



**TO ENSURE
AMERICA'S
FUTURE:
BUILDING A
NATIONAL
OPPORTUNITY
SYSTEM
FOR ADULTS**

Strengthening Links Between
Adult Education and
Community Colleges

Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

CAAL

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**Summary Report of the CAAL
Project on Adult Education and Community Colleges**

February 9, 2005



**Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
1221 Avenue of the Americas – 46th Floor
New York, NY 10020
(212) 512-2362
<http://www.caalusa.org>**

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Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy
(Ed., Gail Spangenberg with Betsy Feist and Bess Heitner)
1221 Avenue of the Americas – 46th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10020

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FOREWORD

This report is a call to arms. It comes at a pivotal time for both the adult education system and the community college sector.

The gap between the “haves” and the “have nots” in American society is growing, and the main pathway to the education and training needed to hold decent jobs and function well as parents and citizens is through the community college door. This has long been the case, but we are at a historical juncture. We ignore present realities at our own peril. We can’t afford to keep doing business as usual. A growing number of adults lack a high school credential. Too few adults are enrolled in ABE, ESL, and GED or other diploma programs, and too few are making the transition to community colleges. We are reaching only about three million adults with current programs, a fraction of the need. Moreover, efforts to address the challenge are fragmented and underfunded.

It is time for community colleges to make service to underprepared adults a much higher priority. These people represent a substantial portion of America’s current and future workforce. They come from cities and towns all across the country, from every large urban center and every small rural area. In fact, most colleges embrace economic and workforce development already, but to benefit themselves, and to benefit their present and future students *and* their communities, they need to go well beyond their present role. And supportive policies and funding from government will be needed to help them. The same is true of the adult education system in all its parts – K-12 systems, community-based organizations, libraries, and others that make up the national provider network.

The adult education and literacy system and community colleges will have to find new ways to work together toward a common goal – through transition programming and in the many other ways discussed in this report – if the National Opportunity System for adults envisioned in this paper is to become reality. That system should come into being for two simple reasons: it is essential to the effective functioning of our democracy, and without it the United States will not remain globally competitive. Creating the system our country needs is achievable. What we need most is the *will* to do it. Fortunately, as this report shows, there is impressive experience on which to build and there are many examples of leadership to help guide the way.

Many people and organizations helped make this study possible. In a time of unusually tight funding, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., the Ford Foundation, Verizon, Inc., the Lumina Foundation for Education, the Nellie-Mae Foundation, Household International, Harold W. McGraw, Jr., and other individual donors have cared enough to stay the course. Hundreds of professionals across the country have given their time and insights in one way or another. And the task force that guided the study (see Appendix II) is a very special group whose experience and wisdom helped shape the effort at every step. CAAL is deeply grateful to them for their generosity and service to the cause.

And, then, there are the students, the most important beneficiaries of our effort.

In most research projects, there is a certain “wake up moment” – an incident that encapsulates what the project is about and why it matters. In the two years of research and deliberations

that led up to this report, that moment came for CAAL early on, in February 2003, when we visited an adult education program at an Oregon community college. After a long day with administrators and teachers, our project director stepped outside to clear his head. He encountered a young woman who had been seated in one of the classes observed.

She asked him what he was doing there. He explained, then asked what *she* was doing there. It turned out that she was a single parent on welfare who divided her time between work and school. She had moved to Oregon a few years before because in her native state, welfare recipients were not allowed to attend school. She was there to get her high school equivalency diploma; she had dropped out because she had difficulty learning, and she thought she'd never be able to graduate. When she enrolled at the college, she found out why. She was tested for learning disabilities and discovered that she was dyslexic. The student services staff worked with the adult education faculty to develop a special program for her. She was learning quickly, and she expected to receive her high school equivalency diploma soon.

When asked what she expected to do after graduation, she said "Oh, I guess I'll go to college. After all, it's easy. I know my way around here. All I have to do is walk over to the admissions office and sign up. They told me all about that." What did she want to study? She said she wanted to become a nurse, that she had always wanted to be a nurse, and the college had an eighteen-month Licensed Practical Nurse's program that didn't cost much to attend. She thought this would allow her to support her son without help from anyone.

We asked her name, explaining that we would like to check in sometime to see how she was progressing. She wrote it on a piece of paper. Almost two years later, we phoned the college's student records office and discovered that the young woman had graduated high in her class. We did not ask her whereabouts, but we learned that she has become a nurse.

This report is for her, a courageous, determined woman. It is also for aspiring adults everywhere. All across America, they can make it, too, if the National Opportunity System called for in this CAAL report becomes reality.

The nation, government, colleges, the adult education system – all have a central role, and all stand to benefit from enlightened and bold action. The National Opportunity System we are recommending depends on their response to the challenges – and the opportunities – treated here.

Gail Spangenberg
President, CAAL

Byron McClenney
Task Force Chair

Forrest P. Chisman
Project Study Director

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

A widening skills gap is at the heart of many of the major economic and social challenges the United States faces today. Too many Americans lack the basic skills and educational attainments required by a postindustrial economy. This places severe limits on the American economy to innovate, grow, and compete in the global marketplace. And it relegates many millions of our citizens to low-wage, low-opportunity jobs, as well as to increasingly marginal positions in the nation's social and political life. If present trends remain unchecked, our children will inherit a nation that has declined from international preeminence to the ranks of a second-rate economic and political power.

The skills gap has many causes but only one solution: we urgently need a National Opportunity System that allows all adult Americans to obtain the knowledge and skills they require. At present, we have a wide range of education and training systems, but we lack an overall opportunity system that knits them together. We need seamless pathways of opportunity that allow individuals to progress up the ladder of education and training as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Furthermore, we urgently need pathways that give all Americans the opportunity to attain much higher levels of education and training than most have attained in the past. In today's economy, high-opportunity jobs require some form of postsecondary education or other specialized training, and an increasing number require postsecondary academic degrees or certifications. Important as it is, education at the high school level is no longer enough to meet national workforce needs or to ensure individual well being. We must build a National Opportunity System that provides seamless paths to postsecondary achievement for all adults who aspire to this goal.

However it is configured, a National Opportunity System cannot focus solely on our youth, though it must obviously include them. There simply will not be enough young people entering the workforce to close the skills gap in the decades to come. To close that gap, we must provide much greater and more systematic opportunities for adults to upgrade their education and training through the postsecondary level. If we do not, children in kindergarten today will inherit a bleak future, regardless of how good their education may be.

Moreover, a National Opportunity System cannot focus solely on native-born adults. Demographic projections indicate that most of the future net growth in our workforce will come from immigrants – most of whom come to the United States as adults, and many of whom have either low educational levels, or deficient English language skills, or both.

B. REPORT FOCUS

Constructing the National Opportunity System that is essential for our nation's future requires radical, results-oriented thinking about how to reconfigure, augment, and link our present education and training systems. It requires breaking down boundaries to construct new

pathways. An increasing number of states have recognized this imperative and are engaged in strategic planning toward the desired new goals.

This report is concerned with one aspect of the challenge faced by states, educational institutions, and the nation as a whole. Its focus is on strengthening the linkage between adult education and community colleges. It explains in some detail how pathways of opportunity can be constructed to allow adults with low basic skills to progress up the educational hierarchy.

This critically important component of building a comprehensive National Opportunity System has not been well understood in the past. This report is the first comprehensive examination of linkages between colleges and adult education.* Its purpose is to add a new dimension to thought and action about what must be done to close the skills gap in America.

C. IMPORTANCE OF LINKAGES

Approximately three million Americans are enrolled in adult education programs each year, and most of them would benefit greatly from postsecondary education. Because of their liberal admissions policies and low costs, community colleges are the logical gateways to educational and economic opportunity for these and the tens of millions of other adults with low basic skills.

At present, too few adult education students pass through these gateways. Although adult education programs and community colleges are linked in many ways, those links must be strengthened to incorporate adult education students into the National Opportunity System. This linkage is manifestly in the national interest, as well as the interest of individuals. Adult education students are among the Americans who must have the opportunity to benefit from postsecondary academic or vocational education if we are to close the skills gap. Moreover, these students have demonstrated a commitment to taking the first steps in improving their education and skills. It would be foolish and wasteful not to help them take the next steps. If we do so, there is the potential for millions of Americans who lack the education and training required by our economy to contribute to the general welfare and their own. If we do not, a major national opportunity will be lost.

The national goal must be to create seamless pathways of opportunity that lead large numbers of low-skilled adults through the adult education system and into postsecondary education.

In the past, adult education and community colleges have been regarded as separate service systems. In the future, they must be regarded as interdependent components of the National Opportunity System.

Strengthening links between adult education and community colleges is the functional equivalent of the efforts underway by many educational leadership groups to create closer ties between

* In this report, the term *adult education* is used to connote the combination or range of services defined by Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act – P.L. 105-220). These are: Adult Basic Education (ABE, which focuses on improving basic reading, writing, and math skills for adults functioning below the ninth grade level), Adult Secondary Education (ASE, which focuses on upgrading the knowledge and basic skills of adults to the high school equivalency level, and usually on preparing adults for high school equivalency tests, such as the GED), and English as a second language (ESL) instruction at the precollegiate level

K-12 and higher education. We cannot close the skills gap without placing far greater emphasis on broadening the educational opportunities of adults. These two efforts must be pursued in tandem if we are to create the National Opportunity System our nation so urgently needs.

D. NATURE OF LINKAGES

The most effective way to accomplish this goal is to build on the *existing* links between colleges and adult education. These take three principal forms:

Provision. Almost half of American community colleges provide adult education services as defined in this report. Collectively, colleges serve at least one third of all the students enrolled in adult education in the United States. These students make up an estimated seven percent of all community college enrollments nationwide, and in some states they comprise a much higher percentage. Most adult education service, however, is provided by school systems. Community based organizations, libraries, and other local institutions also play important roles. For the most part, colleges provide adult education because they see it as part of their comprehensive mission to serve unmet educational needs in their communities, focus on adult students, and respond to local workforce needs.

Transitions. Adult education programs offer students two of the prerequisites for entry into postsecondary programs: high school equivalency credentials and English language skills for language minorities. They also provide instruction that is very similar to the college preparation courses offered by the lower levels of developmental education programs at a fraction of the cost. Adult education programs and colleges are, therefore, natural partners in providing educational opportunity. Adult education can and should be the first step in transitions through the community college gateway. Enrollment in adult education programs can and should serve as the first enrollment in postsecondary education for students with deficient basic skills.

Policy. Adult education is under the governance of community college boards or other postsecondary authorities in 13 states, and in several of these states this governance arrangement has been adopted in recent years. More importantly, these and other states have adopted policies to strengthen links between adult education and colleges by means such as common funding systems, clearly specified entry and exit criteria, joint planning procedures, required faculty qualifications, and incentive grants to increase transitions.

These existing forms of linkage mean that adult education students are students of both the present and the future at many colleges. They provide the tools by which colleges, adult educators, and policymakers, working together, can ensure that a far larger number of current adult education students (whether at colleges or not) can become successful students of the future in academic and vocational programs.

E. STRENGTHENING LINKAGES

Provision. Those colleges that provide adult education service must strengthen their programs by fully integrating adult education students into college life. This means:

- ◆ All provider colleges can and must follow the example of leadership institutions in treating adult education as a core service rather than a peripheral service.
- ◆ They must set high standards for their adult education divisions.
- ◆ They must give adult education students the same quality support services, facilities, faculty, and status that they provide to other students.
- ◆ They should provide adult education faculty with the same pay, benefits, professional development opportunities, and roles in college governance assigned to other faculty with comparable education, experience, and responsibilities, and they should prepare all college staff and faculty to receive and fully support adult education students.
- ◆ Adult education managers should occupy the same place in the college's management system as the managers of other core services.
- ◆ Adult education should be a component in the college's central planning, budgeting, program improvement, marketing, institutional research, and accountability systems.

Those colleges that do not provide adult education service or that are only one of multiple providers in a geographic area must form collaborative arrangements with adult education providers to define the most appropriate roles that each institution in the community can play to expand the opportunities of adult learners. Colleges, adult education leaders, or both, should convene the educational leadership in their communities to identify gaps in the opportunity system and devise means to fill them.

Among the contributions colleges and the outside adult education system can make to each other are sharing facilities, staff, and support services; creating jointly administered programs to meet special needs (such as specialized job training programs for disadvantaged adults); and establishing mutual expectations about the requirements for college entry as well as how those can best be met.

Transitions. Transitions from adult education to postsecondary programs can and must be increased by more active recruitment of adult education students by colleges, as well as better orientation and support systems for these students to overcome barriers to enrollment.

Transitions also can be increased by the creation of special "gap" or "bridge" programs. These are usually short-duration instructional modules aimed at assisting students with high school diplomas or high school equivalency credentials but lacking the skills required for admission to college academic or vocational programs. Rather than providing comprehensive instruction in basic skills or academic subjects, gap or bridge programs target the specific skills or areas of knowledge that students must improve to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

A great deal can also be accomplished by establishing greater synergy between adult and developmental education programs, and between credit and noncredit English as a second

language (ESL) programs.** Across the nation, at least some colleges have taken the initiative to create this synergy. These leadership colleges have demonstrated that students can often progress faster, at lower cost, and with less attrition if adult education is regarded as the lower level of developmental education, and if the curricular linkages between these two services are strengthened.

Most importantly, transitions can and must be increased by creating articulated curricular sequences that allow students to navigate more easily the route from ABE/ASE/GED or ESL programs to success in postsecondary education. Curricula must be designed to ensure that each step on the educational ladder prepares students for the next step, and the sequence of instruction should be transparent to students, faculty, and administrators.

This alignment requires that the educational process from adult education through postsecondary completion be viewed as a seamless system. And it requires breaking down institutional and programmatic boundaries to progress. Students should be placed in the educational programs that offer them the greatest benefit. Completion of each program should prepare them for subsequent placements. And everyone involved in the educational process should know the rules of the game. For example, students who earn high school equivalency certificates should have the opportunity to gain the skills required for success in college academic or vocational programs, or other forms of postsecondary training aimed at meeting industry skill standards.

In the end, creating seamless curricular sequences entails designing educational programs for success. This requires that adult educators, college faculty, and administrators collaborate, that all are prepared to examine carefully their requirements for success, and that they adjust their curricula, assessment, and placement systems to create seamless pathways of instruction. It also means that both colleges and adult educators must “think outside the box” in terms of crafting instructional strategies that are best suited to meeting particular learning needs. They must consider if strategies like self-paced instruction in learning labs, targeted curricular modules, or individual tutoring might be more appropriate than a standard course, or program, or level of instruction.

By combining these approaches, the number of adult education students who enter postsecondary programs can be increased dramatically.

Public Policy. To date, much of the progress in strengthening linkages by these means has been due to initiatives of college and adult education leaders at the local level. Public policy at the state and federal level has encouraged some of these developments, but existing policy must be strengthened to achieve the potential of adult education and colleges to provide pathways of opportunity.

** Discussions of English language instruction and other educational services for people with limited proficiency in English refer to this area of education by different terms. Most commonly, it is designated as English as a Second Language (ESL) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). For purposes of clarity, this report will use the term ESL, without prejudice to the merits of other terminology.

First and foremost, transitions between adult education and postsecondary education should be a stated priority of both state and federal adult education policy, and of state community college policy. To support this priority, both the federal government and the states should provide funding for special transition initiatives linking all colleges and adult education providers. These initiatives should “take to scale” the approaches developed by leadership institutions and introduce new approaches as well. States should mandate these initiatives and monitor their progress at all institutions.

States have a special responsibility, because most have governance authority for both community colleges and adult education. State authorities should encourage better integration of adult education services into the culture and operations of colleges that provide them, and they should facilitate local planning of the avenues through which colleges and adult education programs can best support each other. Most importantly, states should take the leadership in helping local educators design and implement seamless curricular pathways between adult education and postsecondary programs. And they should remove any state regulatory barriers to facilitating transitions.

In some states, adult education provided by colleges is supported by the same funding systems that support other college programs – full time equivalency (FTE) reimbursements or their equivalents. This financing system provides a mechanism to level the stakes between adult education and other services, and possibly to increase total adult education funding. Colleges can and should be reimbursed for adult education service at the same FTE rate that applies to comparable credit programs.

Both the federal government and states should invest in a critical missing ingredient: the development and application of student data systems that can be used for both formative and summative research on strengthening linkages. At present, anyone seeking to bridge the gap between adult education and colleges is groping in the dark; longitudinal student record systems that can reliably track student progress across the two systems either do not exist or are not used in appropriate ways.

Finally, adult education in the United States is grossly underfunded by the federal government and by most states. This leads to service deficiencies by all providers and, too often, to the attitude that adult education is a second-class service relative to other college offerings. Total funding and per-capita funding for adult education should be increased to a level that is comparable to other community college offerings, and the federal government and the states must both contribute to attaining this goal.

F. A MATTER OF PRIORITIES

These and other types of initiatives at the local, state, and national levels can greatly expand the opportunities for millions of low-skilled adults. All of them are eminently feasible. There are colleges, adult education programs, and states in which some combination of these strategies has been adopted and in which students, institutions, and communities are expanding the boundaries of opportunity now.

Nationwide, however, far too little progress has been made in strengthening the links between colleges and adult education. This has not been a goal – or even a common topic in the

educational discourse – among most adult educators, community college leaders, or policymakers. As a result, the potential for linkage between these two systems is much greater than the reality.

In the end, bridging the gap between potential and reality is a matter of priorities. There is a natural tendency for colleges, adult educators, and the policymakers concerned with both to focus on the priorities of colleges and adult education as separate service systems, rather than to focus on their interdependence.

Instead of concentrating on institutional priorities, all parties involved should focus on the priority of building a National Opportunity System that does a far better job of meeting the national need for underprepared adult students, whether native born or immigrants, to make their contribution to building a high-productivity workforce. To achieve this, strengthening the links between adult education and community colleges must be a high priority for institutions and policymakers nationwide.

It may take some time to achieve this goal on a national scale. But it presents a challenge from which individual educators and policymakers should not shrink. There is no college, adult education program, or state that cannot take the steps to strengthen provision, transitions, and policy that leadership institutions and states have adopted.

The responsibility for meeting national priorities ultimately comes down to the responsibility of individuals. To build the National Opportunity System, individual leaders can and must find the time to learn what is required to create seamless pathways of opportunity for low-skilled adults in their communities and states. And then they must take the steps required to achieve that goal.

Community colleges and adult education programs are unified by their commitment to meet the needs of adult learners, whatever those needs may be. They are both highly flexible instructional systems. By asserting their joint commitment to strengthening the links between them, as this report strongly recommends, their dedication to expanding an essential and neglected area of service will be evident.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, CAAL has been studying the connections between adult education and community colleges. It has done this with one overall goal in mind: to develop educational opportunities for adults through basic skills upgrading, further education, and English language programs that support the successful transition from the adult education and literacy system to postsecondary education, career opportunities, and fulfilling lives as family and community members – all essential components of lifelong learning in America.

On the advice of a guiding task force (see Appendix II, p. 90), CAAL has aimed specifically to:

- ◆ Determine the nature and magnitude of contributions community colleges presently make to achieving this overall goal through their support of adult education and literacy service – both as providers of instructional service and as partners with other providers – as well as the role of institutional and public policies in shaping their contributions.
- ◆ Determine how community colleges can enhance their contributions through strengthening linkages among instructional systems, enhancing support services, revising resource allocations, improving management and other means: (a) within their institutions, and (b) between those institutions and other components of the adult education, literacy, and related systems.
- ◆ Determine the benefits that accrue to colleges, other adult education providers, and the population in need of service when the colleges are proactive partners in a comprehensive adult education and literacy system.
- ◆ Determine the visibility of community college contributions to lifelong learning and educational transitions through support of adult education and literacy, and promote appropriate actions by colleges, adult educators, policymakers, and others to strengthen those contributions.

Methodology. To examine these issues, a relatively ambitious research model was put in place. Its design was largely the responsibility of CAAL's two principals, Gail Spangenberg and Forrest Chisman, president and vice president, respectively. Gail Spangenberg, founder of CAAL, was operating head of the Business Council for Effective Literacy in the 1980s and 1990s and has an extensive background in adult education and literacy that includes years of service at several major foundations. Dr. Chisman was principal architect of the *Jump Start* report, which provided the blueprint for the National Literacy Act in the early 1990s. He has

deep experience in human resource development, including a stint with the federal government. In recent years, he has done extensive work on innovations in community colleges.

The research model had several elements:

CAAL commissioned eight research papers: four statewide case studies (Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oregon), a study of adult ESL and the community college, a study of developmental and adult education in community colleges, a study of adult education experience in five states (California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Iowa, and Oregon), and a national study of community colleges in state adult education systems. Collectively, these papers include profiles of nineteen community colleges considered to be exemplary in important respects, including five chosen for their adult ESL services. (See Appendix I on p. 88 for abstracts of the eight papers. All have been previously published and are available in PDF form at the CAAL Web site, www.caalusa.org.)

At the core of the project was the aforementioned task force of community college and adult education leaders. This extraordinary group of professionals was formed early on to help guide the effort. It brought deep experience and varied, thoughtful perspectives to the study. Appendix II, p. 90, gives their names, affiliations, and titles. These professionals came from across the country and are widely known for their state and national leadership.

The task force was chaired by Byron McClenney who came up through the community college ranks to spend some 32 years as a community college CEO, and who retired last year from the presidency of Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn. Dr. McClenney presently codirects the Ford Foundation's *Bridges to Opportunity* program at the University of Texas, and is project director for that institution's role in *Achieving the Dream*, a project of the Lumina Foundation for Education.

The task force was convened for five full-day meetings in Washington, D.C., and New York City to deliberate and review the research paper findings. The members also had ongoing input by phone and e-mail and interacted on a regular basis with the study director and CAAL's president. It had a substantial role in crafting the final report and shaping its recommendations.

CAAL staff made several site visits, both before the project began and while it was in process. The staff also reviewed a wide range of other research important to the topic at hand and consulted with dozens of professionals across the country in various ways.

Definition of adult education. Virtually all of the instruction provided by community colleges and many other postsecondary and vocational institutions is thought of as *adult education* service in the broadest sense of the term. However, in this report, the term *adult education* is used to

connote the combination or range of services defined by Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act – P.L. 105-220). These are: Adult Basic Education (ABE, which focuses on improving basic reading, writing, and math skills for adults functioning below the ninth grade level), Adult Secondary Education (ASE, which focuses on upgrading the knowledge and basic skills of adults to the high school equivalency level, and usually on preparing adults for high school equivalency tests, such as the GED), and English as a second language (ESL) instruction at the precollegiate level.

Organization of the report. The report has five major sections: Section I (The Gateways p. 4) discusses adult education and community colleges as doors to opportunity and service. Section II (Provision p. 22) discusses dimensions of service, links between colleges and other providers, and adult education service within community colleges. Section III (Transitions p. 36) deals with various transition issues including connections between adult education and developmental education. Section IV (Public Policy p. 62) treats governance and management issues, funding, policy opportunities, and other topics, with special reference to the state and federal role.

Section V (Summary and Recommendations p. 78) offers fifty recommendations for creating the National Opportunity System. Fourteen of these are addressed to community colleges (p. 79), twelve are to adult education (p. 81), fifteen are to state government (p. 83), and nine are to the federal government (p. 85). The main recommendations are also woven into the Executive Summary (p. v), which is designed to be a brief stand-alone document for those who want a concise overview of the report. As noted above, Appendix I (p. 88) lists the research papers published by CAAL in support of this project and Appendix II (p. 90) lists members of the project task force. References and notes, which are indicated throughout the report, are presented in the Endnotes of Appendix III (p. 92).

I. THE GATEWAYS

Adult education programs and community colleges are among the major gateways to educational and economic opportunity in the United States today. Because they are more likely to serve educationally underprepared and economically disadvantaged students than most other educational systems, they are precious national resources. Each year, they offer millions of people a stake in the American dream that would not otherwise be available. As a result, strengthening both systems must be a high national priority.

This report focuses on the linkage between these two systems. This subject has received far too little attention from most educational leaders, policymakers, and researchers. For the most part,

Unless the links between colleges and adult education programs are understood, valued, and strengthened, neither system will be able to achieve its full potential as a gateway of opportunity.

adult education and community colleges have been regarded as separate educational enterprises. They have different histories and their primary focus is on different educational content. They often operate under different auspices, are governed by different policies, and are supported by different funding streams.

But these differences obscure the fact that the two systems are similar in a great many ways. More importantly, they obscure the operational and policy links between adult education programs and community colleges. A close examination reveals that those links hold the potential to greatly expand educational and economic opportunities for students of both systems.

Each year, in one way or another, large numbers of students benefit from the links between community colleges and adult education. In those states and localities where links are particularly strong, adult education is an essential component of the community college enterprise, and community colleges are centrally important to achieving the goals of adult education. In fact, in some places, it is hard to think of one system without thinking of the other.

But these states are localities are the exception, and even they have not realized the full potential of what colleges and adult education programs can offer each other, their students, and the nation as a whole. The lessons learned from examining them indicate that unless the links between colleges and adult education programs are understood, valued, and strengthened, neither system will be able to achieve its full potential as a gateway of opportunity. But these differences obscure the fact that the two systems are similar in a great many ways. More importantly, they obscure

the operational and policy links between adult education programs and community colleges. A close examination reveals that those links hold the potential to greatly expand educational and economic opportunities for students of both systems.

This report tells a big story – it shows how and why it so important for links between community colleges and adult education programs to be strengthened.

A. ADULT EDUCATION

Each year, approximately three million Americans enter the adult education gateway.¹ Adult education programs provide: (1) adult basic education (ABE) that improves basic skills in

Students enrolled in adult education programs are disproportionately the economically disadvantaged, racial minorities, and immigrants. These students are only a portion of the American population with low basic skills or inadequate language proficiency.

reading, writing, and math, (2) adult secondary education (ASE) that prepares students for the high school equivalency diplomas (such as the GED), and (3) English as a second language service (ESL) that provides instruction in English language and literacy.² These services are of enormous value both to the learners who participate in them and to the national economy, because they help learners acquire the basic skills required to function on the job and in society.

Students enrolled in adult education programs are disproportionately the economically disadvantaged, racial minorities, and immigrants. These students are only a portion of the American population with low basic skills or inadequate language proficiency. The total size of that population is variously estimated at between 30 and 50 million adults. For this population, adult education programs are a first, and important, step on the ladder of educational and economic opportunity.³

There are approximately 3,000 publicly funded adult education providers in the United States, and hundreds more that are supported entirely by private funding.⁴ Because some of these providers subcontract to or partner with other agencies in

various ways to offer service, the number of “programs” – in the sense of separately administered entities – is much larger than 3,000.

Most adult education programs are not freestanding institutions, in the way that community colleges are. Rather, adult education is usually one of several services provided by institutions

that have other missions as well. Adult education operates at the program level within these institutions. Depending on state and local policies, adult education programs have differing degrees of operational autonomy within the institutions that administer them.

Most adult education programs are administered by local school systems, but community colleges, community based organizations (CBOs), libraries, and workforce agencies (such as One Stop career centers) are also important service providers in many areas.⁵ However programs are administered, the ABE and lower-level ESL components of adult education are provided free – without tuition or fees. There are small charges for ASE and upper-level ESL instruction in some localities.

In recent years, the total annual national expenditure for adult education has been on the order of \$1.7 billion, and most of these funds have come from public sources. About one third of the total public funding for instruction (\$530 million in 2002) is provided by grants from the federal government (under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act), and most of the balance is provided by state grant funding.⁶

Because the lion's share of funding is provided by states, total expenditures on adult education and per-student expenditures differ greatly from one area to another. States are required to provide at least a 25 percent match to the federal grants they receive. Some states provide only the minimum required, whereas others spend three or four times as much or more on adult education as they receive from the federal government. These differences in total funding are accompanied by different state and local policies about how many students should be served by the funds available. As a result, although the nationwide average per student expenditure is on the order of \$600 per year, in some states and localities the expenditure is closer to \$100 or less per year, while it exceeds \$1,000 per year in others.⁷

B. COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Each year, approximately 5 million credit and 5.2 million noncredit students enter the community college gateway. America's 1,200 community colleges are multimission postsecondary institutions.⁸ Through their degree, certificate, and continuing education programs, most community colleges provide a rich diet of academic and vocational opportunities. The total current fund expenditures of America's community colleges in 2002 were on the order of \$27 billion.⁹

Virtually all colleges offer the general education and disciplinary prerequisites for transfer to a wide range of baccalaureate programs. This is the primary mission of some colleges, but most community colleges today pursue more comprehensive missions. Increasingly, community

colleges have come to emphasize the “community” part of their names. “Comprehensive” colleges seek to fill a wide range of unmet educational needs in their localities – although they do so to varying degrees and in various ways.

In addition to their academic offerings, most colleges also have a strong vocational emphasis. They offer degrees, certificates, and continuing education courses in high-opportunity career tracks, such as business, information technology, health care, and public safety. And, in many cases, they offer specialized curricular tracks, courses, or programs (sometimes on a contractual basis with local companies) of particular interest in their localities. For example, community colleges in Northern California often offer programs in viticulture; community colleges in Michigan commonly offer programs in manufacturing technology. At a great many community colleges today, the number of students enrolled in their vocationally oriented credit and noncredit programs far exceeds those enrolled in programs aimed at transfer to four-year institutions.

Increasingly, community colleges are the institutions of choice for entry into postsecondary education for both middle class Americans, and the economically disadvantaged and immigrants. Today, their enrollments are almost as large as the undergraduate enrollments of four-year colleges and universities.¹⁰

Compared to adult education programs, many community colleges are far larger operations. They almost always have their own physical plant, as well as a full range of administrative services. In some states, they are separately incorporated entities with their own individual governance systems; in other states they are legally the creations of state or local government. In many states, they are ultimately under the governance of a separate state agency (a community college board) – which may be an independent agency or an arm of the state’s higher education authority or some other department. In virtually all states, community colleges operate within state policy guidelines, just as adult education programs do. And in virtually all states, community colleges enjoy a great deal of operational autonomy. Beyond a core of instructional services, colleges have considerable leeway in selecting the programs they will offer and in establishing priorities among them.

Community colleges are primarily supported by a combination of state and local government appropriations, and by tuition and fees. Community college education is not free, but the average tuition charged by colleges for credit programs is less than half that charged by public four-year institutions.¹¹ Moreover, many community college students in credit programs are eligible for state and/or federal financial aid.

In most states, different statutory authorities, regulations, and administrative agencies govern community colleges and adult education programs.

C. SIMILARITIES

Despite their differences in educational content, funding sources, institutional capacity, and governance, community colleges and adult education programs have a great deal in common. Their similarities provide a foundation for the links between them.

The most obvious similarity is that both systems are primarily in the business of serving adults – albeit at differing points on the learning spectrum. A certain percentage of adult education students are teenage high school dropouts, and an important percentage of community college students are recent high school graduates taking the next step on the education ladder. But most students served by both systems are older.

The median age of enrollment in adult education programs and community colleges is about the same: in both cases it is in the mid-20s, which means that more than half their students are older

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than this.¹² These are people who have been out of school and are seeking further education to improve their prospects for the future. But they face the challenge of integrating education into adult lives – lives that often include families and jobs. It is estimated that 80 percent of community college students work full time or part time, and most adult education students are either working or seeking employment.¹³

Because of their adult focus, community college and adult education programs share certain elements of institutional culture. Compared to many other educational institutions, they are remarkably student centered. They attempt to offer instruction at times and in places most convenient to adults. They also understand the need for special adult support services – such as day care and counseling – and in many cases they help students gain access to those services. They rarely require full-time attendance, and they recognize that many of their students will drop out and drop in repeatedly before they complete instructional sequences. Indeed, they recognize that many students will never complete these sequences. For these students, the primary benefits that community colleges and adult education programs confer are contributions to lifelong learning – individual courses or instructional modules that fill gaps in the knowledge or skills of adult students.

Community colleges and adult education programs are also remarkably flexible in adapting their offerings to student needs. Helping students meet their individual educational goals is central to the culture of adult education, and programs often differ in their content and instructional methods depending on the needs and goals of their participants. Colleges, of course, have prescribed curricula for their degree and certificate programs. But they are highly entrepreneurial in devising both individual courses and instructional programs that respond to student interests and labor market demands. And their noncredit continuing education programs are designed to help adults meet a wide range of needs.

Importantly, both colleges and adult education programs offer adults (as well as younger students) an open door. In most states, anyone with a high school diploma or equivalent can enroll in community college credit programs, and continuing education programs are open to all. In most states, anyone beyond the state-specified age of compulsory education (16 years in most states) who has not yet attained a high school credential or the skills equivalent to it can enroll in adult education. The only limits on enrollment are limits on the resources these institutions have to provide service.

But resource limits are a fact of life for both community colleges and adult education programs. The latter lack the funding to reach more than a small percentage of their target populations, and they are faced with the trade-off between spreading their funding across as many people as possible and investing more on a per-student basis. Likewise, colleges struggle to provide the range of services required by their communities, while keeping tuition down and maintaining standards of quality. As a result, colleges and adult education programs operate with very low overhead compared to most other educational institutions, and they rely heavily on part-time instructional staff.¹⁴

In short, colleges and adult education entities alike are dedicated to doing whatever it takes to help adult students achieve educational and economic opportunity. And, of necessity, they do so in the most cost-effective way possible.

D. LINKAGE

Given their adult focus and student-centered culture, it should not be surprising that many community colleges and adult education programs are linked at the operational and policy levels. Some major forms of operational linkage are:

Half of American community colleges provide adult education services.

One third of all adult education students in the United States are served in community colleges.

In a few states, the majority of all adult education students are served in community college programs.

Thus, community colleges are an important part of the delivery system already.

Provision.¹⁵ Almost half of American community colleges provide adult education services. In at least 12 states, virtually all colleges provide some adult education programs, and in some, they are the dominant providers.¹⁶

Collectively, colleges serve at least one third of all the students enrolled in adult education in the United States. These students make up an estimated 7 percent of all community college enrollments. In many states, the percentage is higher. In Illinois, for example, colleges serve 77 percent of all adult education students, and those students comprise 20 percent of credit enrollments.¹⁷ In Oregon, colleges serve more than 90 percent of all adult education students.

Providing adult education services is, therefore, part of the mission of a great many colleges, and adult education students comprise an important percentage of their student body. Of course, this is most likely to be true of colleges that pursue a comprehensive community service mission. Conversely, colleges are a large part of the adult education delivery system.

Even in localities where colleges are not service providers, there are many instances in which they support adult education programs by making classroom space and learning laboratories available, sharing faculty, offering staff training, and providing overhead support. Likewise, there are cases in which adult education programs support colleges by providing their facilities as off-campus locations for instruction.

Finally, there are a growing number of localities where colleges and adult education programs merge their resources in special programs that combine basic skills instruction with vocational training. For example, a growing number of colleges and adult education programs are joining forces to offer low-skilled, disadvantaged people opportunities in the health care field.¹⁸

Transitions. Most of the 3 million people served by adult education programs each year are economically disadvantaged, and most would undoubtedly benefit from postsecondary education. Adult education programs provide an opportunity to obtain the credentials most commonly required for admission to community colleges: a high school equivalency certificate or English language proficiency. And they provide a sequence of instruction in basic skills and other subjects aimed at allowing people at virtually any level of skills eventually to achieve this credential. They also can calibrate their instruction to ensure that their students have the basic skills required to succeed in college work.

Adult education programs have the potential to create a revolution in educational and economic opportunity for precisely those sectors of the American population that most need both types of opportunity.

Thus, adult education programs have the potential to serve as points of entry to postsecondary education for millions of people who would otherwise find this goal beyond their reach. Insofar as they accomplish this, and insofar as they can extend their reach to the tens of millions of low-skilled adults they cannot presently serve, adult education programs have the potential to create a revolution in educational and economic opportunity for precisely those sectors of the American population that most need both types of opportunity.

The role that adult education programs can play in preparing students for postsecondary transitions creates a natural partnership with community colleges. For adult education programs, community colleges offer their students a logical next step on the ladder of educational and economic opportunity. For colleges, adult education students are

among their students of the future, and adult education programs can play an important role in both recruiting those students and making sure that they are well prepared.

An increasing number of colleges, adult education programs, and policymakers have come to recognize the importance of adult education programs as pathways to postsecondary education. Preparing students for postsecondary transitions is one of the measures of accountability established for adult education programs by federal policy and by the policies of many states.

Moreover, an increasing number of states, colleges, and local adult education programs have instituted policies to facilitate transitions. These include special outreach/counseling initiatives, improving the alignment of curricula, assessment and placement policies, scholarships, and special “bridge” programs. These and other measures are discussed at length in Section III.

Public Policy. In a growing number of states, adult education and community colleges are linked at the public policy level, and those ties are becoming increasingly close.

One important form of policy linkage is governance. In 13 states, postsecondary education authorities (largely community college boards) administer adult education, and in three of these states they have been vested with this responsibility over the past four years.¹⁹ In some of these states, joint administration appears to have led to substantial improvements in both adult education service and in the link between adult education and colleges.²⁰

But these are not the only states with high-quality adult education systems or close linkages. As noted above, both colleges and adult education programs operate within the framework of federal, state, and local policies. These policies identify missions and priorities for service. They also establish administrative procedures, criteria for admission, funding levels, enrollment levels, staffing, accountability measures, and a host of other parameters for service. In some cases, public policy at these various levels reinforces (or even demands) close partnership between colleges and adult education. In other cases, the opportunity to promote partnerships is foregone.

A key to establishing stronger links between community colleges and adult education – and transition pathways between them – is whether these goals are explicitly recognized in public policy and related planning and funding.

The key distinction with regard to public policy is not whether adult education is under community college governance, or even whether it is provided by community colleges. It is whether obtaining the maximum benefits from links at the level of provision and transitions are a priority for public policy. Implementing this priority makes it necessary to look closely at virtually all aspects of the policies governing both systems to find areas of actual or potential alignment. Some states (such as Oregon and Illinois) have implemented joint planning and budgeting procedures that link adult education and colleges. In these and some other states, such as Kentucky and Massachusetts, explicit policies define the relationship between the two systems in considerable detail.²¹

Although policy tools cannot guarantee excellence in any area of education, they can create an environment in which excellence is more or less difficult to achieve. A growing number of states and the federal government are at least beginning to link adult education and community colleges more closely at the policy level.

E. THE IMPORTANCE OF LINKAGE

Why are these operational and policy linkages so important? Because they are one of the key ways the nation can respond to three important challenges to the prospects for economic and educational opportunity for millions of Americans:

Workforce Demands. The first challenge is the dramatic increase in educational requirements generated by the high technology, global economy. For decades, national labor statistics have documented the fact that postsecondary academic or vocational education is required for most jobs that pay a decent wage. In a global economy, workers who lack postsecondary academic or vocational credentials are increasingly relegated to low paying, dead-end jobs. And the nation is deprived of the high-skilled, flexible workforce it needs for global competition. Although high school or high school equivalency diplomas are of great value in boosting earnings potential, they are no longer enough to ensure a middle class standard of living, secure employment, and opportunities for advancement.²²

There are not enough young people in the educational “pipeline” to fill the nation’s workforce needs in the decades to come. Among the adults on whom our effort must focus are the 30 to 50 million with low basic skills.

To mount an adequate response to this trend, the nation must invest in upgrading all aspects of its education and training systems. And, as part of this effort, it must place a high priority on expanding the opportunities for adults to upgrade their education through the postsecondary level. The reason is simple: there are not enough young people in the educational “pipeline” to fill the nation’s workforce needs in the decades to come.²³ And among the adults on whom the effort must focus are the 30 to 50 million with low basic skills. They have neither the skills required by a postindustrial economy nor the educational attainments required for postsecondary education. Indeed, an important body of research suggests that the basic skills required for college entry and those required for success in the workforce are very much the same.²⁴ Adults who lack these skills comprise too large a percentage of our workforce to be neglected.²⁵ Unless the United States provides them with an opportunity to upgrade their skills and creates pathways to postsecondary opportunities, national workforce demands will not be met for the foreseeable future.

To respond to the challenges posed by this population, adult education programs and colleges must work in tandem. Although high school credentials are not, by themselves, enough to respond to present and emerging workforce demands, those credentials

are prerequisites for access to postsecondary education. Colleges need adult education programs to produce well-qualified students with high school credentials. Adult education programs need the opportunities provided by colleges to help their students take the next step up the ladder of opportunity. And the nation needs both systems to collaborate in helping students make transitions to postsecondary opportunities.

Underprepared Students. A major barrier to meeting workforce demands is the problem of underprepared students. By best estimates, as many as half of the people who seek to enroll in credit courses at community colleges each year are not academically qualified to enter credit programs, whether or not they have high school credentials.²⁶ A recent report by American

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College Testing states that: “The percentage of ACT-tested high school graduates who met or exceeded all three college readiness benchmarks [in English, mathematics, and science] is alarming – a mere 22 percent of the 1.2 million students tested in 2004.²⁷ Research by ACT indicates that the “college readiness” of high school graduates has not increased significantly in recent years, and that students who are less well prepared are considerably less likely than well-prepared students to complete college programs.²⁸

Academically unqualified high school graduates and college applicants commonly have deficient skills in reading, writing, and math. Virtually all colleges operate developmental education programs aimed at improving the skills of these students. These are the same basic skills that form the core of adult education programs. And there is a large gray area in which students might be profitably served by either type of program.

Both adult and developmental education programs can help underprepared students obtain access to postsecondary education, and in some cases adult education programs can provide this help at a lower cost and in a more flexible way. Finding the most effective way to coordinate adult and developmental education is manifestly in the interests of colleges, adult education programs, and students.

Demographic Change. Increased immigration from all parts of the world provides a major opportunity and a major challenge to meeting national workforce needs. It is estimated that, without immigrants, the size of America’s workforce will be static or declining in the years to come.²⁹ America needs the human capital that immigrants provide. But because many immigrants lack adequate English language and literacy skills they find it difficult to access the

education and training systems that would allow them to achieve their full potential as workers, community members, and citizens.

Large numbers of immigrants turn to adult education programs and to community colleges for ESL instruction and other educational services. ESL students now comprise more than 42 percent of adult education enrollments nationwide, and they comprise the vast majority of enrollments in many states.³⁰ There are long waiting lists for adult education ESL service in many areas. It is estimated that immigrants comprise 25 percent of community college enrollments nationwide, and many colleges have large ESL departments.³¹

Colleges and adult education programs must work in tandem to meet this challenge. In areas with large immigrant populations, adult education programs usually provide English language and literacy services to immigrants at the lower end of the skills continuum. In those same areas, colleges usually offer preacademic ESL and pathways to academic and vocational programs. A great many immigrant students require both types of service at different points in their educational careers; some require both lower-level and advanced instructional components at the same time. To respond adequately to the demographic changes that are reshaping the American workforce, the ESL and related services of adult education programs and colleges need to be linked.

F. THE NATIONAL OPPORTUNITY SYSTEM

To meet these and other major economic and social challenges facing the United States, the nation urgently needs a National Opportunity System that allows all Americans to obtain the knowledge and skills they require. At present, we have a wide range of education and training systems, but we lack an overall opportunity system that knits them together. We need seamless pathways of opportunity that will allow individuals to progress up the hierarchy of education and training as quickly as possible. A growing number of education leaders and leadership groups are rising to this challenge in efforts to create stronger links between K-12 and postsecondary education. For the demographic reasons mentioned above, the National Opportunity System must also place a high priority on adults, and it cannot be restricted to native-born adults.

One important requirement for building an opportunity system must be to strengthen the links between community colleges and adult education programs. Strengthening these links is the functional equivalent of efforts to create closer ties between K-12 and higher education. The two efforts must be pursued in tandem if we are to develop the National Opportunity System our nation requires.

At present, we have a wide range of education and training systems, but we lack an overall opportunity system that knits them together. We need seamless pathways of opportunity that will allow individuals to progress up the hierarchy of education and training as quickly as possible.

Because they are already closely associated at the levels of provision, transitions, and policy, adult education programs and community colleges are not separate service systems, as is often believed. Rather, they are closely related components of the same educational and economic opportunity system. From the community college perspective, adult education can be regarded as the first enrollment in that system. From the adult education perspective, entering community college can be seen as the logical next step for many students.

The operational and policy links between colleges and adult education programs provide mechanisms for the two to collaborate in meeting the national challenges posed by workforce demands, underprepared students, and demographic change. In fact, it is hard to see how either system can adequately address those challenges unless those linkages are strong.

Unless adult education programs do a good job of preparing an increasing number of low-skilled adults with the skills and credentials required for college entry, colleges will be serving only a fraction of the population in need of postsecondary education. Unless colleges work with adult education programs to create smooth paths for transition, even the best-prepared students will have a hard time navigating the opportunity system. And, unless policymakers at the institutional, state, and national levels support linkages between colleges and adult education programs, both systems will fall far short of their potential as gateways to opportunity.

Whether or not they are adult education providers, colleges have a responsibility to invest in creating high-quality adult education systems and mechanisms for transition. For provider colleges, adult education students are part of their student body, and the success of these students, both in adult education and in their subsequent educational experiences, is their responsibility. Adult education students deserve the best instruction and the greatest opportunities colleges can devise, just as students in other programs do. For colleges that are not providers, adult education students are among their students of the future, and they deserve a chance to succeed in postsecondary education. Likewise, whether or not they fall under the same systems of management and governance, adult education programs have a responsibility to join forces with colleges in expanding the opportunities to obtain postsecondary education for the tens of millions of Americans with low basic skills.

Even colleges and adult educators that lack this larger vision should recognize that strengthening linkages is in their self-interest. Students who are better prepared through adult education will cut down on the need for developmental programs and the costs associated with them. Sharing faculty, facilities, and expertise can be cost effective in many situations. Increasingly, policymakers are judging both adult education programs and colleges by the success of their students. Collaborative efforts can help improve the performance of both systems.

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By going forward together as representatives of a unified mission, colleges and adult educators will both be broadening their base of support.

Finally, in most states (and nationwide) colleges and adult education systems have somewhat different sources of political support. And the relative strength of those sources in providing policy support and funding tends to change over time. By going forward together as representatives of a unified mission, colleges and adult educators will both be broadening their base of support.

For both systems, and for the nation as a whole, the goal must be to provide seamless pathways of educational and economic progress for adult Americans. This is an essential component of creating a true National Opportunity System, and it is a goal that can be achieved. In some states and communities, it is already being achieved, at least in part. In national leadership states and institutions, the interdependence of colleges and adult education programs has been recognized. Adult education students are regarded as potential college students, and adult education resources are used to help colleges solve the problems of underprepared students, immigrants, and outreach. State and institutional policies promote, support, and often require collaboration.

The example of these leaders demonstrates that the measures required to create a National Opportunity System for adults are neither highly complicated nor vastly expensive. Building that system must be a high priority for all colleges, for all adult education providers outside colleges, and for policymakers at the state and national levels.

G. POTENTIAL AND REALITY

Regrettably, in most parts of the United States, the linkage between colleges and adult education programs falls far short of its potential. Too often, colleges that administer adult education programs regard those programs as peripheral to their major missions. Adult education faculty,

students, curricula, and facilities are often poorly integrated into the mainstream campus life. Top-level managers rarely establish the procedures or invest the resources to ensure that their adult education programs are of the highest caliber. Colleges that are not providers seldom reach out to understand, support, or form close working relations with adult education providers in their communities.

There are no adequate statistics on the number of adult education students who make transitions to postsecondary education. But the statistics that are available indicate that transition rates are distressingly low.

There are no adequate statistics on the number of adult education students who make transitions to postsecondary education. But the statistics that are available indicate that transition rates are distressingly low. Although an increasing number of colleges and adult education programs are instituting measures to increase transitions, most of these are in the pilot phase, and many are supported by soft money.

Remarkably, many students who graduate from GED or other high school equivalency programs managed by colleges lack the basic skills required to enroll in credit programs at those same colleges.³²

At most colleges, adult education and developmental education programs are poorly articulated and offer little support to each other. Likewise, the pathways between ESL programs offered by adult education faculty and precollegiate service to language minorities are often unclear. It is not unusual to visit colleges where there is little or no contact between faculty members and administrators working in adult and developmental education or

in credit and noncredit ESL. Not only is there often a lack of joint planning between these services, but also staff members often have little information about what their counterparts do and how they do it.

In some states, adult education is a fairly high funding priority and other policies are designed to ensure high-quality service – such as policies that establish staff training procedures, improve facilities, and set up accountability systems. This has long been the case in Oregon, where adult education is under postsecondary governance at the state level, and in Massachusetts, where it is under the governance of the state’s elementary and secondary authority.³³ The states that have recently placed adult education under postsecondary governance have done so in large part to give that service higher priority status, and they have had some success in achieving this goal.³⁴ Adult education is also a priority in states with other governance arrangements.

But regardless of governance, the links between adult education and community colleges fall short of their full potential in virtually all states. Although some states have addressed this issue by funding mechanisms, managerial arrangements, and regulations, no state has yet developed a policy structure that fully responds to the imperatives for linkage.

In short, the linkage between community colleges and adult education programs has great potential to strengthen the nation's system of economic and educational opportunity, and to benefit colleges, adult education programs, students, and the nation as a whole. But the goal of a true National Opportunity System for adults has not been realized, either in practice or in policy.

It should not be prohibitively expensive to strengthen adult education provision, establish clearer pathways of transition, and forge closer partnerships between college developmental education and ESL programs and their adult education counterparts. But neither colleges nor adult education programs have much spare funding to bring to the table.

H. PRIORITIES

How can this be? At bottom, the problem is that the old paradigm of regarding colleges and adult education programs as separate educational systems has been hard to break. As a result, forging stronger links has simply not been a high priority for most college leaders, adult educators, or policymakers at any level of government. For the most part, their efforts are devoted to supporting colleges and adult education programs as separate enterprises, rather than to strengthening the links between them.

This is not just a problem of myopia. It is also a problem of resources. Adult education programs and colleges operate under tight budgets. It is rare for either to have substantial uncommitted funds. And when spare funding is available, it is understandable that they invest it in improving their traditional services. It should not be prohibitively expensive to strengthen adult education provision, establish clearer pathways of transition, and forge closer partnerships between college developmental education and ESL programs and their adult education counterparts. But neither colleges nor adult education programs have much spare funding to bring to the table. Nor do their leaders have much time or personal capital for initiatives that reach beyond what they see as their core missions.

Funding streams can also drive a wedge between adult education and colleges. Adult education in the United States is grossly underfunded by almost any measure. Not only are programs unable to reach more than a small percentage of the population in need of service, but also their

average expenditure per student is very low. As noted, due to policy decisions, per capita expenditures on adult education are on the order of \$600 each year. In contrast, across all services, the average current fund expenditures of colleges are on the order of \$2,700 per student each year.³⁵ Given this financial disparity, it is hard for colleges to regard adult education as a service on a par with most of their other offerings. That is, it is hard for them to consider devoting equivalent staff, overhead, or managerial energies. There is a natural tendency for colleges to consider adult education as a peripheral service that must survive on its own resources.

Issues of corporate culture and academic turf also stand in the way of closer linkages. Community colleges are postsecondary institutions. Like four-year colleges and universities, their primary mission is to impart knowledge based on core academic disciplines. Regardless of their commitment to meeting student needs, the focus of most college faculty is on college work for students who are already proficient in basic skills. As a result, they have limited interest in or understanding of either adult or developmental education, although they may recognize the need for both. And they are reluctant to see their colleges establish either service as an institutional priority.

Turf issues may arise between adult and developmental education, and they may also arise between these programs and core academic departments. Who should teach writing to students with a ninth grade level of proficiency? Should it be taught in the adult education program, the tuition-bearing developmental education program, or the college's English department? On the face of it, all are plausible answers. But depending on which answer the college selects, faculty members may believe that their jobs or institutional prerogatives are at stake.

I. LEADERSHIP

Forging stronger links between colleges and adult education to create a National Opportunity System may make eminent sense in terms of the best interests of both systems, of their students, and of the general public. But it will not occur unless leaders at the program, institutional, and policy levels establish these linkages as a priority. Wherever adult education and community colleges work well together, this accomplishment can usually be attributed to the leadership of one or a few people at one or more of these levels.

These leaders have focused on the common commitment that colleges and adult education programs share: doing whatever it takes to help adults improve their educational and economic opportunities through flexible, open-door, student-centered service systems. In a remarkable number of cases, they have made significant progress to overcoming the barriers to stronger links, and they can demonstrate the results in terms of improved service and student achievements.

Leaders in different states and communities have adopted somewhat different strategies for linking colleges and adult education. There is probably no single formula for success. And because these strategies usually have multiple components, there is no way to be certain exactly which measures are most efficacious, in what combinations, or under what circumstances.

The following sections of this paper spell out some of the measures that states, colleges, and adult education leaders have taken to strengthen links in provision, transitions, and policy. They do not provide a recipe for success; they offer a range of possibilities that education leaders and policymakers should consider in building a National Opportunity System that responds to the educational and economic challenges our nation faces today.

II. PROVISION

A. DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE

Approximately half of America's community colleges provide adult education service as defined in this report. Collectively, they serve about one third of all adult education students in the nation. Although the nature of adult education service differs somewhat among colleges, the characteristics discussed below are most common.³⁶

Most colleges that provide adult education at all offer the full range of services required by their communities. This means they offer at least ABE and ASE service, and they offer ESL service if there is a sizable language minority population in their service areas.

Adult education is usually classified as a noncredit service. Even in those states (Illinois is an example) where it is classified as a credit service, students receive "institutional credit," rather than credit toward fulfilling academic program requirements, and they are not charged standard college tuition or fees.

- ◆ Adult education is usually administered by a separate unit within the college – and that unit is generally located in the college's continuing education or workforce development division.
- ◆ The administrative staff responsible for adult education is fairly small and usually consists of full-time employees.
- ◆ The teaching staff consists primarily of part-time employees.
- ◆ Most administrative overhead functions (such as financial accounting, payroll, and student record keeping) are performed by the college's central administrative office.
- ◆ Most students are served in classroom space provided by the college at its main campus locations – although it is common for colleges to provide both adult education and other services at off campus locations.
- ◆ In terms of student characteristics, pedagogy, assessment tools, program structure, student management, teacher qualifications, and other standard descriptors of adult education programs, most college programs strongly resemble those offered by other providers of comparable size in their states or communities. In fact, they strongly resemble programs of comparable size nationwide.

In some states and communities, however, adult education classes at colleges tend to be larger than those offered by other providers and they are more likely to be organized according to the model of traditional college courses, with set periods for enrollment and termination, rather than according to the open-entry, open-exit model found in many adult education programs.

At least some colleges provide adult education in most states, and in several states they serve a majority of adult education students. But they are virtually never the only adult education providers in their states, and they are often not the only providers in their communities. The

Most colleges partner with other providers. The most common form of partnership is to refer low-level learners to CBOs and/or to contract with CBOs to serve these learners.

“direct and equitable access” requirement of federal adult education policy attempts to ensure that federal grant funds are available on a competitive basis to all providers. With or without federal funding, even in those states where colleges are the dominant providers, school boards, CBOs, and others provide at least some adult education service.

Regardless of whether they are the dominant providers in their states or communities, most colleges partner with other providers. The most common form of partnership is to refer low-level learners to CBOs and/or to contract with CBOs to serve these learners. In some states and localities, colleges subcontract a large part of the adult education service for which they are responsible to other providers.

Based on the research evidence available, it appears that adult education programs managed by colleges are at least as likely to partner with and support the efforts of CBOs as are programs managed by other providers. In fact, it appears that they may be *more* likely to be supportive of CBOs and to form mutually beneficial relationships with them. Among the reasons for this may be the desire to reduce costs by minimizing college staff, efforts to mobilize local support systems for students, and the recognition that, as postsecondary institutions, colleges may be more effective if they focus on the more advanced levels of adult education instruction.

Like most other providers, community colleges usually gather data on student enrollment, attendance, and learning gains. They use this data primarily to meet the requirements of funding sources. They seldom use the data they have, or gather additional data, for program development or improvement purposes.

B. COLLEGES AND OTHER PROVIDERS

There is no evidence that, on average, the adult education service provided by colleges is either superior or inferior in quality to that offered by school boards, CBOs, workforce development agencies, or other providers.³⁷ This is the case whether quality of service is measured by program inputs or student achievements. Many high-quality adult education programs – as well as many programs that leave much to be desired – are offered by all types of providers. It should be recognized, however, that very little research has been done on the comparative performance of different types of adult education providers, either on a nationwide basis or within individual states.

But the average performance of colleges is probably less important than their potential. Given the fact that many colleges are providers, can they make a distinctive contribution to adult education service, and how can they do so? The answers to these questions are more likely to be helpful to colleges, adult educators, and policymakers than any scorecard of college performance by national measures, because those answers indicate what (if anything) colleges can do to improve their contribution to the National Opportunity System by providing adult education service.

Many high-quality adult education programs – as well as many programs that leave much to be desired – are offered by all types of providers. However, very little research has been done on the comparative performance of different types of adult education providers, either on a nationwide basis or within individual states.

In some sense, these questions have already been answered. All state adult education authorities have established standards for both the inputs and outputs of adult education programs, and those standards invariably apply to all providers. In some states, such as Massachusetts, those standards are highly prescriptive. In other states, they are less so. Although state standards may differ in specificity and content, most are reasonable guidelines for providers, and the differences among them are mostly legitimate differences within the adult education community. As a result, the answer to questions about what distinctive contribution colleges can make is that they can provide service according to the highest recognized professional standards, just as any other provider would. From this perspective, there is nothing superior about colleges as providers.

This answer is sound as far as it goes. But it does not go far enough to help anyone understand the full potential of the

community college role. Colleges differ from school systems and CBOs in many ways, just as these institutions differ from each other. *Do* certain special characteristics of colleges allow them to make a distinctive contribution to providing adult education service according to the highest professional standards? And, given their institutional structures, how can they best achieve this? These questions about colleges as providers have rarely been explored.

C. COLLEGE ROLES

In many states and localities, colleges do, in fact, make a distinctive contribution to the provision of adult education service. But that contribution differs according to state and local circumstances. The big lesson that a review of colleges as providers teaches is the importance of context. If colleges, other providers groups, and policymakers want to obtain the full benefits colleges can provide to adult education, they should join together to examine the present and future needs for this service in particular states or localities, map these against existing resources, and determine where and how either colleges or other institutions can help fill the gaps. This type of comprehensive strategic planning is seldom conducted. But it is essential to achieving the full potential of colleges and of other providers, and for establishing sound public policy. Oregon is an outstanding example of a state in which strategic planning among colleges, adult education programs, and other human service providers at both the state and local level has been institutionalized for many years. The Oregon case demonstrates how this type of planning can create win-win solutions for all institutions and services involved.³⁸

Among the distinctive contributions that colleges make in at least some states and communities are the following:

An adult focus. Colleges differ from school systems in that their focus is entirely on serving adult students. Moreover, an increasing number of colleges are multimission organizations accustomed to providing a variety of highly diverse services. In contrast, school systems have the primary mission of serving children, and most are struggling to meet the increased demands of state and federal mandates to improve student performance. In these circumstances, at least some school systems and state education officials believe that adult education students can be served best by colleges. Community college provision can contribute by unburdening local school officials.

In addition, colleges have counseling and social support systems geared to adults. In their developmental education and credit ESL programs, they have staff that specialize in remedial education for adults and that may be shared with their adult education units. Colleges as providers can make a distinctive contribution to adult education by bringing these resources to bear.

Finally, at least some educators believe that students with deficient basic skills may be more willing to attend programs at colleges, rather than at school sites associated with negative educational experiences in the past.

But the adult focus of colleges may not be required to provide high-quality adult education service. It depends on the circumstances. In many communities, adult education is a high priority of school systems; they provide exceptional service and have no shortage of students. Moreover, school systems establish the learning and curricular standards for elementary and secondary education in their states and communities. Particularly at a time when reviewing and upgrading standards for learning and high school graduation are a high priority nationwide, state and local school officials have undoubtedly devoted more time, attention, and expertise to determining what basic and applied skills students must obtain than have their community college counterparts. Furthermore, if school systems or other providers are in need of adult support services, they may be able to contract for these either from colleges or other agencies.

In short, the adult focus of colleges *may* make a distinctive contribution to providing adult education. But they will only make a contribution when they are prepared to place as high or a higher priority on this service as other providers do. Clearly, in many states and communities, education leaders and policymakers believe that the adult focus of community colleges does make them more supportive environments for adult education. The challenge for everyone concerned with this service is to determine where and when this is the case.

The state of Kentucky is instructive in this regard.³⁹ Although a majority of Kentucky's community colleges provide adult education services, many do not. The number of provider colleges has increased in recent years, largely due to the fact that some school systems have concluded that the community colleges in their areas can and will offer stronger support for the service than they are able to provide. In other localities, however, both colleges and school systems have concluded that there would be no value added by transferring programs to colleges.

Scale. Some community colleges are fairly large institutions, and many serve fairly large geographic areas. For both reasons, colleges may be able to contribute economies of scale to the provision of adult education.

Compared to many CBOs, colleges often have larger and better physical plants. They also have larger and more cost-effective overhead systems that can be used for financial management and fulfilling accountability requirements. This has proved to be important in some states and localities. Increased state and federal accountability standards have overburdened smaller CBOs and led them to seek alliances with colleges.⁴⁰

Compared to many school systems, colleges have larger service areas, and in some localities they are larger institutions. For example, Illinois has more than 100 local school systems and only 37 community colleges; Kentucky has more than 100 school systems and only 16 community colleges. This disproportionate institutional size and reach may mean that colleges can contribute economies of scale to the provision of adult education service. Rather than having several school systems create separate plans, management structures, and overhead systems to accommodate adult education in a particular region, it may be more cost effective for a single college to perform these functions.

The scope of college service areas may also create economies of scale in terms of state management of adult education. It may be easier for state officials to respond to the needs of a smaller number of providers, rather than a larger number. For example, it may be easier to provide technical assistance and staff training to a few dozen colleges than to a far larger number of school districts or CBOs.

But, as noted, the potential of colleges to achieve economies of scale depends on particular circumstances. The size of some adult education programs managed by school systems, as well as their overhead, student support systems, and physical plants, sometimes exceed those of community colleges. That is the case in Louisville, Kentucky.⁴¹ In a great many cities, community college service areas and those of school systems are virtually the same. Chicago is such an example. There, several community colleges and CBOs provide adult education within the boundaries of a single school system.⁴²

At the state level, interstate comparisons between the managerial capacity of community colleges and school systems are especially difficult to establish. For example, in virtually all states, the number of state level staff employed by boards of higher education is considerably smaller than the number employed by their K-12 equivalents. Moreover, the number of central office staff devoted to adult education by postsecondary authorities in states where community colleges play a major role in providing this service is often smaller than the number of central office adult education staff employed by K-12 authorities in states where colleges play a smaller role. In addition, colleges are often considerably more independent of state-level policy directives than are school systems.

The number of staff employed does not, of course, translate automatically into managerial effectiveness. In fact, if economies of scale are the goal, the opposite may be the case. Likewise, local autonomy can bring benefits. Because of the many differences among the states in size as well as in their educational management arrangements, adult education systems, the role of colleges, and other variables, it is difficult at best (and certainly beyond the scope of this report)

to define “comparable” states with regard to the managerial capacity and effectiveness of state authorities in adult education.

The potential of colleges to contribute economies of scale in some areas should be examined by educators and policymakers.

Despite these uncertainties, it is fair to say that the potential of colleges to contribute economies of scale in some areas should at least be examined by educators and policymakers. In some cases, colleges achieve this by serving as providers. But, in other cases, they help multiple providers achieve economies of scale by partnerships to which the college contributes overhead services, physical plant, staff training, or other common services, rather than through provision of instruction.

For example, in Massachusetts colleges play an important role as adult education providers, but a number also have a significant role in managing the state’s staff training system for all providers. In Western Kentucky, a regional university provides the focal point for collaborative efforts in the areas of program

development and staff training for school systems that provide adult education in ten counties. And, in Oregon, large economies of scale are achieved at both the state and institutional levels by sharing staff, facilities, administrative systems, and other resources for adult education and other services provided by both colleges and other human resource agencies.⁴³

Funding. With a national average expenditure of a few hundred dollars per student, adult education is grossly underfunded. Classifying adult education students as community college students may bring additional resources by tapping new funding streams for adult education.

In this regard, the fact that adult education and community colleges have access to separate funding streams can be an advantage. Colleges are primarily supported by postsecondary appropriations that are more generous on a per-student basis than is adult education funding. At most institutions, the bulk of income flows into the college’s general education fund, and individual colleges have considerable discretion as to what services this fund will support. This means that most colleges have access to much larger discretionary funds for program development and support than adult education programs.

As a result, if adult education is a priority within the college, presidents can, and sometimes do, subsidize it from their general fund. Many of the initiatives at colleges with adult education programs that are discussed in this report have been supported, at least in part, in this way. Moreover, at a time of cutbacks in community college funding, many presidents in Oregon,

Kentucky, and other states have reduced the impact on their adult education programs by allocating a greater portion of general fund resources to them.⁴⁴

In addition, the provision of adult education through colleges gives states the option of funding it by the same mechanism and at the same level that they fund other college services: by full-time equivalency (FTE) reimbursement systems. Usually the net result is per capita expenditures on adult education that greatly exceed national norms. This option will be discussed at length in Section IV.

Finally, colleges in most states do not receive as much local tax revenue on a per-student basis as school systems get, and in some states they receive none at all. In at least some states and localities, this local revenue is one of the most important sources of funding that school systems provide to adult education.

Voice. Over the last decade or more, community colleges have been growing in importance in many states. Because of their cost-effectiveness, diversity of offerings, open door policies and rising enrollments, they have built political capital with both policymakers and the general public. In contrast, after a period of high visibility in the 1980s and early 1990s, support for adult education has leveled off at the federal level and in most states. Community college leaders represent fairly large institutions serving approximately 10 million people each year, whereas adult education leaders represent comparatively small programs that serve only about a third as many people.

As a result, when community college leaders speak, they very often enjoy a larger and more receptive audience than adult educators do, although this is not always the case. At the very least, community college leaders usually have stronger links to a somewhat different audience. While both systems have close relations with policymakers responsible for workforce development and human services, community colleges are also members of the postsecondary education community. This community is comprised of a different set of agencies, leaders, and public supporters that are often concerned with different issues and that interact in different ways than their counterparts in workforce development and human services.

A major contribution that colleges make to adult education in at least some states and communities is giving the significance, needs, and concerns of adult educators a platform that would otherwise not be available to them – a different voice of support to different audiences that, in some cases, may be more influential.

In fact, the benefits of a community college voice for adult education have been apparent in a number of states and localities. In 2002, the support of community college leaders was key to achieving significant budget increases for adult education in Illinois. In 2004, college leaders

were instrumental in protecting adult education funding in Oregon. For the last four years, an alliance between the state’s adult education and community college leaders has been responsible for creating steadily increasing adult education budgets in Kentucky, and then for protecting those increases against threats imposed by state budget constraints.⁴⁵

Community colleges can and do make distinctive contributions to the provision of adult education through their expertise as adult-focused institutions, the economies of scale they may offer, tapping additional sources of financial support, and lending a stronger voice to adult education service where it is needed.

In most instances, community colleges have been more inclined to be a voice for adult education when they are providers – as all of them are in Oregon and Illinois. Colleges are most likely to understand and argue the case of adult learners if those learners are their students, and they can more convincingly do so. But this is not always the case. In Kentucky, only about half of the colleges provide adult education service. A large part of the college support for adult education in that state comes from state and local college leaders who believe that it is, or should be, part of a seamless system of educational opportunity.⁴⁶

Whether or not they are providers of service, therefore, community colleges can give strong support for adult education at the state level. This is also true within individual communities. Colleges can help publicize the importance of adult education simply by treating it as an important service on their own campuses – by demonstrating that it is an integral part of what they have to offer. They can build support for adult education by

forging alliances with local public agencies, such as workforce investment boards, and with private donors, such as individuals, companies, and charities represented on their own boards and advisory councils.

Further, college presidents can join state and local adult education agencies in lobbying for adult education before local school boards or state legislatures, by directing private supporters to CBOs, or by helping to build coalitions of adult education supporters, if they believe this service is an essential part of the opportunity system to which they are committed.

Of course, colleges do not always command a more attentive audience, nor does adult education always need their voice. In Massachusetts, for example, astute marketing of adult education, together with a reputation for excellence, has created a base of political support that rivals that of any community college. This has led to a net budget increase of 750 percent over five years.

The overall lesson to be drawn is that both community colleges and adult education need as many friends as they can get, and each can contribute different bases of support. By joining together in common cause for adult learners, they are likely to be stronger than they would be individually. The role of community colleges as providers makes this alliance for mutual benefit more likely.

In short, even though community colleges do not make all of these contributions, or make them in the same ways in every area, they can and do make distinctive contributions to the provision of adult education through their expertise as adult-focused institutions, the economies of scale they may offer, tapping additional sources of financial support, and lending a stronger voice to adult education service where it is needed.

Colleges have the potential to add value to the adult education service system because of some of their unique characteristics. It is, therefore, incumbent on education leaders and policymakers in particular states and localities to determine whether colleges are living up to their potential in this respect, and whether adult education service would be improved if they did.

To optimize their contribution as providers, colleges and the state agencies responsible for adult education should review at least the most fundamental measures of integration and consider the value these can provide to their adult education programs.

None of these contributions are costly in terms of dollar outlays. They simply require that colleges make the same commitments to adult education that they make to other adult services they provide or with which they are affiliated.

D. ADULT EDUCATION WITHIN THE COLLEGE

Whether or not they make a distinctive contribution to the overall adult education system in their states or communities, the colleges that provide this service have an obligation to serve their students as well as possible. To some extent, this is a matter of meeting the same standards for instruction that should guide adult education programs in any setting. But the institutional context of colleges differs from that of school systems, CBOs, or others. Thus, some of the measures required to ensure that colleges offer high-quality service may be different from or variations of those applicable to other providers.

A prerequisite for success in providing adult education in any setting is that it should receive the full measure of support that the responsible institution can provide. This does not always happen at

colleges. And a major reason is that adult education is too often treated as a marginal service rather than a mainstream offering. Too often adult education is poorly integrated into the life of the college.

Integration of service takes many different forms. To optimize their contribution as providers, colleges and the state agencies responsible for adult education should review at least the most fundamental measures of integration and consider the value these can provide to their adult education programs. To gauge how well they are doing, they should consider the following list of questions:⁴⁷

1. Is adult education identified in the mission statement of the college and in its governance policies? If so, is it identified as one of the central missions of the college by which the performance of college leaders will be evaluated?
2. How knowledgeable are the president and other top managers about the college's adult education program?
3. Is adult education listed in the college's catalogue and other publications along with other course offerings?
4. How is the adult education budget established? Is adult education expected to operate solely on resources determined by external funding sources? Or does the college attempt to determine what resources adult education needs and find the means to make them available?
5. Conversely, does the college attempt to relate its expectations for its adult education system (e.g., the number of students served and the personnel and facilities required to serve them well) to the goal of providing high quality service?
6. Is adult education provided primarily by the college itself, or is a large part of the service contracted out to other providers? If there is extensive contracting, does the college exercise the same level of quality control over its contractors that it would have over a program directly under its management? Has the college evaluated whether students would receive better service by direct college provision?
7. Do adult education program managers and staff have access to top college managers? How many steps removed are they from the college's president or instructional dean? Is their access comparable to that of the managers and faculty of an academic department or instructional division?
8. Do adult education faculty have the same academic status as other community college faculty? For example, is there roughly the same percentage of full-time and part-time faculty, and of tenured and nontenured faculty? Do adult education faculty have comparable contracts, compensation, rights, and responsibilities in faculty/college governance, and union membership (if applicable)?

9. Is faculty shared by adult education and other programs? How frequently do adult education faculty teach in credit or other noncredit programs, and how frequently do faculty from those programs teach adult education students?
10. What is the location and quality of instructional space, relative to comparable programs? For example, what portion of instruction is offered on campus, as contrasted to off campus? Are classrooms of equivalent quality? Are classrooms and faculty offices separate from those of other programs, or do adult education faculty and students have to use the same physical space as other faculty and students? Do adult education staff have equal priority in access to classroom space, AV, computer, and other instructional equipment?

All of these questions about integration boil down to one large question: Does the college treat its adult education programs and students the same way that it treats other programs and students at the college, or are they relegated to a second-class status? Insofar as adult education is accorded an equal status, it is more likely to provide high quality service.

11. Do adult education students have access to the same student services available to other students, such as guidance and counseling, assessments (including for learning disabilities), goal setting, financial aid, day care, transportation, and recreational and other social services? Equally important, are adult education students actively encouraged to use these services, and do they in fact use them?

12. Do student services staff understand the special needs of adult education students, and are they prepared to serve them – e.g., are they proficient in the relevant assessment tools, in helping adult education students set goals, and in pursuit of transition paths and mechanisms? Are student services staff held accountable for the quality of their service to adult education students?

13. Is the necessary technology available to adult education programs relative to other programs requiring comparable technology? Of special importance, do adult education students have access to learning labs on a basis comparable with other students, and are learning lab staff proficient in serving their special needs?

14. Does the college have an adult education staff development program? Do adult education faculty have the same access to professional development opportunities as other faculty have (e.g., funds for attending professional meetings, gaining additional education and training, research)?

15. Does the college market its adult education service, and if so how? How does this marketing differ from its marketing for other programs? Are the differences appropriate?

16. Does the college monitor the effectiveness of its adult education program? Is its oversight limited to accountability measures required by funding agencies, or has the college established internal standards, systems of program review, and oversight bodies? Are faculty and administrators not directly responsible for adult education part of the oversight process? Does the college make use of external evaluators on a regular or occasional basis?
17. Does the college have a program improvement system in place to act on information from this system or other sources? Are there program improvement interventions? If so, how frequent are they, and what form do they take? Is program development solely a responsibility of the adult education staff, or does it draw on the perspectives of faculty and staff from throughout the campus? Does the president participate in program development and review activities? Are independent experts retained to assist in program development? Does the college make use of the experience and expertise of other colleges?
18. Does the president allocate discretionary funds for program improvement initiatives?
19. Does the college have in place a student records system that allows it to monitor the status and progress of adult education students and their eventual transitions over long periods of time? How well integrated are the college's adult education data systems into those of other programs in the college, with the data systems of state agencies (including that of the state's adult education office), and with other relevant data systems (such as those at One Stop centers)?
20. Do adult education faculty mingle with other college faculty? Do adult education students mingle with other students? In short, how well is adult education socially integrated into the life of the college? Are other faculty members aware of the presence of an adult education program on their campus? How knowledgeable are they about it?

Ultimately, all of these questions about integration boil down to one large question: Does the college treat its adult education programs and students the same way that it treats other programs and students at the college, or are they relegated to a second-class status? Reason and available evidence suggest that insofar as adult education is accorded an equal status to other programs in these and other ways, it is more likely to provide high quality service.

E. RESPONSIBILITY

These are not unrealistic expectations. Each measure of integration listed above is drawn from the practices of some, or many, colleges. Like the contributions colleges can make to the overall adult education system, none of these measures are very expensive. The main requirement is that they establish adult education as a priority and apply sound managerial standards to it.

The leadership of provider colleges are key in this regard. They must see to it that adult education students are given the highest quality of service possible. Adult education students

are *their* students, and the obligation of the colleges toward them is no less than their obligation to the rest of their student body. College leaders can and must convene managers, faculty, and students from all parts of the college to determine whether they are living up to their responsibilities and to devise ways to fill any gaps. The indicators of integration listed above can serve as a starting point for this dialogue.

But many colleges do not offer adult education services, and they are rarely the sole providers in their communities. Their obligation to their students of the present and their students of the future, thus, extends beyond their own campuses. College leaders can play an invaluable role by convening forums that involve other providers or by participating in meetings that are convened by others in the outside adult education community. The goal of all participants should be to define and negotiate the most appropriate role for each institution in serving adult learners and how the institutions can support one another.

The value that colleges, school systems, CBOs, libraries, workforce development agencies, and other institutions can add to the equation will differ from community to community. But every institution shares in the responsibility of determining how each partner can best make a distinctive contribution. Moreover, they are all responsible for developing ongoing mechanisms for collaboration that place highest priority on meeting the needs of students, instead of on institutional prerogatives.

III. TRANSITIONS

A. STUDENTS OF THE PRESENT

Whether or not they are providers of adult education services, community colleges play an important role in the transition of adult education students to postsecondary education. Their choice is not whether to play it, but whether to play it well – whether they wish to make a purposeful effort to expand the educational and economic opportunities of the three million people enrolled in adult education programs each year, and, indeed, whether and how to expand their service to reach into the presently unserved population.

The notion that adult education students are the students of the future at community colleges is not hypothetical. It is a fact.

Virtually all colleges play a role in postsecondary transitions because of their open admissions policies and low costs. Anyone with a high school diploma or equivalent can enroll in the credit programs of most community colleges. This includes the graduates of adult education GED or other high school equivalency programs and many immigrants with limited English proficiency who have benefited from the ESL instruction in adult education programs.⁴⁸ Because most

adult education students are economically disadvantaged, the comparatively low cost of community colleges means that both GED or other high school equivalency recipients and immigrants are likely to select these institutions as gateways to postsecondary education.

The notion that adult education students are the students of the future at community colleges is not hypothetical. It is a fact.

B. TRANSITION RATES

Remarkably, there are no reliable nationwide statistics on how many adult education students enroll in colleges each year. The U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education requires states to report on transitions, but this reporting system is inadequate in many ways.

The NRS requires states to report how many students (1) were enrolled in adult education in each program year, (2) expressed the goal of transition to postsecondary education or job training, and (3) made that transition. By this measure, the total number of students making transitions each year is extremely small – on the order of 47,000 nationwide.⁴⁹ NRS figures are, however, a poor basis for estimating transition rates for at least four major reasons:⁵⁰

- ◆ Some states lack the student record systems to report accurate numbers of students who make transitions. Most states use different data systems to record adult education and postsecondary enrollment, and systems for matching data are often difficult to implement. In many states, postsecondary transition rates are determined for NRS purposes by surveys of adult education students or reports by program managers. While both of these data collection methods can be reliable, some states and localities that use them do not meet NRS standards or other statistical tests to ensure validity.
- ◆ “Postsecondary education” and “job training,” can often be very different services. By lumping them together, NRS estimates leave unanswered the question of how many students make transitions to postsecondary programs.
- ◆ By limiting the reporting requirements to students who express transitions as a goal, NRS figures emphasize student-articulated goals beyond what current procedures and practices in many states appear able to support. Many programs admit that goals for a significant number of students are not recorded or that statements of goals are unreliable – in part because students are unsure of their goals. In addition, changes in student goals over time may not be reflected in student records. The important question in assessing the effectiveness of adult education as a gateway to further education is how many students actually make transitions, whether or not programs record this as their goal.
- ◆ Most states report to the NRS only transitions of students who attended adult education programs and then enrolled in further education in the same program year. Because of their personal responsibilities, adult students may not find it possible to enter college directly after obtaining a high school equivalency credential or completing ESL instruction. Also, the dates on which adult education program years end many not coincide with dates at which college semesters begin.

Recognizing these difficulties, a few states have conducted longitudinal studies of their adult education students. In Oregon, research indicates that the percentage of students ever enrolled in adult education who made transitions to postsecondary education over a period of ten years was approximately 15,000 – three times the annual rate reported by NRS figures. In Kentucky, data indicate that approximately one third of GED graduates enrolled in postsecondary programs over a five-year period.⁵¹

This research suggests that the number of adult education students who make transitions to postsecondary education is significantly larger than indicated by NRS reports. But a few state studies are not an adequate basis for projecting national trends.

The lack of reliable figures on the number of adult education students who make transitions to postsecondary education is troublesome, due to the fact that transitions can be a major source of educational and economic opportunity for these students (and, as will be discussed later, they can benefit the colleges as well). Colleges, adult educators, and policymakers at the state and federal levels should conduct the research required to generate reliable data. Unless they have a far more

detailed understanding of how effective adult education programs are in providing pathways to postsecondary education, and under what circumstances, they will be at a disadvantage in adjusting both policy and practice to improve those pathways.

Fortunately, there is a sufficient body of experience with increasing transitions to indicate the major directions that these three groups must pursue in the near term. However, improved data at the institutional, state, and national level is essential to refining these directions. Without improved data, there will be no way to know precisely how effective the measures to enhance transitions are and how they can be improved.

The potential for adult education to serve as a far more effective pathway to postsecondary education is real.

C. POTENTIAL

Whatever the number of students making transitions from adult education to colleges may be, all adult educators and community college authorities consulted agree that, based on their first-hand experience, it is far too small. Millions of adult learners who might benefit from postsecondary education do not make the transition. The linkage between community colleges and adult education programs by transitions is real, but its potential is a long way from being realized.

This problem can and must be solved. In recent years, a growing number of states and institutions have implemented programs and policies to increase transitions. The approaches adopted differ somewhat among states and localities. The remarkable thing is that almost all of these approaches appear to have achieved some degree of success – sometimes individually, and sometimes in combination with each other. According to the institutions that have adopted them, there are ways to increase transitions, and in some cases, to increase them significantly.

The success of these approaches demonstrates that the potential for adult education to serve as a far more effective pathway to postsecondary education is real. Based on these experiences, there appears to be an untapped pool of postsecondary students in adult education programs. Providing them with further educational opportunities is an achievable goal. The difficulty is that there are few policies and programs of this sort, and they serve too few people.

To increase transitions using the tools of adult education, the barriers to transitions must be understood. Broadly speaking, they take two forms: (1) the personal barriers adult education students face in aspiring to and attending postsecondary programs, and (2) inadequate curricular articulation between adult and postsecondary education.

D. PERSONAL BARRIERS

Few colleges feel the need to recruit students of any kind into their mainstream academic or vocational programs, and even fewer make an effort to recruit adult education students. Likewise, few adult education programs have adopted measures specifically designed to prepare their students for college. Increasingly, both are coming to recognize that a high school equivalency certificate or completion of an ESL program by itself is not enough to bring most adult education students to the college door. There are a number of reasons. Among them are:⁵²

- ◆ Many students (and many adult education programs) tend to view obtaining a GED or other high school equivalency certificate or improving functional English language skills as sufficient to meet their goals. They do not see these achievements as stepping stones to greater educational and economic opportunity.
- ◆ Low-income adults and immigrants too often consider college an unrealistic, or unnecessary goal. In many cases, members of their families and immediate peer groups have not gone on to postsecondary education, and they have limited awareness of the opportunities further education can provide or the means of obtaining it.
- ◆ The cost of college can also be intimidating for low-income adults and immigrants who have other responsibilities, as can college admissions procedures and the structured routines of college life (including the fact that college classes may be scheduled at inconvenient times).
- ◆ Many adult students need social support systems to deal with issues such as day care and transportation if they are to attend college, just as they need these support systems to attend adult education programs.

An increasing number of community colleges, adult education programs, or both in conjunction, have developed strategies to address these barriers to transitions.⁵³ At the most elementary level, the strategies consist of various awareness building activities – e.g., providing information to adult education students about postsecondary education benefits (especially those in ASE or upper-level ESL programs), familiarizing them with the college environment, offering financial aid information, and encouraging students to make college a goal.

In some adult education programs, these activities are part of the initial orientation of all students. In others, they are separate program components. Often they consist of little more than remarks by teachers, distribution of materials, and referring interested students to college admissions offices. In other instances, awareness-building activities are structured modules that include meeting with college staff, campus tours, and career mapping exercises. It is difficult to know the success of these activities in isolation from the other strategies discussed, because they

are usually offered together. But staff involved with awareness-building projects believe that they are important components of increasing transition rates.

In addition, the staff of colleges that provide adult education programs commonly believe that the location of these programs on campus helps build awareness of postsecondary opportunities – particularly if the programs are well integrated into the life of the college. College staff often believe that if adult education students are treated like other college students, they will become familiar and comfortable with college life. Having participated in a postsecondary institution as adult education students, they may find it easier to imagine taking the next step of enrolling in an academic or vocational program. Students may see transitions as no more difficult than filling out a different admissions form and attending different classes. Staff at provider colleges often believe that, at the very least, the proximity and common management of adult education programs can make it logistically easier to devise and conduct awareness-building activities (e.g., counseling and interaction with faculty) that can help students overcome the personal barriers to transitions.

Some colleges take awareness building a step farther by actively recruiting adult education students. This often involves scholarships and/or waiving all or some portion of tuition for high-achieving GED or other high school equivalency recipients, as well as outreach by college counseling staff. Colleges that offer scholarships and tuition waivers think that they are helpful in recruitment when combined with other awareness-building and support activities.

Bridge Programs. A growing number of colleges and adult education programs have teamed up to create special transition programs that include elements of awareness building and recruitment with other services. In some areas, these are called bridge programs.⁵⁴ Usually, they combine awareness and recruitment with other components such as:

- ◆ Coaching in independent study skills, time management, note taking, using research tools, and other soft skills required for college;
- ◆ Various forms of career planning aimed at making the benefits of college concrete for students and at focusing them on specific, achievable goals, rather than just on the general goal of “going to college”;
- ◆ Instruction in college-level writing and levels of math not covered by most ASE or ESL programs;
- ◆ Case management to help students obtain support services, and individualized help with admissions procedures and obtaining financial aid;

- ◆ Organizing students into peer cohorts or study groups to help create the interpersonal support they may otherwise be lacking.

Some bridge programs are made up of fairly short-duration, high-intensity modules. Others are organized more along the lines of a full-semester college course. Some are managed primarily by adult education programs, others by colleges, and still others by other community agencies. Given their content, they invariably involve collaboration between colleges and adult education faculty, to define their contents and to provide various forms of assistance.

In addition, partnerships with CBOs often are an important part of bridge and other programs to help students overcome personal barriers to enrollment. CBOs frequently provide essential individualized coaching, tutoring in hard and soft skills, and troubleshooting with regard to needed support services. They often have more expertise than other institutions in these forms of assistance, and they can provide that help in a more cost effective way.

Whatever their structure or specific content, most bridge programs report high rates of student retention and transition to college, as high as 70-80 percent retention and transition in many programs. For the students enrolled, these programs clearly succeed in facilitating transitions.

Most adult education and community college leaders familiar with bridge programs believe that they can and should continue to grow to the point where they become mainstream offerings – a step beyond ASE and ESL programs in the educational sequence that leads to college.

Unfortunately, most bridge programs are small and fairly new. For example, in Massachusetts – where highly developed bridge programs for GED graduates are supported by the state’s adult education program and by the private Nellie Mae Foundation – the total enrollment in them was about 500 students in 2003.⁵⁵ Similar bridge programs for ESL students also report enrollments of a few hundred each.⁵⁶

The success of bridge programs may, therefore, result from self-selection; that is, the students who enroll may have an unusually high level of motivation. As a result, whether or not bridge programs can be expanded to serve large numbers of students remains an open question. However, most adult education and community college leaders familiar with these programs believe that they can and should continue to grow to the point where they become mainstream offerings – a step beyond ASE and ESL programs in the educational sequence that leads to college.

In addition, at least some colleges have concluded that the services offered by bridge programs would be valuable in improving the retention of underprepared students beyond

those who have participated in adult education programs – for example, high school graduates who are not fully prepared for college life. “College prep” courses or seminars have been offered for many years in various forms at many colleges, but the multiple services of bridge programs often go beyond standard college prep offerings.

As a result, bridge programs may well become institutionalized at colleges to serve students who enter the college door from multiple directions as part of the growing effort to help underprepared students. And adult education students may be among the beneficiaries of this service expansion.

Regardless of the form they take in the future, the success to date of various forms of awareness, recruitment, and bridge programs provide evidence that transition rates of adult education students can be substantially increased by addressing personal barriers to entering postsecondary education.

E. ARTICULATION

Adult education students also face barriers created by the inadequate articulation between adult education and postsecondary curricula. Simply stated, colleges believe that students who complete adult education programs often do not have a high enough level of basic skills or specialized preacademic skills to succeed in credit-level programs. The more successful bridge programs mentioned above recognize this and deal with it by including instruction in soft skills required for college work as well as instruction in academic skills not usually provided by adult education programs. But the problem of curricular articulation is more extensive than most bridge programs address.

These problems arise primarily because of a lack of curricular articulation between adult education programs and colleges. Until articulation problems are overcome, the links between the two systems with regard to transitions will be far from complete, and students will face unnecessary challenges in navigating between them.

Articulation problems are most clearly demonstrated by the extent of the gap between the basic skills of GED or other high school equivalency recipients and the skills most colleges believe are required to succeed in academic and vocational programs. It has been estimated that the average GED completer has skills in reading, writing, and math at about the tenth grade level, whereas college credit courses require skills at the twelfth grade level or above.⁵⁷ This is no indictment of the GED. The average high school graduate also has inadequate basic skills for college work. This skills deficit is part of the problem of underprepared students that greatly troubles community college leaders and that threatens the national educational and economic opportunity system.

The situation in ESL programs is somewhat different. ESL students are not a homogeneous group. Some of them have fairly high levels of education in their native countries and need only instruction in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending English. Most of these students have little difficulty making transitions. The majority of ESL students, however, have low educational levels as well as inadequate English language skills. They must obtain both English language proficiency and basic skills.⁵⁸

ESL programs face the challenge of finding an instructional sequence to help advance both types of ESL students. Nationwide, the majority of ESL students served by adult education programs are at the lower levels of English language and literacy ability. In most programs, they are served primarily by instruction that focuses on language and literacy life skills that will help them deal with the immediate practical problems of functioning in American society and on the job. Ultimately, some of these students acquire English- or Spanish- language GEDs or other high school equivalency certificates, but the alignment of their academic skills with those required for college level work may be as imprecise as is the alignment of the skills of other GED recipients. This problem is compounded by the fact that their language skills may not be adequate to succeed in postsecondary education.

The skills deficits of ABE/GED and ESL students are not only barriers to succeeding in college, they are also barriers to college entry. Most colleges use standardized tests to assess the reading, writing, and math skills of incoming students who they believe may not have the skills required to succeed in credit programs.⁵⁹ Among the most common are the COMPASS and ASSET tests produced by the American College Placement Service, and the ACCUPLACER test produced by the Educational Testing Service. For students whose native language is not English, colleges often supplement these tests with specialized English proficiency assessments and faculty evaluations. Students who fail to achieve certain cut scores by any of these measures are referred to developmental education programs until they achieve proficiencies that will allow them to undertake credit work. While cut scores vary among institutions, and among programs within them, they are usually above the proficiency levels of a great many high school equivalency graduates or students at the upper levels of ESL provided by adult education programs.⁶⁰

This is a perplexing problem for adult education programs. Most ABE/ASE programs believe that the purpose of their service is to prepare students to pass the GED or other high school equivalency exam. The measures they use to determine student progress toward readiness to take the exam are largely assessment tools developed specifically for adult education. Of these, by far the most commonly used are the TABE, developed by McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). In fact, these and other tests designed for adult learners are used to guide instruction throughout the adult education sequence: to determine how far students have progressed through ABE (and hence what instruction they

need), when they are ready for high school level instruction, and what instruction they need in basic skills to reach the high school level.

ESL programs often use these same assessment systems, as well as standardized tests of English language ability (such as the BEST, developed by the Center for Applied Linguistics, and the

CASAS).⁶¹ Because many adult education ESL programs believe the available standardized tests are not adequate to identify student learning needs, tests developed by ESL faculty are also commonly used to guide instruction and determine program completion.

Skills deficits of ABE/ GED and ESL students are barriers to college entry and success. Most adult education programs believe that the purpose of their service is to prepare students to pass the GED or other high school equivalency exam. Yet the experience of many programs indicates that they do not necessarily prepare many students for transition to college credit programs. Colleges and adult education programs need to expand the goals of adult secondary education (ASE) beyond their traditional boundaries.

In practice, adult education programs and students are not guided solely by these assessment markers. Most adult educators believe that a single standardized measure is not adequate for program planning or outlining an individual student's education plan. Faculty use student learning needs inventories, learning style assessments, and formal and informal skill assessments – both teacher-made and commercial. These measures augment and support standardized assessment systems. In addition, many state adult education systems have developed ABE/ESL curricular frameworks that detail the universe of skills and abilities they believe students must acquire to succeed. The content and implementation of these frameworks differ from state to state. Moreover, the National Institute for Literacy has managed a leadership effort (Equipped for the Future) to define the skills adult learners need, and how they can be acquired.⁶²

These comprehensive approaches to assessment and learning goals are essential to the effective delivery of adult education service, but their implementation requires considerable professional judgment on the part of faculty and program managers. Insofar as most adult education programs are guided by objective measures of their students' skills, the assessment systems mentioned above are the measures they use. Adult educators may feel that they have completed their job if they guide

students through a sequence of instruction monitored by these measures, as well as other assessment procedures and curricular standards. But the experience of many adult education programs indicates that they will not necessarily have prepared many students for transition to college credit programs. Although students may have succeeded in obtaining progressively higher levels of skills by adult education measures, they are often surprised to find that the proficiencies they can demonstrate by those measures are not recognized as sufficient for credit enrollment in colleges. This can be disappointing to students, and it can be frustrating to adult education program managers. It can also be a barrier to smooth transitions to postsecondary education.

For adult education and colleges to increase the number of students who can make transitions to postsecondary education, adult educators must redefine their job to include providing students with the opportunity to gain the skills required for college work. In essence, this involves expanding the goals of adult secondary education (ASE) beyond their traditional boundaries. As noted, the goal of ASE is often understood to be passing the GED or some other high school equivalency test. To facilitate transitions, this goal must be extended and restated as “to provide students who aspire to postsecondary education with the skills they need to succeed in credit programs.” Likewise, the goal of upper-level ESL instruction provided by adult education programs is often defined in terms of progressively greater language ability for a wide range of purposes – such as citizenship, employment, and consumer protection. To facilitate transitions, adult education ESL programs must ensure that their services include meeting the language and literacy goals of students who may seek college entry.

F. THE CURRICULAR CONTINUUM

Ultimately, lack of articulation between adult education and college programs comes from viewing adult and postsecondary education as separate service systems. The result has been a curricular disconnect that makes it hard for many students to move directly from adult education to postsecondary programs.

A growing number of adult educators and colleges are taking steps to address this problem. Although their specific approaches differ, they all approximate steps toward the same model: a clear and seamless curricular continuum from adult education through postsecondary education, supported by assessment and placement systems that will facilitate student progress. CAAL’s task force identified six major steps that should be taken to fully implement this model:

1. Colleges and adult educators should collaborate to specify the competencies required to progress through the adult education system, transition to academic and vocational programs, and succeed in those programs. That is, rather than assuming that existing

curricula, assessments, or placement measures reflect a progression of competencies required to advance up the educational hierarchy, they must reach beneath existing instructional systems to define what those competencies are. In this undertaking, the work of states and the federal government to establish curricular frameworks and learning standards for adult education can provide a valuable foundation.

A clear and seamless curricular continuum is needed from adult education through postsecondary education, supported by assessment and placement systems to facilitate student progress.

2. Colleges and adult educators should collaborate to develop seamless curricular sequences to ensure that each instructional step will give students the competencies they need for the next step, both within and between adult and postsecondary education and the world of work. For example, students who complete ABE sequences should be fully prepared for ASE instruction, and students who complete ASE sequences and wish to progress to college should be fully prepared with the competencies they need for that. There should be no surprises for adult education students when they walk in the college door.

3. Colleges and adult educators should adopt assessment systems that clearly reflect progress through the entirety of the curricular continuum. And those assessment systems should be understood and accepted by adult educators and colleges as measures of satisfactory competency attainment at each point on the continuum. That is, assessment systems should not be abstract markers of student achievement. They should

clearly indicate – to students and faculty – whether or not students have attained the competencies taught by the curriculum at each level. Assessments should support instruction by indicating whether students are ready to progress to the next level, both within and between adult education and credit studies.

4. Colleges and adult educators should adopt policies for placement in adult and postsecondary programs, and for transitions between them, that are based on the competencies students need to succeed at each instructional level (as measured by assessment systems that reflect those competencies). Importantly, colleges should adopt admissions policies by which students who have completed the adult education curriculum will automatically qualify for college entry, and the adult education curriculum should ensure that students who wish to pursue postsecondary education have the skills they need. If existing college placement procedures (such as screening tests) do not bring about this result, then either the procedures or the curricular continuum, or both, should be revised.
5. Colleges and adult educators should adopt instructional strategies that are best suited to moving students through the curricular continuum. They should consider (in terms of the educational levels, learning styles, and other characteristics of different types of students) when it is most effective to employ standard courses, programs, or levels of instruction, and when it is appropriate to use strategies such as self-paced instruction in learning

laboratories, targeted curricular modules, or individual tutoring. They should also consider how to mix these different instructional approaches to meet students' needs in the best way possible.

6. Colleges and adult educators should make certain that all aspects of this system are clearly understood by students, faculty, and administrators. The curricular continuum should be transparent. Students should understand the full range of competencies they must acquire to progress up the educational hierarchy and exactly what steps they must take to acquire those competencies. Faculty teaching at any level should understand the competencies students have acquired, which ones they need to acquire at that level, and the ultimate goals of the students and the curriculum. Administrators should make sure that students and faculty are fully informed and prepared, and that there are no arbitrary barriers to sequential progress throughout the system.

This model for articulation should be familiar to many educators and policymakers. Its basic logic is the same as that behind efforts to increase the postsecondary readiness of elementary and secondary students, as well as efforts by states and the federal government to establish the learning standards for adult education mentioned above.⁶³

Many of the fundamental challenges of building the National Opportunity System are essentially the same for adults as they are for children. It should not be surprising that a good number of the steps required to overcome those challenges are similar as well. The model for increasing curricular articulation between adult education and colleges applies to adult students using the same principles that have been widely discussed in other contexts. This does not diminish the model's importance. To build a true National Opportunity System, both adults and children must be better served by articulated curricula than they are today.

To adopt this model fully, colleges and adult educators would have to collaborate in reviewing and adjusting instructional goals and curricula. They would also have to recalibrate assessment and placement systems. In some cases, this may involve modifications to existing systems. In other cases, it may mean curricular overhauls and/or the adoption of new assessment and placement procedures.

Regardless of how colleges and adult educators proceed, the development of a seamless curricular continuum entails making explicit many assumptions about both systems that may have been implicit in the past. In any educational system, instructional goals, sequences of instruction, assessment, and placement measures tend to have developed organically over the years. The model of a curricular continuum challenges colleges and adult educators to examine how well each of these components meets students' needs for educational progress and how well the components support each other. It also challenges them to look across traditional institutional and programmatic boundaries – to view adult learning as a single process of increasingly greater achievement, and to craft systems that will support that process. In this sense, it is nothing more

or less than the curricular dimension of providing adult students with seamless pathways to opportunity.

G. STRENGTHENING THE INTERFACE

Few, if any, adult education programs or colleges have taken all of the steps required to build a seamless curricular continuum of the sort described above. The model is, however, valuable as a goal to which both institutions and policymakers should aspire. It is equally valuable because a growing number of colleges and adult education programs have adopted one or more of its components. For the most part, they have not focused on the entirety of the curricular continuum. They have focused instead on strengthening links between adult education and colleges at the point of interface between the two systems – the transition of ASE or upper-level ESL students to college enrollment. Their experience shows that the model of a curricular continuum is not an abstraction. It is possible to implement virtually all of its components, and each component appears to increase transition rates significantly.

The measures colleges and adult educators have taken to implement components of a curricular continuum include the following:

1. Administering college placement examinations to their ASE and upper-level ESL students, and expanding their ASE and ESL curricula to ensure that students who wish to pursue postsecondary education are prepared both to pass high school equivalency tests and meet the cut scores on those examinations.⁶⁴ This approach starts by determining what competencies are required for placement in college credit programs and then works backward to determine how upper-level adult education curricula can provide those competencies. Some programs that have adopted this approach upgrade curricula by setting higher expectations for the extent to which students master the skills taught by standard GED or other high school equivalency programs. For example, they encourage students to continue their ASE instruction beyond the point where they have achieved the minimum level of skills required to pass the GED exam. Using standard GED curricula, they work with students to achieve skill levels that meet the standards of both high school equivalency certification and college placement tests. Other programs collaborate with the academic faculty at community colleges to develop new curricula that meet college admission standards. For example, teams of adult education and academic faculty examine college textbooks and review college syllabi and examinations to define the skills that entering students should have. In fact, a few institutions report that they have standing committees of adult education, academic, and other faculty members to review issues of curricular alignment on an ongoing basis.

Collaborations between adult education and academic faculty to prepare upper-level adult education students for college placement tests can be very fruitful for both. Cut scores on these tests are often not as well considered as they should be. Collaborative work with adult educators should lead college faculty and admissions staff to reflect more closely on exactly what skills are required for credit programs and whether the placement exams adequately measure them.

2. Aligning assessment measures. Another approach to adapting adult education curricula based on assessment measures is to use the same measures to guide placement into all instructional program levels, including adult education, developmental education, and college credit programs, and to align these measures with a curricular continuum across the programs. Studies are in process in a number of states to align the CASAS competencies, content standards, and assessment system with adult education and college credit programs.⁶⁵ Kentucky state community college authorities have commissioned ACT to construct a crosswalk between TABE and COMPASS scores.⁶⁶ Colleges, therefore, have the option of using TABE scores rather than COMPASS scores for placement decisions, and some of them have exercised this in at least some programs. In fact, a number of college faculty previously unfamiliar with the TABE reportedly have come to prefer it as a better diagnostic tool of basic skills for purposes of college placement.

This approach to increasing articulation opens the door to developing curricular sequences within and between adult and postsecondary education that can be assessed by the same metric. Rather than serving as a barrier to transitions, the assessment system can help adult educators and college faculty form a common understanding of what competencies are and must be taught at different levels of the curricular continuum.

3. Instituting high-intensity and/or individualized “gap” programs. Rather than revising standard adult education curricula, an increasing number of institutions have opted to supplement them with specialized gap programs. These take various forms, but their common goals are to determine what competencies adult students need to master if they are to succeed in postsecondary education and to provide targeted, high-intensity instruction to help them master those competencies as quickly as possible.

For example, many students who fail to achieve the cut scores on college placement tests do so by only a few points on a standardized scale, and often in only one of the skill areas tested. Some colleges have developed short-term, high-intensity adult education programs to help students make up particular skills deficits so that they can pass these high-stakes exams on their second try.⁶⁷ Often these gap programs are highly individualized. They try to determine which skills each student must master and then help the student master them. They use instructional modules that can be adapted to individual needs, rather than a standard set curriculum. Many gap programs also include sessions on test-taking skills.

High-intensity instruction for adults with limited English proficiency has a long tradition in the programs that colleges and others have offered to foreign students who wish to attend American universities. Using these same techniques, some colleges have developed high-intensity gap programs of various durations as part of their ESL curricular sequence.⁶⁸ Upper-level ESL students or students who test into adult education at fairly high levels of English proficiency are referred to these programs if they want to pursue college work.

The aim of the programs is to ensure that students acquire the particular skills in English language and literacy needed to succeed in college – skills that are often not taught by

other components of ESL programs. Some of these ESL gap programs are of fairly short duration. Students can either progress quickly to college or repeat the program. Others are of longer duration but allow students to exit whenever they have obtained the necessary skill levels.

An increasing number of colleges and adult education programs have attempted to strengthen the curricular alignment between adult and postsecondary education by these and other measures. Although none of these initiatives incorporate all of the components of a seamless curricular continuum, they have proved to be highly successful in increasing transition rates. For example, some gap programs report that virtually all their students progress to postsecondary education, and programs that have aligned upper level adult education instruction more closely with college placement criteria report increased transition rates.

Most programs would probably benefit from a combination of both approaches. This is because even those that adapt their standard ASE and ESL offerings so that students can obtain skill levels required for college work cannot prevent students from seeking college entry before they have reached those levels. For example, ASE programs may provide instruction beyond the minimum levels required to pass high school equivalency exams. But some students will take those exams as soon as they have attained the minimum proficiency required and subsequently apply for college admission. In addition, many adults earn high school equivalency credentials or fairly high levels of English language proficiency without attending adult education programs. As a result, both curricular upgrading and gap programs of some kind are probably required to facilitate transitions for adult students.

H. INCREASING SYNERGY WITH DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION⁶⁹

The curricular linkage efforts discussed focus primarily on building bridges between adult education and college credit programs. A more promising way to strengthen linkages and increase transition rates may well be to focus on increasing the synergy between adult and developmental education. This is because adult and developmental education programs are similar in many ways. In essence, they provide the same service: upgrading the basic skills of adults. Because they share this same goal, and often achieve it in similar ways, they have much to gain by working more closely together. This would be a win-win situation for both, and it would increase the opportunities of adults to enter and succeed in community college credit programs.

Yet adult and developmental education programs usually operate as separate systems, even when both are offered by the same college. Strengthening the synergy between them can avoid duplication of service and facilitate transitions for large numbers of students.

One promising way to strengthen links and increase transition rates may well be to increase the synergy between adult and developmental education. This is because adult and developmental education programs are similar in many ways.

It can do this in two ways: by extending the mission of adult education programs to include many students now served by developmental education, and by assigning to developmental programs those students that adult education cannot effectively prepare for successful transitions.

Similarities and differences. Community colleges address the needs of underprepared students primarily through development education programs. Almost all colleges have such programs, and as many as half of entering students are placed in one or more developmental courses – an estimated one million students per year. Students are usually assigned to developmental programs if they fall below the cut scores for credit enrollment on college placement examinations. In addition, developmental education often includes credit ESL instruction. ESL students served by adult education programs, as well as other adults with limited English

proficiency who seek college entry, are often referred to this level of instruction on the basis of formal or informal assessments.⁷⁰ The students referred to “credit ESL” usually have fairly high levels of academic and English language skills, but their skill levels are not high enough to meet the standards colleges have established for entry into credit programs.

This means that many high school equivalency graduates or other former adult education students who apply to colleges are assigned to developmental courses as a way to help them make the transition to credit programs. From the perspective of students, developmental education may seem like a detour from their primary goal: enrollment in credit programs. From the perspective of educators, it helps students achieve that goal by increasing retention and program completion rates. In this regard, they are highly successful. Students who complete developmental education programs do as well as or better than students who did not need developmental education in their subsequent college careers.

Both adult and most developmental education programs focus on upgrading the same basic skills: reading, writing, and math. In addition, ESL programs, whether offered for credit or by adult education, focus on improving skills in speaking and comprehending English. But the two programs differ in several important respects:

- ◆ Developmental courses are usually organized in the same way as other college courses—on a semester basis with classes meeting with the same regularity for the same periods as

other courses. In contrast, adult education courses are often organized in a more flexible way. They allow for easier entry, variations in intensity and duration of instruction, and completion based on skills attainment.

- ◆ Developmental courses aim specifically to prepare students for credit programs, whereas adult education programs aim to improve basic skills across the full skills continuum.
- ◆ Developmental courses are usually provided for institutional credit. This means that developmental education students are regarded as credit students and must pay tuition, whereas adult education is offered free or at nominal cost.
- ◆ Different faculty usually teach adult and developmental programs, and the two programs usually are administered separately. In some cases, developmental education is a separate division in the college with a separate faculty; in other cases, developmental courses are administered by the math or English departments whose academic faculty does the teaching. In contrast, adult education within colleges is usually a program within the continuing education or workforce development units. It usually has its own faculty. Both credit and adult education ESL are sometimes provided by the same faculty within the same administrative unit, an ESL department or division. In other cases, these services are provided by different faculty in different departments or divisions.
- ◆ Adult education programs commonly use the TABE, CASAS, BEST or some other test to determine student progress and completion of various levels of instruction. Developmental education usually uses exams prepared by the faculty to determine course completion.

The gray area. Despite these differences in goals and administration, there is a significant overlap in the services that adult and developmental programs provide. Although developmental programs may teach basic skills at a higher level than most adult education programs do, they also provide instruction within the same range. Depending on the college, developmental programs may serve students with English and math scores as low as the seventh grade level – or at about the middle range of adult basic education (ABE) service. There is, thus, a gray area of unknown size in which both programs are providing instruction in the same skills to students at the same skill levels. The gray area at any given college would be between the lowest level of developmental instruction, and the highest level of adult education instruction (which is usually the level required to pass the GED examination – tenth grade or beyond). Either program might profitably serve students who fall into this gray area.

Students with limited English proficiency may also fall into a gray area. The level of English language skills taught in credit ESL programs differs significantly at different colleges. In part, this is because students with limited English proficiency may require instruction in multiple skills – in speaking, comprehending, reading, and writing English as well as in math and other academic skills. Individual students may have different levels of proficiency in each of these

skills. In some areas, they may require instruction that would fall within the standard range of adult education service; but in others, they may be prepared for higher-level courses.

The prevalence of these gray areas is illustrated by the imprecise methods used to refer students to developmental education. At some colleges, any student seeking enrollment who does not have a high school diploma or equivalent is automatically referred to developmental education (which may then refer them to adult education providers). The developmental program in these cases effectively manages the college's ASE program.

At many colleges, the program to which underprepared students are assigned depends primarily on where they apply. If they apply to the adult education program they receive service by its system; if they apply for admission to the credit program, they get service from the developmental education system. Decisions about whether to refer students to credit ESL or adult education programs are often made on the basis of assessments of only one or a few of the skills ESL students may need to master if they are to succeed in college. In short, at many colleges the methods for sorting students into adult or developmental education are not adequate to determine which system of instruction would be most beneficial to them.

Creating synergy through single-service systems. A growing number of colleges are coming to recognize that operating two parallel programs that provide overlapping services is both inefficient and not in the best interests of students. It is inefficient because it entails creating and managing two separate programs to provide essentially the same service – at least within the gray area.

It is often not in the best interest of students because students in the gray area may be able to progress more rapidly in the more flexible adult education programs. And it is also not in their interest because adult education is free, while developmental education students must use up limited personal or student aid funds to cover tuition. Although most developmental students enroll in only one course, and 75 percent complete their developmental program within two semesters, for low-income students the cost of developmental education may be an unfair burden. This unfairness is underscored by the arbitrary ways in which students are assigned to one service rather than another at many colleges.

Colleges that have acknowledged these problems have taken steps to link adult and developmental education as a single-service system. At most of these institutions, the structure of a single system is determined by defining adult education as the lower level of developmental education, either explicitly or implicitly.

These colleges refer students to one program or another based on their skill levels, as measured by college placement exams, adult education assessment scores, or both. The cut scores used for

All single-system programs emphasize the ultimate goal – college readiness – over intermediate goals, such as attaining particular test scores.

Single-system approaches to developmental education expand the reach of adult education programs.

referral differ among colleges that adopt this model, but the colleges often consider the differing motivational levels and learning styles of students in making referrals. Moreover, students are rarely locked into one system or the other, nor are they required to progress from adult education through developmental courses before they can undertake credit work.

Students who have difficulty in developmental courses are sometimes referred to adult education, and some adult education students improve their skills sufficiently to bypass developmental education by attaining a high enough score on adult education or college placement tests. In the words of one college president, “We aim for students who complete our adult education program to be ready for the college transfer curriculum but those who are not will definitely be ready to participate in developmental courses.”⁷¹

Some states and institutions have adopted dual enrollment policies that make it easier for students to overcome programmatic boundaries.⁷² Dual enrollment allows students

to take adult education and developmental programs at the same time if this is the most effective way to meet their skill needs. For example, a student with fairly strong English skills, but weaker math skills, may be enrolled in a developmental English course and an adult education math program. An ESL student with fairly strong academic and English literacy skills, but weaker skills in speaking and comprehending English, may be enrolled in a developmental English or credit ESL program to hone his or her stronger skills and in an adult education ESL program to bring up his or her weaker skills.

The degree of integration between adult and developmental education differs among colleges that adopt the single-system approach. In some cases, separate administrative structures, faculty, and instructional approaches remain. In others, adult and developmental education are administered as a single system, with a single faculty and a single instructional approach – usually modeled on the more flexible adult education model.

In the more highly integrated programs, virtually no distinction is made between adult and developmental education students or services. The terms *adult* and *developmental* are used interchangeably and applied to both students and services.⁷³ These programs demonstrate most vividly the idea implicit in virtually all single-system approaches: that the goal of adult/

developmental education is to help students progress as quickly and easily as possible along a continuum of basic skills improvement without being interrupted by the administrative thresholds that separate service systems create. In this sense, all single-system programs emphasize the ultimate goal – college readiness – over intermediate goals, such as attaining particular test scores.

Strategies for integration. Regardless of how tightly integrated they are, most single-system programs share a similar student-centered culture epitomized by comments of program staff such as, “Our ABE and ESL students are the college’s graduates of the future,” and “Our job is to meet students where they are and move them as far as they can go.”⁷⁴ They are also far more likely than other adult and developmental education programs to have certain other characteristics. CAAL research conducted by the National Center for Developmental Education indicates that among the characteristics highly integrated programs most commonly share are the following:⁷⁵

- ◆ Faculty in both programs have the same qualifications and they routinely teach both adult and developmental students (if a distinction is made between the two categories).
- ◆ Comparable assessment systems are used for students at all skill levels. In practice, this often means using both adult education and college placement tests, as well as crosswalks between them.
- ◆ The programs share physical facilities and instructional materials, including computer labs and software.
- ◆ Faculty meet regularly to make sure that there is consistency between adult and developmental curricula.
- ◆ To the extent possible, student learning needs are determined on an individualized basis, and instruction targets the particular learning needs of individual students.
- ◆ Colleges have data systems that allow them to track the progress of underprepared students from initial point of entry to college completion.
- ◆ Students in both programs have access to the same support services.
- ◆ Adult and developmental programs have comparable budgets on a per-student basis.

The net result of single-system programs is to expand low-cost adult education service to students who would otherwise be served by tuition bearing developmental programs. Obviously this is a financial bonus for students, and it may well have a significant impact on their ability to complete postsecondary education. A large percentage of developmental education students rely

on federal Pell grants to finance a significant part of their college costs. Because there is a limit to the total amount of Pell grant funding for which students are eligible, many educators are concerned that at least some students will use up so much of their Pell money paying the costs of developmental courses that they will exceed their eligibility limits before they can complete credit programs.

Educators differ about the extent of this problem, but there appears to be agreement that it can be a serious issue for at least some low-skilled, low-income students. As a result, substituting low-cost adult education programs for at least some developmental courses may well have far reaching benefits in terms of building the National Opportunity System. It can enhance the prospects of low-income students not only to enter college, but also to complete their courses of study.⁷⁶

Single-system approaches to developmental education expand the reach of adult education programs. They may also expand their program content by challenging adult educators to accelerate progress and incorporate college-level skills into their curricula – not just at the end of the instructional continuum, but often throughout it.

Measuring success. How successful are these efforts to increase the synergy between adult and developmental education programs? One highly integrated program reports that 80 percent of all entering students make the transition to credit programs.⁷⁷ In another college where the single-system approach is being phased in, 60 percent of students served by the integrated system entered credit programs, compared to a much smaller percentage for the college's adult education programs operating separately.⁷⁸ Unbundling the success rates of students at different levels of initial entry can be a challenge for college data systems, and reliable data on success rates are hard to come by. But colleges that have adopted the single-system model uniformly report that it has greatly increased the transition rates for students regardless of their initial skill levels at the time of program entry.

The number of single-system programs appears to have increased in recent years, although they are still the exception rather than the rule at colleges. They are more likely to be found at colleges that provide adult education programs, but one of the largest single-system programs (in Louisville, Kentucky) is an alliance between an adult education program administered by a school board and a community college.

I. PREREQUISITES FOR SUCCESS

Few adult education students complete transitions to postsecondary education, but strategies are available that can increase transition rates. Regrettably, these strategies have not been used in

enough localities or on a large enough scale. The major prerequisite for success in increasing transition rates is the willingness of adult educators and community college leaders to see their enterprises as a single system for moving students up a hierarchy of competencies to college entry and success. Ultimately, this is a leadership issue. It can only be addressed effectively if community college and adult education leaders collaborate in creating seamless transitions.

Why doesn't this happen more often? Aside from the general problem that adult education is viewed as a marginal educational service, initiatives to increase transitions face three other problems.

Costs. First, they are not free. Creating bridge programs, strengthening curricular alignments, and increasing the synergy between adult and developmental education all entail program development and ongoing management costs. These costs can be a deterrent to adult education programs and colleges that are tightly budgeted.

For example, single-system programs require modest financial investments in their developmental phase to create links between their curricula, faculties, and procedures. Some programs report developmental costs on the order of \$100,000.⁷⁹ In addition, unless adult and developmental education are placed under a single management, there are usually ongoing costs to fund the position of a program coordinator. Because of these costs, many single-system programs have been developed with special grant funding, and their continuing operations are often supported by special contributions from presidential discretionary funds or other sources outside mainstream funding for adult and developmental education.

The development and operational costs of bridge and gap programs, as well as other approaches to overcoming personal and curricular barriers to transitions, can require outlays of the same magnitude if these programs are fairly elaborate, although some programs of this sort have been implemented with fairly modest amounts of staff time.

These are not enormous costs relative to the benefits students are likely to achieve. But, for many colleges and adult education programs, the costs are large enough to prevent the development of solid transition programs.

Changing roles and responsibilities. A second major reason for the shortage of transition initiatives is that they involve a different way of doing business by both adult educators and their counterparts in community colleges. They require that adult educators focus hard on transitions as a goal and take the necessary measures to broaden the scope of their programs. Likewise, they require developmental educators, credit faculty, student services staff, and others to adapt their services and expectations to meet the needs of adult education students. In short, everyone

Adult education must be viewed as an integral service in the National Opportunity System, not a marginal enterprise.

To increase transition rates requires modest additional funding from state, federal, and college sources. Faculty and staff roles need to be rethought. The development of better information systems is essential. And strong leadership on the part of college presidents and adult educators is key.

involved must redesign his or her job description in some way. And some people may feel that they lose out from the changes.

Single-system programs may pose a challenge for developmental educators. There will be changes in the students they serve, how they serve them, and the college's academic structure. In the more successful single-system programs, these challenges are adjusting pay rates for all faculty to make sure they are comparable, and giving developmental faculty the opportunity to teach in credit programs. In addition, a continuum of instruction may benefit developmental educators by increasing the flow of adult education students into developmental programs. Nevertheless, it sometimes requires strong leadership by the college's president to meet the turf challenges posed by changes in faculty roles and responsibilities. And it also requires strong leadership to encourage student services staff to expand their scope, or to convene meetings of adult educators with college faculty to resolve articulation issues.

Information systems. Having adequate information is a third major prerequisite for success in increasing transitions. Regrettably, there is no satisfactory information about transition rates at the national or state level, or even at most colleges or adult education programs. At the institutional and state level, this is sometimes simply a matter of matching data files. That is, both colleges and adult education programs maintain records on the demographic characteristics, educational history, and (where relevant) test scores, skill levels, and academic achievements of individual students. And, in most states, all or some of this information is reported to state education authorities.

But adult education and college records are often not comparable and do not flow between institutions to generate ongoing information about how students move through the adult and community college systems. In some cases, technical electronic barriers prevent the merging of files. In other cases, reports could be generated, but they are not. Whatever the problems may be, they can and must be solved at the institutional, state, and national levels. At present, any

institutional, state, or national policymaker who wants to do something about the problem of transitions is flying blind.

All of the strategies for improving transitions require student record systems on both an institutional and statewide basis that allow long-term tracking of students through and between their adult, developmental, and credit educational experiences. They also all require systems that contain information not only about the educational attainment of students, but also about the nature and duration of service they received, and about their lives (for example, employment status and family circumstances) that may affect both educational outcomes and need for service. Finally, they all require that this information should be reported, analyzed, and used on a routine basis by provider institutions and policymakers to evaluate the need for transitional services, to assess results of services now in place, to plan new services, and to assist particular students in making transitions.

Too often, the institutional research departments of colleges and their counterparts in adult education programs, as well as state educational research agencies, focus almost exclusively on gathering and reporting data on adult and developmental education that is required by funding sources. Because the funding sources differ, the data are often not comparable, and they are rarely reported or analyzed in ways that would shed light on either transition patterns or how to improve them. Program improvement efforts require routine access to a wide range of student record data, and they should include measures to specify and acquire the data they need. This is rarely the case.

Overcoming institutional barriers. Colleges and adult education programs may require assistance from state governments and from the federal government to overcome some of the institutional barriers to increasing transitions. (The forms that assistance might take are discussed in the next section.) But state and federal assistance cannot substitute for institutional leadership, nor can that assistance be assured. As a result, it is incumbent on the leaders of colleges and adult education programs to do whatever is within their power to overcome barriers to increasing transitions.

Specifically, college presidents and adult education directors should not allow the challenges posed by changing faculty roles and responsibilities to stand in the way of progress. They should exercise their leadership abilities by working with all stakeholders to focus on the central missions of their institutions, the needs of their communities, and the best interests of students, rather than on existing programmatic boundaries. They need to find solutions that minimize friction, give all stakeholders a sense of ownership in the new directions adopted, and emphasize the common benefits to everyone in their institutions. College and adult education leaders should follow the example of institutions that have already made progress in this regard: they should

create internal and collaborative task forces – representing all the stakeholders in their institutions and communities – to design more effective transition programs and establish the specific goals, benchmarks, and timetables to implement them.

Because of the cost of developing fully adequate student record systems, this barrier is best addressed at the state and national levels, as will be discussed below. If state and national support is not forthcoming, however, local institutions should make the best use possible of the data systems they have, and they should play an active role in state and national efforts to specify the systems required.

College presidents and adult education directors need to empower their faculty and their data management staff to tackle these challenges. Those institutions with limited data management or institutional research capacities should work with other institutions in their communities or elsewhere in order to enhance their capacity. The experience of small CBOs in partnering with colleges for these purposes suggests that a great deal can be accomplished this way.

Neither colleges nor adult education programs should work in isolation to improve the record systems that they use and will eventually share. It is in the interest of both to collaborate in specifying the systems required, making the best use of what they have, and advocating state support for fully adequate systems that will increase the opportunities of all adult students.

Although the cost of improving transition systems may pose substantial barriers to many colleges and adult education programs, they need to do whatever they can to find the resources they need. If they do not try to help themselves, state and federal authorities are less likely to assist them. Some colleges and adult education programs have reached out to find at least short-term resources from philanthropies or from special state and local program improvement funds. Others have enlisted the support of local human resource agencies (such as workforce investment boards and TANF agencies) and corporations. Most colleges and at least some adult education programs have institutional development programs devoted to finding new resources for new missions. They can and should make it a priority to find support for improved transition efforts.

Because of their importance in improving the National Opportunity System for adults, programs to increase transition rates should not have to rely on soft money funding of this sort, nor will it be available in many cases. As noted in Section I, little can be accomplished by strengthening the links between colleges and adult education unless both systems make this a central part of their mission. At the very least, leaders of colleges and adult education programs must establish increasing transition rates in their communities as institutional priorities. And they must collaborate with each other and with other human resource institutions in their service areas to design and implement the programs required to achieve this.

As Section II indicated, most colleges have considerable discretion in how they allocate their general fund resources, and most college presidents have discretionary funds they can direct to high priority initiatives. Colleges routinely reallocate resources to support new programs they believe are central to achieving their comprehensive missions. To build an effective National Opportunity System for adults, colleges will need to include the development of programs to improve transition rates into their core budgeting processes. They should also allocate the funds necessary to support not only new directions in their own institutions but collaborative efforts with adult educators and others.

Likewise, all adult education programs have some funds earmarked for program improvement. In many smaller programs, these funds are barely adequate to support staff training and other central program functions. But the larger programs should make the improvement of transition rates a higher budget priority, reallocating funds to support this goal wherever possible.

In short, colleges and adult education programs may not be able to overcome all of the barriers to increasing transition rates through the application of their own resources and initiatives. They need and deserve additional support from state and federal sources for this purpose. But there is much that they can accomplish, and they need to take responsibility for strengthening this aspect of the National Opportunity System. They can and should mobilize the most valuable resources they possess: the professionalism, ingenuity, and commitment of faculty and staff to advancing the cause of adult learning.

IV. PUBLIC POLICY

Adult education programs and community colleges operate within a dense network of federal and state policies. Although public policy cannot assure success in education or any other endeavor, it can foster an environment for success.

Strengthening linkages between adult education and colleges has not been a high priority for policymakers in most states or at the federal level. But experience shows that the potential of public policy to this end is very large. Among the primary policy tools are those that directly address: (a) the missions of both systems, (b) the governance and management of adult education, (c) the funding of both systems, and (d) the specific issue of transitions.

Overall, federal policy and the policies of most states do not particularly support strengthening the links between colleges and adult education – either in terms of provision or transitions. This has been primarily an error of omission. Strengthening these links has not been a high priority for policymakers in most states or at the federal level. Nevertheless, a few states have taken the initiative to address the issue, and planted seeds for a more robust federal role. Experience to date indicates that the potential of public policy to strengthen linkages is very large, and that it could well be realized.

To date, states have been far more innovative than the federal government in building policy links between colleges and adult education. In part, this is because the federal government has a clearly defined policy structure for adult education, though its policies affecting colleges are more diffuse. States, in contrast, are responsible for funding and other forms of management, as well as attendant policies, in both areas. They are more likely to identify and act on the potential for linkages. Therefore, this discussion of policy links focuses mostly on the states.

Because state policies for both services differ considerably, the policy tools that some have adopted to promote links often are not directly applicable to other states. But those tools deserve close scrutiny by all policymakers because they highlight problems that all states and the federal government should be addressing by some policy measures, and they present options that all states should at least consider.

Virtually all aspects of public policy affecting colleges and adult education have some bearing on the links between them. As a result, the number of policy tools that might be adopted to strengthen those links is very large. This report discusses only a few of the tools that are or might be widely employed to achieve that goal.

Among the primary policy tools linking adult education and community colleges are those that directly address: (a) the missions of both systems, (b) the governance and management of adult education, (c) the funding of both systems, and (d) the specific issue of transitions. These are discussed in the following pages.

A. MISSIONS

Statements of goals or missions in federal, state, or institutional policy can often be empty verbiage. But this is not always the case. Mission statements sometimes ratify a preexisting institutional priority, but they also sometimes signal that institutions should consider a new or neglected priority. They can stimulate a process of policy examination and subsequent policy development that would not otherwise occur. In other words, the presence of links between colleges and adult education in mission statements does not automatically guarantee that such links will become a priority. But the absence of this stated mission means that the matter is not likely to get focused attention.

Federal policy. Establishing links to community colleges or other postsecondary institutions is not one of the goals for adult education stated by the legislation that presently governs the federal role in this field (Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998).

However, that legislation requires the establishment of a national reporting system to monitor the effectiveness of state adult education programs, and it prescribes that transitions to postsecondary education and job training should be one of the effectiveness measures reported. As discussed, this system in its present form has many defects. But many state adult education officials report that it sends a message that they should pay more attention to postsecondary linkages.

In the years since 1998, the federal Office of Adult and Vocational Education (OVAE), which administers Title II, has taken an increasing interest in postsecondary transitions by adult education students, although it has yet to define what the federal role should be. The primary focus of the U.S. Department of Education in the area of postsecondary transitions has been on improving high school students' access to college. Improving adult education students' access has been a secondary theme, and the two strands have not been connected. Arguably, adult transitions merit at least equal emphasis, due to the large number of adults who would

benefit from postsecondary education and the large role of colleges in providing adult and postsecondary education.

The Workforce Investment Act (including Title II) was due for reauthorization in 2004, but Congress failed to pass new legislation. It is significant that both the House and Senate bills would have established postsecondary transitions as a major goal of adult education.⁸⁰ Hopefully, the final reauthorization will include this change. Nor did the bills introduced sharpen the focus of the National Reporting System (NRS) to address the limitations of that system discussed in Section II of this report. Improving the legislative mandate for the NRS in this regard merits Congressional attention.

State policy. Like the federal government, most states have not emphasized postsecondary linkages in their adult education policies. However, a number of states have adopted legislation or regulations that establish links in provision and transitions as priority missions of both adult education and colleges.

In Kentucky, for example, the enabling legislation for community colleges not only establishes adult education as one of their major missions, but it uses virtually the same wording to describe its purposes as the enabling state legislation for adult education.⁸¹ In another example, the 10-year strategic plan of the Illinois Community College Board includes not only a commitment to “expand adult education and literacy services” but also a commitment to offer “programs designed for college and university transfer.”⁸²

These examples are significant, because both states have adopted these positions in recent years. In Illinois, the redefined mission ratifies a preexisting commitment of colleges to provide adult education service. But it also signals a stronger emphasis on transitions at the state level – an emphasis that is rapidly taking shape.⁸³ In Kentucky, the assignment of adult education as a mission for colleges has enabled a growing number of colleges to adopt this mission. The emphasis on transitions has led the state’s community college and adult education authorities, as well as individual colleges, to establish some of the country’s strongest transition initiatives.⁸⁴

With mission statements, as with all aspects of policy, it is often difficult to determine the difference between cause and effect. However, where they do not exist, the statements linking colleges and adult education are conspicuous by their absence. If states or the federal government want to make it a priority to strengthen links between adult education and colleges, an essential first step is to ensure that this is explicitly stated in the governing policies of both systems.

B. GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governance. Federal policy is silent on the issue of which state agencies should administer adult education programs, as well as on how those agencies should be linked to postsecondary institutions. As a result, states have made different choices in this matter. A majority of states have chosen to place adult education under the governance of their elementary and secondary education agencies (school boards).⁸⁵

In twelve states, however, adult education is administered by the state's community college agency, and in three of these states (Illinois, New Mexico, and Kansas) transfer of authority has occurred within the last five years. In contrast, in Oregon, adult education and colleges have been responsible to the agency from the outset, since the 1960s.⁸⁶ In a thirteenth state, Kentucky, adult education and colleges are administered by separate agencies, but have operated under the state's postsecondary education system since 2000.

By placing both adult education and community colleges under one agency, a state makes an emphatic policy statement that colleges and adult education should be closely linked. It emphasizes that both systems serve adults, that they share the special expertise required to do so, and that they should work closely together in this enterprise.

It is difficult to determine why particular states have adopted community college or other postsecondary governance. But it is clear that college governance and college provision of adult education tend to go hand in hand. From the evidence available, in most of the thirteen states that have adopted community college/postsecondary governance, colleges serve a majority of the adult education students. In Kentucky, where postsecondary authorities govern both systems, the number of colleges providing adult education service has increased significantly in recent years. In all the other twelve states, all or most community colleges provide adult education service. In other states, such as Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, this is also the case.⁸⁷

In some states, such as Illinois, community college governance of adult education was, in part, adopted as a way to ratify and rationalize preexisting arrangements.⁸⁸ Colleges had long been the dominant providers in Illinois, and the shift of governance to the state's community college board was, in part, recognition of this fact. It was also an attempt to improve management by transferring authority to the agency responsible for managing the dominant service providers. In Kentucky, the primary motivation for postsecondary governance appears to have been to promote policies that support seamless systems of progress across all areas of education in the state.⁸⁹

In Oregon, state policy has linked adult and postsecondary education with the expectation that key state benchmarks regarding adult basic skills proficiency, secondary completion, and entrance into postsecondary education and training will be reflected in the missions and performance of the community colleges. This linkage began with the creation of comprehensive community college legislation in the 1960s, and it has been implemented continuously through a long-range vision based on principles established for overall statewide governance (in “Oregon Shines”) and planning by the legislatively established Oregon Progress Board.⁹⁰

In these and other states, recognition of the need for a more highly skilled workforce is a large part of the stated public policy rationale for links between colleges and adult education. That is, community college governance has been seen as a way to place more emphasis on improving the skills of adult workers – by transitions to either college programs or other types of postsecondary instruction. Effectively, these states have explicitly adopted community college or other postsecondary governance as a means to build a stronger National Opportunity System for adults.

Community college governance is not a silver bullet for solving the problems of adult education or colleges. Taken as a group, most states that have adopted this arrangement do not necessarily have adult education outcomes (as measured by NRS reports) that are superior to those in other states.⁹¹ Nor have all of these states managed to create closer links between the two systems at the operational level. For example, many have been unable to establish adult education as a priority at all colleges (whatever college mission statements may say). And many states with college governance systems have not been outstandingly successful in facilitating transitions. At some of the most highly regarded institutions in some of these states, adult and developmental education programs operate in virtual isolation from each other, as do credit and noncredit ESL programs.⁹²

Management. In many states that have community college governance, therefore, the potential benefits have not yet been fully realized. For these states, the challenge is to use the advantages of a common governance structure to build closer linkages. For the most part, the management tools required to achieve this are available to all states regardless of their governance systems. In fact, the strength of a state’s management system is probably more important in building links between adult education and colleges than its approach to governance.

Thus, all states should consider the use of management tools to strengthen the links between adult education and colleges, regardless of what systems of adult education governance they may have. CAAL’s research on links between colleges and adult education and deliberations by its project task force, identified a number of tools that states have adopted, such as:

- ◆ Encourage colleges and other local adult education providers to work in partnership to assess educational and economic needs, find opportunities for resource sharing, and develop joint programs.
- ◆ Support better integration of adult education programs and students into the operation of colleges that provide these services through the processes of technical assistance and planning.
- ◆ In conducting program reviews of colleges that provide adult education, require the involvement of the whole college, including top managers, to emphasize adult education's importance and its contribution to all of the college's missions, and to enlist top management support.
- ◆ Establish strong, clear input and output standards for adult and postsecondary education program quality to ensure that colleges (whether they are adult education providers or not) and other providers have a common understanding of the nature of adult education service in their communities. Also make certain that they understand the skills that adult education students can be expected to acquire and the relationship of skills upgrading to postsecondary programs. Clear quality standards are essential to put all providers on a level playing field, and also to help colleges and other providers plan for strengthening links at the operational and curricular levels. These standards should serve as a road map to adult education that allows colleges and the other providers to plot the directions they should take in strengthening linkages.
- ◆ Establish planning processes to determine the best division of labor between different types of adult education service providers (e.g., school systems, colleges, CBOs, and workforce development systems) in each locality – including the best division of labor between adult education and college developmental education programs, regardless of whether colleges are adult education providers.
- ◆ At provider colleges, set up terms of employment and qualifications that are comparable for adult education and other college faculty.
- ◆ Create common data systems and assessment procedures that link adult education and colleges.
- ◆ Fund adult education at a rate equivalent to funding for comparable college services.

In addition, CAAL and members of its task force believe that states can accomplish a great deal by other forms of leadership and technical assistance. In particular, state adult education and community college authorities should collaborate to develop models for seamless curricula supported by assessment and placement systems, as well as many of the components (such as bridge and gap programs) that may be adopted as steps toward the full implementation of this

goal. And they ought to provide technical assistance to colleges and adult education programs to encourage and support joint efforts to develop and implement seamless continua of instruction within their service areas. This will require research, collaborative planning, systems design, and other functions that may be beyond the capacity of many local institutions. Almost certainly, it will also require states to examine state and local policies on assessment, placement, and funding to see if they stand in the way of implementing seamless continua and make changes where necessary. Ultimately, the requirements for seamless links between adult education and colleges should be incorporated into the state program planning, program review, and quality standards that guide both.

Governance and management. States can adopt any and all of the measures discussed above without assigning governance authority for adult education to community college or other postsecondary authorities. Indeed, many of these measures have been adopted by states with other governance systems.⁹³ However, officials in many states with college governance believe that a common management system makes it easier for them to implement managerial improvements. And, in fact, the two states that have most recently made the transition to postsecondary governance (Illinois and Kentucky) have made rapid advances in this regard.⁹⁴ In Oregon, the community college governance system has facilitated partnerships and managerial improvements across agencies and service systems at both the state and local levels.⁹⁵ Indeed, many Oregon officials believe that the college governance that has been in place for more than three decades is central to the effectiveness and efficiency of adult education and community college service in their state.

The examples provided by these states, and the inherent potential of a single-management system, should be strong motivation for states with community college governance systems that have not fully realized their potential for strengthening the desired links.

Certainly, adult education governance by postsecondary authorities is not an appropriate policy tool in all states for building stronger ties between colleges and adult education. For example, in states with few community colleges, or where community colleges presently play a minor role in providing adult education, this approach is probably not feasible. Moreover, states (such as Massachusetts) where strong links have been forged by other governance arrangements would benefit little by changing those arrangements. But states in which the college role is increasing, as well as states that want to strengthen their adult and postsecondary systems, may find it beneficial to consider some version of a common management system for adult and postsecondary education. And regardless of their governance systems, all states should carefully consider the managerial measures leadership states have adopted to strengthen linkages.

C. FUNDING

Total funding. Perhaps the strongest statement government can make about the priority of any service is the level of funding devoted to it. The federal government has no designated funding stream for community colleges, although colleges are among the major beneficiaries of programs to assist low-income students – notably through Pell grants and the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act, as well as other funding streams.

In contrast, under Title II of the Workforce Investment Act, the federal government makes grants to states for the sole purpose of supporting adult education, and provides funding through a number of smaller programs. After increasing during the 1990s, total federal funding under Title II has leveled out at about \$575 million in recent years.⁹⁶ Most of this funding is distributed to states by a formula based essentially on the relative number of adults (persons 16 years and older) without a high school diploma or the equivalent in each state. An increasing portion of the funds, however, is earmarked for English language civics (EL Civics) instruction to immigrants.⁹⁷ These funds are distributed according to the relative number of immigrants in each state. To receive funds, states must agree to a number of administrative, programmatic, and reporting requirements. Most importantly, they must match their federal allotment by dedicating 25 percent of that amount to adult education from their own source funds.

A majority of states provide only the required 25 percent match. However, some states provide much more.⁹⁸ In total, state resources dedicated to adult education have exceeded \$1.2 billion in recent years, whereas if all states only met the 25 percent requirement, total state commitments would be only about \$140 million. Seven states account for 80 percent of the over-match in total dollar terms.⁹⁹ But other states over-match as well, in terms of the percentage of own-source funds they contribute to adult education relative to their federal allocations. The total dollar amount they give to adult education are smaller than those of other over-matching states, because they tend to be smaller states and, hence, receive a smaller federal allocation. In all of the states where community colleges play a dominant role in providing adult education, the states' appropriate funds that are two to three times as much as the funds they receive from the federal government, rather than the 25 percent minimum.

From the standpoint of establishing priorities, these total funding patterns tell the following story: Community colleges per se are not a federal priority. Adult education is a priority of both the federal government and the states, but it is not a very high priority. Total federal funding translates into an average of \$200 for each of the approximately three million adult education students served each year. Total federal and state funding translates into approximately \$600; in many states it is substantially lower. Total funding relative to the estimated population in need of adult education services is far less – on the order of a few cents per capita depending on what

estimate of need is adopted. In contrast, total expenditures by community college students are on the order of \$2,600 per capita.¹⁰⁰

Virtually all adult educators (and everyone else who has examined the situation) agree that adult education funding is grossly inadequate to support the instruction required by the population served and to reach the population in need of service. Some states have attempted to address this situation by overmatching to the point where their per-student expenditures are on the order of \$1,000 or more. But even these states have not been able to level the stakes between adult education and community college resources.

In fairness, it should be noted that college costs for administering different types of programs are not the same. Thus, some states fund adult education at a very high level that can approximate the costs colleges incur for some of their less expensive programs. In those cases, colleges take less of a “hit” and the barrier is reduced.

Nevertheless, it is hard to expect colleges to regard adult education students as being on a par with their other students when the resources to support them are so much less. Program managers at a number of colleges studied by CAAL’s researchers believe that inadequate funding for adult education students is a major reason that the potential for linkage between adult education and colleges has not been achieved. The funding system sends the message that these students are second-class members of the college community, and too often they are treated this way.

More adequate federal and state funding in all states is a prerequisite for success in adult education nationwide. And greater parity in funding is a prerequisite for success in strengthening links between adult education and college programs. In the present funding environment, it is a tribute to the vision of state and local leaders that at least some colleges and adult education programs have found ways to strengthen opportunity systems for adults.

Distribution of funds. Although total funding may be inadequate, some states have adopted methods for distributing available funds that allow them to provide more adequate support for students as well as to level the stakes between adult education and other college services. All states face a trade-off between serving as many students as possible with the funds available (thereby creating a low level of expenditure per student), or concentrating their funds on providing a high level of service to a smaller number of students. Massachusetts is one state that has chosen the latter alternative.¹⁰¹

In recent years, state adult education authorities in Massachusetts have set exceptionally high quality standards that all providers including colleges must meet. Because programs that meet these standards are expensive to operate, this has had the effect of increasing the total per-student

expenditure and reducing the number of students served. The average per-student expenditure is about \$1,900. Although this amount does not quite level the stakes between funding for adult education and other college services, Massachusetts comes much closer than most states in providing support for adult education that approximates the average expenditure of colleges on other types of programs. It should be noted, however, that in terms of head counts, the participation of Massachusetts' colleges is modest: they serve only about 12.5 percent of adult education students in the state.

FTE reimbursement systems have the potential to increase both the funding and status of adult education. And they are an emphatic way for policymakers to send the message that adult education and other college programs are not separate.

FTE reimbursements. A few states use another method of increasing per student expenditures and evening out the stakes. These states reimburse colleges for serving adult education students the same way that they reimburse them for serving other students, using full-time equivalency (FTE) reimbursements or similar systems. In Oregon, colleges receive exactly the same FTE reimbursement for adult education students that they receive for credit students.¹⁰² In California, they receive FTE reimbursement at the noncredit rate (approximately half the credit rate).¹⁰³ And, in Illinois, a new funding formula including FTE reimbursement gives adult education one of the highest funding levels of all college services.¹⁰⁴ In all three states, funding via FTE reimbursement substantially exceeds per-student funding in most other states.

Adopting an FTE reimbursement system may have the net effect of increasing total funding for adult education. That is, it may add postsecondary revenue streams to earmarked adult education grant funds, or encourage states to level the stakes by increasing the level of grant funding to FTE reimbursement levels.

It is difficult to assess whether FTE systems actually have this effect because it is impossible to determine what the funding levels would be if states that now use FTE systems abandoned them. In both California and Illinois, per-student expenditures for providers not reimbursed on an FTE basis are also high, and they are high in other states that do not use an FTE system, such as Massachusetts. It appears, however, that in Illinois a recent increase in FTE reimbursements for adult education led to increased total funding for this service.

Other potential benefits of FTE funding are equally important. For example, officials in states that have adopted FTE systems believe that reimbursing colleges for service to adult education

students in the same way they are reimbursed for other students raises the status of adult education at colleges and increases the institutional support it receives. They also believe that it motivates college leaders and adult educators to join in common advocacy for increased funding.

In addition, some educators believe that the cost of adult education is less than the cost of other college services. (Regrettably, there has been virtually no research on this subject.) If this is thought to be true, FTE reimbursement may lead colleges to favor adult education as a profit center and to expand their programs.

FTE reimbursements flow into the college's general education fund. Some state adult education managers believe that this may cause college leaders to regard adult education as more of a hard money service than a grant-funded, soft money service for which support can be uncertain. As a result, colleges may be more inclined to make the same levels of commitment to hiring full-time staff, facilities, and program development in their adult education programs as they are prepared to make in other programs.

Equally important, colleges have a great deal of flexibility in how they allocate their general funds. This can be either an advantage or disadvantage for adult education or any other service. In Oregon over the last few years, it has been an advantage. Despite draconian budget cuts in community college funding, most colleges in the state maintained their adult education service levels by allocating available funds to support this service while cutting other programs.¹⁰⁵

FTE reimbursement systems, therefore, have the potential to create leverage for increasing both the funding and status of adult education in a number of different ways. This funding system is a tool available only when colleges provide adult education services as this report defines them. As a result, it may not be of interest to policymakers in all states. But in those states where colleges play a significant role in adult education, FTE reimbursement systems should be examined as a way to strengthen links between adult education and these institutions. FTE systems are an emphatic way for policymakers to send the message that adult education and other college programs are not separate, but part of the same opportunity system. They may well create incentives for colleges to place a higher priority on adult education and to treat adult education students on a par with their other students.

However, states that adopt this funding system should carefully examine the level of FTE reimbursement. In Oregon, colleges are reimbursed at the same FTE rate for serving adult education students as they are for serving credit students. Policy leaders in Oregon believe this is one of the reasons why adult education receives high priority at Oregon's colleges. In contrast, California reimburses colleges for serving adult education students at the noncredit FTE rate (roughly half of credit). Many adult education and community college leaders in California

believe that this lower reimbursement rate sends the message that adult education is an ancillary service, rather than a central part of the college mission. They believe it is one reason why many California colleges are reluctant to provide adult education service, and why those that do claim they lose money on the service.

D. TRANSITION POLICY

Federal role. As noted above, present federal adult education policy is largely silent on the issue of transitions. There is no provision in existing federal legislation to provide either policy guidance or special funding for transition initiatives. Hopefully, pending legislation will establish this as a goal.

Any federal policy in this area should recognize that virtually all community colleges either are or should be destination points for adult education students, and virtually all adult education programs should be linked to colleges by collaborative transition strategies. Federal policymakers should consider a variety of policy strategies for promoting transitions. These might range from requiring all states to develop transition strategies to requiring that some of the preconditions for creating those strategies should be addressed.

The lack of reliable data on existing transition rates is a prime candidate for federal policy attention. Creating new federal research programs that would gather the required data (perhaps under the aegis of the National Center for Educational Statistics) is one option that should be considered.

In addition, federal policymakers should consider providing technical assistance and financial support to help states strengthen their student record systems. This would improve the quality of data on transitions as well as other performance measures reported to the NRS. It would also support the development and implementation of more robust transition strategies.

Federal policymakers should also think about strengthening the role of the NRS in facilitating transitions. At the very least, they should improve the reporting guidelines for transitions to overcome the shortcomings identified above. NRS transition reports can and should provide a far more meaningful indication of actual transition rates than they presently do. In addition, the federal government should negotiate with states to establish increasingly higher targets for transitions, based on improved reporting guidelines.

However, in considering options to make the NRS a more useful tool for monitoring and encouraging transitions, it should be recognized that even existing NRS requirements place a heavy burden on many states. These requirements are, effectively, unfunded mandates imposed in 1998 without additional resources to support them. In these circumstances, it is not surprising

that many states have had a difficult time implementing NRS requirements, including those that require reporting transition rates. As a result, the federal government should consider providing additional funds to the states to support existing NRS requirements and to develop improved uses of NRS to support increased transition rates.

Another important role the federal government can play is sponsoring research and development to devise models for seamless curricular continua as well as the assessment and placement systems to support them. It should develop information dissemination and technical assistance programs to help states and local providers understand and implement seamless curricula and other best practices.

Even in ideal circumstances, it is doubtful that research and technical assistance alone will be sufficient to help states adopt the strategies that have proved effective in increasing transition rates. Funding is essential if programs are to increase transitions.

As discussed above, the amounts required to support any or all of the strategies that have proved successful in increasing transitions are not large in any given locality (on the order of a few hundred thousand dollars). But in most states and localities, neither colleges nor adult education programs have sufficient uncommitted resources for these purposes.

As a result, probably the most important step the federal government can take to increase transition rates is to establish a special grant program to support new initiatives. Due to the shortage of adult education operating funds, any funding stream of this sort should have money appropriated above and beyond what Title II of the Workforce Investment Act now provides.

If community colleges are used as the unit of analysis, incentive grants for transitions of \$100,000 per college, would require new federal funding on the order of \$100 million per year. The \$100,000 figure is roughly the expenditure devoted to many of the more successful transition initiatives already launched. If states are used as the unit of analysis, appropriations on the order of \$1 million to \$2 million per state (varying by the number of colleges and programs in each state) would provide the same level of support.

Any language in federal legislation making it a national goal to increase transitions will be hollow without special funding for that purpose. Although colleges and adult education programs should do as much as they can with existing resources, many lack the funds necessary to make much progress in increasing transitions, and many may not try. Because increasing transition rates is of central importance in building a National Opportunity System for adults, the federal government should state that this is a national priority and show that it means what it says by

providing the modest funding required for all colleges and adult education programs to launch the needed initiatives.

The state role. If states consider transitions to be a priority, they should set that priority solidly in policy and funding, just as the federal government should. In most states, mission statements specific to transitions are vague for both colleges and adult education programs, and policy systems to support transitions are almost nonexistent. In practice, most of what has been accomplished to strengthen the links between colleges and adult education programs by this means has been the result of initiatives by local colleges and adult educators, supported by small amounts of money from special public or private grant programs, or by scarce institutional resources.

Because of how important transitions are to the National Opportunity System and to the economic welfare of every state, state governments should also prescribe at least some of the elements that transition programs should contain. Further, they should support implementing stronger transition programs even if the federal government will not. All states should follow the example of national leaders in thinking across programmatic and institutional boundaries to develop seamless opportunity systems for all of their citizens and to reallocate resources to support those systems.

These are not unrealistic expectations. In a number of states (such as Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oregon), comprehensive planning to develop seamless opportunity systems has taken place in the past, and such planning is presently underway in other states (such as Louisiana and New Mexico). In these and other states, one result of comprehensive planning has been to strengthen policies and procedures that increase transitions, as well as to allocate resources to support them.

In Kentucky, facilitating transitions is a stated mission of both colleges and adult education programs. Moreover, Kentucky community college policy contains highly detailed regulations for which students should be served by adult, developmental, and credit programs, respectively, and for the procedures (including assessment measures) by which students should move between these programs.¹⁰⁶

In addition, Kentucky makes available on a competitive basis modest amounts of grant funding for transition program development partnerships between colleges and adult education programs. Likewise, adult education policy in Massachusetts establishes transitions as a priority, and state adult education funds support special transition programs at eight colleges on an ongoing basis.¹⁰⁷ In Illinois, a comprehensive transition policy strategy is under development.¹⁰⁸

These states provide models for policies in support of transitions that other states should carefully examine. To fully meet the need for stronger transition efforts, however, states should

Policymakers should see the challenges of strengthening the links between adult education and colleges as a chance for strategic, forward-looking statecraft.

consider more aggressive approaches. For example, because they govern both adult education and colleges, they should consider requiring joint transition planning in every community college district, establishing standards for transition programs, providing technical assistance in this process, and approving plans. They should also consider establishing state and local benchmarks for the number of adult education students who make transitions and monitoring progress toward the achievement of those benchmarks. That is, they should consider making transition planning a mainstream function of both colleges and adult education programs.

If the federal government will not provide all or some of the funding for systems of this sort, state education authorities should reallocate resources to the extent possible, or turn to their legislatures for support. In Illinois, Kentucky, and Massachusetts,

state legislators have been remarkably receptive to requests for support of well-considered and well-reasoned cases for investing in strengthening adult education, particularly when these emphasized the benefits to state economies.

Finally, states should not await federal action to develop and implement models for seamless curricular continua. They should urge the federal government to take up this challenge and collaborate with any federal efforts along these lines. But, ultimately, they are responsible for devising plans and policies that meet their special circumstances, and the circumstances of individual communities. Each state and each community is starting from a different point in terms of their educational needs and the policies and programs in place to address them. As a result, adult education and community authorities should launch collaborative research and development efforts to spell out the steps needed to create seamless pathways of opportunity for adults. They should work closely with colleges and adult education programs to take those steps.

E. THE POLICY OPPORTUNITY

The policy agenda for both states and the federal government to strengthen the links between colleges and adult education should not be daunting. The measures that state and federal policymakers need to adopt are well within their powers, and the cost is modest compared to the cost of meeting other educational challenges. Moreover, most of the measures that states and the federal government should take have a track record of success at the state or local level. In addressing the policy challenge to strengthen the links between adult education and colleges, states and the federal government are not groping in the dark. Assuredly, this is one area in which public policy can make an enormous difference.

Policymakers should, therefore, see the challenges of strengthening the links between adult education and colleges as a chance for strategic, forward-looking statecraft. With modest efforts, a great deal can be achieved. More importantly, they should see it a way to exercise leadership in building the National Opportunity System for adults that is so essential to the well being of Americans and to the country in the decades to come.

V. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening links between adult education and community colleges should be a top priority for everyone involved in the two systems. People dedicated to expanding educational and economic opportunity in the United States should also place high priority on strengthening the links. Adult education and college programs should no longer be regarded as separate service systems. In both policy and practice, they should be seen as interdependent aspects of the National Opportunity System.

The national goal should be to create seamless paths of provision and transition between existing programs. Colleges, adult educators, policymakers at various levels of government, and employers all have a stake in helping to close the national skills gap by achieving this goal. There should be vigorous commitments to:

- ◆ Strengthening the provision of adult education services that will open the door of opportunity to all Americans; and
- ◆ Greatly increasing the number of adult education students who make the transition to postsecondary academic and vocational education, and to improved employment prospects.

These commitments can and must be met. If they are, millions of Americans who would otherwise be economically and socially marginalized will be able to contribute to the growth and prosperity of our postindustrial economy.

To achieve this goal, colleges and adult education programs will have to reorder their priorities; the same is true of state and national policy. It will also be necessary to reallocate existing resources and to infuse modest new resources. If America is to build the National Opportunity System it so urgently needs, the key stakeholder groups must step up to the plate and take responsibility.

Most of all, collaboration among community colleges, adult educators, state government, and federal government is essential. All have the responsibility and capacity to help build the National Opportunity System by taking the needed action. Building collaboration can take time, of course, and some aspects of it may well begin in piecemeal fashion. But while it is being developed, any one of the partners can and should take up the leadership; that is, no partners to the collaboration should await laggards.

Specific steps for each partner are set forth below. Because they require collaboration, some of these recommendations appear more than once but are framed from the perspective of the different target groups.

A. THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE ROLE

Whether or not they are providers of adult education services, community colleges should recognize that adult education students are among their students of the present and the future. To be true to their missions as comprehensive “community” institutions and leading-edge centers of workforce preparation, colleges must look beyond their institutional walls to improve both the quality of adult education in their service areas and the transition rates to postsecondary academic and vocational programs. Among the most important steps colleges should take are:

Colleges that provide adult education services should:

C-1. Establish adult education as a core service, and exert leadership at the highest levels to ensure that their adult education programs are well integrated into the life of the college in terms of staffing, administration, student services, facilities, accountability, and chains of command.

C-2. Set high performance standards for their adult education divisions in terms of achieving student learning gains and transitions to postsecondary academic and vocational education. Monitor performance and establish program improvement procedures to achieve these outcomes.

C-3. Take steps to ensure that adult education students receive the same quality of support services, facilities, faculty, and status that their other students receive.

C-4. Establish the same qualifications and pay rates for adult education faculty as for comparable college faculty.

C-5. Develop a clear and seamless curricular continuum from adult education through postsecondary education, as well as assessment and placement systems that are aligned with it. That is:

- ◆ Specify the competencies required to progress through the adult education system, to make the transition to academic and vocational programs, and to succeed in those programs, as well as in the occupations for which they prepare students.

- ◆ Develop seamless curricular sequences to assure that each step in instruction will prepare students with the competencies they need for the next step, both within and between adult and postsecondary education, as well as in the world of work.
- ◆ Adopt assessment systems that clearly reflect progress through the entirety of the curricular continuum.
- ◆ Adopt placement policies for adult and postsecondary programs (and for transitions between them) that are based on the competencies students need to succeed at each level of education, and be sure the competencies are measured by appropriate assessment.
- ◆ Take steps to ensure that all aspects of this system are clearly understood by students, faculty, and administrators.

C-6 Develop instructional strategies that will support the curricular continuum and meet individual learning needs.

C-7. Establish special programs to support the transition of adult education students to postsecondary education – including recruitment, support systems, orientation, college preparation, and bridge programs of various kinds.

C-8. Increase the synergy between adult and developmental education programs to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of both and to increase the number of prepared students seeking college admission. Determine what services each type of program can provide best, establish clear entry and exist criteria for each program, and use these criteria to guide student referrals and accelerate student progress to credit enrollment.

C-9. Establish longitudinal student record data systems that will make it possible to track the progress of all adult education students, both within adult education and in subsequent postsecondary enrollments. Also develop more robust institutional research capabilities for adult education, and use those capabilities for ongoing program assessment and improvement.

C-10. Incorporate adult education into core budgeting and strategic planning systems, and reallocate general fund or other resources as necessary to improve the quality of adult education provision and increase transitions to postsecondary education.

Whether or not they are adult education providers, colleges should:

C-11. Form collaborative relationships with all adult education and human resource providers in their communities to negotiate the most effective roles each institution can play to expand the opportunities of adult learners. If required, serve as the convening institution for these collaborative efforts.

C-12. Forge effective partnerships of mutual support with all adult education and human resource providers in their communities. This may include sharing facilities, staff, and support services, and implementing jointly administered programs (such as specialized job training programs for disadvantaged adults).

C-13. Collaborate with all adult education and human resource providers in their communities to establish articulated curricular continua, transition programs, and synergy with developmental education.

C-14. Join with adult educators and other human resource providers to advocate improvements in policy and increases in funding at the state and federal levels required to create seamless pathways of educational and economic opportunity for all adults.

B. THE ADULT EDUCATION ROLE

Adult educators should recognize that their contribution to the National Opportunity System does not end with preparing students for high school equivalency credentials or the attainment of higher levels of English language proficiency. Their contribution extends to helping students gain the competencies they need to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and employment. As a result, adult educators must recognize the importance of forging stronger links to community colleges, whether or not those colleges provide adult education service themselves.

Adult educators based within community colleges can make an important contribution by playing an active role in advocating, planning, and implementing the steps colleges need to take to strengthen links identified above. They are the custodians of a unique body of expertise on how to serve adult learners most effectively, and they must bring that expertise to bear on the task of strengthening linkages within and outside their institutions.

But a majority of adult education programs are not based at community colleges. Their responsibility for strengthening links is equally great. In states or localities where colleges do not take the initiatives set forth above, they can and must do so. In states and localities with a mixed provider system, they must be active and equal partners in building seamless pathways of opportunity.

In short, regardless of where adult educators are based, strengthening ties requires a partnership between them and colleges, and either partner can take the lead. As a result, the responsibility of adult educators for building a National Opportunity System for adults mirrors that of colleges in many ways. They can exercise their responsibility by working within colleges or by leading colleges to join in the collaborative efforts. Specifically, adult educators should:

AE-1. Take the initiative to raise the awareness of community college leaders about adult education, and increase their knowledge about its nature and significance.

AE-2. Forge partnerships with colleges for the joint use of staff, facilities, and other forms of mutual support.

AE-3. Establish increasingly ambitious goals for the number and percentage of their students who will make transitions to postsecondary education, and initiate or join with colleges in developing specific plans to increase transition rates. To the extent possible, reallocate resources to support the attainment of this goal.

AE-4. Initiate or join in collaborative planning processes with colleges and other local workforce and human resource providers to determine which institutions can best provide each of the various services students need to progress through the adult education system and move along pathways to postsecondary education.

AE-5. Join with colleges in creating seamless curricular continua as well as articulated assessment and placement systems that link ABE/ASE/GED and ESL service to postsecondary education and the world of work. Where required, take the initiative in developing these systems, and in designing instructional methods that support them.

AE-6. In particular, take the initiative to expand ASE/GED and ESL programs to make sure that all graduates can gain the skills they need to succeed in postsecondary education and employment.

AE-7. Join with colleges to establish college preparation and bridge programs to facilitate transitions to postsecondary education.

AE-8. Join with colleges to create greater synergy between adult education and developmental education programs.

AE-9. Adopt data systems that track students throughout the educational system, and use that information for both formative and summative research on their programs.

AE-10. Advocate federal and state policies to strengthen the links between adult education and colleges.

AE-11. Enlist the support of colleges in advocating for improved funding, management, and policy for adult education at the state and national levels, and in their communities.

AE-12. Establish leadership networks within the adult education field to expand understanding of linkages with community colleges and to take the initiative in strengthening those links.

C. THE STATE GOVERNMENT ROLE

To be economically competitive, now and in the decades to come, states must develop comprehensive opportunity systems to increase the educational levels of their workforce. To do so, they will have to look across established programmatic and institutional boundaries to determine what educational delivery systems are in the best interests of their citizens as a whole.

Within this context, state governments must strengthen the links between adult education and community colleges, and they are uniquely well positioned to accomplish this. States have the governance authority for both systems, and they promulgate many of the policies that guide them. They usually provide a large part of the financial support for colleges, and in many cases they give much of the financial support for adult education.

This means that state governments, more than any other institutions, have the tools required to forge seamless pathways of opportunity for all adults. Because of their governance responsibilities, it is incumbent on them to do so. Some individual colleges or adult education programs may take the required initiatives, but, without state support and leadership, it will not be possible to build comprehensive opportunity systems that serve all the states' citizens and that meet state economic needs.

To fulfill their governance responsibilities, state policymakers and administrators must view adult education and community colleges as interdependent components of their educational and economic opportunity systems, rather than as separate service systems. They should make strengthening the links between adult education and colleges an explicit goal in both adult education and community college policy.

Specifically, this means that states should lead and enable colleges and adult educators to adopt the measures recommended above. They must ensure that these measures are taken to scale, and that state policy and management leads, rather than handicaps, progress toward enlarging opportunities for all citizens. To that end, states should:

SG-1. Encourage, facilitate, and support local partnerships between colleges and other adult education providers to assess educational and economic needs, share resources, and develop joint programs.

SG-2. Encourage better integration of adult education services and students into the culture and operations of colleges that provide these services through technical assistance and more appropriate planning processes.

SG-3. Establish strong and clear quality standards for adult education programs that will be used in common across all providers and delivery systems, both to improve the level of service and to build a foundation for collaborative efforts between colleges and other adult education providers.

SG-4. Strengthen articulation between adult education and college programs by developing uniform learning standards for seamless curricular continua, as well as related assessment and placement systems. Remove any state policy barriers to the adoption of these seamless systems. Assist colleges and other adult education providers in implementing seamless curricula and improved assessment and placement systems.

SG-5. Formulate state policies that enable and help colleges and other adult education providers to identify and implement the most effective division of labor between developmental and adult education.

SG-6. Establish state and local benchmarks for greatly increasing the number and percentage of adult education students who make transitions to postsecondary education, and monitor progress toward the achievement of those benchmarks.

SG-7. Require all colleges and other adult education providers to collaborate in developing specific plans to increase transition rates from adult education to postsecondary programs within their service areas. This would include creating special transition initiatives (such as gap or bridge programs, and student support systems) and adopting seamless curricula and greater synergy between adult and developmental education. One of the goals should be to ensure that all students in adult secondary education and ESL programs can gain the skills they need to make transitions to postsecondary education, and to succeed in college work.

SG-8. Provide adequate funds and technical assistance to support both the development of local transition plans and their implementation on an out-year basis. Provide financial or other incentives to help local institutions achieve transition benchmarks.

SG-9. Allow state adult education funds to support transition programs, including those that serve students who already have a high school diploma or its equivalent.

SG-10. Determine the criteria by which an agency or agencies can best administer adult education programs at the state and local levels, and revise existing management responsibilities, if necessary.

SG-11. Establish student record systems that make it possible to track the progress of adult education students, both while they are enrolled in adult education and in their subsequent enrollments in postsecondary or other educational programs. Establish statewide systems to which colleges and other adult education providers can create links. Aggregate data at the local and state levels, and use it for planning, evaluation, and program improvement activities.

SG-12. Assist colleges and other providers in developing vigorous institutional research capabilities in adult education and use these capabilities for ongoing program assessment and improvement.

SG-13. Evaluate the need for, and potential of, FTE reimbursement systems for adult education provided by community colleges in the state.

SG-14. Narrow the gap between per capita funding of service for adult education and community college credit students. In those states where adult education is supported by FTE reimbursement to colleges, establish parity of funding between adult education and comparable credit programs.

SG-15. To achieve these goals, reallocate state community college, adult education, and other human service resources to the extent possible, and appropriate additional funds where necessary. Advocate increases in federal adult education funding and other policy changes that will help strengthen the linkages between adult education and colleges.

D. THE FEDERAL ROLE

The federal role in the community college field is diffuse. Colleges are among the beneficiaries of many federal programs, such as Pell grants, but they are the primary focus of very few. In contrast, the federal government has long had a well-defined role in adult education. Under the provisions of existing and prior legislation, this role has four primary components:

- ◆ Providing grants to states to support adult education programs, which in many states comprise a large part of adult education funding, and providing Pell grants that support basic skills instruction for developmental education students.
- ◆ Establishing certain broad guidelines for the use of federal funds (such as the requirement for “direct and equitable access” for all would-be providers of adult education, and regulations limiting Pell grant eligibility), within which states design their adult education programs.
- ◆ Conducting research on program performance and best practices, and supporting a limited amount of technical assistance to states and programs.
- ◆ Since 1998, negotiating each state’s targets for adult education learning gains and other program outcomes, and requiring states to report on their progress toward these targets through the National Reporting System (NRS).

Because of its nationwide scope and the large resources it commands, there is much that the federal government can and should do within its presently defined role to support stronger linkages. In fact, without a stronger federal role, it is hard to see how an opportunity system that is truly national can be created.

To date, however, strengthening links between colleges and adult education has not been a federal priority, although two projects to investigate model transition programs between adult and postsecondary education have been supported recently. Given the importance of creating a National Opportunity System for adults, the federal government should lead, not sit on the sidelines. Following are some of the first steps that the federal government should take:

Fed-1. Establish transitions between adult education and community colleges as one of the major priorities of federal support for adult education in reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act, which governs the federal role in adult education.

Fed-2. Improve the NRS performance measure that requires states to report on transitions to “postsecondary education or job training” to better indicate the total number of adult education students who make transitions specifically to postsecondary education over a multi-year period.

Fed-3. Provide states with additional funding to support compliance with NRS mandates and to improve student data systems in the adult education field. At present, NRS requirements are an unfunded mandate, and funding it will free up states’ resources for other program improvement initiatives.

Fed-4. If and when improved NRS performance measures and student data systems are in place, negotiate with states to increase greatly their targets for the number and percentage of students who make transitions to postsecondary education.

Fed-5. To support attainment of these targets, provide grant funding to support the development and management of transition programs linking community colleges and adult education providers. Funding for these purposes should supplement rather than supplant existing funding streams for adult education. Funds might be granted to states or to consortia of colleges and adult education programs.

Fed-6. Conduct and disseminate research on models for seamless curricular continua as well as related assessment and placement systems that will help link colleges and adult education programs.

Fed-7. Assist adult educators, colleges, and policymakers plan and evaluate strategies for strengthening linkages, by establishing a research program to collect, analyze, and report baseline longitudinal data that is presently not collected by the federal government or any other source. This would include data on the numbers of adult education students served by colleges, the nature of the service they receive, their educational progress, how many make transitions to postsecondary education, their placements in postsecondary programs, and their completion rates. This program might be managed by the National Center for Educational Statistics or by an expanded version of the NRS.

Fed-8. Greatly expand state grant funding for adult education instruction. This is a prerequisite for improved service, whether by colleges or other providers. In many states, there is no realistic prospect that per capita funding for adult education students will come close to per capita funding for comparable community college students. Working with states, the federal government should establish greater parity of funding as a goal, and it should contribute the funds necessary to attain that goal.

Fed-9. Conduct research to identify the barriers to opportunity that present Pell grant regulations place on developmental education students, and adopt policies, either within the Pell grant program or in other educational funding programs, that make it possible for these students to have the resources they need to complete their education.

**APPENDIX I:
RESEARCH TITLES IN THE CAAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE SERIES**

(available at www.caalusa.org)

1. ADULT BASIC EDUCATION & COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN FIVE STATES: A Report from the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) to the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 31 pages, by Patricia Rickard et al. A comparison of

selected program characteristics of community college and non-community college programs in five states (Oregon, California, Iowa, Connecticut, and Hawaii) based on comparable data collected by CASAS. The characteristics investigated include size of enrollment, demographics, education level, retention, staffing, service to welfare clients, and learning gains. For each state, data from individual programs is aggregated at the state level and comparisons are drawn. Published September 2003.

2. ADULT EDUCATION & LITERACY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN MASSACHUSETTS: A Case Study for the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 62

pages, by Martin Liebowitz. Massachusetts is a state model in which jurisdiction is based in the State Department of Education. The study describes the way the state's adult education system works and assesses the distinctive role of community colleges in the overall statewide context. Among other variables, institutional factors related to effective performance are identified and assessed, as are strategies for building closer linkages and transitions between adult education programs and community colleges. Published March 2004.

3. THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN STATE ADULT EDUCATION

SYSTEMS: A National Analysis, 35 pages, by Vanessa Smith Morest with Kerry Charron, Annika Fasnacht, and Daniella Olibrice of the Community College Research Center of Teachers College at Columbia University. An introduction to the report notes that the study "brings together information on adult education and literacy gathered from several sources, including interviews with state directors of adult education across the country and the National Reporting System (NRS)." The report examines the structure of adult education in the U.S. with special attention to the role of community colleges. Published April 2004.

4. ADULT EDUCATION & LITERACY AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN

KENTUCKY, 89 pages, by Forrest Chisman in cooperation with the Kentucky Adult Education Council on Postsecondary Education and the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. Documentation and analysis of the initiative by the Kentucky Community and Technical College System to create a seamless transition between adult education, developmental education, and degree programs at community colleges. The state's initiative aims to construct an articulated course structure, funding and governance system, transition to postsecondary education and job training, and credit system operated jointly by colleges and other providers. Published May 2004.

5. THE ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM & ADULT EDUCATION, 113 pages, by Suzanne Knell and Janet Scogins of the Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center, with assistance from the Illinois Community College Board. The study investigates the same characteristics as the Oregon study. Because Illinois recently transferred responsibility for adult education from its Board of Education to its Community College Board, special emphasis is placed on what considerations led the state to make this change, what difference the change makes in state policy and local programs, and what major implementation issues the state and colleges are facing. In Illinois, 77 percent of adult education and literacy learners are served by community colleges. Illinois is the largest U.S. state in which a community college authority administers adult education services. Published July 2004.

6. OREGON SHINES! Adult Education and Literacy in Oregon Community Colleges, 84 pages, by Sharlene Walker and Clare Strawn. In Oregon, adult education and literacy programs are governed by the state's community college board and by state legislative mandate. Community colleges provide more than 90 percent of adult education and literacy service in the state. The study discusses state level policies, management, funding, staff training, quality control measures, the population served, and learning gains. It also examines the management, structure, quality, and outcomes of programs managed by selected colleges, with attention to how well they are integrated into mainstream instructional and student services provision by the colleges, how well they are linked to developmental education, and whether (and how) they lead to transitions to enrollment in community college or related degree and job training programs. Published October 2004.

7. ADULT ESL AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, 59 pages, by JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall and Ken Sheppard. A concept paper on the quality and articulation of ESL programs offered by community colleges. Most colleges offer several different types of ESL programs supported by different funding streams. These often are not linked at the management, faculty, curricular, or assessment levels. Aside from possible inefficiencies, this makes it difficult for students to make transitions from ESL instruction to GED or college degree and job training programs. The paper is based on review and analysis of existing data and literature, interviews with selected program directors, and two small-group meetings. Published December 2004.

8. FORGING NEW PARTNERSHIPS: Adult and Developmental Education in Community Colleges, 73-pages, by Hunter Boylan et al, Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State University. A national study of best practices in linking community college adult education/literacy and developmental education services. Among the questions explored are these: How common is this linkage? What forms does it take? What are its benefits? What are the barriers to implementing it? How can those barriers be overcome. The study includes a survey of 200 Kellogg Fellows who have participated in the developmental education leadership program of Appalachian State University. Published December 2004.

**APPENDIX II:
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDY TASK FORCE**

Byron McClenney (Chair)

retired president, Kingsborough Community College, CUNY
Co-Director of Ford Foundation *Bridges to Opportunity Project*
University of Texas (Austin)
Project Director for the University of Texas' role in
the Lumina Foundation's *Achieving the Dream Project*

Forrest P. Chisman (Study Director)

Senior Vice President
Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

Robert Bickerton

Associate Commissioner of Lifelong Learning
(embracing Adult Basic Education)
State Department of Education
Malden, Massachusetts

Hunter Boylan

Director
National Center for Developmental Education
Reich College of Education
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina

JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall

Professor of Education
Director, Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program in Language, Literacy, and Culture
University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC)
Baltimore, Maryland

Sarah Hawker

Vice President
Workforce Development and Adult Education
Illinois Community College Board
Springfield, Illinois

Lennox McLendon

Executive Director
National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium
Washington, D.C.

Patricia Rickard

Director,
Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS)
San Diego, California

Gerardo de los Santos

Acting President
(formerly Vice President for Advancement)
League for Innovation in Community Colleges
Phoenix, Arizona

Gail Spangenberg

President
Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

Sharlene Walker

Director (recently retired)
Adult Basic Skills and Family Literacy Unit
Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development
Salem, Oregon

APPENDIX III: ENDNOTES

Notes and Sources

¹ The U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System for adult education reports that approximately 2.8 million students (2,767,416) received 12 or more hours of instruction from programs receiving federal support in program year 2001-2002 (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, "Report to Congress on State Performance, Program Year 2001-2002, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act." Table 1, p. 2). Allowing for students who received instruction of shorter duration (such as "brush up" classes for high school equivalency tests) from which they may have benefited, and allowing for students served by community based organizations, libraries, and other institutions that often do not receive federal support, the number of students who benefit from adult education in the United States almost surely exceeds three million, although there is no reliable tally of the total.

² This is the family of services defined as *adult education* by the federal Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998, as well as preceding legislation.

³ Since 1977, several studies have attempted to estimate the number of American adults with deficient basic skills of the type that adult education programs attempt to improve. Although they have used different methodologies, all of these studies have estimated that the numbers fall within the 30 to 50 million range, and all of them have shown strong correlations with the demographic variables mentioned. For a convenient summary of this research see: Betsy Feist, "Benchmark Studies and Reports on Adult Literacy," (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2001), available on the CAAL Web site at www.caalusa.org.

⁴ Surprisingly, neither the U.S. Department of Education nor any other source appears to have published an estimate of the total number of adult education programs in the United States. This estimate is based on extrapolation from data reported by states and found in: Vanessa Smith Morest, et al, The Role of Community Colleges in State Adult Education Systems: A National Analysis (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004), available at www.caalusa.org.

⁵ See Morest, op cit.

⁶ Based on U.S. Department of Education figures. See: USDOE, "Report to Congress," op cit. For a more complete discussion of funding patterns see: Forrest P. Chisman, Leading from the Middle: The State Role in Adult Education and Literacy (Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2002), available at www.caalusa.org. The figure of \$530 million represents federal outlays for states to provide instruction. In addition, the federal government provides funds for program improvement and administration, and it manages research and leadership activities at the national level. In recent years, total annual federal expenditures for all of these purposes have been approximately \$575 million, although this figure is not cited in USDOE's report to Congress.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ American Association of Community Colleges, www.aacc.nche.org.

⁹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 2002, Table 344. This NCES table does not distinguish community colleges from other public two-year institutions, but it is fair to surmise that most of the amount reported represents community college expenditures, or at least their order of magnitude.

¹⁰ American Association of Community Colleges, “Community College Statistics,” at www.aacc.nche.org.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² See AACC “Statistics,” op cit, and USDOE, “Report to Congress,” op cit, Table on National “Program Facts.”

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Except where indicated, statistics in this section are based on Morest, op cit.

¹⁶ Although there is considerable overlap between states in which most community colleges provide service and those in which they are the dominant providers, the list is not exactly the same. States in which 80 percent or more of community colleges provide adult education service are: Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Illinois, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Nebraska, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. States in which community colleges serve 50 percent or more of adult education students are: Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, North Carolina, Nebraska, Nevada, Oregon, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. See Morest, op cit. According to this tally, the only states that meet both criteria are: Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, North Carolina, Nebraska, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Complete and reliable data was not available for all states. As a result, the number of states falling into either or both categories may be greater. Moreover, these state differences do not account for local differences – i.e., in many large cities, such as San Diego, colleges are the dominant providers.

¹⁷ Suzanne Knell, et al, The Illinois Community College System and Adult Education (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004), available at www.caalusa.org.

¹⁸ A CAAL report on college partnerships with adult education programs in the health care field is in preparation. Among the more interesting examples identified by CAAL research are Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, Portland Community College in Oregon, and Santa Cruz Community College in California.

¹⁹ See Morest, op cit. The thirteen states are: Alabama, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. Since 2000, Illinois, Kentucky, and New Mexico have made the transition to postsecondary governance of adult education.

²⁰ See Forrest P. Chisman, Adult Education and Community Colleges in Kentucky (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004). Also see Sharlene Walker and Clare Stawn, Oregon Shines! Adult Education and Literacy in Oregon Community Colleges (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004). Also see Knell et al. "Illinois," op cit. All three reports are available at www.caalusa.org.

²¹ Ibid. Also see Martin Liebowitz, Adult Education and Community Colleges in Massachusetts (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004), available at www.caalusa.org.

²² In general, this conclusion has been supported by the increasingly high correlation between wage rates and education levels discovered in census data since the 1970s (NCES, "Annual Earnings: Ratio of median annual earnings of all full year wage and salary earners ages 25-34 whose highest education level was grades 9-11, some college, or a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with those with a high school diploma or GED, by sex:1971-2002, Special Tabulation, 2003). Since the late 1980s, the skills gap between the educational attainment of the American workforce and the requirements of the American economy has been documented by a large literature. A seminal work in this literature was: Anthony P. Carnavale, Leila J. Gainer, and Ann S. Meltzer, Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want (Washington: American Society for Training and Development, 1989). Another important summary was: Educational Testing Service, Beyond the School Doors: The Literacy Needs of Job Seekers Served by the U.S. Department of Labor (Washington: USDOL, 1992). Among the more recent research findings on the skills gap have been: Anthony P. Carnavale and D.M. Desrochers, Standards for What? The Economic Roots of K-16 Reform (Princeton, Educational Testing Service, 2003); Paul Barth's "A Common Core Curriculum for the New Century" in Thinking K-16 7:1, Winter 2003; and American College Testing's Crisis at the Core (Iowa City: ACT, 2004 – available at www.act.org). A more recent summation of research on the skills gap and its consequences in one state is: John Comings, Andrew Sum, and John Unvin, New Skills for a New Economy: Adult Education's Key Role in Sustaining Economic Growth and Expanding Opportunity (Boston: Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth, 2000). Other states have commissioned or conducted similar research in recent years. See, for example, Chisman "Kentucky," op cit; Walker and Strawn "Oregon," op cit.

²³ According to census figures (U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder), DP-2, File 4 [SF-4]), 69 percent of Americans 25 years or older – 123 million people – lack a postsecondary degree. There are presently about 40 million children enrolled in elementary and secondary education. Even if every one of these students graduated from high school over the next 12 years, and if every one of them completed at least a two-year postsecondary program, in 14 years they would replace only about one third of today's adults who lack postsecondary credentials. Assuming that demographics remain the same, it would take more than 40 years to replace those

adults with young people who have postsecondary education and training under the best of circumstances.

²⁴ See Janis Somerville and Yun Yi, Aligning K-12 and Postsecondary Expectations: State Policy in Transition (Washington: National Association of System Heads, 2002) and ACT Crisis at the Core, op cit.

²⁵ Depending on the estimate used, these adults comprise between 21 percent and 35 percent of the 142 million Americans defined by the census as being “in the workforce.” Assuming that all of today’s elementary and secondary students graduated from high school with high levels of basic skills, it would take a decade or more to replace this population with a high skilled workforce prepared for postsecondary education and even longer for these young people to complete postsecondary programs. Given present trends in educational achievement, this would be a heroic assumption.

²⁶ See Hunter R. Boylan et al, Forging New Partnerships: Adult & Developmental Education in Community Colleges (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004), available at www.caalusa.org. Also see: Robert H. McCabe, No One To Waste: A Report to Public Decision-Makers and Community College Leaders (Washington: Community College Press, 2000).

²⁷ American College Testing, Crisis at the Core, op cit.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ U.S. Census, “Population Projections 2000-2013.”

³⁰ USDOE, “Report to Congress,” p. 2, Table 1, op cit.

³¹ The demographic and educational information as well as its sources on which this section is based can be found in: JoAnn (Jodi) Crandall and Ken Sheppard, Adult ESL and the Community College (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004), available at www.caalusa.org. On community college enrollment trends, see also: Kent Phillipe, National Profile of Community Colleges: Trends and Statistics, Third Edition (Washington: Community College Press, 2000).

³² There appear to be no national statistics on this point. However, case studies from CAAL research on individual colleges indicates that, even when colleges provide adult education services, most adult education students who enter postsecondary education are initially enrolled in one or more developmental education courses (indicating that their skills are not adequate for credit courses). See: Boylan, et al, op cit; Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit; and Knell, “Illinois,” op cit.

³³ See Liebowitz, op cit, and Walker and Strawn, op cit.

³⁴ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit, and Knell et al, op cit.

³⁵ This average is obtained by dividing total current fund expenditures reported for colleges by the National Center for Educational Statistics by the total number of students enrolled in credit and noncredit programs. According to the American Association of Community Colleges, average tuition is \$1,518 per year. AACC, “Fast Facts” at www.aacc.nche.edu.

³⁶ These general findings are based on CAAL research on community colleges and adult education in Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oregon, as well as individual college case studies in other states reported by Boylan, et al, op cit, Crandall and Sheppard, op cit, and information gathered by Morest, op cit. They are also based on Adult Basic Education and Community Colleges in Five States (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2004), available at www.caalusa.org. This report draws largely on this body of research. Collectively, it describes statewide patterns of provision, and/or provision by individual colleges in 18 states. CAAL relies heavily on examples of state or college policies and practices from its own research because of certainty about the accuracy of the information. It is possible, however, that examples from other states might illustrate the points made by this report as well or better.

³⁷ CASAS (Adult Basic Education and Community Colleges in Five States, op cit) carefully investigates delivery by community colleges and other providers along a number of input and output dimensions using comparable data sets. The methodology compares states in which colleges provide virtually all adult education service (Iowa and Oregon) with states in which they play practically no role in service provision (Connecticut and Hawaii), and it also compares community college providers with other providers in California. The analysis shows differences among states, and between community colleges and other providers in California, but it finds no systematic differences between states where colleges are dominant providers (and California colleges) and states where they are not significant providers (and California other providers) in terms of the variable examined.

³⁸ See Walker and Strawn, op cit.

³⁹ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Walker and Strawn, “Oregon Shines,” op cit. Unfortunately, it is nearly impossible to make precise comparisons between the overhead costs of providing adult education by community colleges, CBOs, school systems, and other providers. In part, this is because many of the overhead services offered differ by state and locality, and overhead caps are imposed by state or local policy for some institutions (or types of institutions) in some areas. The main difficulty, however, is that adult education is one of many services provided by both colleges and school systems, as well as by larger CBOs. As a result, separate accounting for overhead costs, and sometimes full direct costs, appears to be rare. Colleges often charge a fairly high overhead rate compared to CBOs, but it is hard to determine what their true costs are or in what ways overhead services may be compatible. Many small CBOs are unable to meet many of the accountability requirements for adult education established by the federal government and/or the states. In many cases, CBOs are developing partnerships with colleges, school systems, or both, for these and other overhead services.

⁴¹ See: Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁴² See: Knell, “Illinois,” op cit.

⁴³ See Liebowitz, “Massachusetts,” op cit.’; Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit., and Walker and Strawn, “Oregon,” op cit.

⁴⁴ See: Walker and Strawn, “Oregon,” op. cit; Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁴⁵ See Knell, Walker and Strawn, and Chisman, supra.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ This list of measures of integration of adult education into colleges was initially developed by the CAAL Community College Study Task Force. It was subsequently used, in whole or in part, in CAAL sponsored-research on colleges in Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oregon, as well as in CAAL-sponsored research on linkages between adult and developmental education. Thus, these measures of integration are present in whole or in part in many provider colleges studied by CAAL research. Moreover, although no precise tabulation was made, the more effective college adult education programs do appear to be integrated into their host institutions in all or most of these ways, and this is less likely to be the case with less effective programs.

⁴⁸ Immigrants with limited English proficiency would, of course, have to meet the same admissions standards as other applicants to colleges, including a high school diploma or equivalent for admission to credit programs in most states. However, a significant number of ESL students has achieved this level of education (or higher) in their home countries, and require only English language instruction. In addition, many ESL programs include preparation for high school equivalency tests. The importance of immigrants with or without adequate English language skills as “students of the present” in community colleges is demonstrated by estimates that they comprise the fastest growing percentage of community college enrollments nationwide, and may comprise up to 25 percent of total enrollments. See Crandall and Sheppard, op cit.

⁴⁹ U.S. Department of Education, “Report to Congress,” op cit, p. iii. The precise number cited is 47,125.

⁵⁰ The limitations of the NRS measure of transitions listed here are commonly recognized by both program managers and state staff. This was verified by CAAL’s research in Illinois, Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oregon as well as by CAAL’s Community College Task Force.

⁵¹ See Walker and Strawn, “Oregon,” op cit; Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁵² These “personal barriers” were commonly cited by program staff, state officials, and others interviewed in conjunction with the state research projects sponsored by the CAAL Community College Project, supra.

⁵³ At least some of the measures mentioned here were found in a great many of the more successful programs profiled by the state case studies sponsored in CAAL's research, *supra*, as well as in many of the exemplary programs examined for CAAL by Crandall and Sheppard, *op cit*, and Boylan et al, *op cit*.

⁵⁴ See especially Liebowitz, *op cit*. Also Crandall and Sheppard, *op cit*, report what appear to be similar programs for ESL students at Denver Community College, North Seattle Community College, and elsewhere.

⁵⁵ See Liebowitz, *op cit*. Extensive information about the Nellie Mae Foundation's initiatives is available at the Foundation's Web site: www.nmefdn.org.

⁵⁶ See Crandall and Sheppard, *op cit*.

⁵⁷ See Boylan, et al, *op cit*, and McCabe, *op cit*.

⁵⁸ The transition problems of ESL students are very complex, and they do not appear to have been fully explored in any study. Due to the complexity of the subject and limited information about it, this report cannot set forth either these problems or possible solutions to them in their full dimension. As a result, some of its observations may be slightly oversimplified. Crandall and Sheppard, *op cit*, make an invaluable contribution by their survey of these issues and of the available research. Most of the observations on ESL transitions in this report are based on their work. As they note, however, additional research is urgently required to understand this important subject fully. In particular, the work by Crandall and Sheppard indicates that some programs have found effective solutions to many transition problems that should be further explored. With support from the Hewlett Foundation, CAAL has just launched a project to investigate these and other aspects of innovative ESL curriculum development and staff training.

⁵⁹ Nationwide, colleges differ somewhat in their policies about which applicants should be tested to determine if they can succeed in credit programs. Many colleges test all applicants who have not taken either the SAT or the ACT college entrance examinations and achieved what the college (or, in some cases, state postsecondary education policy) defines as satisfactory scores on them.

⁶⁰ A full discussion of one state's assessment system is found in Chisman, "Kentucky," *op cit*.

⁶¹ See Crandall and Sheppard, *op cit*.

⁶² See the NIFL Web site at www.nifl.gov. Also see Gail Spangenberg and Sarah Watson, Equipped for the Future: Tools & Standards for Building & Assessing Quality Adult Literacy Programs (Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2003), available at www.caalusa.org.

⁶³ See, for example, Davis Jenkins, The Potential of Community Colleges as Bridges to Opportunity (New York: Community College Research Center, 2004). Several educational leadership groups (such as the Education Trust, the Education Commission of the States, the American Council on Education, and American College Testing) have focused their attention on creating seamless systems of instruction and transition that link K-12 with postsecondary education. (See www2.edtrust.org, www.ecs.org, and www.acenet.org, and www.act.org; also see www.achieve.org for information on the American Diploma Project – a partnership between the Education Trust and other organizations to create seamless instructional systems that link high schools and higher education.) The National Governors’ Association has announced that this is one focus of its new initiative on high school education, launched by its chairman, Governor Mark Warner of Virginia, in collaboration with other educational leadership groups. (See “Redesigning the American High School” at www.nga.org.) In some cases, the idea of seamless instruction and transitions from K-12 through college is referred to as creating “K-16” systems or a “core curriculum” at the high school level. In other cases, it is referred to in other terms. However it is described, it is part of what has been hailed by columnist David Broder as “The Next School Reform,” Washington Post, January 2, 2005. Strengthening the links between adult education and colleges is the functional equivalent, and seemingly the natural companion, of this growing movement in the education field. Both are required to build the National Opportunity System America needs.

⁶⁴ For examples of colleges and adult education programs that have adopted this approach, see Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit, and Crandall and Sheppard, “Adult ESL,” op cit.

⁶⁵ See www.casas.org.

⁶⁶ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit. ACT and most psychometricians believe that there are inherent difficulties in equating a test developed for placement (the TABE) with a test developed to measure educational gain (the COMPASS). As a result, the Kentucky effort is in some respects experimental. But it demonstrates one approach to increasing transitions: the development of comparable assessment systems for adult and postsecondary education. In addition, the precision of virtually *all* education tests in predicting student performance is open to debate. The Kentucky effort merits careful evaluation in terms of the measure that matters most: its benefits to students.

⁶⁷ Examples of gap programs are found in most of the state case studies commissioned by the CAAL, supra. The most detailed descriptions are found in: Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁶⁸ See Crandall and Sheppard, op cit.

⁶⁹ Virtually all of the information and data in this section is based on Boylan et al, op cit, and McCabe, op cit. To avoid a proliferation of citations, the source of most particular points are not referenced, and the interested reader is strongly encouraged to refer to these sources. An excellent source of additional programmatic data on innovation in developmental education is: Robert H. McCabe, Yes We Can! A Community College’s Guide for Developing America’s Underprepared” (Phoenix: League for Innovation in the Community College, 2003).

⁷⁰ See Crandall and Sheppard, op cit, for basic information on developmental and “credit ESL” and references to additional literature. Regrettably, most reports on developmental education do not adequately explore developmental “credit” ESL, despite the fact that this is a very large program at many colleges.

⁷¹ Boylan, et al, op cit.

⁷² For an explanation of the policies of one state with regard to dual enrollment, see Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁷³ Examples of highly integrated programs are found in Boylan, et al, op cit, and in Chisman, “Kentucky” op cit, particularly in discussions of the Lexington, Kentucky partnership and the Big Sandy Community College program.

⁷⁴ Boylan, et al, op cit.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The nature and extent of what is often called “the Pell grant problem” in developmental education is a complex issue, and this report cannot do justice to it. It is, however, an important aspect of the linkage between adult education and colleges. For a more thorough discussion of it, see Boylan, et al, op cit.

⁷⁷ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁸⁰ Links to drafts of both Bills as well as of the Workforce Investment Act are available via the Web site of the National Institute for Literacy: www.nifl.gov.

⁸¹ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁸² See Knell, et al, op cit.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁸⁵ Morest, op cit.

⁸⁶ Ibid; Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit; Walker and Strawn, op cit.

⁸⁷ Morest, op cit.

⁸⁸ Knell et al, op cit.

⁸⁹ Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

⁹⁰ Walker and Strawn, op cit.

⁹¹ See state reports in U.S. Department of Education, “Report to Congress.” See also CASAS’ Adult Education and Community Colleges in Five States, op cit.

⁹² See CAAL state case studies and Boylan et al, op cit.

⁹³ Massachusetts is an outstanding example of a state that has adopted many of these management measures, but in which adult education is not under the governance of postsecondary authorities. See Liebowitz, op cit.

⁹⁴ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit; Knell et al, op cit.

⁹⁵ See Walker and Strawn, op cit.

⁹⁶ The amount dispersed in grants to states for instructional purposes in 2001-2002 was \$530 million, according to U.S. Department of Education, “Report to Congress,” op cit.

⁹⁷ According to USDOE, in 2001-2002, EL Civics grants comprised \$70 million of the \$530 million total dispersed to states. Ibid.

⁹⁸ The data and analysis in this paragraph are based on Chisman, “Leading from the Middle,” op cit.

⁹⁹ The states in order of funding level are California, Florida, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts, and North Carolina. Several other states provide funding nearly as high as North Carolina.

¹⁰⁰ This figure is determined by dividing total current fund expenditures of colleges (as reported by Digest of Education Statistics, op cit, Table 344) by the total number of students reported to be enrolled in college credit and noncredit programs (according to the American Association of Community Colleges “Fast Facts” op cit).

¹⁰¹ See Liebowitz, op cit.

¹⁰² See Walker and Strawn, op cit.

¹⁰³ See CASAS, op cit.

¹⁰⁴ See Knell, et al, op cit.

¹⁰⁵ See Walker and Strawn, op cit.

¹⁰⁶ See Chisman, “Kentucky,” op cit.

¹⁰⁷ See Liebowitz, op cit.

¹⁰⁸ See Knell et al., op cit.

NOTES