

# transition services

## Postsecondary Access and Success

It is widely understood that the workplace increasingly requires employees to be educated beyond the level of a high school diploma. Yet adults who seek to advance their education often face dual challenges: weak academic and social skills and the difficulty of balancing coursework with job and family obligations. Helping adult students succeed in postsecondary learning necessitates that state and regional governments fundamentally rethink the goals, content and delivery of adult education and college-based developmental (remedial) education services.

Ninety-seven percent of the total increase in employment openings from 2008 to 2018 will require some college or better.<sup>1</sup> For each year of postsecondary education, an adult is more likely to be employed, earn family-sustaining wages, lead a healthier life and raise children who are better prepared to succeed in school.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of the economic and social benefits of postsecondary education or vocational training, 270,000 Cuyahoga County adults 25 years and over have no more than a high school diploma. An additional 127,000 people in the 25 and over demographic lack a high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate.<sup>3</sup>

According to a research report by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), 85% of people 25 years and over reported having graduated from high school, but only 53% reported having attended college. Only 27% obtained a bachelor's degree or more.

Almost 60% of high school diploma holders who enroll in two-year colleges are assessed as needing at least one year of non-credit, developmental-education coursework because they lack basic skills. These students are 39% less likely than their prepared peers to stay in school and earn a degree or certificate.<sup>4</sup> Community colleges across America spend an estimated \$2 billion annually on remedial education, achieving only mediocre results.<sup>5</sup> Failure to successfully transition the 270,000 Cuyahoga County residents who are on the cusp of economic productivity to postsecondary or vocational learning opportunities means lost potential and revenue for the county, region and state.

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Many studies have examined the challenges of college enrollment and completion. Causes for bleak college-completion rates across the nation include rising tuition costs, poor academic and study skills, and minimal student support and advisory services.

### A Promising Model in Transitions: Capital IDEA (Texas)

Capital IDEA serves 10 counties in central Texas. The program provides comprehensive wraparound services to low-income adult learners. Included are academic training, intensive counseling and mentoring, childcare vouchers, transportation assistance, emergency financial assistance for utility bills and case management services to coordinate the efforts. Capital IDEA's transition program has a 90% completion rate, with most of the clients placing into college-level classes in associate degree programs; 84% obtain their associate degree.<sup>6</sup>

### Transition Services<sup>7</sup>

- Intensive, accelerated basic-skills services
- Contextualized curriculum connected to occupational-skills training
- Dual enrollment in remedial and credit-bearing courses
- Personalized academic and career advising services
- Student-support services that include child care, financial aid and transportation assistance

### The Cost of Remediation to Students

The costs of remediation to the taxpayer are substantial, but the financial, psychological and opportunity costs borne by the students themselves may be even more significant. While enrolled in remediation, students accumulate debt, spend time and money, and bear the opportunity cost of lost earnings.<sup>8</sup>

### Case for Transition Services

% of 1st year students in remediation FY 2010<sup>9</sup>

- Cuyahoga Community College - 44%
- Lakeland Community College - 48%
- Lorain County Community College - 60%

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## nontraditional<sup>adult</sup>learners

In order to be successful in academic and workplace environments, under-prepared adult learners require training and awareness in areas beyond the specific academic and vocational skills that are traditionally addressed in postsecondary developmental-education and vocational-training programs.

Adult learners often have significant family responsibilities, and for each year of pre-college instruction, they incur financial costs in terms of tuition and fees, lost wages and foregone work experience. Among students attending community colleges, six out of 10 work more than 20 hours a week, and more than a quarter work more than 35 hours a week. An estimated 23% of college students have dependent children.<sup>10</sup>

Many adult learners also lack the social capital to navigate the postsecondary education system. Lower-skilled students typically have a long educational path ahead of them, yet the educational, training and support systems serving these students are typically disconnected from each other. Students often find it difficult to navigate from one system to another. Improving postsecondary enrollment and retention rates for lower-skilled adults requires transition services that integrate academic and non-academic support systems that help students overcome barriers to academic persistence and success.

## transition<sup>services</sup>

Transition services consist of a holistic set of academic and non-academic support services for lower-skilled adult learners who are enrolled in postsecondary institutions. The goal is to help these learners navigate the academic, social and life challenges that too often impact their ability to stay in school and succeed in postsecondary learning. An evaluation of bridge programs in Illinois, as part of the Shifting Gears initiative, found that the most successful programs provide students with career orientation, admissions assistance and advising.

*Daunted by complex bureaucracies and insufficient information about how to access available resources, individuals can fail to achieve the desired outcome: postsecondary credentials.*

In addition, an ongoing random-assignment study found that participants who received enhanced support services (including intensive counseling) achieved better academic outcomes. The study also shows that, while receiving these services, students were more likely to stay for the following semester.<sup>11</sup> Another study found that graduates of a City University of New York program overwhelmingly credit enhanced support services – financial aid, free access to textbooks, a transportation card and comprehensive

academic, social and interpersonal services –for enabling them to complete their educational program.

In Cuyahoga County, as in many other urban counties across the country, adult learners struggle to manage the demands of full- or part-time work and learning. Many adult learners face limited childcare and transportation options and are de-motivated when they are assessed as needing substantial remediation to prepare for credit-bearing courses.

*An effective system must offer clients rigorous, accelerated and contextualized academic content to bridge basic skills deficiencies; academic and workplace-socialization programs to help them navigate and succeed in the world of higher education and work; and support and barrier removal to equip them to deal with personal and life challenges.*

A unified view of the various academic, workforce-readiness and social-services investments across the range of systems that serve these learners is a critical component of successful transition services. This can be achieved by creating a client-management model, similar to the “account manager” system that is widely implemented in private industry. Account managers ensure that navigating the system is not a burden for the client, and they insulate the client from the complexities of how service is delivered. The adult learner has a single point of contact, who knows what resources are available and how to access them.

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Institutionalization of effective transition services must be driven by state and regional policies that help promote better-organized, more cost-effective programs. In addition to looking at how college funding can be reorganized to incentivize institution-wide transition services, policy makers must consider other issues that impact the target population -- such as clients’ abilities to hold secure part-time employment -- if postsecondary enrollment and completion rates are to improve.

For too long, most under-prepared college candidates – those who have the most to benefit from higher education – have been shuffled into “poorly resourced, poorly designed and poorly taught courses.”<sup>12</sup> To dramatically improve student success, remedial education must be front and center in regional workforce and economic development discourses, and innovative practices must be applied.

- 1) *Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*,” Georgetown University, Center on Education and the Workforce
- 2) CLASP, *Beyond Basic Skills: State Strategies to Connect Low-Skilled Students to an Employer Valued Postsecondary Education*.
- 3) *Ohio Department of Development, Ohio County Profile for Cuyahoga County (2010)*
- 4) *Center for Postsecondary And Economic Success, Fast Facts - www.clasp.org/postsecondary/fast\_facts*.
- 5) *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – Key Facts on Developmental Education*
- 6) *Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models, NCSALL occasional paper 2006*
- 7) *Beyond Basic Skills: State Strategies to Connect Low-Skilled Students to an Employer-Valued Postsecondary Education, Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success*
- 8) *Referral, Enrollment, and Completion in Developmental Education Sequences in Community Colleges, Community College Research Partners*
- 9) *Ohio Board of Regents Report on Percent of Students Taking Remedial Course Work FY 2010*
- 10) *Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, Fast Facts*
- 11) *Susan Scrivener and Michale J. Weiss, More Guidance, Better Results? Three Year Effects of an Enhanced Student Services Program at Two Community Colleges. MDRC’s Open Door Project, MDRC 2009 Early Outcomes Report for City University of New York Accelerated Study in Associates Program – http://www.nyc.gov/html/ceo/downloads/pdf/asap\_final\_report\_2009.pdf*
- 12) *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – Key Facts on Developmental Education*

**literacycooperative** issue papers are intended to express a point of view, challenge public thinking and -- we hope -- change institutional practices. They are released as part of *the* **literacycooperative's** Public Education and Advocacy Initiative, which seeks to bring broad attention to issues of learner access, transitions, progression and program quality; spur policy and institutional innovations and collaboration; and promote actions to sustain effective practices. Current advocacy efforts focus on addressing systemic and institutional barriers that impact secondary-school credential holders who have earned a high school diploma or a GED -- but are not prepared for postsecondary education or workforce success -- and are unemployed or underemployed. Transition Services is one in a series of briefs *the* **literacycooperative** releases periodically. *the* **literacycooperative** is a nonprofit intermediary organization working to improve literacy levels in Cuyahoga County.

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a thriving community*

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