage.

Another issue is how we define and measure outcomes. Bachelor's degrees are measured over a six-year completion basis, and associate's degrees are reported within a three-year timeframe. We are beginning to know more about how adult students participate in postsecondary education and that it often takes an adult longer to complete a degree than younger students. What incentive is there for postsecondary institutions to recruit older students when the likelihood of their completing may not be as good?

LENNOX McLENDON: I want to talk about the capacity of the system. We're talking as though the only focus of our learners is college. Eighty percent of our teachers are part-time. Our students are whomever walks in the door, and some of their goals are appropriate for college. Some are just trying to learn to speak English well enough to survive. Many are already working and just need skills to hold on to the job they have. For those students who can think about going on to college, we should respond to them right now. We should not push students with other goals in that direction. But these part-time teachers have to respond to all of their students' goals. So federal policy needs to provide enough funding for the program to have the local support to respond to that variety of learner goals.

CLIFF ADELMAN: I want you to be very wary of state report cards and the worship of borders in public policy. We have one of the most mobile societies that you can possibly imagine. Go to the Census Bureau and take a look at the migration figures every year. It will blow you away.

You can look at your population, the adult GED population, in that regard, and there are different patterns within that population. For example, 60 percent of traditional-age college students

attend more than one school as undergraduates, and half of that group crosses state lines in the process. The state report cards don't pick that up. A lot of those students are lost from estimates of high school graduation rates if they graduate in another state. We've got inconsistent administrative reporting systems. Some states pick them up, some states don't.

That's why I trust our chief statistician, Marilyn Seastrom of NCES, to produce the high school graduation rate, because we have statistical standards. State reports cards are very good on the affordability of postsecondary education, because the state boards are accountable in terms of estimating that for public education. They're very good on that, but I wouldn't look at them for other things.

HAL BEDER: We've been successful in pointing out problems. Maybe we haven't been successful enough in thinking about some of the things that we have in our favor. I think we do have some things in our favor. In the last six or seven years, I think the research is pretty conclusive on the economic benefits of the GED. We can make a good argument that if you only have a GED, the best you're ever going to be is a member of the working poor.

That is a sound argument that the only way we're going to do what we want to do, which is to help people, is to get them into postsecondary education so they can get credentials. I don't think we could have made that argument five or six years ago. Now, I think that everything is in place to do it. Forrest is absolutely right: Political will is where it's going to have to be. But we do have things to say that can create that public will in ways that we never had before.

ROSE BRANDT: In terms of programs preparing people for the academic placement tests, I wonder if that gets them into a program that they test into, but then can't succeed in. I was particularly struck when Israel said that a credential and a year of community college is the tipping point. The credential is important, but what did that year of community college add what the credential didn't add? If we just look at credentials, fast-track GEDs, and preparing people for entrance exams, maybe we're preparing people to succeed in a short-term program to get a job, but we know the world is going to continue to change. Where in this whole conversation do we talk about learning-to-learn, life-long learning skills, helping students become independent learners, and developing skills that will serve them—not just to get credentials—but also to make it through the first year of community college?

Second Roundtable: Where Are We Going?

Promising Approaches to Promote ABE to Community College Transition

The second roundtable focused on organizational and academic approaches to making ABE more successful in promoting college transitions. Several approaches were suggested, such as sharing instructors among ABE, English as a Second Language (ESL), and postsecondary education; expanding career pathways to adult learners; and providing college instructors with professional development to enable them to serve nontraditional learners more effectively. Panelists and participants also recommended making more academic counseling and peer mentoring available to learners. They noted some federal and state policy changes are needed as well, including holding ABE programs and postsecondary institutions accountable for their transition rates; creating a more flexible financial aid system to support part-time students; and using data to show policymakers the relationship between human capital development and economic development.

Panelists for the second discussion were: Johannes (Hans) Bos, Berkeley Policy Associates; Debra Bragg, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Ding-Jo Currie, Coastline Community College; Silja Kallenbach, New England Literacy Resource Center; and David Seith, MDRC. The discussion moderator was Christopher Coro. Once the panelists had spoken, members of the audience asked questions and commented. These members are identified in Appendix B.

OPENING REMARKS

DEBRA BRAGG: I think of adult career pathways as trying to rebuild systems that have been separated because we think about programs—not how students move through our systems. I think that’s an extremely important mind shift, and I want to reinforce that. The way we fund these initiatives through different programmatic strategies reinforces at the local level that these are disparate strategies or programs. A pathway is not the same as a program. It’s not just a series of programs. I would caution us against thinking of building ABE and GED technical programs or ABE and GED transfer programs. I don’t think that’s going to get us where we want to be.

I think what is happening in the places that we’re talking about is that there are some thoughtful practitioners out there (Bragg and Barnett 2006). There are the beginnings of some very interesting ideas around the country. We see the blossoming of new systemic ideas in states that are making a commitment to realign and think strategically about funding. Those who are building adult career pathways are doing backward mapping and forward mapping. They’re thinking simultaneously about the labor market needs in their communities, the role of the community college, and the unique and important needs of diverse adult learners.

Community college folks who are leading these initiatives are thinking critically about the local labor market and the employees needed in that labor market. At the same time, they're looking at the student populations that they need to serve. And somehow, there's a strategic matching between the people who have real needs in the community and the employment needs of that community. Matching those two requires systems thinking. This is why we need community college presidents; K-12 superintendents; adult, development and occupational educators; and local CEOs at the table who are committed to building career pathways. You can't do it if you're only representing one of those perspectives. Academics and curriculum and instruction may seem removed from this systems thinking, but if you don't think about the whole system and how you align it, you can't build a curriculum that has a true career pathway.

I want to mention some other things I think are important to academic instruction. First, it is important that programs prepare ABE students adequately for postsecondary education. A second piece is cohorts. The cohorts that we've seen cut both ways. There are some real benefits to pulling students together so that they can teach and support one another. On the other hand, the student populations are often so diverse that it's very difficult to keep the cohorts together.

DING-JO CURRIE: The focus on programs and academic instruction is at the micro level. When you're talking about systems thinking, we need to focus at the macro level, on how the systems are connected. In some cases, they are loosely connected. In some cases, they are not connected at all. And some are integrated. For example, in Washington State, you have ABE embedded in the community college system, but in California, that's not the case.

We had some discussion this morning about where the leaders are on this. I don't know of any president who's been fired or terminated for having bad curriculum or bad transition rates. We've been fired for other reasons, but this is just not on the radar screen.

Why are we having low graduation rates? Why are we having low certificate completion rates? If you go down several levels, you'll find that students don't come in with good basic skills. If we keep asking the "whys," we will find that the connections are so weak among the systems and that there is no integration, no articulation, no partnership in many areas, and these all need to be strengthened. Bridges need to be built for the students to make those transitions seamlessly and successfully.

At the macro level, leaders need to make articulation a top priority. The only way the leaders of the institutions are going to pay attention is if they're measured by it. Our mission is so complex. We're not just about transfer, although transfer is one of the first things that comes to mind when people talk about community college. What does workforce development mean in the mission of the community college? What are the transition successes? If that becomes one of the outcome measures, a criterion for which we measure success, perhaps we will look at it differently.

At the micro level, instruction is not the beginning and the end of everything. Yes, the content needs to be there. Yes, the design needs to address the gaps in skill levels. At the same time, we need to approach those students, particularly those who need basic skills, in a more holistic manner. Do they need other skills? Life skills? They may do math very well, but they can't

manage their lives. Part of the reason they are in these circumstances is that they have barriers in coping with life, which need to be looked at in terms of curriculum and programming.

Life skills must be embedded or integrated to meet the needs of basic skills students. The design of programs is not flexible enough to accommodate different learning styles or to meet the needs and life challenges those students have. Studies have shown over and over that cohorts or learning communities are areas in which we're experiencing more success and higher retention rates. There's a support system.

We have a course at Coastline Community College, for example, custom-designed by our own instructor who is looking at the cognitive designs of expert learning. We have put students with the lowest potential for success, the at-risk students, through this expert learning program, teaching them how to learn. Once they grasp that, we have found that the success rate just shoots straight up.

The programs really need to be outcome-based, making sure that learning outcomes are in line with the content and instruction, as well as the delivery methodologies. They also need to be appropriate and relevant to students' different learning styles.

Last, I think the integration of instruction with support programs is absolutely necessary; they cannot be separated. The holistic approach to the person has been supported by some of the latest studies about how people learn and succeed. What we have found is that we've got to make that connection. It's not just about teaching straight academics. We must weave the holistic approach into the entire institutional culture.

JOHANNES BOS: I'm not an expert on academic instruction or adult instruction, but I've seen some adult education instruction, and I've never been impressed with it. My biggest worry about academic instruction for adults is that the standards are just not there. The quality of instruction and the expectations both of the students and the teachers are not really part of how people are being assessed and how well they do. We need something like "No Adult Left Behind," with some clear indicators of the learning going on in adult education programs, outside of the standard measures of "obtained employment," "got a GED," or even "transitioned to college." There would be an incentive to start developing things to improve the quality of academic instruction and ABE programs, through things like teacher professional development or curriculum development. Those things are happening on a pretty large scale across the country in K-12—especially with English language learners and special groups—with instructional, academic, and curricular approaches that work to narrow the achievement gap and meet the goals of *No Child Left Behind*.

What we need in adult education is something similar. Berkeley Policy Associates (BPA) is working with the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) on a study of adult ESL curriculum changes (Cronen, Silver-Pacuilla, and Condelli 2005). There's a new curriculum being developed focusing on explicit literacy instruction for adult ESL students. When you see the contrast between the traditional external, goal-focused

ESL instruction and explicit literacy instruction in the ESL class, in which learning the language and vocabulary is the first and foremost goal, you set a broader academic goal in these adult education programs. People set different expectations for themselves, both the instructors and the students, as a result of participating in those programs.

One way to get there is to start looking for better academic outcomes and greater academic programs and progress in these programs. I would like to see a lot of experimentation with things like new curricular approaches and new instructional approaches and how to work with adults to make academic gains in addition to all the other goals adult education programs are trying to meet.

SILJA KALLENBACH: We've been running a project in New England for the past seven years called the New England ABE to College Transition Project that operates in 25 adult education programs in six states. We know there are other models, and we're not saying that our model is necessarily the best one. We have been documenting promising practices (Zafft, Kallenbach, and Spohn 2006), though. They're on our Web site at: collegetransition.org. There are instructional approaches that do seem to work that our staff observed and documented. There's some evidence.

We were fortunate to start this project with private funding, so it has not exactly been a systems reform effort in the sense of bringing all the players to the table. Its goal has been to prepare adult learners coming out of GED programs for postsecondary education and training and to pair them with a college—usually a community or technical college—in their local community.

Because we had the luxury of this funding, we decided we're already pushing the limits of what can be done in a regular GED class or adult diploma class. These require an additional component so that we can do academic instruction.

It's been a sobering experience. There are program components that run about 14 weeks. We require a minimum of six hours a week of instruction in reading, writing, and, we thought, algebra. But we found out that even though students are required to have at least a GED or high school diploma and have been out of high school for five or more years, the average turns out to be 13 years. It's about evenly split between GED and high school diploma recipients. Their math skills measure on about a sixth-grade level. When we talk about instruction, I have one word: math. It's a huge gatekeeper.

In the last few years, we have started measuring pre- and post-instruction with the ACCUPLACER. There's been improvement in math skills if you have people come to math class, say, three hours a week. But they're still not making the cut, not in Massachusetts, where the cutoff score is 80. The averages went from about 41 to 70. Twenty percent of the adults, overall, made it into college-level math courses after the add-on to the GED.

I don't know how you do this as part of a GED program, because one truth about the GED is that it doesn't prepare you for postsecondary education. You can do pretty well if you score in the very upper levels, but you still need those elusive college success skills and study skills. How do you do that for the average GED student with the funding and the part-time workforce that we have?

Overall, 50 percent of our learners are placed in college-level courses. The other 50 percent are at the upper levels of developmental education. That's the best we have been able to do. We are funded to provide professional development and technical assistance to these 25 programs, so they receive more support than the average ABE program. We still have half of our students going to upper level developmental education. I think that's progress. We had about 62 percent, at the last count, complete the 14-week program. I think, realistically, having the higher-level developmental education courses as a goal is probably the best we can do.

Then there are the integrated, blended models that the morning panelists and Debra talked about. I think they are models that we need to look into, but I'm not quite sure how you implement them in an ABE setting if you don't have a critical mass in smaller communities. Half of our sites are in small towns in rural New England, so you don't have urban settings with lots of different career pathway possibilities. So I think there are challenges for the career pathway model in particular settings.

Another challenge is the whole awareness-raising issue in the adult education field. It needs to be a mandated goal in adult education. There needs to be awareness raising among ABE teachers and administrators, state directors, adult learners, and on the postsecondary side. Because, guess what? Adult learners are not flocking to college transition programs. We have to recruit four times as many adults as those who eventually enroll. For us, a 60 percent completion rate is a huge success. That's the reality of adult education. Adults are not out there flocking to college. There's a lot of marketing and selling we need to do in all these sectors for college transition to move anywhere.

DAVID SEITH: From MDRC's perspective and also from my own perspective, I want to challenge all of us to collect irrefutable evidence that proves what we know, and to help lay out an agenda to discover and articulate what we don't know.

MDRC is now moving aggressively and successfully, I think, to build a portfolio of work around community colleges and extending the opportunity of college to low-income families. The *Opening Doors* project (MDRC 2003) is one of the first national demonstrations of how to improve enrollment and success rates of low-income people in community colleges by addressing three things that you all have spoken about today: financial aid; student services, counseling, guidance, and support; and curriculum and instruction.

Along those lines, we have a couple of positive impacts that we can share. They're on our Web site. Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn has built small learning communities for students, to work with them in a student success course, a remedial English course. We use random assignment; there's no selection bias and we have large samples. We've proven that this very modest improvement has already, in the first year, shown success. There are more students passing the remedial English classes and taking more credits.

In Louisiana before the hurricane, in the first-year follow-up, our schools had shown that small financial aid stipends for low-income moms, contingent on performance, could increase

enrollment rates and pass rates (Brock and Richburg-Hayes 2006). Those are just a couple of the positive findings from the *Opening Doors* study.

I was impressed with some of the instructors I met in these programs. But they were challenged to build in simultaneity to make best use of people's time, so they weren't teaching rote skills in the abstract, but making it relevant and challenging. They set higher standards for all their students, including those who were slower learners. I was especially impressed with the pedagogy of some of the ESL and math instructors we met, who were able to break down complicated problems into three or four different approaches and to switch them very quickly when they saw that someone was getting frustrated with one of the approaches.

On the issue of support, there's a tension between meeting people where they are and then helping them go to the next step. We found that some institutional structures, based more in high school, can be comfortable. The ones based in colleges might introduce people to the next step. A good compromise might be that if you want to meet somebody where they are and help them to the next step, work with them in small learning communities. That's something we're very interested in testing.

About policy, in the *Opening Doors* study we heard a lot about systems that need to be changed to make financial aid available, make sure there aren't perverse incentives around selection of students from the college's perspective, and make sure that low-income students can get health insurance without having to enroll under their parents' plan.

ON THE IMPACT OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

JOHANNES BOS: May I ask a follow-up question about your *Opening Doors* findings? You're saying that at Kingsborough Community College you actually see impacts on academic performance among the ABE students? Do you have any ideas about what it is in the learning communities that improves academic performance? Is it the quality of instruction? Is it the amount of instruction? Is it the targeting of instruction?

ROB IVRY: That's a good question, Hans. The learning community picks up on a lot of the themes from this morning's discussion of integrated curriculum. At Kingsborough, they focused on students who had failed the entry exam to get into a four-year school. The students had failed the English exam, so they had to go to the community college, and they had to take developmental education. Kingsborough decided that—if these students are only taking developmental classes, with all the usual issues, not only the stigma, but also the chances that they won't transition to college-level work—they're delaying their opportunity to earn credits for a degree.

Kingsborough decided to provide the appropriate level of developmental English and link that with an academic content class in the student's major, for which they would earn credit toward a degree right from the beginning. The students didn't have to transition out of developmental education before they could earn credit, and the school met the students' interests.

At that same time, getting back to earlier points about first-generation students feeling overwhelmed, intimidated, and unsupported on a college campus, the third part of the link was a one-credit student orientation class to help acclimate those students to college life. These three classes were linked. Kingsborough got release time for faculty to do professional development around collaborative teaching and write integrated curriculum. Many faculty members were able to go over to the Washington State Center at Evergreen State University, which was a pioneer in integrated learning and learning communities, and then they were able to implement the program.

We enrolled the sample over four semesters. We had about 1,200 students in the sample. It was a random assignment design. We're seeing significant impact on students getting out of developmental English, being much further along in their English sequence of classes, having passed the writing exam, and having a modest impact on the English exam.

The surprising thing was that there is no impact on retention. Students in this program are not more likely to be at Kingsborough than the control group just taking random classes. That was the surprise. We thought that the supportive structure of a learning community would, in fact, give a greater boost to retention. Students are much further ahead academically, but they're not more likely, necessarily, to be in school.

Going back to Hans' question about what's driving the effect, it's hard to know. You don't know whether it's the structural part. You don't know whether it's the fact that the academic components are robust, and you don't know whether it's because of the added counseling and support. We haven't refined the evaluation in a way that would disentangle the different elements of the program.

As part of the Institute for Education Sciences' research center at Columbia Teacher's College (Community College Research Center n.d.), we're going to test the learning community model in six other institutions. This will include some four-year universities, and looking at different configurations of learning communities: whether or not there are learning communities that will extend to a second semester; learning communities with a focus on developmental math versus developmental English; and different population groups. There's a lot to be learned. We're beginning to build some evidence about whether or not this approach works.

One caution is that we feel very strongly that just making the structural changes is not enough. If you link classes together, but there's no effort around curriculum integration, or collaborative teaching, or faculty development, we'd be very surprised to find much of an effect. As you've probably seen in the K-12 area, if you just provide small schools without doing something about content and instruction, students may feel more supported and teachers may have higher expectations, but that doesn't necessarily translate into higher academic achievement. It's important, when you think about learning communities, to think beyond just the structural elements and to think about curriculum and instructional features as well.

SILJA KALLENBACH: I think it's important to point out that learning communities occur after the transition to college. When we look at adult basic education, learning communities take on a very different shape. When we're transitioning adults to colleges, we don't have control over which colleges offer learning communities. Are they in the community in which there are adult education programs? Sometimes they are, and sometimes they're not.

We've started bringing faculty from our 50-plus postsecondary institutions that partner with the adult education programs we fund to our annual professional development event. We provide professional development to them on learning communities because we'd like our students to go into learning communities. On the adult education side, we also have several programs that contract with their community college to teach a course for their students as a learning community. The money flows from adult education to the college, so that those students go through as a cohort, at least for the initial couple of courses. That's been somewhat problematic because students want to take different courses.

DING-JO CURRIE: On the practical end of it, the learning community has proven to have high retention rates, as long as students stay within the learning community. It is a scheduling nightmare when you cluster four classes together as a learning community. Then, the next semester, another cluster needs to be put together. Sometimes it's impossible. The students fall out of the learning community; the retention is just not there.

It also takes a tremendous amount of work on the faculty end to integrate curriculum. I think one of the reasons that the learning community truly works for a lot of students is that they learn the applied side of it. How does math get applied in an English course and in social science? When you can see the applied side of the skill, it makes more sense. When you make it relevant to them, students seem to retain a little bit more.

ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSITION MEASURES

JOANIE RETHLAKE: I have a couple of questions for the panelists. If you had the opportunity to present a performance measure for postsecondary students that would help solve the problem of ABE learners transitioning to postsecondary, what would that look like? If you had the opportunity to do the same measure for K–12, and they had that responsibility, what would that measure look like? Should you give that information back to the K–12 teacher or to the ABE teacher to show what happened to their students? Do teachers ever find out about transition? Would they be responsible in any way? Also, we talked this morning about life challenges, life skills, academic skills, college readiness, and work readiness. How do those fit in to a transition measure? Which ones do you measure? And I'd like you to comment on accountability, as far as matching the data over time. I'm an ABE director from Texas, and this is on the agenda in our state, so I'd like to go back and be able to say I heard from the experts.

JOHANNES BOS: This may sound simplistic, so I hope this becomes a discussion in which people who disagree with me will come forward and say so. When we were talking about the analysis for this project, one of those big barriers was the entrance test for community colleges, like the ACCUPLACER and COMPASS. For some of our ABE programs, that seemed to be the way they got students, because students would fail that test and then end up coming back to the college through the other door. In other cases, that was the thing that kept even our successful ABE programs from getting a lot of their students into community college.

In some ways, the ideal performance measure for ABE students with a reasonable expectation of getting into community college would be the GED plus—passing the ACCUPLACER or the COMPASS—rather than the GED. It seems the appropriate measure. At the high school level, you already have some of that going on with the exit tests and even the SAT scores.

Whether this is feasible, I have no idea. We were talking earlier about how challenging those tests are and how inappropriate it might be to give them to ABE students. I certainly am not going to say that this should be done universally, but I do think it would be one of those performance measures that would matter.

SILJA KALLENBACH: We do use the ACCUPLACER as a pre- and post-test in our project, but we also know that it only measures placement. It doesn't prepare you for college. But we have to prepare people to pass the test, and I don't really have a good answer to how to measure performance. The National Reporting System (NRS) does not approve the ACCUPLACER, or the ASSET, or the COMPASS. It has to be an NRS-approved measure if you're serving students with Title II funds.

With adult education, it would be very nice for the information to get back to adult education. Some of our programs have negotiated agreements, through which they can administer the college placement test. They've negotiated permission to do the testing, or they accompany their students to the testing. So the teachers do get that feedback right away from the test scores.

DING-JO CURRIE: I like that first question about performance measures and transmitting the information back to K–12 or ABE programs. We've talked about whether or not K–12 educators talk to the community college and whether or not the community college talks to ABE. We all operate in silos, so my outcomes have nothing to do with your outcomes. What outcome measures can we agree on as the ultimate measure of success for one individual?

I think it's a result of how we operate as an individualistic society versus a collective society. If the ultimate goal is to have one common goal, and the way we play the game is that I don't win until you win or all of us win, then I'd better make sure I talk to you and work with you because what you do is ultimately going to determine how much funding I get. To me, that's a policy issue. Can we set a policy in which all of our outcomes depend on each other? That will force us to talk to each other and work with each other. If the policy requires the funding stream to be that way, of course it will cause a revolution. At the same time, I think the funding structure is set up so that sometimes we are competing for each other's dollars, whether you're ABE or a community college or K–12. The culture is set up to be competitive, rather than a collective model where we can work together.

ROBERT BICKERTON: There were a few different threads I wanted to pick up on, and, Silja, you added to the list with your last comment about ACCUPLACER. I think we have to appreciate that there's a science to assessment. The ACCUPLACER is a valid instrument for placement, but not a valid instrument for pre- and post-testing. So when we say it's not used in the National Reporting System for pre- and post-testing, I think we're saying the correct thing. But I didn't hear Hans recommending a pre- and post-test. He was talking, I think, about an

exit test, which is how we use the GED as well. It's not a pre- and post-test. It's not used in that way. But it is used validly and appropriately as an exit test. In this case, ACCUPLACER may be for placement, but because the next step for that student is higher education, it may be an appropriate exit test. I think that's worth looking at.

A couple of other threads—David, you raised a point about irrefutable evidence. I want to reinforce that message. I do want to point out, though, that I have much less regard for how policy leaders use MDRC research and other research. My training was originally in the natural sciences, not in education or the social sciences, in which the absence of replication says we suspend belief. I think that the lack of policy leaders' investment in replication in education and in other social sciences borders on the misuse of the research that's being conducted. We need to understand its limits.

Two points about high expectations: We engage in a certain amount of goal substitution. Students come to us saying, "I need to get a high school diploma," but they also come to us with dreams and aspirations that go beyond that. We listen to those dreams and aspirations and then we substitute the GED. If it requires more than a GED to get them where they want to go, let's not ignore that part of their message and tell them what they want is this minimalist goal. That's not enough to do what they want.

The second piece about high expectations is that we talk about support in very expansive ways, but I worry sometimes that we talk about support to a point where we're not having high expectations for our students. The research in this regard is very powerful, starting back some 30-odd years. If we don't believe in high expectations for our students, we disable them from achieving them. So when support moves into the realm of not really enabling us all to have high expectations, then we disable our students.

Testing is a wonderful place for this. Educators will tell you their students hate testing. In adult education, I believe this is true in the initial interactions with students. They come in with an aversion to testing. But when you talk and listen to students after they've been studying for a while, they want solid feedback and not unlimited positive regard. I think teachers have more difficulty accepting that than students do.

The last piece is on math. I appreciate Silja's raising the math issue. Adult educators share with elementary teachers a lack of subject matter competence in math. It's not simply teaching them how to teach math. It's having subject matter competence in math. Competence in the structural foundation, in other words, being able to answer why things work the way they do, is necessary. We would never accept anyone teaching reading or English who couldn't answer why things might be true, but we accept that in math, because what we accept as competence is computation a half step ahead of the posse.

This is one of our fundamental challenges because math, more than reading, predicts success in a number of domains, including success in higher education. It is the sorting variable. The Department of Education has a math initiative (U.S. Department of Education n.d.), but if we don't embrace this fully, we do so at our peril. We don't embrace it fully because the level of

understanding is shallow, not just for the teachers, but for all of us. Only about 10 percent of the adult population is comfortable and fluent in math. That means most policy leaders aren't comfortable with math either....

ON THE CAPACITY OF SYSTEMS TO RAISE TRANSITION STANDARDS

CHRISTOPHER MAZZEO: I wanted to raise the issue again of benchmarks. I think it's important to set high standards. One way to think about this issue is why not, at a minimum, set a benchmark of the transition rate for traditional-age students, which is by no means a perfect benchmark. We're trying to improve college-going rates for traditional-age students. That speaks to the level of ambition that we have. Why not also think about a benchmark for the percentage of jobs in the economy that are going to require some postsecondary education? That's the ambitious side. Benchmarks are only as acceptable as our sense of what the system can do. We need to discuss what the current system can do at its current capacity. That's the way environmental benchmarks are set regularly. I think that's an open question.

Regardless of the issues of urgency and accountability, this is a major capacity-building problem at the state, institutional, practitioner, and site levels. I would never say that we shouldn't set audacious benchmarks. But we should not forget this capacity issue. We should think hard about whether we're even remotely able to get to that level with our current capacity. What can we, and what can policymakers and government, potentially do about that?

JOHANNES BOS: Was that a rhetorical question? Do you think we don't have the capacity to set higher benchmarks?

CHRISTOPHER MAZZEO: The fact is that we have waiting lists for adult education speaks to the capacity issue. We have a lot of individuals in the room who can answer this question better than I can. There probably is some suggestion that there may not be sufficient capacity to get to a certain point. We have to have both ends of the conversation together. We shouldn't reduce our expectations because of capacity, nor should we ignore capacity because we care about expectations. I would offer, again, the environmental standards as a good model or metaphor for thinking about this, not to say that we shouldn't be audacious when it's important.

ROSE BRANDT: With regard to capacity and expectations, I'd like to add two other factors. One is that I know that there are a lot of adults in our programs who, for example, are working three jobs, but we don't entertain the fact that they might go to school and work. How many of us worked and put ourselves through school? That's not to make light of the fact that many are raising a family and can't do all three. But I think sometimes we don't even put that out as an expectation or as a context.

Also, I believe that it's good to start out with information being applied, but there is a certain point at which you're working with theoretical information. You're comparing ideas, the kind of work we're doing today. Are we preparing students well enough to be part of this forum? If not, we're not treating them as equals. At a certain point, you start working with ideas, and while

not all students want to get to that level; those who do want to get to that level are being sold short if we give them everything brought down to the very immediate applied level, as opposed to theories and philosophies and the world of ideas. That's what I wanted to say on expectations.

In terms of capacity, to me, it's the elephant in the living room. We have a very short attention span, in general, in terms of any kind of practice or policy in this country. What has happened in adult education is that we have tried to respond to everything out there. So we have adult education programs for the homeless, for people in prison, for people with drug and alcohol issues, and for those in domestic violence programs. In addition to that, it could be ESL or ABE preparing people for the GED. We are trying to do all of these things, and, yes, without enough money.

Because the policy often doesn't get set where the policy should get set, it ends up with the teacher in the classroom who has to deal with how that gets played out. You have teachers with 15 different populations in their classroom, and they are trying to negotiate that because we are not making policy decisions that say, for example, we will have classes addressing transition to postsecondary or we will have classes focused on those recovering from substance abuse.

As state director of Pennsylvania, I would like to see a lot more learning communities in Pennsylvania. We have too many classrooms in which you have 15 individuals working on individual work, with the teachers trying to work with 15 different individuals. You don't have a community. Let's take math, for example. The best you can do is say, "Oh, you're dividing fractions? Invert and multiply." Then you're on to the next person. It's like a magic trick. You cannot teach 15 people principles. I think we need to look at that.

We need to make policy decisions about what our classes are going to be, what the focus is going to be. I totally support math instruction, but again, it's going to be one more thing that teachers are going to try to do. Same thing with transition to postsecondary education: how are teachers going to do yet one more thing? The policy decisions are important because of how they get played out in the day-to-day classroom, and they truly bring down the quality of the education.

We have some wonderful people out there teaching. We have some people who aren't so good, too. But we have some wonderful people who just don't know how to do 15 different things in the same class at the same time.

JOHANNES BOS: We saw this approach in our study as well, and it was raised often as a promising practice: we give the students what they need and work with the students one-on-one. That's what they appreciate. We had our doubts about that as well. But I'm wondering if other panel members who are at community colleges can reflect on how that works? Are they worried about it, too?

ROSE BRANDT: We need to remember that our students don't know a lot about how education works. They haven't met people who are successful because they have higher-level skills to market to employers. So our students often are not good consumers of educational services.

HAL BEDER: There's a tendency for people who don't understand adult literacy programs to assume they're K-12 extended to older people. In reality, they operate differently from the

K–12 system. First, large pieces are grant funded. That means what they do and whom they do it for depends on the availability of grants. That means that they're in chronic funding insecurity. It means that their growth and development are totally dependent on their ability to secure grants. Grantsmanship is driving the situation, and it's placing incredible administrative burdens on people providing services who are burdened already.

The second thing is that the attrition rate is extraordinarily high, 50 percent in 16 hours in some studies. That creates an extraordinarily different student flow within adult literacy programs. It means that people are disappearing quickly, and there are empty seats. If you're funded on a per capita basis, you can't afford to have empty seats, so you're putting in new people, and you have open enrollment. Where you have open enrollment, you can't do traditional group instruction because the new people aren't privy to what was done before. That drives the instructional system, which tends to be highly individualized.

To understand transition as an organizational issue, a system of organizations working together to reach a common goal, the emphasis on adult basic education programs is an important one to study. It's easy to make incorrect assumptions.

BARBARA BONHAM: Developmental math at all institutions isn't doing the best it can do drawing on what we know works. There are exemplary programs and research out there to guide our work. Collaboration is key to more successful transitioning of students between these areas. We started this with a systems approach. Let's get the developmental math and the adult basic education math people together. One thing I see is that adult basic education instructors understand the affect issues very well. They deal with self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-esteem. Most educators who teach developmental math are highly qualified and know the content but are not as familiar with noncognitive factors, which influence students' success. There are some math educators in adult basic education and some teaching developmental mathematics who do integrate the affective and the cognitive to meet the diverse needs of their students. They also work collaboratively, i.e., instructors in basic skills and developmental courses, support services, etc. This doesn't happen often enough. But we're not making attempts to get educators from these two areas to work together. I would argue that if we can, we're going to find some major accomplishments. I've visited programs that have these collaborations as described in the CAAL study (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy 2004–06). They are meeting with greater success in transitioning their students into curriculum programs. These things are working. We need to look at what we already know works. Let's not reinvent the wheel if we already have people, programs, strategies, and techniques to draw on to build better programs.

ISRAEL MENDOZA: I shared with you earlier some of our dirty laundry about low transition rates. I want to say a few words about what we did about that. When we saw that study, we decided one thing we were going to try was to shorten the time it takes our basic skills students to get to that tipping point. That's what got us to these integrated programs you've been hearing about that we call I-BEST, Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges 2005). We ran ten pilots for a few years and learned what was working and what wasn't. What we learned from those pilots was that

students who were taking those earned five times more college credits than people who didn't take those courses. They were 15 times more likely to finish a vocational course, not even the entire thing, just a single course. Results were enough to get people excited about it.

We started selling that with all those other statistics you heard me talk about, that this was part of the economy and future workforce. We were able to get approved on the financing part, because we talked about money. Schools that ran these programs would get reimbursed at a 1.75 percent rate instead of a 1 percent rate. Here's what that means. The community college system gets funded for a full-time-equivalent position, no matter how many students sit in that class during the year. They get about \$5,000. To run this program, they now get almost \$9,000 instead. That was one incentive we were able to do, which had to be approved by our board and all the presidents.

We were always talking about the problem with financial aid. Last year, our legislature passed a bill allowing us to pilot giving financial aid to students who are only taking between two and four college credits, so we're doing that. In addition to that, doing integrated instruction, they're earning college credits. We've asked people, even at the federal level, if these students can qualify for financial aid, at least for those parts of the course. It's being mulled over.

Our legislature also funded what they call "opportunity grants" for us. They gave us \$4 million and said, this is financial aid money and it can only go to people who do not qualify for traditional financial aid. There are absolutely no rules. You don't have to pass any threshold; you can be working or not; you can have income replacement; you can use it for traditional support services. There are no restrictions on this. We funded eight programs, gave them \$500,000 each, and said create some programs. Don't follow the traditional rules, because our legislature is interested in determining if financial aid is really the barrier. Now we're going to request \$16 million this coming legislative session, and that was at the request of the chairperson of our higher education committee, because the committee already liked what it was seeing.

The opportunity grant programs had to compete to get the money. They all are basing the instructional part on integrated instruction because of how quickly people are making gains. At worst, the gains we've been measuring are at least as fast in adult basic education or ESL as in traditional ABE and ESL. Most are greatly accelerating, and they're accomplishing levels much faster than the traditional ABE and ESL students. That was our hope.

The surprising thing was that in the courses these folks are taking at the college level, they are exceeding the outcomes of traditional students who never went to basic skills or developmental education but went directly into college programs. Our students' GPAs are higher. Their drop-out rate is lower: ten out of 12 people stay instead of ten out of 20. The rate of retaking tests to stay in the course is lower than that of traditional students.

For whomever raised the issue originally about policy and leadership's being crucial to getting something done, this is testimony that it really is important if you're going to get the commitment of the systems all the way from the top down to make everything work.

ON ELEVATING THE NATIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF TRANSITIONS

JOHANNES BOS: Those ideas are absolutely fascinating. I think someone should fund a study to do this with experimental designs to validate the findings you're seeing, because you have evidence that looks something like *Opening Doors*. That's replicating some of those institutional things, rather than individual things. I think that's the next step.

CHRIS KING: Washington state is one of the most interesting places because it has a state statute that requires that every two years officials do a gross outcomes evaluation, and every four years, a net impact evaluation, but it's a quasi-experiment. It's not a full experiment, although the recent evidence is showing that quasi-experiments look pretty robust. It would be good to do a full-blown experiment. If the foundations come forward, that would be nice because I think there's stuff that we could learn and apply.

We talked earlier about incumbent worker issues. We shouldn't lose sight of that. There are far more incumbent workers who need adult education than there are adult education students or high school students right now making their way through these programs. I would encourage OVAE to think carefully about what we could learn from these programs and from customized training. We need to be thinking very hard, and for a couple reasons. There's a nice report that David Ellwood at the Kennedy School did for the Aspen Institute (Aspen Institute 2002) that talks about three coming gaps, and we're in the middle of them. We've got a worker gap, a skill gap, and a wage gap.

We're not growing our labor force right now, which, in a sense, for this community, creates a wonderful opportunity. There is a much greater need to raise the skill levels of all workers, because we're not going to have enough to go around. Here's an opportunity to put pressure on policy leaders and Congress, maybe with employers who will be the first to feel the pinch, to step up to the plate. We should think long and hard about what the criteria should be for good programs that employers could partner with provided by community colleges, community-based groups, and workforce intermediaries. We're on the very edge of that, and we should think long and hard about it and focus on that group of working adults.

FORREST CHISMAN: One of the striking things about this gathering is the level of common understanding of the people in this room. It's great that all of us have reached, by different routes, a certain level of understanding that transitions matter and about many of the ingredients that go into making some progress against the barriers. But I don't think that, outside this room, very many people understand very much of this. I mean the people who have to address these gaps—the policymakers, the program directors, the teachers, the people in other disciplines, and the college presidents.

Given that it's a long road to march, we need some initiatives, whether from OVAE or the states or someplace else, to elevate the national understanding of this topic, to state why it matters, and to recap everything we've talked about here. We all write reports. Sometimes when I read them, I think they're all coming into the same house from different doors. When I go out and talk to

people who need to make this happen, doing yet another study of it from another point of view, I discover this is all news to them.

At least as a threshold, in terms of moving things along, we should take this collective understanding from participants today and find a way to put it on the road. I don't mean put out a brochure but actively put it on the road, whether you're working through the state directors or the community college directors or whomever, you can think of all kinds of ways to do it. Until this understanding of the literacy needs of the current workforce gets to be more of a movement or a given—the way that school-to-college transition is now becoming a given and sophistication is growing—then I think we're going to have a hard time.

DING-JO CURRIE: Thank you for those comments. I couldn't agree with you more. I really applaud OVAE's leadership in having this symposium and roundtable discussion. It definitely raises awareness. As you said, everybody who has a higher level of awareness is probably sitting in this room right now. The critical mass is here. The awareness needs to be there. I hope that OVAE would take some leadership and do something else just with the leadership alone on this topic.

I can give you an example. Last April, we had the CEO meetings in Long Beach. One of the key sessions was about pandemic planning on our campuses. Well, three months later a group of us CEOs got together and guess what we were talking about? Have you got pandemic planning done at your campus? Just that one session alone raised the awareness, so that many of us have gone back and we better have that plan. What about transition as a focus session for the CEOs?

BARBARA ENDEL: I don't know about you, but I thanked my lucky stars on more than one occasion when Thomas Friedman wrote *The World Is Flat* (Friedman 2005). I thought it would be the kind of spark that would raise public awareness and there would be more emphasis on the incumbent worker, more emphasis on tying the vast wealth of a talented labor market to an economic development argument on a national level. I don't know if there's an opportunity that's been missed, but I think that more awareness of what we can do collectively is something we ought to tackle from this fantastic think-tank that we have going today.

Summary of Roundtable Discussions and Recommended Next Steps for Policy, Programs, and Research

Judith Alamprese of Abt Associates Inc. provided a summary of the roundtable discussions and the recommendations that were made for next steps.

Symposium participants discussed a variety of challenges in implementing effective services for transitioning ABE learners to postsecondary education. They also identified possible practices that might be undertaken to facilitate ABE learners' transition as well as next steps for policy, program implementation, and research.

The following types of challenges regarding the transition of ABE learners to postsecondary education emerged from the symposium discussion:

- ♦ *Time*—The additional time needed for: ABE learners to advance academically; instructional staff to learn new information, prepare for class, and implement new practices to facilitate ABE learners' transition to postsecondary education; and ABE administrators to coordinate across community college divisions, within their programs' administrative structure, and across institutions (e.g., community colleges, local education agencies, or community-based organizations).
- ♦ *Money*—The increased financial resources needed by: learners to enroll in and complete college courses and programs to provide support services to learners, purchase new equipment and materials, and offer professional development to enhance instructors' knowledge and teaching strategies.
- ♦ *State policy*—The need for states to set instructional content standards that can promote the delivery of quality instruction at levels that can assist learners in developing the knowledge and skills required for success in postsecondary courses.
- ♦ *Advising/Counseling*—The need for educational and career counseling services to assist ABE learners in determining their skills and interests and career areas that align with these, as well as other support services to facilitate ABE learners' admission into and retention in postsecondary education programs.
- ♦ *Perceptions*—The need to address the different perceptions of ABE programs and community colleges about their missions and the types of learners who might be candidates for postsecondary education, as well as ABE learners' perceptions about their ability to succeed in postsecondary education.

Participants also shared their ideas about practices that might promote ABE learners' enrollment and success in postsecondary education. One suggestion was the creation of learning communities by ABE programs and postsecondary institutions to bolster learners' commitment to education. Although the results from studies on learning communities are mixed with regard to their

effectiveness in increasing learner retention, the use of learning communities to increase learner persistence is worth considering. Some participants pointed to the practice of preparing learners for admission to postsecondary institutions by using postsecondary assessments as screening tools with ABE learners. The use of these tools can help learners and instructors understand the skills that learners may need to develop in order to be admitted to postsecondary courses. A number of symposium participants also have found that integrated instruction, which blends ABE or ESL instruction with occupational information, can facilitate ABE learners' movement to postsecondary professional and technical courses.

The symposium discussions highlighted a number of areas where additional work is needed. Possible next steps include:

- ♦ Creating a system of lifelong learning that promotes the concept that learning is an ongoing part of adults' lives and that many adults will need to develop new skills or knowledge as they grow older.
- ♦ Clearly articulating and systematically coordinating the components of career pathways to include academic training, career awareness and planning, and the provision of support services.
- ♦ Building the awareness of incumbent workers about opportunities for participation in postsecondary education and the payoff in the workplace from their development of new, or enhancement of existing, skills.
- ♦ Continuing to educate community colleges and state policymakers about the issues of ABE learners' transition to community college.
- ♦ Conducting rigorous experiments to test promising approaches to facilitating ABE learners' enrollment in and completion of postsecondary programs.

Closing Remarks

Cheryl Keenan, OVAE's Director of Adult Education and Education, presented closing remarks.

The ABE to Community College Transitions Symposium is the first time OVAE has convened a select group of professionals to discuss adult learners and postsecondary education at the same time. Today's gathering also recognizes the needs of adults—working or unemployed—as they pursue postsecondary education and training opportunities.

Everyone here today has a role in providing more effective transition services to adults with low-level literacy skills. This includes the research community, educational foundations, government officials, policymakers, state and local program directors, and teachers. Today's discussions reflect the various roles of federal and state offices, as well as roles played by community college presidents, ABE directors, and instructors, in extending postsecondary education to adults with lower-level skills. The discussions also have created a special dynamic and energy that I've never seen before around this topic.

Advancing the goals of ABE from high school completion or its equivalency to college preparation is central to our shared vision of adult education in the 21st century. Launching any significant effort to assist ABE participants in their transition to postsecondary education necessitates changes in ABE curriculum and instruction, support services, partnerships, and policies and procedures. If adult education is to be considered more than preparation for the GED, then programs must be responsible for collecting evidence to demonstrate that the number of ABE students participating in postsecondary education increases when practices are implemented explicitly to support transition.

The lack of data and documentation on the local ABE program level is striking. Anecdotally, practitioners and program administrators can describe the practices they believe work, but the hard data to support their anecdotes do not exist. I know this to be true in ABE, and I suspect it is not exclusive to ABE. The education community at large needs to better document results and collect data, to be more data-driven in our approaches to educational program improvement and reform. Evidence of “what works” must be produced to move the system forward.

Colleagues across the country point out that progress involves taking a first step. OVAE views the ABE to Community College Transitions Project as a first step to begin documenting the characteristics and practices of ABE programs that can support adults' transition to postsecondary education and training. Even with the limitations that “best practices” present, the lessons from the 16 programs in Florida, Washington, Kentucky, and Wisconsin have potential to help the wider ABE community achieve stronger postsecondary transition rates. The case studies provide baseline information for moving the field ahead. However, further research and demonstration projects are needed to assess conclusively the values of these practices in promoting and sustaining postsecondary transitions among ABE students.

The researchers here today discussed logical next steps to continue building a body of research on postsecondary transitions. One approach would be to test systematically the implementation and impacts of practices that appear to influence ABE to college transitions, across a representative number of programs. Practices, for example, like those observed by the ABE to Community College Transitions Project. The ABE field must be prepared to support the research to conduct rigorous studies of this nature. Programs must be willing to absorb some of the cost and accept the responsibility to be true to the research design and committed to carrying it out systematically from beginning to end. To support new research activities and the implementation of practices supporting postsecondary transitions, the capacity of ABE programs needs bolstering.

An important role for the federal office is to help create field pilots and demonstration projects around topics related to postsecondary education. This approach would make certain researchers and practitioners were working together in “lab” settings using strategically placed interventions and gathering documentation and data. Without appropriate testing grounds, it is unlikely the high-powered research needed in this area will occur.

OVAE is preparing to engage in some work in the area of career pathways. The project, *ABE Career Connections*, is designed to demonstrate existing pathways programs that include low-skilled and low-literate adults. The project will produce documentation to assist other state and local adult education programs in joining career pathways and partnerships focused on moving adult learners into workforce programs in the two-year system.

Some ABE programs and practitioners have already begun to support students in the transition from adult education into postsecondary education and training, but to see a substantial increase in the numbers of ABE students who enter college, a transformation of adult secondary education (ASE) programs is required. Any discussion about expanding ASE to include college preparation should be carried out against a historical, legislative backdrop.

It is important to understand that ASE in this country represents a relatively small part of the adult education world. Only 16 percent of the 2.6 million adults served by this country’s adult education programs are enrolled in ASE. In all previous legislation, funds for GED preparation and ASE have been capped at 20 percent because adult education carries the history of needing to serve the most educationally disadvantaged adults. ASE programs help people to obtain their high school diploma or its equivalency, but is that enough for our students? The world has changed since the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s when those pieces of legislation were written. About 90 percent of the fastest growing jobs of the future will require education or training beyond high school. Adults cannot succeed and be economically self-sufficient in the 21st century without some level of postsecondary education.

Although the *Workforce Investment Act*, the major source of federal support for adult education programs, removed the cap, most states kept the same policies in place and ASE programs did not expand significantly. Certain states and programs have moved to develop information and procedures for linking ABE and ASE with postsecondary education. However, adult basic and literacy programs primarily teach only those skills needed to complete high school or to pass the

GED tests, without providing real connections to further education and training. Promising practices must be pursued and challenges must be faced to make transition services available and effective.

I encourage you to think about how you can share the responsibility of helping to create a more robust adult secondary education program that enables adult students to succeed in postsecondary education. The future of our communities and our country depends on the ability of the education system to do a better job of moving all students, including adults, to and through higher education and training, toward better jobs and self-sufficiency. Reflect on what role you might play in expanding the goals of ASE programs to give students the tools to understand and navigate the postsecondary system and to succeed in their goal to complete a postsecondary education. It is an important goal, to which everyone here has contributed to extensively today.

Thank you.

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Appendixes

- A. Panelist and Presenter Biographies
- B. Participant List
- C. ABE to Community College Transitions Project

Appendix A

Panelist and Presenter Biographies

JUDITH A. ALAMPRESE is a principal associate in the Economic and Social Policy Division of Abt Associates Inc. For the past 25 years, she has directed research, evaluation, technical assistance, and program development projects in adult education and workforce development. As one of the designers of the National External Diploma Program, she conducted the first national dissemination project in adult education assessment funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Her current research is focused on organizational change, program improvement, and policy development in adult education, the instructional and organizational factors associated with adults' development of reading skills, and pathways for adult education participants' transition to work and postsecondary education. These projects are supported by: the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute For Literacy, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health. Her previous work has included studies of effective practices in workplace and family literacy, the evaluation of statewide adult education systems, and the provision of assistance to states in program policy development. She currently serves on the National Institute For Literacy's Lifespan Literacy Methodology Panel and the Adult Literacy Expert Work Group. She also was a member of the National Research Council, Board of Testing and Assessment's Committee on Performance Levels for Adult Literacy and the Committee on Alternative Assessments of Adult Literacy. She received her M.A. in sociology from Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs where she also completed her course work for a Ph.D. in sociology.

JOHANNES M. BOS is the president and CEO of Berkeley Policy Associates (BPA). Bos has 15 years of experience in public policy research and evaluation. During this time, he has conducted numerous studies of interventions and policies in the areas of employment and training, education, childcare, and youth services. He specializes in random assignment evaluation research and has conducted large-scale random assignment studies for the U.S. Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. Bos has been the CEO of BPA since 2002 and has been principal investigator on a number of research projects at BPA. These include the evaluation of SOURCE, a Los Angeles-based program to promote high school-to-college transitions, OVAE's ABE to Community College Transitions study, various design projects for the Institute of Education Sciences, statewide welfare reform projects for the states of California and Louisiana, and local research projects on youth violence, school safety, and homelessness. Recently, BPA has initiated three large-scale random assignment evaluations as part of the Western and Pacific Regional Educational Laboratories. Bos plays a major role as a principal investigator or senior reviewer on all of these projects. He is also a member of the Technical Working Groups for the Appalachian and North Western Regional Educational Laboratories. Before joining BPA, Bos was a senior research associate at MDRC, in New York, N.Y., and San Francisco/Oakland, Calif., where he evaluated education and training programs, welfare reform programs, and various adult education interventions. Bos has a Ph.D. in public administration from New York University and a master's in architecture from Delft University in the

Netherlands. He has published in *Child Development*, the *Journal of Human Resources*, and the *Evaluation Review*.

DEBRA D. BRAGG is a professor of higher education in the Department of Educational Organization and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she also directs the Office of Community College Research and Leadership. Her research focuses on a range of P–16 policy, with a special interest in policies and practices addressing the educational needs of underserved students. Funded by the National Centers in Career and Technical Education with support from Office of Vocational and Adult Education and other state agencies and foundations, her research has delved into understanding the transitions diverse students make from high school to college and careers, particularly community college, including career pathways, tech prep, and dual credit. Her most recent work, titled *Beyond the GED: Adult Career Pathways for Low-Skilled Adults*, examines the implementation and impact of integrated college and career pathway initiatives for underserved adult populations.

JOHN COMINGS is a senior researcher and lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Comings earned his Ed.D. from the University of Massachusetts. He previously served as director of the National Center for Adult Learning and Literacy and vice president of the Literacy Division of World Education, Inc. He also has directed the State Literacy Resource Center in Massachusetts and led projects to improve the teaching of both math and health in adult education programs. His research focuses on adult learner persistence and the impact of adult literacy programs.

DING-JO H. CURRIE, president, Coastline Community College, has been a leader in higher education for over 25 years. Since July 2002, she has been leading Coastline Community College as it strives to remain one of the nation's most innovative institutions. Prior to starting her career in education, Currie obtained her doctorate of philosophy from the University of Southern California in intercultural and international education. She also holds degrees in math, psychology, and counseling. It was through her scholastic endeavors that Currie developed the commitment to serve the needs of diverse communities through the establishment and advancement quality learning environments. Her work as an advocate for diversity began more than 20 years ago while chairing the Asian Advisory Council for the Superintendent of the Long Beach Unified School District to advocate for the needs of Asian students. She also led the Asian Advisory Committee for the Long Beach Police Department. Since then, Currie has served in several other leadership roles, in different capacities, to bring about positive change in diversity. In her administrative roles, she developed, coordinated, and oversaw refugee assistance programs and technical assistance programs for refugee-owned businesses. Working with the community-based Latino Education Council, she helped to establish an "I'm Going to College" project to promote college for Latino students. She currently serves on the Board of Directors Executive Committee for the National Conference for Community and Justice, a national organization devoted to promoting diversity and cross-cultural understanding, and as a mentor for LEAP, a national leadership institute for Asian and Pacific Islanders. At the Kaleidoscope Leadership Institute, a national leadership development institute for women of color in higher education,

Currie served as a faculty member for 15 years. Coastline Community College is the current host for the annual Kaleidoscope Institute.

CHRIS FURGIUELE is a principal research analyst at the University of California Office of the President in Oakland, Calif., where he conducts research on topics pertaining to student financial support. Previously, he was a senior analyst at Berkeley Policy Associates, serving as the project director for the ABE to Community College Transitions Project, which examined promising practices within ABE programs and community colleges that promote the transition of ABE students to enrollment in postsecondary programs. Furgiuele also served as senior analyst for a number of different BPA education and workforce evaluations for both federal and state agencies. Furgiuele holds a master's degree in public policy from the University of California, Berkeley, and a B.A. in economics from Syracuse University.

DAVIS JENKINS is a senior research associate at the Community College Research Center at Teachers College, Columbia University. He conducts research on how to increase access to economic opportunity by disadvantaged youths and adults. A key focus of his work is finding ways to strengthen the capacity of public postsecondary institutions, particularly community colleges, to educate economically and educationally disadvantaged individuals for gainful employment in a knowledge economy. Currently, Davis is directing a series of studies that use longitudinal student unit record data collected by state agencies to chart the paths of students within and across educational systems and identify the determinants of educational and labor market success. He is also co-directing a study of community college institutional effectiveness with CCRC director Thomas Bailey. His recent publications include: *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice from a Statewide Longitudinal Tracking Study*, with David Prince of the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and *What Community College Policies and Practices Are Effective in Promoting Student Success? A Study of High- and Low-Impact Institutions*. His current work at CCRC is funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education through the *Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count* initiative and the Ford Foundation, as part of the *Community College Bridges to Opportunity* project. Davis is one of the originators of the “career pathways” concept, and he advises states, colleges and local agencies on aligning public resources for education, workforce, and human services to support educational and economic advancement for individuals and better address regional labor force needs. Davis has over 20 years of experience as a researcher, evaluator, consultant, and program manager on projects related to education for employment in the U.S. and abroad. He has a B.A. from Princeton University and a Ph.D. in public policy analysis from Carnegie Mellon University.

SILJA KALLENBACH has 25 years of experience in adult basic education as a teacher, administrator, researcher, professional development provider, and program developer. Kallenbach has served as the director of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education since 1994, a six-state collaborative focused on staff development for adult educators. Kallenbach helped design and now oversees the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project and the national College Transition Network. Kallenbach is co-author of *Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models* (National Center for the Study of Adult Learn-

ing and Literacy, in press). From 1996 to 2002, Kallenbach co-directed the Adult Multiple Intelligences Study for the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) with staff from Project Zero at Harvard. She co-authored two publications related to the use of multiple intelligences in adult education: *Open to Interpretation, Multiple Intelligences in Adult Education* (NCSALL, 2002) and *Multiple Intelligences and Adult Literacy: A Sourcebook for Practitioners* (Teachers College Press, 2004) and co-edited *Multiple Intelligences in Practice* (NCSALL, 2001). Kallenbach is former director of the City of Boston Adult Literacy Initiative and a co-founder and former associate director of the Boston Adult Literacy Fund.

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Appendix C

ABE to Community College Transitions Project

Chris Furgiuele, director of OVAE's ABE to Community College Transitions Project (2003–06), opened the symposium. Below is a summary of his presentation and information from the study's draft report.

The goal of the ABE to Community College Transitions Project was to identify programs, practices, and strategies that appear to facilitate successful transitions from ABE to credit-bearing community college programs. Berkeley Policy Associates and its partner MDRC (registered corporate identity) interviewed staff from adult basic education (ABE) programs that transitioned students successfully in order to answer the following questions:

- ✦ Which aspects of ABE program operations contribute to successful postsecondary education transitions?
- ✦ How do these aspects contribute to successful postsecondary education transitions?
- ✦ How do ABE programs help students overcome personal and academic barriers to advancing to the postsecondary level?

The project helped identify a set of practices and strategies used by ABE programs and college staff that, to the extent they are transferable, can offer guidance to ABE programs, postsecondary institutions, and adult education policymakers seeking to promote and support the successful transition of ABE learners to postsecondary education.

Conceptual Framework

The research team scanned the literature and research on ABE program effectiveness, ABE-to-postsecondary transition efforts, and persistence in ABE and postsecondary programs to develop the conceptual framework for the study. Researchers used existing work to identify six program characteristics that affect ABE programs' ability to help students navigate the path from ABE to postsecondary enrollment. These program characteristics form the conceptual underpinnings for the study:

- ✦ *Institutional setting*: Having a structure and organization that provide them and their students with access to important financial and educational resources and expose ABE students to the academic and campus life of a postsecondary institution.
- ✦ *Appropriate target audience*: Targeting ABE students who are most likely to be admitted to postsecondary education soon and who would benefit most from help in transitioning.
- ✦ *Academic preparation*: Using curricula and instructional techniques aligned with postsecondary content and relevant to students' career goals.

- ♦ *Support services*: Offering internal support services, such as tutoring and counseling, and external partnerships with human service agencies or workforce training programs to assist ABE students in overcoming academic, financial, and personal barriers.
- ♦ *Links to postsecondary programs*: Having personal and organizational collaborations with postsecondary institutions to help students learn about postsecondary programs, application procedures, financial aid, and enrollment.
- ♦ *Mentoring and support*: Providing ongoing assistance and support to ABE students during their transition to credit-bearing community college programs.

This conceptual framework, based on the limited amount of existing research and literature available about postsecondary transitions for adult education students, was the organizing tool for the field research and subsequent analysis.

Program Selection

The research team worked with an expert panel of researchers, practitioners, and policymakers from both ABE and postsecondary education to identify criteria for selecting four states to participate in program case studies. The criteria included states’:

- ♦ Ability to capture transition outcomes for individual programs and ABE students by matching adult education and postsecondary databases to track postsecondary placements, and
- ♦ Diversity in the states’ adult education governance and local delivery systems.

Washington, Wisconsin, Kentucky, and Florida were invited to participate based on these criteria. The research team then used program-level and student-level administrative data to identify individual adult education programs in each state with relatively high transition rates. Researchers counted a successful postsecondary transition when an ABE student enrolled in, or completed, at least one credit-bearing academic or vocational class that led to a degree or certificate at a community or technical college. The transitioning student also could be enrolled in one or more developmental education courses concurrently with the credit-bearing class.

Researchers calculated a transition rate by comparing a program’s actual transition rate with its predicted transition rate. Researchers used a performance index to calculate the actual transition rate. That index included the following three outcome measures, with the first measure given the most weight:

- ♦ *Postsecondary transition rate*: Among students entering the ABE program in 2000–01 and 2001–02, the percentage attempting at least one credit-bearing class between initial enrollment and the end of the spring semester 2004
- ♦ *Postsecondary course-completion rate*: Among students entering the ABE program in 2000–01 and 2001–02, the percentage completing at least one credit-bearing class between initial enrollment and the end of the spring semester 2004

- ✦ *Postsecondary degree completion:* Among students entering ABE programs in 2000–01 and 2001–02, the percentage completing a postsecondary degree or certificate between initial enrollment and the end of the spring semester 2004.

Researchers calculated the predicted transition rate using student demographic characteristics to control for differences in the student population across programs. These characteristics included ABE functioning level, age, race or ethnicity, gender, highest grade attained, employment status, and TANF participation. Researchers for various reasons were unable to collect information from the programs on the number of students with diagnosed learning disabilities.

Four programs in states with the highest transition rates were identified using this approach and presented to the participating state adult education directors for review. Kentucky's state-level review led to the replacement of one top-ranked program with a slightly lower-ranked program to enhance the geographic representation of selected sites. One of Florida's top four programs declined to participate in the study, due to hurricane damage, and was replaced by a similarly ranked ABE program in the same county. Participating state adult education directors agreed with the program selections and the selected programs accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

Overview of Programs

The 16 programs chosen for the study reflect the diversity of ABE delivery models, with nine programs administered by a community or technical college, six by a local school district, and one by a community-based organization.

Programs participating in the case study in Washington state included Bates Technical College, Lower Columbia College, Renton Technical College, and Skagit Valley College. These four programs are administered by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges, which has ABE programs at each of its 34 campuses. Its 2001–02 ABE cohort included about 33,000 students. Approximately 8 percent of those students attempted postsecondary credits and 7 percent completed those credits. Bates, which serves a high proportion of high school graduates, out-performed this rate by the largest margin, with 42 percent of its ABE students attempting postsecondary credits and more than 35 percent completing them. Renton, which also serves a large number of high school graduates, had a transition rate of more than twice the state average, while Skagit and Lower Columbia's transition rates were not notably different from the state average.

Wisconsin's ABE programs, like Washington's, are administered by the state's network of technical colleges. Its 2000–02 cohort was composed of approximately 17,000 students. The four ABE programs in Wisconsin that participated in the case study are located at Fox Valley Technical College, Blackhawk Technical College, Moraine Park Technical College, and Northcentral Technical College. More than 46 percent of Fox Valley's ABE students, primarily high school graduates, attempted postsecondary credits, while 43 percent of them completed college credits. North Central, which serves a similarly large number of high school graduates, had comparatively low transition rates but still out-performed the state average. Despite their lower unadjusted

rates, Blackhawk and Moraine were selected for the study because they transitioned more ABE students than their program and student characteristics would predict.

Kentucky's ABE programs also are overseen by a postsecondary agency, the Kentucky Adult Education Council on Postsecondary Education, but a variety of providers offer services, including local school districts, community colleges, and nonprofit organizations. This diversity was reflected in the programs included in the study. Local school districts administer two ABE programs, Anderson County Adult Education and Pulaski County Adult Education. A community-based organization administers the third, Breathitt County Adult Education, and a community college, Big Sandy Community and Technical College, administers the fourth.

Kentucky's 2001–02 ABE cohort included 46,000 students. Those served by the Mayo campus at Big Sandy Community and Technical College were the most likely to make a successful postsecondary transition. More than 68 percent of Mayo's ABE students went on both to attempt and complete postsecondary credits. Mayo's high transition rate is likely related to the high proportion of high school graduates in that program, as well as its role as the college developmental education provider. Pulaski's transition rates also are consistently high—with 58 percent of its students completing postsecondary credits—and well above the state average. Anderson and Breathitt are above state average for students both attempting and completing a postsecondary program.

Florida's Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Education, housed in the state department of education, oversees ABE programs. Florida's programs served more than 150,000 ABE students in 2000–02 and are offered by a mixture of community colleges, local school districts, and community-based organizations. All four programs selected for the study, however, are administered by local school districts. W. Travis Loften High School ABE program had the highest transition rate in the state sample, with 19 percent of its students going on to attempt postsecondary credits and 14 percent completing them. Gulf County Adult School produced similarly high transition rates that out-performed the state average on all counts. Despite having transition rates somewhat below the state average, both South Technical Adult Education Center and Lindsey Hopkins Technical Education Center were chosen for the study because their transition rates were higher than expected given their program and student profiles.

Case Study Methodology

Researchers from BPA and MDRC visited the 16 ABE programs selected to participate in the study, conducting in-depth interviews between March and December 2005. Program directors, instructors, counselors, tutors, and volunteers, as well as administrators and faculty from the nearest community college, participated in these interviews. Community or technical college personnel interviewed represented the postsecondary institution administering the ABE program, or in some cases, represented colleges in the same town. The overall purpose of the 60-to-90 minute interview was to identify program practices that appear to promote ABE student transitions to postsecondary programs. Each interview covered most or all of the following topics:

- ✦ Program environment, capacity, and management
- ✦ Recruitment, intake, and assessment
- ✦ Curriculum and instruction
- ✦ Support services
- ✦ Reports on advancing learners to the next stage

Researchers recorded all interviews and chose interviews from a consistent set of key respondents for transcription. They compiled detailed summaries of each interview based on field notes and tape recordings. They then used software to create analysis files for each of the four states and coded all the relevant interviews into those files. A two-stage approach analyzed the interview data online. First, researchers conducted keyword and text searches of all the interviews by topic heading to identify patterns of frequently mentioned practices and program aspects related to postsecondary transition. They then extracted descriptions of particular practices or aspects that may not have been frequently mentioned, but nonetheless stood out, as both unique and relevant to segments of the conceptual framework.

Case Study Observations

The most prominent practices emerging from the field work that appear to contribute to postsecondary education transitions fell into the following four distinct dimensions: program structure and organization, instruction, support services, and personal and organizational collaboration. These categories overlap with and complement the conceptual framework of the study.

Program Structure and Organization

Staff interviewed said program structure and organization facilitated ABE-to-postsecondary transitions. Staff reported in varying degrees that their programs' strong relationships with their administrative agency, such as a community college, school district, or community-based organization provided:

- ✦ *Organizational integration*: ABE programs were treated as a valued function within the administrative structure.
- ✦ *Fiscal and other resources*: ABE programs had access to additional funding and in-kind resources such as classroom space, computer labs, libraries, staff, and professional development opportunities.
- ✦ *Postsecondary exposure*: ABE programs' close proximity to the local community college campus gave students a chance to acclimate to college before enrolling.
- ✦ *Simultaneous enrollment opportunities*: ABE programs' enrollment links with their community college helped to connect basic skills instruction to career interests and postsecondary content. These links included integrated instruction, co-enrollment, and blended courses.

- ♦ *Sufficient instructional staffing*: ABE programs were able to hire and support a sufficient number of full-time instructors.

Instruction

Staff also indicated that the quality and nature of instruction was a key factor in their students' successful transition to postsecondary education lab-based instruction, and group instruction, to accommodate the different learning styles and challenges of their students. Some instructors also reported helping their students prepare for college assessments, aligning their curriculum with developmental and postsecondary education courses, and encouraging students at intake to set educational and career goals and develop action plans to meet those goals.

Support Services

Another factor identified by staff as helpful to postsecondary transition was the availability of support services enabling their ABE students to address personal barriers such as a lack of childcare or transportation. These ABE programs generally took three approaches to helping students overcome these barriers: referring students to the network of support services in collaborating community colleges, referring students to local human service and workforce training agencies, or relying on ABE instructors to provide students with personal support and encouragement.

Personal and Organizational Collaboration

The staff interviewed also believed their programs' personal and organizational collaboration with a postsecondary institution provided their students with important information on college programs, the application process, and educational and career pathways. Some instructors reported inviting postsecondary instructors and counselors to make presentations to their classes. Others provided their students with college application materials and explained the application process during their ABE classes. Some also directed their students to their local TRIO program, a federally funded program based in postsecondary institutions that offers tutoring, mentoring, and financial assistance to at-risk students entering college. The staff believed that their connections to postsecondary education helped facilitate their ABE students' transition regardless of the specific approach.

Limitations of the Study

This study had some key limitations. The study was an exploratory analysis of what appeared to be effective transition practices and strategies employed by ABE programs in promoting postsecondary transition. It was not an evaluation of programs or interventions geared toward postsecondary transition, and it was not designed to determine which of the 16 programs were more or less effective at promoting transition. The study design also did not identify any low-performing programs against which to compare high-performing programs. The study did not determine if the low-performing programs also used the selected programs' practices.

Data used in the study to select programs were based on an earlier time period than the site vis-

its, a problem that this design could not eliminate. Researchers instead operated on the assumption that programs that were effective in 2001–02 remained effective for the same or similar reasons in 2005. Inconsistencies occurred in program selection data—for example, ABE enrollment, ABE functioning level, demographic characteristics, and postsecondary outcomes—collected across the four case study states. The result was that the transition models used different types and levels of information across states. Different programs might have been selected if a consistent set of variables had been available for all four states.

The study also did not include ABE students' perceptions of the transition practices used by their programs, and it did not include an extensive analysis of postsecondary practices that sustain former ABE students' transition and promote degree completion. A more complete assessment of postsecondary practices was beyond the scope of this work.

Finally, although the intention of the study was to select a diverse cross-section of program types, the final selection turned out to be somewhat uncharacteristic of ABE programs nationwide. Some of the selected programs combined ABE and developmental education or served a disproportionate number of students with high school diplomas. Combined with their proximity to community college campuses, selected programs had features likely to influence both the programs' performance on the study's transition measures and the programs' chances of being selected for the study.

Study Conclusion

The design of this study precluded determining whether, and to what extent, the observed practices promote transitions. The relative success of the 16 ABE programs that the research team visited suggests that these practices may have potential in helping the broader ABE community achieve higher transition rates. This study provides an illustrative snapshot of practices that may contribute to postsecondary transition despite its limitations. ABE practitioners and policymakers need to identify which of these practices are the best candidates for replication and further evaluation. Further research is needed to assess conclusively the value of these practices in promoting and sustaining postsecondary transitions among ABE students.

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