

*ADULT EDUCATION
& LITERACY IN
COMMUNITY
COLLEGES IN
MASSACHUSETTS*

A CASE STUDY FOR
THE COUNCIL FOR
ADVANCEMENT OF
ADULT LITERACY

by Martin Liebowitz

March 2004 (rev. 9-14-04)



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IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES
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**Working Paper 2
CAAL Community College Series**

March 2004 (rev. 9/04)



Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy

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Table of Contents

FOREWORD

INTRODUCTION - 1

I. GOVERNANCE AND CONTEXT - 3

1. Need for Adult Education - 5
2. History and Context of the Adult Education System - 8
3. Governance of the Adult Education System - 9
4. History and Context of Community College System - 10
5. Governance of Community College System - 11
6. Characteristics of Adult Education in Massachusetts - 13
 - Diverse provider base - 13
 - Competitive five-year contracts - 14
 - Intensity of services - 14
 - Community planning process - 15
 - Sequence of courses - 16
 - Class size - 16
 - Student counseling - 17
 - Program and staff development - 17
 - Teacher salaries - 17
 - College transition programs - 18

II. DEMOGRAPHICS, GOALS, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES - 19

1. Demographics of Students Served - 19
2. Student Outcomes - 22
3. Adult Education Goals and Performance Measures - 24
4. Community College Goals and Performance Measures - 25
5. The Potential for Mutual Support - 27
6. Economies of Scale - 28
7. Counseling as a Strategy for Improving Student Goal Setting and Attainment - 29

III. MANAGEMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION IN FOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGES - 31

1. Overview & Common Characteristics- 31
2. Two Community College Profiles - 34
 - Community College One** - 35
 - Organizational structure and management – 35
 - Adult education and college transition programs - 36
 - Developmental education - 36
 - Counseling and student support services - 38
 - Community College Two** - 38
 - Organizational structure and management - 38

Institutional change strategy – 39

Developmental education, counseling, and support services - 40

IV. LINKAGES AND TRANSITIONS - 41

1. Broadening Adult Education, Workforce Development, and Higher Education System - 41
2. Transition Routes from Adult Education to Community Colleges - 42
3. Building an Articulated Lifelong Learning Continuum - 43
4. College Transition Programs - 44
5. Local and Regional Partnerships - 46
 - Lawrence Literacy Works - 46
 - Cape Cod ACCESS - 47
 - The BEST Initiative - 48
6. The Potential of Interagency Integration – 50

V. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS – 51

APPENDIX A: WIA: Massachusetts State Plan - 56

APPENDIX B: Massachusetts Adult Education & Workforce Development System - 58

APPENDIX C: The Path to Self-Sufficiency Matrix - 59

APPENDIX D: Interviews - 60

APPENDIX E: References - 61

FOREWORD

To help develop resources for the provision of adult literacy services in the nation, CAAL is studying the role and potential of one set of institutions that are already an important part of the service system, community colleges.

The study, launched in early 2003, is directed by Forrest P. Chisman, Senior Vice President of CAAL. Dr. Chisman authored the highly influential *Jump Start: The Federal Role In Adult Literacy* (1989). It is guided by a prestigious task force chaired by Byron McClenney, representing the American Association of Community Colleges. Dr. McClenney has been president of several community colleges and is currently co-director of the Ford Foundation Bridges to Opportunity Project at the Community College Leadership Program of the University of Texas (Austin).

This project will publish several working papers, all commissioned to help inform the task force in its deliberations. It will culminate in a final task force report with recommendations in late 2004. (CAAL's web site, www.caalusa.org, contains a statement of overall project goals, a listing of the task force membership, studies in progress, and copies of all CAAL-published papers.)

The main findings of this case study are summarized in Section V beginning on page 51. The research was done by Martin Liebowitz. His background includes positions as Program Director at Jobs for the Future, Director of Research and Development for Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, Senior Policy Analyst in the Commissioner's Office of the Boston Department of Health and Hospitals, and Policy Analyst in the Boston Mayor's Office.

Adult Education & Literacy & Community Colleges in Massachusetts: A Case Study is Working Paper No. 2 in CAAL's Community College Series. Its publication, and the community college project generally, are made possible by funding from the Ford Foundation, Household International, the Lumina Foundation for Education, the McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., the Nellie-Mae Foundation, Verizon, Inc., and several individual donors.

We are pleased to make this resource paper publicly available, and urge our readers to keep an eye out for the national studies and other state case studies that will follow soon.

Gail Spangenberg
President, CAAL

INTRODUCTION

This case study examines the role of community colleges in providing adult education services (ABE, ESL, and GED) in Massachusetts and the statewide context in which the services are provided.

Massachusetts delivers high-quality adult education services using both community colleges and other organizations such as community-based providers and school districts. The state provides a natural “laboratory” for assessing what, if any, distinctive role community colleges play and how well they are performing this role compared to other providers. Massachusetts’ emphasis on maintaining a diverse provider base presents opportunities to assess links and transitions from adult education to postsecondary education in community colleges.

The study focuses on three major issues: (1) transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and potential for a division of labor with other providers; (2) integration of adult education services in those community colleges that provide internal pathways to postsecondary education; and (3) economies of scale or lack of such economies for community colleges and other types of providers. The study will assess the performance of community colleges and other providers in Massachusetts with respect to such traditional measures of performance as student learning gains and achievement of student goals, including transitions to postsecondary education.

The study will describe how the adult education system works in Massachusetts, identify strengths and weaknesses, and consider key policy issues. It will focus on analyzing the institutional factors related to performance effectiveness by provider type. It will also look at strategies for building closer linkages and transitions between community colleges and other adult education providers in order to create an articulated continuum of services that enables students to progress through any level of education into community college or job training programs.

The study is organized into five sections: (1) state governance of adult education and community colleges, and the context for adult education in Massachusetts; (2) demographics, goals, and performance measures in terms of students served, outcomes, and how services are delivered; (3) how adult education is managed within community colleges; (4) links and transitions within community colleges and between the colleges and the rest of the adult education system; and (5) summary and key findings.

I. GOVERNANCE AND CONTEXT

Massachusetts is nationally recognized for providing well-funded, high-quality adult education services from a diverse base of provider organizations – including school districts, community-based organizations, municipal agencies, libraries, correctional institutions, and community colleges – to deliver a broad range of Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Transitions to Postsecondary Education programs.¹

The provider network ranges from large, comprehensive institutions (such as community colleges, school districts, city agencies) to a vast array of community-based organizations (such as libraries and voluntary organizations). With this network of diverse providers, Massachusetts faces the challenge of providing high quality and cost effective services. It meets this challenge through a generally centralized governance system with detailed funding formulas, policies that regulate class size and hours of instruction, clearly defined performance measures and accountability procedures, and a high level of staff development and program technical assistance operated by five regional centers and one central resource.

The Massachusetts Department of Education (MADOE) funds community college adult education programs just like all other adult education providers in the state – with the same funding formulas, policies, and performance. But governance of the community colleges themselves is decentralized, with each college largely governed by its own local board. State funding accounts for only 45 to 50 percent of each college’s overall operating budget.

Adult education accounts for a very small percentage of community college enrollment and funding. Funding is limited by the state’s commitment to a diverse provider pool; therefore, community colleges do not have strong financial incentives to provide adult education services. They do so largely for two reasons: (1) their leadership is committed

¹ In this report, the term *adult education system* is used to describe the network of ABE, ASE, ESL and transitions programs that are funded with state and federal adult education dollars and administered by the state Department of Education (MADOE).

to promoting educational and economic advancement for adults with limited literacy, occupational, and English language skills; and (2) they want to strengthen their student recruitment activities. While community college adult education programs serve a small number of students relative to the institution as a whole, they help bring about broader institutional change designed to serve more effectively a larger number of adult students who are not prepared for college, provide transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training, and build linkages with other adult education providers.

As indicated, adult education services in community colleges are governed by the same funding formulas, policies of class size and hours of instruction, and performance measures as all other providers. For this reason, institutional differences in the delivery of adult education services and student outcomes are more limited in Massachusetts than they would be in states where community college adult education services are governed separately under differing policies and performance measures. However, differences in institutional setting, culture, and ancillary supports have the potential to improve effectiveness of services. For instance, some colleges contribute their own cash resources to support adult education services, partly by using developmental education resources. This allows them to use unspent MADOE funds as venture capital to improve any purposes supported by the college, perhaps even to make the adult education program itself better in some way. Colleges often have the cash flow and infrastructure to do things that other literacy-providing institutions lack.

The primary importance of the community college as an adult education provider in Massachusetts lies in: (1) its role in college transition programs; (2) providing internal pathways from adult education to postsecondary education and training within community colleges; and (3) extending the elements of adult education service to bring about broader institutional change (such as improving developmental education, education and career counseling, and student support services in general). Moreover, Massachusetts is an interesting state model because it has an articulated continuum of education for adults – from adult education and literacy services to postsecondary education and training – in an environment where adult education, community colleges,

workforce development, and transitional assistance are separately governed by a broad range of state agencies.

1. Need for Adult Education

According to the 2000-2004 Massachusetts WIA Title II State Plan, 19 percent of the population (about 877,000 adults) do not possess functional literacy. Another 25 percent (1,162,000 adults) are literate but lack skills expected of a high school graduate. The two groups represent a combined 44 percent of the adult population (MADOE 2000) or about two million people in need of adult education services.

Public policy debate about the need for adult education in Massachusetts is driven to a large extent by *The New Skills for a New Economy* (see Appendix E), a report prepared by John Comings, Andrew Sum, and Johan Uvin (2000) for the Massachusetts Institute for a New Economy (MassINC). This report focuses on the need to improve the skills of the adult workforce. It found that 1.1 million adult workers, more than one-third of the Massachusetts workforce, lack the skills needed for success in the state's knowledge-based economy. The report pointed to three distinct challenges the state would face in addressing this problem: the needs to upgrade language skills, provide educational credentials, and upgrade basic literacy skills generally.

New Skills contends that "What used to be viewed as an individual's problem is [now] better understood as a public problem, with major economic and social consequences." It proposes that the adult education system should play a key role in meeting some of the need, but indicates that it cannot do everything and must target its efforts.

It recommends that the adult education system focus primarily on meeting the needs of two target groups: (1) the approximately 195,000 immigrants who have limited English language proficiency (half also lacking a high school diploma), and (2) the 280,000 working-age adults in the Massachusetts labor force who do not have a high school or GED diploma.

It further recommends that the community colleges put *their* primary focus on a third group, the 667,000 high school or GED graduates, the working-age adults who lack adequate literacy and math skills needed for success in today's economy.²

Using the analysis of MassINC's *New Skills for a New Economy* as a starting point, this case study assesses how the needs of these three distinct populations are presently being met in Massachusetts:

Currently, the state's adult education system serves about 25,000 students annually, or about 5 percent of the population identified by the report. It has a waiting list of about 21,000. In Massachusetts, students who have a high school diploma or GED can receive adult education services if they test low enough on basic skills; approximately 15 percent of adult education students have high school diplomas. There clearly is a great unmet need for adult education services in Massachusetts.

There is a growing belief among public policy advocates and public officials that poor adult literacy skills and lack of English language proficiency pose both an educational and an economic challenge to individuals, families, and the Massachusetts economy. Improving these skills is seen as essential for strengthening economic development and increasing economic prospects for low-skilled workers and their families. Two demographic trends are driving these convictions. First, Massachusetts had the fourth lowest labor force growth in the nation during the 1990s. Second, immigrants, many of whom have limited English language proficiency, accounted for almost all of the labor force growth during that period.

The MassINC report plays an important role in public policy deliberations in Massachusetts, and it provided the starting point for the 2001 Governor's Task Force to Reform Adult Education and Worker Training (Governor's Task Force 2001). It is for this reason that Massachusetts places such a strong emphasis on the economic development role of adult education in the state.

² Their skills are at levels 1 and 2 of the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).

The high cost of living in Massachusetts is a main factor in determining the education and training needed by adults with limited skills. The Massachusetts Self-Sufficiency Standard describes the real costs of basic housing, healthcare, child care, transportation, and food for different types and sizes of families in specific locations around the state. A report by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union (Bacon et al. 2000) found that 25 percent of all the families in Massachusetts were living below the state Self-Sufficiency Standard and were unable to meet their basic needs at a modest level. In the years since the Standard was developed in 1997, the basic living costs for a family of four rose much higher than the rate of inflation, from \$42,888 to \$53,206 in Lowell, from \$40,056 to \$46,714 in Worcester, and from \$42,564 to \$54,612 in Boston (Pearce 2003).

By itself, the adult education system cannot prepare adults with low literacy and poor ESL skills for jobs that pay wages and benefits sufficient to support a family in Massachusetts; most such jobs require some postsecondary education or training. But adult education plays a critical role at some points in an articulated continuum of lifelong learning, from adult education and job training to postsecondary education and training. The services the system provides are a vital link in moving low-wage working adults with low skills into self-sufficiency and in stimulating economic development.

In sum, *New Skills for a New Economy* and the Governor's Task Force Report have together defined a need that goes beyond the boundaries of the adult education system, but that depends on adult education within the context of a broader integrated system of lifelong education and occupational training.

Adult education should not be seen as an end in itself but as part of a lifelong learning process. ABE is effective for many students, but it should be seen as the first step toward other training and educational opportunities. The community colleges, Workforce Investment Boards, Commonwealth Corporation, Department of Employment and Training, Department of Transitional Assistance, Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Board of Higher Education should all be more closely integrated with the adult basic education system (Comings et al, 2000).

Increasingly, Massachusetts believes that to meet the state goal of a more highly skilled workforce, and the economic and educational needs of adult education students and adult

learners, stronger links and transitions are required between the adult education, workforce development, and community college systems. Indeed, *New Skills for a New Economy* calls for aligning all of these services to help working adults develop basic educational skills and occupational competencies.

Articulated pathways that bridge traditionally separate arenas are needed at every level of educational and economic growth. Many adults who seek workforce development services lack the literacy and basic math skills necessary to participate, while many students who participate in adult education to get a job or get a better job might also benefit from workforce development services. This vision of an integrated continuum of adult education, workforce development, and community college services revolves around a common mission and performance measures. *Its starting point is the needs of the adults these systems serve rather than the institutions that serve them.*

2. History and Context of the Adult Education System³

Massachusetts set up its first adult learning centers of the modern era in 1966 with federal funding. Adult education was supported entirely with federal funding until 1982, when the state allocated \$600,000 for it. State funding was increased to \$2 million three years later, and adult education leaders got the State Department of Education to create a Bureau of Adult Education and establish the right of every resident to obtain the basic skills expected of a high school graduate.

The four-year plan, which was developed in 1990, marked the beginning of a long-term reform strategy to improve the quality and effectiveness of services and reduce unmet need. The expansion, however, was not funded until 1995. The System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES) was created at that time to provide program development, professional development, and technical assistance to improve quality of services. Four community colleges, the University of Massachusetts, and World Education manage SABES.

³ For more detail, see Comings and Soricone 2003, an in-depth case study of the adult education system in Massachusetts.

The major increase in state funding came after adult education was built into the state's Education Reform Act. This Act expanded adult education services and developed several explicit adult education objectives including the development of: (1) a full continuum of services from the lowest skill levels to high school completion leading to further education and training; (2) a system of trained, full-time instructors to deliver quality instruction; (3) a performance evaluation capacity; and (4) an effective accountability system. It also created a broad-based, high-level Adult Education Committee to recommend strategies for funding adult education services. The Committee's final report built political and public support for adult education and recommended a \$36 million increase in state spending over a five-year period. Between 1987 and 2002, federal and state funding for adult education increased more than ten-fold, from \$4 to \$45 million, with the state providing about two-thirds of the funds. Due to a severe budget crisis, state funding for adult education was reduced by almost 8 percent between 2001 and 2004.

3. Governance of the Adult Education System

MADDOE, through the Adult & Community Services (ACLS) unit headed by the state ABE director, governs the adult education system. ACLS, with its staff of about 35, manages and allocates federal and state adult education funds, oversees performance accountability, collects data through the System for Managing Accountability and Technology (SMARTT), and provides support for improvement of services through direct delivery of technical assistance and support for SABES.

MADDOE oversees the delivery of adult education services by community colleges, so the community college governance system has no impact on the delivery of adult education services funded by ACLS. As noted, community college adult education programs operate under the same policies, procedures, and funding formulas as all other adult education providers. While it varies among different colleges, adult education funding makes up a small part of community college revenues. At the low end, for example, one college receives \$117,000 in adult education funds, only .003 percent of its \$39 million budget. At the high end, another college receives almost \$1 million in funding. On

average, grants to community colleges for adult education are 50 percent higher than grants to other institutions, reflecting the larger average number of students they serve.

4. History and Context of the Community College System

In the fall 2002 term, Massachusetts' 15 community colleges served 80,368 credit students, and the unduplicated credit enrollment for the 2002-2003 academic year was 118,210. There were an additional 93,495 noncredit enrollments, for which the colleges received no state funding. Enrollment in noncredit workforce skills training increased more than 60 percent from 1997 to 2001, and the number of certificates issued rose by 25 percent.

In FY2003, the total state budget for the community college system was slightly over \$222 million, making up 45-50 percent of each college's budget.⁴ Spending on public higher education as a percentage of the state budget has gone down nearly 50 percent since 1988, from 6.5 percent in 1988 to less than 3.5 percent in 2004. Overall state funding for community colleges has fallen disproportionately, almost 23 percent since 2001 (from \$248.5 million in 2001 to \$192.1 million in 2004). State spending for scholarships and financial aid fell more than 27 percent during the same period (Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation, 2003).

Community colleges in Massachusetts play two distinct roles in providing education and training for adults with low skills:

First, they operate within the adult education system – where they serve approximately 2,900 ABE, ASE, and ESL students and, in partnership with other adult education providers, an additional 300 students in federal- and state-funded college transition programs. Adult education students make up slightly less than 1 percent of community college credit and noncredit enrollment. The colleges also partner with adult education providers in college transition programs funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation that serve another 200 students per year.

⁴ Data provided by Massachusetts Community College Executive Office.

Second, they also provide education and training for adults with low skills at many different stages of their development. They serve as an entry point to postsecondary education for many GED graduates, as a parallel system of education and training for high school graduates who have low-level skills similar to other adult education students, and as a provider of career ladder workforce development services for adult learners⁵ without high school credentials.

Community colleges thus provide an important pathway to further education for GED graduates who are former adult education students, and as a provider of a broad range of postsecondary education and training for adult learners generally. Given the large waiting list for adult education services in Massachusetts and the much larger number of adults who lack adequate basic skills, community colleges could also play a critical role in meeting the education needs of adults in the state who are not served by the federal- and state- funded adult education system. And effective community college developmental education, counseling, and student support services could have a major impact on meeting the needs of GED graduates and adult learners generally, similar to how students in the adult education system are served.

5. Governance of the Community College System

The governance of community colleges is decentralized; local boards of trustees govern the colleges. By state policy, community colleges are open-enrollment institutions required to admit any high school or GED graduates who apply, regardless of their skill level. Thus, postsecondary education for most GED graduates comes under community college governance.

Three other institutions play roles in the decentralized governance of community colleges: the President's Council, the Massachusetts Community College Executive Office, and the Board of Higher Education (BHE). The President's Council discusses

⁵ The term *adult learners* is used to describe a broad range of adults, with and without high school credentials, who lack adequate basic skills and/or English language proficiency but who are not receiving adult education services either because of inadequate system capacity or because they have high school diplomas or the equivalent and don't test low enough on basic skills tests.

broader issues and policies and develops systemwide initiatives. The Massachusetts Community College Executive Office represents the community colleges, serves as an advocate for the community colleges and a liaison with the state, and provides support for implementing such initiatives as improvement of developmental education or development of college transition programs in collaboration with ACLS. BHE serves as a coordinating council that oversees the annual budget process and development of performance measures in collaboration with college presidents.

The budget process begins with the development of proposed local budgets in each college and then goes to the BHE for creation of a unified community college budget proposal for the governor. Funding is allocated through a formula linked to actual instructional, student support, and physical plant costs. Thus, for example, developmental education is funded at a higher level than many other programs because it is more costly to deliver. Tuition for credit courses, which receive state funding, goes back to the General Fund; colleges retain all student fees, tuition for noncredit courses that are not reimbursed by the state, and other sources of revenue. State funding for community colleges has decreased over time, now accounting for only 45-50 percent of a college's budget, so that colleges have become more reliant on developing other revenue sources. Due to reduced state funding, student fees have been increasing so that in many colleges in the state they are twice as high as the tuition.

Management and delivery of services vary across the campuses because of the highly decentralized governance system. Therefore, because organization, management, and delivery of services are determined locally, it is not possible to talk about how adult education and developmental education are integrated within community colleges across the state. However, this study looked in detail at four community colleges (see Section III), selected because of their commitment to helping adults with low skills advance to postsecondary skills and credentials: Northern Essex Community College, Quinsigamond Community College, Middlesex Community College, and Cape Cod Community College. The colleges were among those in the state known to be developing and implementing promising practices for improving retention and educational and economic outcomes for a broad range of low-skilled adults.

A new set of performance measures has been developed by BHE in collaboration with community college presidents. Beginning in 2005, BHE will evaluate campus performance annually and identify institutions considered to be underperforming. In 2004, colleges at risk of being designated as underperformers will be identified and the board of trustees will be required to develop and implement a performance improvement plan approved by BHE. If sufficient improvements do not take place the following year, BHE will take over the college's state funding and make campus spending decisions. While the system will remain decentralized with regard to *how* colleges achieve performance goals, there will be a high level of accountability for performance against mutually agreed upon measures (Massachusetts Board of Higher Education, 2003).

6. Characteristics of Adult Education in Massachusetts

The Massachusetts adult education system is defined by a number of characteristics that, taken together, constitute a unique approach to providing adult education services. These are discussed below:

Diverse provider base: Massachusetts funds a diverse provider base: about 38 percent of adult education funding goes to community-based organizations, 26 percent to school districts, 18 percent to higher education, 8 percent to municipal agencies, 3 percent each to workforce development providers and correctional institutions, and 4 percent to businesses and unions (Comings and Soricone, 2003). Community colleges serve about 14 percent of adult education students in Massachusetts, although they comprise only about 8 percent of the providing network.

Strictly speaking, this diversity of providers is a result of the state's commitment to giving all providers "direct and equitable access" to state funding, rather than a goal in its own right. Massachusetts adult education policy is "provider-neutral." That is, it does not favor providers of any type. All providers may apply for funding and grants are awarded based on an evaluation of which applicants are best able to meet the state's demanding quality input and output standards. The diversity of providers in Massachusetts is a result

of the state's free and open competition, and the relative percentage of providers of different types changes over time.

Massachusetts adult education officials believe that the diversity resulting from this open and competitive policy is valuable because it enables them to serve a broad range of adults with different skill levels, goals, and learning preferences at a high level of quality.

Competitive five-year contracts: Massachusetts achieves a measure of stability by awarding competitive five-year contracts within regions, based on the level of need. Selection depends on various indicators of program quality – i.e. student educational progress; family, career, and community impact; professional development; program planning; program management and accountability; data collection and evaluation; instructional support services; curriculum development and implementation; instructional methods; and community links to tie the program and students to the larger community (MADOE, 2003a).

Massachusetts is currently in the fourth year of the five-year renewable contracting cycle and only currently funded providers are allowed to apply for renewable contracts under the existing cycle. There may be a tradeoff, however, between the value of program stability and the value of awarding contracts to providers with the highest performance. Five-year contracts provide greater stability, but shorter-term contracts promote greater competition by allowing new providers to apply more frequently. The state addresses this problem by placing programs that underperform for two consecutive years “on probation,” and they can be defunded before the five years end.

Intensity of services: The Massachusetts adult education system has made the decision to change its goal from serving as many students as possible to targeting its resources on higher quality services for a smaller number of students. In 1991, the adult education system served 40,000 students. ACLS cut the number of students to 12,000 in order to improve quality of services within its budget and put resources into program improvement and professional development. This focus is maintained by policies

establishing a floor for class size, hours of instruction, staff salaries, and spending for professional development and student support services.

From 1987 to 2002, per-pupil spending increased from \$150 to \$2,000, a 1,300 percent increase (Comings and Soricone 2003). As funding increased, the number of students increased to its current level of about 25,000. In 2000, students received an average of about 120 hours of instruction a year, almost double the national rate of 66 hours. Students who had more hours of instruction were more likely to achieve measurable learning gains (Comings et al, 2000). However, as might be expected, it appears that learning gains produced through greater intensity of services are at the expense of people whose demands for adult education services must go unmet. With a waiting list nearly equal to the number of students who are served, and an unmet need for services significantly greater than the waiting list, this is a centrally important issue for Massachusetts.

Community planning process: MADOE mandates that adult education providers develop partnership plans to work with other organizations and institutions in the community to (1) identify community needs of undereducated and limited English proficiency adults; (2) develop plans for how those people will be served; and (3) enhance ABE services, expand access to programs, and develop linkages with transportation, child care, health care, and case management support services. The goal is to create linkages that will make a broad array of educational, workforce development, and health and human services available for adult education students (Comings and Soricone 2003, MADOE 2003b). Partnerships are expected to consist of various community stakeholders, including but not limited to, ABE/ESL/literacy programs, K-12 public schools, institutions of higher education, students and prospective students, regional employment boards; and one-stop career centers, local employers, and human service agencies.

It is important to note that each adult education Community Planning Partnership includes a workforce investment board, which is explicitly designed to build collaborative partnerships between workforce development, adult education, community

colleges, and other services. This may in effect create two parallel systems because adult education representatives are mandated members of both the workforce investment boards (WIBs) and the community planning partnerships (of which the WIBS themselves are mandated members). That is, both institutions are involved in both processes, and each is charged separately with partnership building by separate state agencies. While planning efforts are collaborative in many communities, attention should be paid to developing a single, unified planning and partnership building process with the aim of providing a coordinated network of education and training.

Adult education providers have themselves identified two problems with the mandated community planning process. First, it brings institutions together to plan collaboratively for meeting community adult education needs but then they must compete against each other for adult education funding. While the process occurs differently in each community, there is no mandate for providers to develop collaboratively a division of labor that forms the basis of a unified partnership proposal for adult education funding. Second, some of the providers who were interviewed see the community planning process as labor intensive, a time-consuming process that takes up a significant amount of staff and management time without adding significant value.

Sequence of courses: The state requires programs to offer the community a sequence of at least three classes at different ability levels during the same part of the day. This is to ensure that students receive instructional services appropriate for their ability levels. The sequence of classes must be part of a broader continuum designed to enable students to advance from the most basic skill levels to a level “sufficient to meaningfully meet their goals.” The state and its adult education system will not support services that do not meet the needs of adults at the most basic skill levels, that are not great enough in number or depth to allow students to achieve skills equivalent to a successful high school graduate, or that do not provide opportunities to develop foundation skills and abilities necessary for success in postsecondary education and training (MADDOE 2003a).

Class size: Programs must offer classes of no less than 5 and no more than 20 students per teacher, with specific class size requirements for different types and levels of service.

For example, classes with 5 to 15 students are permitted for the beginning ABE level, while from 7 to 20 students are allowed at the beginning ESL level. Policy on class size reflects an understanding that students who have encountered difficulty in prior schooling need smaller classes to be successful. The minimum class size contributes to the existence of waiting lists and cost effectiveness issues (MADOE 2003a). Obviously, mandated class sizes have a significant impact on the number of students who can be served and the per-student cost of services.

Student counseling: Programs are required to provide paid student counseling for at least 2.5 percent of total student hours in order to support student attendance and retention. While teachers may be involved in counseling, specific staff must be allotted sufficient time to take lead responsibility. (MADOE 2003a)

Program and staff development: Programs are required to pay staff to participate in professional development activities, in an amount equal to 2.5 percent of an employee's total number of paid hours each year or twelve hours, whichever is greater. Programs must also provide paid time for staff to engage in program development activities, allocating at least 3.5 percent of total paid hours, and specific staff must be charged with lead responsibility for program development. (MADOE 2003a)

ACLS provides nearly \$3 million in annual funding to maintain SABES (MADOE 2003). As noted above, SABES operates through six Regional Support Centers based in four community colleges, the University of Massachusetts, and World Education. It helps faculty develop new skills and provides program support for incorporating those skills into classes (Comings et al 2003).

Teacher salaries: A state formula (the ABE Rate Fund) provides incentives for programs to offer a competitive package of salary and benefits equal to about \$22 an hour on average for professional staff in order to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff. This includes one hour of prep time for each two hours of teaching. In addition, programs must provide two to four weeks of paid time for direct service staff to engage in planning and development when classes are not in session (MADOE 2003a).

College transition programs: ACLS provides funding for eight community college programs to help current and former students make the transition from adult education to postsecondary education. All of the college transition programs funded by the adult education system are operated by community colleges and work in partnership with other providers. The Nellie Mae Education Foundation also funds a network of college transition programs, with technical assistance provided by the New England Literacy Resource Center. A mix of community-based providers and community colleges operate these programs (for more detail see Section IV).

II. DEMOGRAPHICS, GOALS, AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

1. Demographics of Students Served

As Table I shows, a total of 24,488 students were enrolled in adult education programs in FY 2002, including 2,876 in community college adult education programs and 273 in college transition programs. Community college ABE and ESL programs served 11.7 percent of all adult education students, and transition programs taught an additional 1.1 percent.

Table I: Total Enrollment in State-Funded Adult Basic Education Programs, FY 2002

Provider	Enrollment	Percent of Enrollment	Agencies	Percent of Agencies	Average Enrollment
CC Transition	273	1.1	7	5.6	39
CC ABE & ESL	2,876	11.7	8	6.3	360
All CC	3,149	12.9	10	7.9	315
State	24,488	100.0	136	100.0	194
Non-CC ABE & ESL	21,339	87.1	126	92.6	169

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 2: SMARTT database

The students served by community colleges and other adult education providers differ with regard to age, racial and ethnic background, and beginning functional skill levels.

Community colleges were more likely to serve younger students while other providers were more likely to serve older students. Table II shows that community colleges serve a significantly higher percentage of students 18 years of age or younger than other providers. They are slightly more likely to serve students between 19 and 25 years old, and slightly less likely to serve students older than 25.

Table II: Age Distribution in State-Funded Adult Basic Education Programs, FY 2002

Provider	16-18 (%)	19-24 (%)	25-44 (%)	45-59 (%)	60+ (%)	Total (%)
CC Transition	9.5	27.0	44.2	17.9	1.5	100.0
CC ABE & ESL	12.7	21.5	50.3	13.1	2.4	100.0
All CC	12.4	22.0	49.8	13.6	2.3	100.0
State	7.0	18.0	53.9	17.0	4.1	100.0
Non-CC ABE & ESL	6.2	17.4	54.5	17.5	4.3	100.0

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 3: SMARTT database

In 2002, adult education students served were about 37 percent white, 32 percent Hispanic, 19 percent black, and 12 percent Asian American. American Indians or Pacific Islanders made up less than 1 percent. Table III shows that community colleges were significantly more likely to serve white students, who made up 57.5 percent of their enrollment, compared to 33.5 percent for other providers. They were significantly less likely to serve Asian (5.3 percent compared to 12.9 percent) or black students (6.8 percent compared to 21.1 percent). Both served a similar percentage of Hispanic students, at 29.4 percent and 31.7 percent respectively.

Table III: Ethnicity Distribution in Federally Funded Adult Basic Education Programs, FY 2002

Provider	AI/AN	Asian	Black	Hispanic	NH/PI	White	Total
CC Transition	1.5	4.0	9.5	21.2	0.0	63.7	100.0
CC ABE & ESL	0.8	5.4	6.5	30.2	0.1	57.0	100.0
All CC	0.9	5.3	6.8	29.4	0.1	57.5	100.0
State	0.5	11.9	19.3	31.7	0.0	36.6	100.0
Non-CC ABE & ESL	0.4	12.9	21.1	32.0	0.1	33.5	100.0

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 2: SMARTT database

Compared to other providers, community colleges enrolled a comparable percentage of ABE students, more than double that of ASE students, and a significantly lower percentage of ESL students. Within each type of program, community colleges served more students functioning at higher educational levels, while other providers served more students in lower levels of ABE, ASE, and ESL. Table IV shows that ASE students made up 23.4 percent of community college enrollment compared to 11.1 percent for other providers, while 44.8 percent of community college students were in ESL classes compared to 58.7 percent for other providers. Community colleges and other providers served a roughly similar percentage of ABE students at around 30 percent. Of these, 17.3 percent of community college ABE students were at the beginning level and 82.4 percent were at the intermediate level compared to 28.8 percent and 71.1 percent respectively for other providers.

Table IV: Entry Educational Functioning Level Distribution for ABE Learners, FY 2002

Educational Functioning Level	CC Transition	CC ABE & ESL	All CC	State	Non-CC ABE & ESL
ABE Beginning Literacy	0.0	2.4	2.2	3.1	3.2
ABE Beginning Basic	0.4	3.6	3.3	5.2	5.5
ABE Intermediate Low	1.5	7.3	6.8	8.4	8.7
ABE Intermediate High	20.5	19.3	19.4	13.6	12.8
Total ABE	22.3	32.6	31.8	30.4	30.2
ASE Low	26.4	14.6	15.6	8.3	7.3
ASE High	33.7	5.4	7.8	4.3	3.8
Total ASE	60.1	20.0	23.4	12.7	11.1
ESL Beginning Literacy	0.0	11.8	10.7	12.5	12.7
ESL Beginning	0.0	11.5	10.5	15.4	16.1
ESL Intermediate Low	0.0	6.4	5.8	8.1	8.5
ESL Intermediate High	0.0	5.9	5.4	7.8	8.1
ESL Low Advanced	4.0	4.1	4.1	6.6	7.0
ESL High Advanced	13.6	7.8	8.3	6.5	6.2
Total ESL	17.6	47.4	44.8	56.9	58.7

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 4: SMARTT database

Table V shows that a higher percentage of community college adult education students were employed, while a higher percentage of students served by non-community college providers were out of the labor force or on public assistance. This indicates that non-community college providers are serving a larger number of students who are at greater risk.

Table V: Labor Force Status for State-Funded Adult Basic Education Learners, FY 2002

Employment Status	CC Transition	CC ABE & ESL	All CC	State	Non-CC ABE & ESL
Employed	63.1	61.3	61.4	52.7	51.4
Unemployed	18.5	25.3	24.8	22.4	22.1
Not in the Labor Force	18.5	13.4	13.8	24.9	26.6
Public Assistance	10.4	9.8	9.8	14.3	15.0
Single Parent	8.1	10.2	10.0	na	na

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 6: SMARTT database

In sum, while they overlap, community colleges and other adult education providers serve somewhat different populations. Community colleges serve a higher percentage of younger students and a lower percentage of older adults; a higher percentage of white students and a lower percentage of Asian American or Hispanic students; a higher percentage of ASE students and a lower percentage of ESL students; and a higher

percentage of employed students and a lower percentage of students not in the labor force or receiving public assistance. In addition, within ABE, ASE, and ESL, community colleges serve more students at higher skill levels than other providers.

These data suggest two things: that other community-based providers and school districts serve a more educationally and economically at-risk population, and that a diverse provider base may indeed expand access for a more varied group of adult learners. However, there are three possible reasons for the difference in populations that community colleges and other providers serve. First, community colleges place greater emphasis on GED attainment as a step toward transition into postsecondary education; they may focus on populations with higher skill levels for this reason. Second, there may be an informal division of labor in which the different provider types have just fallen into serving people at different skill levels. Third, because of their community roots, community-based providers may by their nature attract more of the neediest cases.

2. Student Outcomes

Community college adult education and college transition programs had lower average attendance hours than the programs of non-community college providers: transition program students attended an average of 89 hours, community college adult education students attended 106 hours, and students in other adult education programs attended 122 hours. Despite attending fewer hours, the percentage of students who completed a skill level was slightly higher in community college adult education programs than in community-based programs. (In considering this point, it should be kept in mind that community colleges serve a larger percentage of students who start with higher-level skills.)

Attendance hours and skill level completion: As Table VI shows, in FY 2002 more than 72 percent of community college adult education students had either completed a skill level or remained at the same level, compared to 65 percent of students in programs offered by non-community college providers. Not only did students in community college programs have a higher-level completion rate, they left programs at a lower rate without completing a level despite attending fewer average hours. College transition

programs had the highest rate of students leaving before completing a level, and the lowest percentage of students who either completed a level or were still enrolled at the same skill level. However, in interpreting the meaning of this result, it should be remembered that college transition programs in Massachusetts are in the pilot stage and still developing strategies and practices.

Table VI: Student Attendance Hours and Skill Level Completion, FY 2002

	CC Transition	CC ABE & ESL	All CC	State	Non-CC ABE & ESL
Average attendance hours	89	106	104	119	122
Percent completed level	33.2	33.5	33.5	32.4	32.2
Percent left/not completed	51.1	27.7	29.7	34.4	35.1
Percent remaining in level	15.7	38.8	36.8	33.2	32.7
Percent completed & remaining	48.9	72.3	70.3	65.6	64.9

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 4: SMARTT database

Completion rate by skill level: Community colleges had higher skill-level completion rates than other providers for students in seven skill levels: ABE Beginning Literacy, ABE Beginning Basic, ASE High, ESL Beginning Literacy, ESL Beginning, and ESL Low Advanced. Non-community college providers had higher completion rates in four skill levels: ABE Intermediate Low, ABE Intermediate High, ASE Low, and ESL Intermediate High. Interestingly, while community colleges served fewer students in lower skill-levels, they had higher learning gains for students with lower-level skills than other providers.

Table VII: Completion Rate By Skill Level, FY 2002

Educational Functioning Level	CC Transition	CC ABE & ESL	All CC	State	Non-CC ABE & ESL
ABE Beginning Literacy	100.0	35.7	35.7	22.2	21.1
ABE Beginning Basic	75.0	31.5	32.0	26.4	25.8
ABE Intermediate Low	36.4	25.8	26.7	28.5	28.7
ABE Intermediate High	58.0	14.1	17.3	20.5	21.2
ASE Low		10.3	17.2	18.8	19.3
ASE High		40.9	31.7	28.9	28.2
ESL Beginning Literacy		50.6	50.6	45.1	44.4
ESL Beginning		50.7	50.7	36.2	34.7
ESL Intermediate Low		43.8	43.8	47.0	47.3
ESL Intermediate High		40.4	40.4	39.0	38.9
ESL Low Advanced	100.0	46.7	51.1	38.3	37.2
ESL High Advanced	0.0	0.0	0.0	26.3	31.5

Source: Massachusetts FY 2002 Federal Report Table 4: SMARTT database

3. Adult Education Goals and Performance Measures

The Mission for the Education of Adults adopted by the Board of Education frames adult education goals and performance measures in Massachusetts. That mission is “to provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop the literacy skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, better employment and to reach his or her full potential as a family member, productive worker and citizen” (MADOE 2000). The Adult Education & Family Literacy Massachusetts State Plan explicitly states that “the vision for the education of adults not only encompasses increasing the employability of undereducated and limited English proficient students, but also includes building their capacity as lifelong learners and as contributing family and community members” (MADOE 2000).

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) combines a large number of employment, job training, and literacy programs for youth and adults into four block grants that states can use for adult education and workforce development. Massachusetts developed a Unified Plan under WIA that combines Title I, Title II, and Perkins services. The goal is to break down artificial “silos” and improve adult education and workforce results by integrating separate programs and funding streams into a more coordinated approach to meeting the needs of unemployed and low-wage workers with low skills (see Appendix A). As noted earlier, improvement of basic literacy skills and English language proficiency is seen as an integral component of a broader workforce development system. Massachusetts performance measures for adult education, like the National Reporting Standards, focus on five indicators of student achievement and economic and educational outcomes:

- Educational progress, measured as the percentage of students who complete a grade level equivalent;
- Enrollment in postsecondary education, measured by the percentage of students enrolled in ASE or Advanced ESL levels who identify “enroll in postsecondary education” as a goal, and the percentage who achieve that goal;
- Enrollment in vocational training, measured by the number of students who identify “enroll in vocational training” as a goal, and the percentage who achieve that goal;

- Employment and job advancement, as measured by the percentage of students who identify “gain employment” or “advance in job” as their goal who achieve one or both of these goals; and
- Attainment of a high school diploma or equivalent, measured by the percentage of students enrolled in the ASE level that obtain a high school diploma or equivalent (MADOE 2000).

To track enrollment in postsecondary education or vocational training, employment and job advancement, and attainment of a high school diploma or equivalent, longitudinal data is required across multiple providers, programs, or agencies. In the past, these student outcomes were tracked by student surveys, an approach that is both less accurate and more time-consuming than data matching. Massachusetts is now using a database that can track outcomes by social security number. MADOE asks students for their social security numbers on a voluntary basis; about 60 percent provide them.

If these kinds of outcomes are central to public support for adult education, it is important that longitudinal systems be developed to track postsecondary, workforce development, and employment outcomes so as to demonstrate the value of the adult education and promote accountability to public goals.

4. Community College Goals and Performance Measures

Because local boards of trustees generally govern community colleges, priorities may vary from one college to another, and these priorities are often reflected in strategic plans or institutional improvement plans. Improving outcomes for adult education students, GED graduates, and adult learners generally is seen as important by the leadership of the four community colleges examined closely in this study (see Section III). The goal is reflected in their priorities for change, which include the following:

- Improving instructional practice, retention, and persistence in adult education and developmental education;
- Using educational and career counseling to help students develop individualized learning plans;

- Encouraging adult education students to think about educational and career options that include postsecondary education and training;
- Developing enhanced student support services;
- Creating links with adult education providers to promote transitions to postsecondary education and training;
- Creating linkages with workforce development providers to create opportunities for advancement up a career ladder; and
- Integrating academic instruction, counseling, and support services for nontraditional adult students.

Transition to postsecondary education is a high priority for the community college adult education programs studied in this report for two interrelated reasons: First, the community college leaders who were interviewed believe that adult education students, GED graduates, and adult learners should have the right of access to at least two years of higher education. Second, they see adult education as a potential feeder system for student enrollment. While GED attainment and transitions to postsecondary education are of high importance to the four community colleges examined, they are only two of several elements that make up the mission of the adult education system in Massachusetts.

The strong support that the community college leaders interviewed give to adult education and transition-to-postsecondary education programs is based primarily on their commitment to these things as integral to their institutional mission. In these cases, the role of adult education as a feeder system for the community colleges is secondary because of the small numbers of students who directly make the transition from adult education to postsecondary education.

About 6,000 adult education students are enrolled in ASE or ESL advanced level courses each year. Some 1,300 of them are enrolled in community college adult education or college transition programs and some 4,700 are in community-based adult education programs. Even if all of them attained GEDs and then enrolled in community colleges, this would be a small number compared to the 120,000 students enrolled in community

college credit programs and the additional 93,000 who participate in noncredit courses. However, college leaders interviewed for this study recognize the potential for increasing the number of adult education students who make the transition into community colleges, and their colleges are working to realize that potential more fully.

The Board of Higher Education recently developed a set of performance measures in collaboration with community college presidents in the state. These include:

- First-year retention rate;
- Student success rate;
- Six-year graduation rate;
- Credit course completion rate;
- Number of degrees and certificates awarded;
- Acceptance and enrollment of special admission students and students with a high school grade-point-average less than 2.0;
- Percent workforce placement and/or continuing education after graduation;
- Number of not-for-credit workforce development/jobs skills courses offered;
- Enrollment in not-for-credit workforce development courses; and
- Enrollment of minority students.

None of these performance measures relate directly to adult education. However, they do provide incentives for community colleges to pursue two goals: admit larger numbers of nontraditional adult students with low literacy skills and poor English language proficiency, and improve academic performance, retention, and persistence of students. In order to improve outcomes for GED graduates and adult learners generally, the community colleges will likely focus more on effective developmental education, counseling, student support services, workforce development programs, and transitions from noncredit to credit programs.

5. The Potential for Mutual Support⁶

As already noted, Massachusetts is committed to supporting a diverse pool of provider organizations because officials believe that different types of providers have different

⁶ Massachusetts has a decentralized community college system in which colleges are governed by local boards of trustees. Statements about community college practices in this section only reflect practices in the four community colleges that were studied.

strengths. They believe that some adult education students want to be part of a college, while others, partly because of negative experiences with formal education, prefer small programs located in their community. Community-based programs may be able to recruit those in greatest need because of their roots in the community, particularly in cultural or linguistic communities. Because they are comprehensive full-service institutions, community colleges have the potential to provide more paths and opportunities for students to move into a broader range of educational and training opportunities. The colleges can also emphasize counseling geared to developing goals and plans for education and advancement up the career ladder, and they have more connections to potential employers.

6. Economies of Scale

If considered solely from the standpoint of direct costs for instructional service, it would appear that there are no economies of scale in the state because all providers must follow the same policies for class size, instructional hours, and funding formula. However, because average enrollment in community college programs is nearly double that of other providers, 315 to 169, they are in fact able to achieve some economies of scale with regard to administration. In the four colleges studied, the salaries of adult education and transition program directors are paid with adult education funds. The people to whom they report – who facilitate the integration of adult education into the mainstream of the college and the development of internal transitions to postsecondary education – may be paid with other community college funds. This is an important potential economy of scale that might well be used to encourage more community colleges in the state to develop stronger linkages from adult education to postsecondary education and to give higher priority to meeting the needs of GED graduates and adult learners who enter community colleges on their own.

Community colleges also have the potential to leverage other resources to provide counseling and support services for adult education students and professional development for adult education faculty. Adult education students in community colleges have access to the same counseling and support services as other students,

and faculty in adult education programs participate in community college professional development opportunities. A community college director who had previously worked in a community-based program notes that: “In a CBO [community-based organization] there’s a counselor. Here we’re surrounded by them.” Some other adult education providers such as school districts and city agencies may also be able to leverage additional resources for counseling and support services.

In two of the four colleges studied in depth for this report (Section III), the adult education directors are active participants in integrated planning teams led by their vice presidents for academic affairs. These teams bring together leaders from developmental education, several academic departments, ESL services, counseling, student support services, continuing education, and enrollment and financial aid to develop and carry out goals of institutional change. This process is a vehicle for integrating adult education into the college and for providing effective counseling and support services for adult education students. It is also a structure by which to incorporate effective principles and practices of adult education and college transition programs into broader institutional change efforts, thereby benefiting large numbers of GED graduates and adult learners who enter on their own. Practices developed in college transition programs related to student support services, counseling, cohort learning communities, and “college survival skills” programs are being implemented on a larger scale to meet the needs of nontraditional adult learners.

7. Counseling as a Strategic Tool for Improving Student Goal Setting and Attainment

Community college adult education programs place a strong emphasis on GED attainment and transitions to postsecondary education. Education and career counseling are designed to help students think about the importance of a GED and the value of education beyond the GED, and also to help students make the transition into higher education. Several directors of community college adult education and college transition programs believe that adult education should help students expand their thinking about their career and personal goals. According to one director: “About half of the people who come here have no idea what they want to do in terms of a career. We know if they don’t

have career goals they want to pursue we will lose them. Career counseling is very important.” This director feels that ABE services need to walk a fine line between being responsive to the goals students express and being proactive in helping students broaden their horizons about what is possible:

In the GED program, we understand students are motivated to get a GED, but we also believe a GED is insufficient and that they need more than that to get a family-supporting job. So we go beyond what you need to know to pass the GED test, like current events and citizen participation. For those who have expressed interest in going further, maybe we'll do a class on writing a research paper.

We are part of a community college, so we like to let people know what their options are. We say to them, “we're not setting limits for you; you can go wherever you want to go.” We also have statistics that show that it's very hard to be self-sufficient with just a GED or a high school diploma. Some people have not even imagined that college was an option for them.

We take them on a tour of the campus and introduce them to people in financial aid. This is a big part of the barrier. We talk about how to do research and use the resources of the library. This is a big part of the transition program, which is much more in depth, but we also introduce it in the GED program so all of them get at least a sample of what it might be like. We talk to them about other possibilities from day one.

In sum, incorporating educational and career counseling into adult education programs is a valuable strategy for increasing the move to postsecondary education and training by increasing the number of students who pursue that goal.

III. MANAGEMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION IN FOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

1. Overview & Common Characteristics

Local boards and college leaders usually determine how adult education programs are managed, where they are located in the organizational structure of community colleges in Massachusetts, and how adult education is integrated into the broader institution. Extensive data and literature review informs this paper generally, but as a way to help flesh out variations and similarities in principle and practice, four community colleges were examined in detail. Interviews were conducted with the presidents of Northern Essex and Cape Cod Community Colleges, the vice presidents for academic affairs of Middlesex and Quinsigamond Community Colleges, and the directors of adult education at all four institutions. Two of these colleges are profiled below.

All four colleges examined have several fundamental qualities in common:

- **Top-down commitment.** In all four institutions, there is a firm commitment to providing adult education and literacy services. From the president on down, leaders and managers are dedicated to helping nontraditional adult students advance in the skills and credentials necessary for economic self-sufficiency in Massachusetts, and strong management is provided by the vice presidents for academic affairs who drive the change process. The leadership commitment in these colleges takes many forms – e.g. building relationships and links with other adult education providers (discussed in detail in Section IV); creating transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training; improving developmental education, counseling, and student support services to better serve a broad range of low-skilled adult learners; working collaboratively with workforce development entities to create career ladder programs; and building internal education and career ladder pathways from multiple entry points to the skills and credentials necessary for economic self-sufficiency.

- **Commitment to serving both adult education and developmental education students.** When asked why the institution is committed to serving adult education and developmental education students, a leader at one college replied, “We have to do it, given the communities we serve, or we’d just shut out so many people. We’re morally obligated – it’s a passion here, in people’s souls here. It comes up in almost everything we do. It comes from the top, but it also comes from bringing in people for whom it is both personally and professionally important.”
- **A focus on GED attainment, transitions to postsecondary education, and education and career counseling.** The colleges pursue various strategies and practices to enable GED attainment and the successful transition to and success in college programs. To this end, counseling services are offered that help students think and plan beyond the GED as an end in itself to possible postsecondary options and career goals.
- **Adult education programs are integrated into the college.** For instance, adult education students have full access to collegewide counseling and student support services. And adult education directors are an integral part of the interdisciplinary planning and strategic change teams led by the vice president for academic affairs; they have a direct role in making key decisions about services that affect outcomes of adult education students, GED graduates, and other adult learners.
- **Improving outcomes for nontraditional adult learners is a high priority goal.** The colleges work to achieve this by making developmental education practices, education and career counseling, and student support services as effective as possible.
- **Adult education is explicitly linked to helping students meet their economic goals of getting a job or a better job.** Career counseling is designed to improve student retention and success in adult education as well as enrollment into postsecondary education.

- **Involvement in statewide planning.** Adult education directors maintain ongoing interaction with other adult education providers in the state through college transition programs, the community planning process, and other mechanisms.
- **Developmental education is integrated into, and operated by, academic departments rather than separate departments.** In addition, top staff in the colleges play key roles in an ongoing statewide effort to improve developmental education practices and outcomes across Massachusetts.

The persons interviewed at the colleges see community-based adult education programs as a potential feeder system, but the number of students their adult education programs presently serve is very small compared to overall community college enrollment. Nevertheless, the interviewees indicated that adult education services are an important tool in helping them develop strategies and practices that can be implemented on a broader scale to meet the needs of more GED graduates and adult learners generally who enter the college on their own.

The adult education directors believe that strong leadership support from the president on down is an absolutely essential ingredient. Without it, it would be impossible to make progress in serving adult education students more effectively or in applying the principles and practices of adult education programs more fully to other important institutional purposes.

It is significant that in all institutions examined, adult education programs report to persons well positioned to bring about institutional change and provide meaningful support for integrating principles and practices of adult education into the college. One director said, “ABE used to be the black sheep of the college; now they see the importance of these students as a feeder system.”

There is consensus that meaningful progress has occurred in the four institutions but also a belief that more change is needed to achieve a number of objectives – e.g. to integrate

adult education and effective college transition practices more fully into broader institutional behavior.

Moreover, while the colleges place strong emphasis now on better service to nontraditional adult students – by improving developmental education, enhancing education and career counseling and student support services, and expanding workforce development programs to provide an entry point to career ladder advancement for adults who do not have a GED or high school diploma – those interviewed feel that the colleges should be making further changes to meet the needs of these students. For instance, one adult education director feels that the college should provide more weekend and evening classes; another believes that many developmental education students could benefit from programs modeled on the college transition program.

The experiences at these colleges suggest that change is taking place in two ways. The first is through transformations on individual campuses. The second is through statewide efforts, operating outside the formal governance and funding structure, to improve services for GED graduates and other adult learners. One such statewide effort is a network of practitioners and college leaders working together to improve developmental education, which is coordinated by the Massachusetts Community College Executive Office on behalf of community college presidents.

2. Two Community College Profiles

Two of the community colleges studied are profiled in depth below. Their presidents are active participants in a statewide campaign to adopt the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which measures the real costs of meeting basic family needs, as a benchmark for workforce development and postsecondary education. The colleges use the Standard to guide development of education and career ladder pathways.

Community College One

This college serves about 100 students in adult education programs and 30 additional students in a Title II-funded college transition program, for which it has combined Title II funding of \$189,000. Overall, the college serves 11,500 students in credit programs and 26,000 additional students in noncredit programs – with some \$17.8 million in state funding. The institution also operates several programs that serve young adults who would be eligible for adult educational services including: (1) a charter high school reentry program for students under 21 years old who dropped out of school; (2) an out-of-school youth development center; and (3) a school reentry program. Students at the charter high school, which places a strong emphasis on postsecondary education as a goal, attend classes at both the high school and community college and they earn a high school diploma upon graduation.

Organizational structure and management: The director of adult education reports to the dean of math and science, who was chosen “because of a strong interest in developmental education students.” This provides a direct link with the developmental education program. The dean in turn reports to the vice president for academic affairs, who oversees the process of institutional change. The adult education program used to report to the associate provost for community education, with its new organizational structure, greater integration between adult education and developmental education is more easily promoted (developmental education at the college is a decentralized service operated by an academic department).

Adult education students and faculty are seen, and see themselves, as students and faculty of the college. The adult education staff can take advantage of professional development opportunities offered by the college, which includes two professional development days each semester, in addition to staff development funded by Title II. Adult education students have full access to counseling and student support services available to other students.

The adult education director is part of the virtual developmental department, which is headed by the vice president for academic affairs and is designed to plan and carry out broader institutional change in developmental education, counseling, and student support services. The team includes key people from developmental math and English, the deans of the English, math, and science departments, the ESL department head, the director of tutoring services, the director of counseling services, the director of enrollment and advising, and staff of the TRIO⁷ program.

The virtual developmental department is responsible for taking the lead on nine strategic priorities related to improving outcomes and success for developmental education and other at-risk students through changes in developmental education practices, student counseling, and student support services.

⁷ TRIO is a collection of federal programs that have evolved over the years from three programs created in the 1960s to promote economic and educational opportunity: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Special Services for Disadvantaged Students. Over the years, several programs have been added to the original group and the TRIO name has been retained.

Participation on this interdepartmental team integrates adult education leadership with the key counseling, student support services, and developmental education services that contribute to the success of adult education students at the college and to successful transitions from adult education to postsecondary education. Participation of adult education leadership on this team also brings to the table the perspectives, practices, and lessons of adult education in planning broader institutional change to improve outcomes for nontraditional adult learners. In addition to serving individual students, adult education and college transition programs are seen as a greenhouse for development of strategies and practices to improve outcomes for a broader range of nontraditional adult learners, some of whom are GED graduates who entered on their own and some of whom are high school graduates who lack academic skills necessary for college-level work.

Adult education and college transition programs: Adult education services at this college are focused on GED attainment and transition to postsecondary education. To achieve these goals, there is a strong focus on educational and career counseling to broaden students' goals and horizons. The adult education director pointed out that over half of the students who come to the college have no idea what they want to do in terms of a career. The college knows from experience that they won't be able to retain students who don't have a career goal they want to pursue. Many students come to get a GED because they know they need a high school diploma to get a job. Counseling aims to help them see the value of education beyond the GED and understand the link between postsecondary education and job/career opportunities.

The college transition program at this college, called Links, is designed to bridge the gap between the GED and skills needed for college-level work. Links helps students improve their academic reading, writing, and mathematics skills but it also recognizes that academic skills are not the only barrier to postsecondary success. The program also helps students develop college study skills; create short- and long-term education and career plans; prepare for a college environment where it is necessary to work independently; navigate college admissions, financial aid, and other systems; and learn how to take advantage of all the services available at the college. Transition program students take a career development seminar, a freshman seminar for adults, and a college-level laboratory science course with participation in weekly study groups. The program allows students to earn seven to ten college credits at no cost.

Transition program students are recruited through the college's adult education program in conjunction with community-based adult education providers. A cohort model, in which classes and modules are taken together, enables students to get support from each other as well as from faculty. By the time they complete the transition program, students have a good understanding of what services are available to them and how to take advantage of them.

Developmental education: The vice president for academic affairs believes that many students who enter the college on their own "look just like" students who graduate from the college transition program. This belief is behind the institution's commitment to improve developmental education, counseling, and student support services and to incorporate effective transition program principles and practices into broader institutional change.

Developmental education in this college is the port of entry to postsecondary education for many adult education graduates, including approximately half of the adults who complete college transition programs and many high school graduates who are not academically prepared for college. In some ways, developmental education offers a parallel system to adult education for adults with high school or GED diplomas who have academic skill levels similar to adult education students. Some high school graduates, for example, have entered the college with third-grade math skills; even some graduates who pass the recently enacted mandatory state standardized test enter at an ninth- or tenth- grade level.

Developmental courses are offered at three reading levels: fourth grade to sixth grade, sixth grade to ninth grade, and ninth grade to tenth grade and above. A tenth grade reading level is mandated by the state for college-level courses. Developmental math courses include Fundamental Mathematics, which teaches basic elementary and middle school mathematics; Algebra 1 and Algebra 2; and Intermediate Algebra, the gateway to college-level mathematics. Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 together are the equivalent of a ninth grade algebra course. In order to help students complete developmental education work and begin college-level courses more quickly, the college has redesigned the program to offer combined Fundamental Math/Algebra 1 and Algebra 1/2 courses that cut out a full semester for better-prepared students.

The college uses a decentralized system in which developmental education is managed by the academic departments. As one leader in the college described it, “We don’t have a developmental department. We have a math department, an English department, a science department, and an ESL department. Faculty in these departments teach both developmental and credit-level courses.” The college believes that developmental education students and faculty feel less marginalized in a decentralized system: students see themselves as part of the broader college, and faculty are seen as English, math, or ESL teachers rather than developmental education instructors.

The math and science departments design the developmental math curriculum while the English department designs the curriculum for reading and writing. Instructors in those departments teach both developmental and college-level courses, and developmental courses are articulated to the skill requirements of college-level classes. Developmental ESL courses are managed by the college’s ESL program for students who have a high school diploma but limited English language proficiency. The program offers a sequence of 17 developmental and college-level ESL courses at five skill levels, ranging from beginner to advanced.

Improvement in developmental education practices and outcomes is a major priority for the college that is driven by state performance measures, a moral commitment to expand access to college-level education for nontraditional adult students, and enrollment feeder system issues. The Board of Higher Education performance measures call for a 75 percent course completion rate, but course completion rates in developmental education are in the mid-60 percent range. Since developmental education is a critical link in feeder system for transitions to college-level education, improving developmental education retention and completion is seen as a strategy to expand access to college-level education and improve college enrollment.

Counseling and student support services: Placing strategic emphasis on counseling and student support services builds on having learned from college transition programs that underprepared students lack more than academic skills, and that their success depends on more than academic remediation. Ten strategic initiatives at the college aim to improve developmental education and outcomes for at-risk students, beginning with an internal assessment of barriers to student success. These initiatives mirror many of the strategies and practices developed and tested in college transition programs generally. They focus on developing an integrated web of effective instructional practices, counseling and advising, and student support services for developmental education and other at-risk students.

The strategic initiatives include creating student cohorts and providing cross training for instructors and tutors; creating collaborative intervention teams in which developmental education faculty, counseling services, and academic support services work together to improve classroom instruction and develop new instructional practices; developing cohort learning communities that link developmental courses with college-level courses through team teaching; developing a comprehensive advising/mentoring program through use of a case management approach; integrating academic, enrollment, and student support services; and developing a holistic approach to orientation and advising. The virtual development department makes it possible to integrate this range of initiatives across departments and services.

Community College Two

This college serves about 700 students in its adult education programs (194 ABE students, 181 ASE students, and 300 ESL students) and another 30 college transition program students. It does so with combined Title II funding of \$896,000. Classes are offered on campus and in seven sites located in the community. The college serves 10,000 students in for-credit programs and 2,500 students in noncredit programs, on \$13.4 million in state funding (equal to 45 to 50 percent of its total budget).⁸ While the college receives relatively similar funding for each adult education and credit-bearing student, it receives no tuition revenue for adult education classes.

Organizational structure and management: The director of adult basic and occupational education manages the adult education and college transition programs. This person is funded by the college and oversees both adult education and noncredit certificate programs. The director reports to the dean of continuing education who, in turn, reports to the vice president for academic affairs. This organizational structure provides the college with a direct link between adult education and certificate workforce development programs.

The college takes a holistic approach to institutional change under the guidance of an interdepartmental team of leaders from adult education, developmental education, student support services, counseling, and college-level academic education. Together they work to develop and implement an integrated change process. The director of adult basic and

⁸ Community colleges receive no state funding for noncredit continuing education or workforce development classes. In Massachusetts, developmental education classes are considered to be credit-level classes for purposes of state funding, but they do not grant credits that can be used toward graduation.

occupational education is part of this integrated planning team. The team is led by the vice president for academic affairs; it also includes the dean of health care and life science, the director of nursing education, the dean of continuing education, the dean of technology, the coordinator of developmental education, the director of career development and academic advising, the assistant dean for library and academic support services, and the dean of business management.

As in the case of college one, participation on this interdepartmental team promotes integration of adult education within the broader college and provides direct links to the developmental education, counseling, and student support services so central to the success of adult education students, GED graduates, and low-skilled adult. It further guarantees that the voice and experience of adult education is heard when decisions are made about counseling and support services that directly benefit adult education students. Finally, it ensures that the lessons and practices of adult education and college transition programs inform broader institutional change that affects a larger number of adult learners. Since the college transition program can only generate 30 graduates a year, its role in developing and testing practices and strategies is far more important than its role as a feeder system. This is exactly the role a pilot program should play.

Institutional change strategy: Institutional change objectives in this college are driven by a leadership focus on improving retention and success for nontraditional adult students by creating pathways that will move them from multiple entry points to the postsecondary skills and credentials necessary for family economic self-sufficiency. Broader institutional change is built on the underlying premise of college transition programs, that adult students who are not prepared for college need more than academic skill development to be successful. Change is focused on improving retention and completion rates in developmental education, which is the entry point for many GED and high school graduates in terms of pathways to college-level education. The goal is to increase the number of students who complete developmental education and go on to enter and succeed in college-level programs. This is central to the college's goal of promoting advancement from many different skill-level entry points to the skills and credentials necessary for self-sufficiency in Massachusetts. It builds education and career ladders extending down to entry-level with a broad range of precollege skills, and extending up to college-level degrees and certificates.

The change strategy is driven by surveys that were conducted to determine why students leave college and what their preferred methods of learning are. The process identified three things students need to be successful: (1) career development, (2) academic advising and study skills instruction, and (3) a quick connection to the college.

With respect to the first item, it is interesting that no more than 40 percent of students saw no connection between any community college degree programs and career opportunities, and they came to the college without an educational or career plan. As one person put it, "they have no idea why they're here." The college believes that the key to success for nontraditional adult students is to come into college programs with career goals already established, or, with counseling help, to quickly determine career goals after entry. This provides motivation and direction for developing short- and long-term education plans and staying on track to complete them.

Developmental education, counseling, and student support services: The college's Title III institutional improvement initiative focuses on: (1) revising and redesigning developmental education courses offered in the math and English departments so that they reflect learner-centered instructional practices and have appropriate learning supports; (2) expanding professional development to sustain curriculum changes and develop multiple instructional strategies; (3) creating a college orientation course to help students develop college survival skills and map individualized career, academic, and personal plans; and (4) designing innovative advising strategies to improve retention in developmental education courses.

Revision and redesign of developmental education courses is a high priority for the president of the college. The college orientation course – which helps new developmental education students see the connection between education opportunities at the college and economic opportunities outside its walls – is being implemented as a pilot program. The aim is to help students develop goals and plans for advancement; to say “this might be what I’m doing now to achieve this goal, but I’ve always got to be thinking about how that can lead to long-term career advancement.”

There is a 90 percent retention rate for students involved in the college orientation course, and action is being taken to expand the course systemwide. This process will improve outcomes for a larger number of adult learners in the institution, incorporating the desired use of college transition programs to bring about broader institutional change.

Developmental education at the college is operated by the academic departments rather than by an independent developmental education department. English and math faculty teach both developmental and college-level courses; they see themselves as English or math teachers rather than developmental education teachers.

Moreover, the coordinator of developmental education is a key player in a statewide community college practitioner network formed to improve developmental education. (The network grew out of a 1996 report prepared by the Massachusetts Community College Developmental Education Committee (MCCDEC), which was created by the Massachusetts Community College Executive Office.) With funding from the Fund for Improvement of Postsecondary Education (commonly known as FIPSE), the coordinator is working with the network team to set up a statewide Developmental Education Mathematics Institute. This Institute will be responsible for identifying characteristics of quality developmental education math, providing a clearinghouse for exemplary practitioner examples and practices, and developing ongoing professional development through a train-the-trainer model.

IV. LINKAGES AND TRANSITIONS

In 2001, the Governor’s Task Force to Reform Adult Education and Worker Training issued an urgent call to transform a broad array of separate and often competing programs into an articulated network of education and training:

*The workforce development system has grown up over the years on an ad hoc, piecemeal basis, resulting in dozens of discrete, often disconnected, programs run by a wide variety of independent, but overlapping state and local agencies. The result is a non-system that is difficult to access for both workers and employers. Moreover, although there are many high-functioning programs, the whole adds up to less than the sum of its parts. [Governor’s Task Force 2001]*⁹

Blenda Wilson, President and CEO of the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, is a prominent education voice in the region. She has also spoken publicly about the need for “creation of articulated pathways to educational and economic advancement for adults from entry-level literacy training or ESL services all the way to postsecondary skills and credentials” (Liebowitz et al 2002). (Nellie Mae has provided significant funding for work in this area.)

1. Broadening the Adult Education, Workforce Development, and Higher Education System

The Massachusetts adult education system exists within the context of a broader network of education, job training, and support services that address the needs of undereducated and limited English proficiency adults. Massachusetts allocates nearly \$143 million a year for a broad array of adult education, workforce development, higher education, and social support services that could potentially provide a coordinated continuum of education and training for adult education students and other adult learners who are unable to get needed adult education services (see Appendix B). This funding is in addition to significant resources that community colleges allocate for developmental

⁹ The term *workforce development* is used increasingly by public officials and public policy advocates in Massachusetts to describe a broader network of education, training, and postsecondary services for adults in which adult education plays a major role in preparing adults for further advancement.

education, counseling, and student support services. This large public investment is considered essential if all programs and agencies are to work collaboratively toward the shared mission of providing greater benefits to individual adults and the Massachusetts economy.

A tool called The Self-Sufficiency Scales and Ladders Assessment Matrix is being piloted by 11 community action agencies in the state to demonstrate clear need for a coordinated continuum of services to meet the multifaceted needs of adults with low skills. It describes the adult education, workforce development, human services, and postsecondary education requirements that adult education and other adult students need to progress through different stages of education and career advancement from poverty to self-sufficiency (see Appendix C).

It has been concluded that the comprehensive array of services the students need can only be provided through alignment and partnerships across the full range of service provider organizations, including federal and state programs, each of which is designed to deliver specific services for people at specific stages of the self-sufficiency continuum (FutureWorks 2003). This requires a fundamental change in the way that adult education, workforce development, community college, and human services systems operate.

2. Transition Routes from Adult Education to Community Colleges

Transition routes from adult education to community colleges are opened the moment students enroll in their first adult education class at whatever the skill level.

Attaining a GED is the last stage from which students make the actual transition to postsecondary education, but transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training involve two distinct stages: advancing through adult education skill levels to attain a GED, and then making the transition from the GED to postsecondary education, either immediately or at a later date. GED graduates can either make the transition through programs funded by MADOE or Nellie Mae, or enter on their own. Various

strategies and practices have been developed to increase the number of adult education students who stay on track to attain a GED as well as the number of GED graduates who continue their education at the postsecondary level.¹⁰

Once enrolled in college, placement tests are given to all students who enter on transitional pathways to determine if they are prepared for college-level courses or first need to take developmental education classes to upgrade their reading, writing, or math skills.

Adults lacking high school or equivalent diplomas can transition to noncredit workforce development or continuing education programs. These programs do not receive state funding and are not eligible for student financial aid. Interagency career ladder pilot programs – based on linkages between adult education, workforce development, community colleges, and employers – provide new transition routes from adult education and noncredit workforce development programs to college-level education.

3. Building an Articulated Lifelong Learning Continuum

Rather than focus on governance change, Massachusetts has chosen to put its emphasis on building a coordinated network of adult education, workforce development, economic development, and postsecondary education and training through collaboration, alignment, and shared performance goals. Their goal is to develop a network of providers organized around a similar mission and shared outcomes.

The state has adopted two key strategies to this end: integration of interagency funding streams and development of shared performance outcomes among provider systems. Both strategies require action inside each system on its own, but they also require collaboration and alignment across system boundaries – for example, in such areas as decreasing the number of adults waiting for adult education services, increasing the number who complete GEDs and who go on to postsecondary education, and increasing

¹⁰ There is also a stage within the community colleges that focuses on enabling adult education graduates to succeed in college-level programs and attain degrees or certificates.

the number of developmental education students who go on to and succeed in college-level programs leading to degrees and certificates. To determine accountability, the state examines each institution in terms of established goals.

4. College Transition Programs¹¹

Two networks of college transition programs in Massachusetts are designed to create opportunities for adult education graduates to enter and succeed in postsecondary education: The first network, funded with state adult education funds and operated by community colleges, serves approximately 275 students each year. Programs in this network were developed by the Massachusetts Community College Executive Office, the Adult and Community Literacy Service, and community college developmental education practitioners. The second network, funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and coordinated by the New England Literacy Resource Center, serves about 200 students annually in nine programs operated by a diverse group of providers. Two of the nine programs are located on community college campuses; the other seven are located in a range of community-based sites. Programs in both networks depend on partnerships between community colleges and other adult education providers.

As noted, college transition programs in Massachusetts were created to fill the gap between the skills a student possesses and those necessary for success in college-level postsecondary education. The programs go beyond traditional developmental education principles by recognizing that success in postsecondary education requires more than academic skill development. College transition programs perform the role of developmental education by providing basic instruction in reading, writing, pre-algebra, elementary algebra, and computer skills, all deemed necessary for academic success at the college level. The academic focus is on college-level reading and writing skills, such as effective reading strategies in multiple content areas, writing research papers, and preparing for college-level math.

¹¹ For more detail, see New England Literacy Resource Center/World Education 2002.

Transition programs in Massachusetts also go beyond traditional developmental education in another important way: they provide educational counseling, advising, and student support services specifically designed to ensure program completion and successful transition into postsecondary education – e.g. college survival skills and independent study skills. Some components help students understand the college admissions and financial aid process, the college culture, and how to navigate the college system. Some give instruction in goal-setting, planning and time management, stress management, listening, and note-taking skills. Moreover, the programs use a cohort model so that students get support from each other as well as from the staff.

Besides helping individual adult education graduates enter postsecondary education, college transition programs are designed to promote systemic institutional change that will ensure that students get the foundational skills necessary to succeed in college-level courses. Many community college leaders and transition program directors in the state believe that the principles and practices of college transition programs should be adopted more widely by community colleges and used as models to prepare nontraditional adult students for college-level work. At one community college consulted, many of the students who enter the college on their own have characteristics similar to students coming out of transition programs; the college has adopted the cohort model for all of the students because it has been so effective with transition program students.

Community college leaders are incorporating many of the practices used in college transition programs – e.g. education and career counseling, student support services, student cohorts, and instruction in college survival skills – into broader institutional change developmental education programs, as discussed elsewhere in this paper. This is important for three reasons:

First, after students make the initial transition into community colleges, support services tend to fall off, even with dedicated program funding – and community-based transition programs are concerned about how long they can continue to be available to students after they transition into college: “If the community college doesn’t [make them feel welcome] and doesn’t have [adequate] support services they come back to the

community-based adult education providers with problems.” Long-term success in postsecondary education depends on having immediate and continued access to effective counseling and support services within the college.

Second, approximately half of transition program graduates enter community colleges through developmental education courses. Thus, the effectiveness of developmental education is critical to achieving a successful transition to college-level programs.

Third, many GED graduates and undereducated high school graduates enter community colleges on their own and stand to benefit from effective instructional, counseling, and student support practices similar to those enrolled in college transition programs.

Mistrust and competition for funding between community-based adult education providers and community colleges can pose a barrier to building collaboration and linkages. College transition programs are playing an important role in building effective working relationships between these groups. For example, in one region, the community college had never applied for adult education funds because it didn't want to compete with adult education providers in the community, but funding from the state's College Transition Program enabled the college to become an active partner in a regional network of adult education providers that have transitioning programs.

In 2001-2002, 67 percent (131 of 197 students) in transition programs funded by Nellie Mae completed the programs; 89 percent of them (117) went on to postsecondary education. Thus, the programs surpassed the goal of 60 percent and 75 percent set forth by the state. Some 86 percent of the students in community college transition programs completed the programs, compared to 54 percent in programs operated by other providers; and 96 percent of the community college program completers enrolled in postsecondary education, compared to 83 percent of the completers of programs operated by other providers.

5. Local, Regional, and Interagency Partnerships

Three promising local, regional, and interagency partnership arrangements are discussed below:

Lawrence Literacy Works: Lawrence Literacy Works is a recent partnership between Northern Essex Community College, the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board, and five major adult education providers – all dedicated to reducing the large ESL waiting list in Lawrence and improving transitions from adult education to community college. In order to avoid competition for funding, the partnership focuses on collaborative activities to develop new resources for ESL services. The mayor of Lawrence, Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board, Northern Essex Community College, and the quasi-public Commonwealth Corporation provided some of the funding to get the initiative started.

Lawrence Literacy Works is a major step forward from a past marked by competition and rocky relationships between community-based adult education providers, the workforce investment board, and the community college. It provides an ongoing vehicle for dialogue and planning so that collectively the members can better address the needs of the people they serve. One promising outcome is the development of a common assessment instrument and referral form to promote cross-referrals and linkages among the three systems to create an articulated continuum of education and training.

The partnership has also resulted in a division of labor: The community college has stopped teaching basic ESL and is focusing on advanced ESL; basic ESL is now provided entirely by community-based providers. For their part, adult education providers have come to see the GED as a stepping stone to moving their students into the community college rather than as an end in itself, and they have incorporated educational counseling focused on postsecondary options into their programs. This is a clearly only a beginning, but it is an important one.

Cape Cod ACCESS: The ACCESS adult education and college transition program in Cape Cod is, similarly, a coordinated network of adult education and postsecondary education services. It is delivered through a partnership of community-based adult education providers, school systems, and the independent, nonprofit Cape Cod Community College. The partnership is built into the adult education funding grant stream and the state-funded adult education programs operate as a joint partnership venture with its own board. Classes are offered in school districts at night and in the community college during the day, with all providers using the same curriculum. By moving from a competitive funding situation to a unified collaborative division of labor, a foundation has been provided on which to build community college transitioning into the fabric of adult education services.

One community college leader consulted believes that the funding process for adult basic education should go even more in the direction of awarding grants to partnerships rather than individual providers.

The BEST Initiative. BEST (Building Essential Skills through Training) was designed by the governor's 2001 Interagency Task Force to Reform Adult Education and Worker Training. It provides another route for adult education students and adult learners to take in making the transition to postsecondary education and training. This interagency career ladder initiative integrates existing resources from multiple state agencies into a model for helping frontline workers develop foundation skills for career advancement, ranging from multiple entry points that provide low educational and occupational skills to postsecondary skills and credentials.

The BEST program integrates adult education programs, workforce development, community colleges, and economic development services, while leveraging private sector resources. It provides an articulated continuum of education and training programs linked to career ladder advancement in such sectors as financial services, manufacturing, health care, and biotechnology.¹²

¹² This summary of the BEST Initiative is based on a detailed baseline evaluation of the program contained in the study cited in FutureWorks 2003a.

BEST is intentionally designed to promote systems change, “to transform the current ‘non-system’ (in which individual workers must identify job opportunities and requirements, determine their own career goals, and navigate an educational system separated from the work environment) into an integrated, easily accessible system in which employers and educators work collaboratively to support frontline workers in advancing their health care careers.”

BEST creates interagency collaboration at the state and regional levels and funds the development of regional partnerships that bring together employers, education and training providers, workforce investment boards, career centers, and community colleges to provide a continuum of education and training that ranges from ABE and ESL to postsecondary certificates and associate degrees. There is a direct link between education and career ladder advancement because education and training activities are focused on skill needs identified by employers that participate in curriculum development. Education and training are directly linked to advancement along transparent career ladder pathways. This makes it possible to meet both the education and economic needs of low-skilled, low-wage adult workers so that participants see a direct and immediate connection between what they are learning and their ability to get a job or a better job.

BEST career ladder programs serve entry-level workers, many of whom have low literacy levels and/or limited English language proficiency similar to those adults who seek adult education services. They provide educational and career advancement along clearly articulated career paths that extend from low-wage, entry-level jobs, and ABE or ESL, to family-sustaining skilled employment that often requires a postsecondary certificate or degree. The focus is on basic skills and ESL services that gear instruction to career path contexts, making it relevant to the students. The program gears basic skills and ESL instruction to job-specific needs and to such workplace competencies as problem solving, teamwork, and communication. A Foundation Skills program, for example, incorporates four modules: math, critical reading and writing, principles of biology, and career pathways.

Programs provide intensive career counseling and coaching to help learners develop individualized plans that link educational and career advancement activities and enable them to see concrete economic benefits at milestones along the chosen pathway. This results in improved retention and persistence. BEST programs focus on adult learners as workers, which provides several advantages for reaching different adult populations. Recruitment and retention are more easily improved because adults are recruited in the workplace. Moreover, workers see a direct connection to promotion and higher wages, can pursue their education with released time from work, and can often get tuition reimbursement from their employers.

The BEST Initiative was launched with state funding from several integrated revenue streams: the Division of Employment and Training, the Department of Education, the Department of Transitional Assistance, and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. Funding is allocated directly to local or regional partnerships, including employers, community colleges and other education/training providers, local workforce investment boards, and workers from participating firms or organized labor.

6. The Potential of Interagency Integration

Massachusetts considers itself to be in the early stages of developing policies and structures for interagency integration to bring about more effective lifelong learning services across a wide continuum of need. Key public officials, public policy advocates, and adult education, community college, and workforce development leaders believe that fragmentation of services remains a barrier to creating a system that will truly meet the educational and economic needs of low-skilled adults.

But the BEST Initiative and the many other promising developments and interagency collaborations discussed in this study are examples of strong steps in the right direction. Programs like BEST are an innovative new pathway to workforce development and postsecondary education and training in Massachusetts – and they may have special appeal to adult workers who cannot or will not pursue traditional educational routes.

V. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS ¹³

In Massachusetts, adult education services are delivered by a diverse base of community colleges, school districts, municipal agencies, voluntary organizations and CBOs, libraries, and other provider organizations. In addition, adult education policy in the state is fairly prescriptive in terms of quality standards and funding systems. Community colleges are required to meet the same adult education policies and standards as other providers in the state – *and they are funded in the same way*. In this decentralized system, local boards of trustees generally govern community colleges and determine college policies and priorities.

Community college adult education programs in the state serve a somewhat different student population than other providers, with a greater emphasis on GED attainment and transition into college. The colleges are more likely to serve students younger than 24 years of age while other providers are more likely to serve students older than that. They are also more likely to serve white students and less likely to serve blacks and Asian American students. They serve a larger percentage of ASE students and a lower percentage of ESL students than other providers. Finally, they serve a larger percentage of students who are employed, and a lower percentage of students not in the labor force or who receive public assistance.

As noted, Massachusetts policies require community colleges to meet the same standards for adult education service as other providers and fund all providers using the same formula. Colleges (and other providers) that do not meet these standards either are not funded or can be defunded. The fact that 12 of the 15 Massachusetts community colleges receive funding within this policy system shows that most colleges are at least as effective as other providers in delivering high quality service. Data show that community colleges have a slightly higher rate of skill level completion than other

¹³ Analysis of the community college role in adult education in this report is informed significantly by interviews with representatives of four community colleges and other state leaders (see Appendix D). Because governance of community colleges is decentralized in Massachusetts, and because only four community colleges were examined in depth, findings related to community college practices in general are discussed in terms of the *potential* of community colleges to act in certain ways.

providers, although this is not surprising considering the student populations they tend to serve.

College transition programs, which are still in the pilot stage, are successful in helping a large percentage of their students make a transition to community college. About 70 percent of students complete transition programs and enroll in community colleges. Characteristics of successful programs include aggressive recruitment, strong admissions and financial aid help, effective counseling and student support services, the provision of college survival skills courses, and articulation with college placement testing. Close cooperation among college admissions, financial aid, counseling, student support services, and developmental education programs is important to transition program success. College transition programs provide a structure for ongoing dialogue between community colleges and other adult education providers that has potential for building ties on a larger scale.

Current college transition programs and other local partnerships show that it is possible for community colleges and other adult education providers to collaborate in expanding transitions from adult education into postsecondary education and training. It is clear, however, that building effective linkages and partnerships is a collective responsibility of all parties, which requires time, resources, and infrastructure. Because transition programs in Massachusetts are still being piloted, it is not clear yet whether the relationships built between community colleges and other adult education providers will, in fact, lead to larger-scale collaborations that improve and expand the delivery of adult education services in the community or that make for more, and more effective, transitions to postsecondary education and training.

In addition to their role as adult education providers – which is governed by policies of the Department of Education – community colleges in Massachusetts play other important roles for former adult education students, GED graduates, and other kinds of adult learners. Many students who enter community colleges on their own volition have the same characteristics as graduates of college transition programs. Community colleges interviewed for this study emphasized the role of having change strategies to improve

transitions to college-level programs for students, including many GED graduates and others unprepared for college level work.

While still in the early stages, recent innovative changes in developmental education, career and academic counseling, and student support services clearly have the potential to help a larger number of underprepared students enter and succeed in college-level courses leading to certificates and degrees. The colleges studied are presently implementing some transition program practices on a broader scale as part of their institutional change strategy.

Compared to other states, Massachusetts offers colleges and other providers fairly generous levels of adult education funding. But the funding level is not by itself sufficient to generate college participation in adult education (largely because of the small number of students served to date) or to foster a strong college commitment to the service. The Massachusetts case indicates that a college's sense of mission and service to the community is at least as important as funding, if not more so, in generating commitment to adult education services. Because governance is decentralized, community colleges make decisions about the role and scale of adult education services based on their own sense of mission and purpose. Apparently, commitment to adult education has grown largely because there is a strong leadership commitment to serving adult education students and other nontraditional adult students with low skills.

Economies of scale in community college provision of adult education services are hard to tease out of available data, but there are strong indications of the potential for savings, particularly in the areas of administration, counseling, and student support services. There appear to be few economies of scale in delivery of instruction because community colleges are governed by the same class size, hours of instruction, and teacher salary policies as all other adult education providers.

The potential for some economies of scale in administration exists because average enrollment in community college adult education programs is nearly double that of

other providers. In addition, some of the community colleges examined in this study pay some of their adult education administrative costs with funds from other college resources.

Since adult education students have access to the same counseling and student support services as other students of the college, this is another area of potential savings. To the extent that college resources are used to support adult education services, state and federal funds can be used to improve program quality.

There has been progress in integrating adult education programs and services into other college programs and services, especially in the areas of counseling, student support services, developmental education, and continuing education services. This integration not only gives adult education students greater access to key college services, it also creates potential for adult education and transition program practices to influence broader institutional change within the college that could benefit a large number of adult learners unprepared for college-level work.

In the colleges studied, adult education students are treated the same as other students. In addition, the leaders of college adult education programs are treated as important members of interdisciplinary planning and institutional change teams that also include developmental education, counseling and student support services, and some academic departments.

Developmental education serves as a point of entry for GED graduates and other adult learners, including many high school graduates, who lack the reading, writing, and/or math skills required for college-level courses. In many ways, developmental education operates as a parallel system that serves a significantly larger number of students than college adult education programs. While developmental education serves a broad range of skill levels, because of the state's open-enrollment policy, it serves a large number of students at higher ASE and ESL skill levels and fills the gap between the GED curriculum and requirements for entering college-level courses.

While they operate on parallel tracks, there is a close working relationship between adult education and developmental education leaders in the two colleges profiled in depth in this paper (see Section III, p. 34), and developmental education is part of their academic departments. In many cases, faculties teach both developmental and college-level courses, and ongoing attention is given to better articulating exit standards of developmental courses with entrance standards of college-level courses.

There is considerable potential in Massachusetts for adult education and developmental education to learn from each other, as a way to improve the effectiveness of both services, and to better articulate adult education curriculum with developmental and college-level courses.

In sum, the Massachusetts case study indicates that community colleges can play an important and distinctive role in an adult education system and policy structure when they operate on a level playing field with other providers. Clearly, community colleges have the potential to integrate adult education programs with other community college services and to build linkages and partnerships with other adult education providers so as to expand transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training.

APPENDIX A

WIA Title II “Adult Education and Family Literacy” Massachusetts State Plan July 2000 to June 2004

A. Vision and Goals

As the “eligible agency” under WIA Title II, the Massachusetts Department of Education manages our state’s federal- and state-funded adult basic education services under a broader “Mission for the Education of Adults” that was previously adopted by the State Board of Education:

“To provide each and every adult with opportunities to develop the literacy skills needed to qualify for further education, job training, better employment and to reach his or her full potential as a family member, productive worker, and citizen.”

GOALS:

- 1.0 Massachusetts will develop a comprehensive, integrated, coordinated, and effective delivery system for adult education services throughout the Commonwealth.
 - 1.1 All state and regional “investors” in ABE services will achieve a higher level of coordination through formal memoranda of agreement/understanding. (Memoranda of Understanding will be negotiated and signed between the Department and our state’s sixteen local WIBs by the beginning of FY2001.)
 - 1.2 The Department will provide leadership and support for comprehensive ABE interagency planning through the statewide WIB, the WIA Steering Committee, the Massachusetts Family Literacy Consortium (MFLC), and the Massachusetts Workplace (incumbent worker) Education Committee (MWEC).
 - 1.3 Coordination of services among employment & training, human service and ABE (“Community Adult Learning Centers”) providers will increase through a funded, ongoing process of ABE Community Planning.

B. Coordination and Non-Duplication of Services

ABE Community Planning is a requirement of all programs applying for funds from the Massachusetts Department of Education (the Department). The purpose of the Community Planning initiative is to ensure that:

- The needs of all undereducated and/or limited English proficient constituencies are accounted for and that strategic plans are developed to identify how and when every such constituency will ultimately be served;
- Every organization with an interest in and the potential for supporting services to these populations is included in such planning, and that protocols are established to coordinate these services;

- Students benefit from the broadest possible array of educational, employment and training, health, and human services available and which so may adults need in order to successfully pursue their goals and aspirations; and
- Adult basic education takes its place as a key ingredient in each organization's, community's, and region's plans to improve the quality of life for its citizenry.

The Department will also be negotiating Memoranda of Understanding with each of the state's sixteen local WIBs to provide for the support of career centers and increased coordination with the state's system of ABE providers with the state's education and training providers. The joint review of ABE multiyear proposals by the Department with the WIBs and SDAs also lays the foundation for a higher degree of coordination and collaboration; approximately 12 percent of the funding awarded in each region will be provided through a subcontract with the SDA (or, in the future, likely through the career center). We expect this coordination will ultimately lead to an increased number of programs using integrated education and training approaches to providing services to adults with employment related goals.

APPENDIX B

Massachusetts Adult Education and Workforce Development System¹⁴

Department & Division	Program	Funding
Dept. of Labor & Workforce Dev. Commonwealth Corp. Employment & Training	Workforce Investment Act (Youth)	\$ 16,000,000
	Extended Care career ladders Initiative	\$ 4,100,000
	BEST Initiative	\$ 1,750,000
	Workforce Investment Act (Dislocated Workers)	\$ 12,321,000
	Workforce Investment Act (Adults)	\$ 10,112,000
	Wagner Peyser Act	\$ 15,144,000
	One-Stop Career Centers	\$ 3,750,000
	Workforce Training Fund	\$ 18,000,000
Department of Education Adult Basic Education	Adult Basic Education	\$ 28,617,000
	Connecting Activities	\$ 4,130,000
Health & Human Services Dept. of Transitional Assistance	Employment Services Program	\$ 28,000,000
Board of Higher Education	Community College Workforce Training Incentive	\$ 900,000
	Community College Developmental Education *	
Total		\$142,824,000

* Note: A significant portion of community college resources could also be used in ways that promote transitions to postsecondary education and improve college success for adult education students.

¹⁴ The table is adapted from “Workforce Development: An Agenda for Massachusetts’ Next Governor” (2003) by the Massachusetts Workforce Alliance.

APPENDIX C

The Path to Self-Sufficiency Matrix¹⁵

Stage	Assets & Barriers	Services Needed	Institutions
In-Crisis	No income or assets No skills or credentials Unstable housing Unreliable transportation, child care, & health care Safety & mental health risks	Outreach/recruitment Intake/assessment/screening Help accessing support services Services for refugees and immigrants	Community Action Agencies (CAAs) Community Development Corporations (CDCs) Community-based Organizations (CBOs)
At-Risk	Seeking employment Seeking ESL, GED, or vocational training Temporary/transitional housing Transportation & child care not affordable or reliable	ESL, VESL, ABE, and GED Employment and life skills training Personal success plan & early career planning development Job development/placement	CAAs, CDCs, CBOs Employers One-stop centers Adult education providers
Safe	Employed in semi-stable job Has high school diploma, GED, or vocational training Permanent, affordable housing Reliable & affordable transportation & child care	Job retention/ advancement supports: mentoring or peer support, employer contacts, skills upgrading, career ladder progress, career planning	CAAs, CDCs, CBOs Employers Bridging to postsecondary education
Stable	Permanent & stable job Career & educational plan Active and ongoing learning Affordable housing, child care, and transportation	Career advancement supports: support for licensure, degrees, & credentialing; employer-funded education & training; mentoring & peer support	CAAs, CDCs, CBOs Employers Postsecondary education
Thriving	Permanent employment of choice Implementing education and career plan Affordable housing, child care, and transportation	Support on an “as needed” basis only	Employers Postsecondary education

¹⁵ Adapted from FutureWorks 2003

APPENDIX D: Interviews

Bob Bickerton – Associate Commissioner of Lifelong Learning, MA Department of Education

Irene Chalek – Director of Adult Basic Education and ABE to College Transition Program, Northern Essex Community College

Ann Dunphy – Director of Workforce Development, MA Community College Executive Office

Don Gillis – Executive Director, Massachusetts Workforce Board Association

David Hartleb – President, Northern Essex Community College

Linda Huntington – Coordinator, Cambridge Community Learning Center ABE to College Transition Bridge Program

Silja Kallenbach – Coordinator, New England Literacy Resource Center

Joan Kieran – Coordinator, Cape Cod Community College ABE to College Transition SUCCESS Program

Cathy Livingston – Vice President for Academic Affairs, Quinsigamond Community College

Betsy Lowry – Director, Cambridge Community Learning Center

Mary Jane McCarthy – Vice President for Academic Affairs, Middlesex Community College

Betty McKiernan – Coordinator, MCC Adult Learning Center, Middlesex Community College

Carlos Matos – Director, U.S. Department of Education Title V Program, Northern Essex Community College

Janice Motta – Executive Director, MA Community College Executive Office

Steve Quimby – Director of Planning and Policy Research, Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

Jim Rice – Coordinator, Communication Skills Center, Quinsigamond Community College

Shaw Rosen – Executive Director, Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

John Schneider – Director, New Skills for a New Economy Awareness and Action Campaign, Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth (MassINC)

Kathleen Schatzberg – President, Cape Cod Community College

Jessica Spohn – Director, College Transition Program, New England Literacy Resource Center

Linda Young – Dean of Math and Science, Middlesex Community College

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