



# THE NEW ENGLAND ABE-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

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The Nellie Mae Education Foundation, located in Quincy, Massachusetts, provides grants to New England institutions and organizations that help improve academic achievement and access to higher education for underserved students through four strategic initiatives—Adult Literacy, College Prep, Minority High Achievement, and Out of School Matters!. The Foundation also funds research that examines contemporary educational opportunity issues that affect New Englanders, and convenes educators, policymakers and community members to influence public policy in education.

Since its founding in 1998, the Foundation has distributed more than \$53 million to promote access, quality and effectiveness of education, especially for underserved populations in New England.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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**Julia Gittleman**  
*Evaluator*

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# FOREWORD

Five years ago the Nellie Mae Education Foundation began deliberations about a strategic focus for our grantmaking. We became aware that a significant obstacle to New England's economic recovery and well-being was the large number of adults who are not sufficiently skilled or literate to participate in the emerging 21st century economy.

We knew that, in the new economy, possession of a high-school diploma—once the ticket to the middle-class—no longer guaranteed that status. All adult learners, and especially those from immigrant populations, are at a grave disadvantage if their education ends at the secondary level. We believed that the region would benefit if we could help increase the opportunities for non-traditional adult students to obtain 21st century skills through post secondary education.

It was with that conviction that the Foundation established the first grantmaking program within our Adult Literacy initiative—the ABE-to-College Transition Project. The goal of the program is to assist adult students who have obtained their General Educational Development (GED) certificate to enroll—and succeed—in college. We developed a partnership with the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC), whose expertise in educational transitions for adults inspired and shaped our program. Over the course of the initiative, programs that have received Nellie Mae Education Foundation grants and participated in technical assistance activities with NELRC have prepared more than 1,500 GED recipients for college.

We are indebted to Dr. Julia Gittleman, who conducted this evaluation of the ABE-to-College Transition Project. This report represents the Foundation's commitment to share what we learn from our grantmaking strategies. It is also a tribute to the commitment and hard work of ABE-to-College students, program staff, and staff of the New England Literacy Resource Center. We are proud of our association with their remarkable accomplishments.

**Dr. Blenda J. Wilson**  
**President and CEO**  
*Nellie Mae Education Foundation*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New England ABE-to-College Transition Project is a comprehensive college transition model, funded by Nellie Mae Education Foundation (NMEF), that aims to bridge the gap between the level of academic work required to receive a certificate of General Educational Development (GED) or an External Diploma Program (EDP), and the skills required for college-level academic work. The project's 25 sites offer direct instruction and counseling that address the social barriers experienced by nontraditional adult students. For more information on the project, see [www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org). With support from NMEF, Julia Gittleman, Ph.D., was hired in the spring, 2003, to implement an evaluation of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.



The evaluation sought to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the program participants?
2. Do program participants enter college at higher rates than comparison students?
3. What can be learned from the most successful programs about their relationship with their college partners?
4. What was the experience of dropouts?



The evaluation included a quantitative analysis of data gathered from students at enrollment and program completion, a qualitative analysis of three programs and their graduates' experiences in enrolling and remaining in postsecondary education and a secondary analysis comparing the data gathered through this evaluation with related research being conducted on nontraditional adult learners and their experiences transitioning to and attending postsecondary education.

**KEY FINDINGS**

- ▶ A typical student in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project was a 32 year old, white, English-speaking woman. Slightly less than half (41 percent) of all students were never married and 15 percent were single parents. The majority (68 percent) was employed and 47 percent worked more than 35 hours per week. Of the students, 79 percent had incomes of \$25,000 or less, with 28 percent of all students reporting incomes of less than \$5,000. Some type of public assistance such as Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Social Security was received by 38 percent of the students.
- ▶ Of the project graduates, 69 percent (116 out of 168 students) had enrolled or were expected to attend postsecondary education, a figure higher than the percentage reported in other research that shows that 27 percent of GED recipients went on to enroll in postsecondary education programs. Although 51 percent of the project graduates had a high school diploma, they had been out of school an average of 15 years. Therefore, regardless of their diploma status, they are considered similar to GED recipients in that both groups are non-traditional college enrollees.
- ▶ Programs with highly collaborative and successful college partnerships shared several characteristics, including strong relationships with appropriate people in the college who could effectively advocate and deliver services to students; partnerships that formed over significant time and were characterized by a high level of coordination; and knowledgeable and resourceful program staff.
- ▶ The percentages of project dropouts who were Latino (20 percent), non-native speakers of English (30 percent) exceeded the percentage of project graduates who were Latino (12 percent) non-native speakers of English (17 percent).

**KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- ▶ Implement a longitudinal study using five to eight programs from the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project to focus on students attending postsecondary education. Focus data gathering on assessment testing, college level course enrollment, and college persistence for five years post enrollment in a postsecondary institution.
- ▶ Implement further evaluation of the postsecondary education transition needs of non-native English speaking adult learners. Student intake data showed that students who dropped out of the project were more likely to be non-native English speakers than those who successfully completed the project.
- ▶ Maximize program model replication by pairing effective programs (demonstrated by transition program completion rates and entries into postsecondary education, and academic learning gains while in the transition program) with less experienced programs to encourage the sharing of promising practices.
- ▶ Strengthen college partnerships focusing on maximizing the shared responsibility for providing educational opportunities to nontraditional adult learners.
- ▶ Share evaluation findings to inform policy and funding priorities. The findings from this evaluation support the effectiveness of college transition programs. The New England ABE-to-College Transition Project represents a model more states should consider using to provide essential college preparation services that maximize nontraditional students' likelihood of persisting in college.



The goal of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project is to enable adult literacy program graduates to prepare for, enter and succeed in postsecondary education so as to help them improve and enrich their own and their families' lives. This is a comprehensive college transition model that aims to bridge the academic gaps between a GED/EDP and college-level work through direct instruction and counseling that addresses the social barriers experienced by nontraditional adult students. The model is based on a partnership between the adult learning center and a collaborating college to facilitate access to and persistence in college.

This initiative comprises 25 transition programs partnered with more than 40 postsecondary institutions across the six New England states. The transition programs operate as part of Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs in diverse settings: community-based organizations, public schools, community colleges and prisons. Regardless of the setting, each transition program provides free instruction to adult learners in basic academic skills: reading, writing, math and using the computer and the Internet. Students also learn study skills and receive educational and career counseling and assistance with financial aid and admission processes. Students who have successfully enrolled in college are mentored through at least the first semester to help them to persist in college.

The project outcome goals are: 60 percent of the students enrolled in the college transition program will successfully complete it and 75 percent of those completing will enroll in postsecondary education. Each individual transition program is under contract to strive to meet these goals.

This project was designed by the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC), a consortium that strengthens adult literacy services in New England through sharing and collaborative special projects. Housed at World Education, a private non-profit organization, NELRC staff provide professional development and technical assistance to the transition programs, maintain a Web site with resources for the programs, and manage the project for the Nellie Mae Education Foundation.



The Nellie Mae Education Foundation hired an external evaluator, Julia Gittleman, Ph.D., to implement an evaluation of NELRC’s New England ABE-to-College Transition Project in the spring, 2003.

## EVALUATION GOALS



The overall goals of the evaluation were:

- ▶ to increase knowledge about program participants and program outcomes, and
- ▶ to better understand program outcomes to make a policy-relevant case for program design and institutionalization.



The evaluation sought to answer these questions about the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project:

1. Who are the program participants?
2. Do program participants enter college at higher rates than comparison students?
3. What can be learned from the most successful programs about their relationship with their college partners?
4. What was the experience of dropouts?

## EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation consisted of three parts. The first was a quantitative analysis of data gathered on students enrolled in the ABE-to-College Transition Project. The second was a qualitative analysis of selected programs and their graduates’ experience in enrolling and remaining in college. The third was a literature review of research on nontraditional adult learners and their experiences transitioning to and attending postsecondary education.

Four data gathering instruments—a standard intake form, a graduate survey form, an update form and a dropout form—were created and used to gather the quantitative data. These four instruments were designed by the program evaluator and project staff, reviewed and critiqued by program staff and then revised based on this feedback. These instruments continue to be used to gather data on students who participate in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

The qualitative data analysis utilized a case study approach for data collection. The case studies focused on the relationship between the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project sites and their college partners and program graduates' experiences once they enter postsecondary education. Three programs were selected for the case studies: Sumner Adult Education, Sumner, Maine; SUCCESS program at Cape Cod Community College, Hyannis, Massachusetts; and Nashua Adult Learning Center, Nashua, New Hampshire.

The literature review involved an examination of qualitative and quantitative research on college retention of nontraditional adult learners. The articles reviewed were: *Adult Education and Literacy in Community Colleges in Massachusetts* (Liebowitz, 2004); *Adult Literacy and Postsecondary Education Students: Overlapping Populations and Learning Trajectories* (Reder, 2001); *A Promise of Empowerment: Results of the GED 1992 Follow-up Survey* (Kroll, 1995); *College Persistence on the Rise? Changes in the 5-Year Degree Completion and Postsecondary Persistence Rates Between 1994–2000: Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004); *Getting Through College: Voices of Low Income and Minority Students in New England* (Institute for Higher Education Policy, 2001); *Nontraditional Undergraduates*, (Choy, 2002); *Profiles of Undergraduates in US Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999–2000, Statistical Analysis Report*. (Horn, Peter & Rooney, 2002); *Who Benefits from a GED? Evidence for Females from High School and Beyond* (Tyler et al., 2003).

This evaluation sought to increase the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project staff's understanding of how the project is meeting the needs of nontraditional learners preparing for college. It is our hope that through this effort, the experiences and lessons learned by the project can be shared with other practitioners in the adult education field to support efforts to serve the growing numbers of nontraditional students pursuing postsecondary education.

### STUDY LIMITATIONS

This evaluation had several limitations related to design and availability of data. Data from only one semester was used in the analysis, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The case study data were gathered over two months in the summer semester. Finally, while the newly designed data gathering tools were extensive in scope, certain information was unavailable for this evaluation. This included college placement test scores, level of college courses in which graduates enrolled and college retention data. Recommendations related to these limitations are included in the final section of the report.



**BACKGROUND**

From 2000 to 2003, the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project collected aggregate student data from the college transition programs. The programs collected individual student data using forms they designed to meet project requirements. The four-year aggregate data showed that the project was exceeding its 60 percent completion rate outcome goal. To capture information on project impact as reflected by student enrollment, program completion and enrollment in postsecondary education programs more accurately and thoroughly, the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project implemented a new data gathering system in the spring, 2003, that used standardized forms to collect student data. The goal of the new system was to better understand the demographics of program enrollees, the experiences and plans of program graduates and the reasons some students chose to leave prior to program completion. The student data gathering system included four new tools, described here.

**Intake Form:** A standardized intake form captures demographic and baseline educational assessment data on each entering student at the program sites. Information gathered includes:

- ▶ Age and gender;
- ▶ Race and ethnicity;
- ▶ Family information such as marital status, parenting status, number of children;
- ▶ Employment history and experience;
- ▶ Public assistance participation (such as TANF, Medicaid, Social Security);
- ▶ Educational history – school leaving date;
- ▶ Parents’ educational history: highest grades achieved by parents;
- ▶ Self-assessment of readiness for college;
- ▶ College study plans; and
- ▶ Assessment of whether specific problems are likely to be obstacles in achieving success in college.

**Graduate Survey Form:** The graduate survey has two sections. The graduate completes one section, rating how prepared he or she feels for postsecondary education; noting whether his or her knowledge about postsecondary education has changed since entering the program; noting whether his or her career goals have changed since entering the program; and listing what his or her current career goals, employment status and perceived potential obstacles to success are.

Program staff complete the other section of the survey on the student's college placement test scores; financial aid information; college admission and enrollment information; and the total number of hours that the student participated in the program.

**Dropout Form and Update Form:** The dropout form is used for students who did not complete the program and did not enroll in college. The dropout form asks staff to report on why the student left the program and whether they think the student is likely to return to the program. The update form was created to capture information on students who enrolled in postsecondary education programs at a later date. In particular, many students complete the program but do not yet know which postsecondary education program they will be attending or when they expect to begin.

These four forms were created and tested over the course of the spring, 2004, semester. The data were used for the data analysis for this evaluation.

#### QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The data from the spring, 2004, semester were gathered from January to June, 2004. New England ABE-to-College Transition Project staff input all data sent in by the program sites into an Access database. After a thorough review and cleaning, the data were sent to the program evaluator and converted into an SPSS database, allowing for statistical analysis. Means, medians and standard deviations were calculated on all relevant variables, and overall percentages and totals were tallied, as appropriate.

Four programs were not included in the spring, 2004, evaluation. Community Learning Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts runs an eight-month College Transition program. Rather than starting its program in January, like the other programs, it starts in October and ends in May. The ODWIN Learning Center, Dorchester, Massachusetts; the New Haven Adult Education Center, New Haven, Connecticut; and Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center, Providence, Rhode Island, have been omitted because these programs operate different college transition models than the 21 programs participating in the evaluation.

**FINDINGS**

**A. Intake Data Summary (Please see Appendix A for complete tables on all variables.)**



The primary goal of the intake data analysis was to answer two questions:

- ▶ Who are the program participants?
- ▶ How do the demographics of dropouts compare with those of students who completed the program?



To answer these questions, the intake data for all students enrolled in the program were compared with the intake data for the 168 students who successfully completed the program and the intake data for the 49 students who dropped out of the program prior to completion. Intake data for these three groups of students were compared using percentages and means to determine if any significant differences existed between the demographics of the completers versus the dropouts. An additional 24 students (10 percent) were unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form nor a dropout form was completed for them. A number of these students were repeating the program and are likely to appear as program graduates in future semesters.

Of the 241 student intakes, 47 (19 percent) were from Connecticut, 81 (34 percent) were from Maine, 75 (31 percent) were from Massachusetts, 16 (7 percent) were from New Hampshire, 14 (6 percent) were from Rhode Island, and 8 (3 percent) were from Vermont.

### **Gender, Race, Age and Language**

The average New England ABE-to-College Transition Project student was a 32-year-old, white, English-speaking woman. The gender, race and language data, revealed some interesting differences among the three groups (all students, graduates and dropouts). More women than men were found in all three groups, with the largest percentage of women found in the dropout group (62 percent). Whites comprise the majority of the students in all three groups. This is not surprising given that ten out of the 21 programs whose data were included in this analysis are located in the three northern New England states, which have very small minority populations. More Latinos were found in the dropout group (20 percent) than in the graduate group (12 percent) and overall (14 percent). The mean ages were very similar among the three groups. The composite of the program dropout group differed from that of the program completers, as 30 percent of the dropouts were non-native English speakers while 17 percent of the program completers were non-native English speakers. Research has shown that students from minority groups reported higher rates of risk factors negatively associated with postsecondary education persistence (Choy, 2002).

### **Marital and Family Status**

Many of the marital and family status characteristics were similar across the three groups. A larger percentage of the dropouts were never married (49 percent) when compared with the graduates (45 percent) and the total student group (41 percent), and a higher percentage of the dropouts were single parents (22 percent compared with 14 percent of the graduates and 15 percent of the total group). Research has shown that single parent status is a documented risk factor negatively associated with postsecondary education persistence (Choy, 2002).

### **Employment Status and Income**

The majority of all students worked more than 35 hours per week, an extraordinary fact when coupled with their enrollment in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project. Of all students, 28 percent reported incomes of less than \$5,000; 79 percent had incomes of \$25,000 or less. Most students did not receive public assistance support such as TANF or Medicaid, although a higher percentage of dropout students (46 percent) received some type of support compared with the graduates (38 percent) and the overall group (38 percent). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor (1999), the gains from college in median earnings for full-time workers are substantial: even some college and no degree increases earnings by \$5,705 over those with only a high school diploma. An Associate degree results in gains of almost \$7,000.

### **Education Experience**

Fully one half of the adults served by the project had a nontraditional high school credential: 43 percent had a GED and 7 percent had an EDP. The rest had traditional high school diplomas, and most of these adults had been out of school nearly 15 years.

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## **B. Graduate Survey Summary**

In the spring, 2004, semester, 168 students (70 percent) successfully completed the program and submitted graduate survey forms. The data gathered at program completion included a number of questions identical to those on the intake form in order to compare how students had changed over the course of their participation in the project.

### **College Preparedness**

Graduates were asked to rank themselves in a number of areas in terms of their preparedness for postsecondary education. The subcomponents that were assessed reflect the instruction, workshops and counseling offered by the project programs. A comparison of the students' assessment of their college readiness prior to entering the program and at program graduation resulted in consistent and positive change in mean scores.

In a 15-week period, notable gains in student preparedness were observed, particularly in math, writing and computer skills and knowledge about what college is like. Research by Reder (2001) shows that GED recipients are more likely than high school recipients to need remedial math instruction in college. It is widely acknowledged that math is a gatekeeper to college success. These positive changes are an important indication that the students perceived the program as having had a valuable impact on their readiness for postsecondary education. The students felt they were better prepared to successfully enroll and participate in postsecondary education as a result of the concrete skills they gained through the program.

**Table 1: Graduates’ Readiness for Postsecondary Education Comparing Intake and Graduate Survey Data (N=168)**

| For the following areas, please rate your preparedness for college:<br>(1–4 scale: poor/fair/good/excellent) |                        |                                 |  |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Issue  | Mean Score from Intake | Mean Score from Graduate Survey | Difference between Score from Intake and Graduate Survey |
| <b>Overall Academic Readiness</b>  | 2.41                   | 2.99                            | +0.58  |
| <b>Math</b>  | 2.09                   | 2.70                            | +0.61  |
| <b>Reading</b>   | 2.73                   | 3.12                            | +0.39  |
| <b>Writing Skills</b>  | 2.38                   | 2.87                            | +0.49  |
| <b>Computer Skills</b>   | 2.38                   | 2.90                            | +0.52  |
| <b>Knowledge about what college will be like</b>   | 2.33                   | 3.04                            | +0.71  |

Another variable in program impact was the dosage, or number of hours that students attend the program. The mean hours attended was 99.5. During the nearly 100 hours of program participation, students participated in both academic and study skills classes and workshops, leading to their increased preparedness for postsecondary education.

### Perceived Barriers to Success

Students were asked, at intake and at graduation, to assess how likely it was that each of seven specific barriers might prevent them from successfully attending postsecondary education. At program completion, students assessed education costs and financial supports as less likely to be barriers to postsecondary education than they had originally thought. This is a positive program impact: it demonstrates the change in students' perceptions about the costs of postsecondary education and the availability of financial aid after participating in the program.

At program completion, students rated needing childcare and transportation as barriers that would be more likely to challenge their ability to attend postsecondary education successfully than they originally anticipated. This increase probably reflects students' more realistic assessment of these potential barriers as a result of participating in college survival skills classes through the program.

Table 2: Graduates' Challenges to Success at College

| To what extent do you think the following are likely to challenge your ability to successfully attend college?<br>(1–4 scale: not at all/not very likely/likely/highly likely) |                        |                                 |  |
|--|------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Issue  | Mean Score from Intake | Mean Score from Graduate Survey | Difference between Score from Intake and Graduate Survey |
| Needing Childcare  | 2.30                   | 2.77                            | +0.47  |
| Needing Transportation   | 2.38                   | 2.75                            | +0.37  |
| Lack of Financial Aid  | 2.46                   | 2.30                            | -0.16  |
| Needing to Work to Pay Tuition   | 2.38                   | 2.30                            | -0.08  |
| Overall Cost of Tuition  | 2.41                   | 2.27                            | -0.14  |
| Immigration/<br>Language Issues  | N/A*                   | 2.76                            | N/A  |

\*These two questions were not included on the intake form.

**Enrollment in Postsecondary Education**

Of the program graduates, 69 percent were enrolled or were expected to be enrolled in college. In addition, 55 percent of the program graduates applied, received or were waiting to hear about financial aid. Education about and assistance with applying for financial aid is a standard component of the project.

**C. Dropout Data**

Of the students, 20 percent (49) left the program prior to graduating and did not enroll in postsecondary education. Staff completed a short form indicating why each student left. The issues most often indicated as the reasons for the student leaving were personal motivation and health.

**Table 3: Reasons for Students Leaving Program from Dropout Form**

| Issue                             | Number Checked                   |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Needing Childcare                 | 4 (5%)                           |
| Needing Transportation            | 4 (5%)                           |
| Needing to Work                   | 13 (18%)                         |
| Health Issues for Self and Others | 18 (25%)                         |
| Personal Motivation Issues        | 22 (30%)                         |
| Lack of Readiness for College     | 12 (17%)                         |
|                                   | <b>Total reasons = 73 (100%)</b> |

## BACKGROUND

The case study research was implemented in the summer, 2004. It examined the relationship between selected New England ABE-to-College Transition Project programs and their college partners, and explored program graduates' experiences once they enter postsecondary education. More specifically, the case studies focused on these four questions:



1. What program characteristics are critical to program success and to graduates' college persistence?
2. How have successful partnerships between programs and colleges evolved?
3. What characterizes the relationship between a successful ABE-to-College Transition program and its college partner?



The following factors were considered when choosing the programs to be profiled in case studies:

- ▶ The number and demographics of students served
- ▶ Program effectiveness as demonstrated by transition program completion rates and entries into college, and academic learning gains while in the transition program
- ▶ Program quality as observed by NELRC staff visits over several years
- ▶ Strength of program efforts to track graduates with strong documentation
- ▶ Program model replicability
- ▶ Record of students retained in college for more than two semesters
- ▶ Geographic location
- ▶ Nature of college partners (e.g. both four-year, state and community colleges)

Using this criteria, three sites were selected: Sumner Adult Education (Ellsworth, Maine), the SUCCESS Program (Hyannis, Massachusetts), and the Adult Learning Center (Nashua, New Hampshire).

### CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

The case studies were conducted utilizing several data gathering techniques. Program staff were interviewed and individual and group interviews with partnering college staff were conducted. Focus groups were conducted with students and graduates of each program and documents were reviewed at each program site. The research team visited each program site for one or two days, depending upon the availability of key interview subjects, focus group scheduling and other logistical concerns. In total, nine program staff and seven college administrators participated in interviews and 19 students participated in focus groups. (Please see Appendix B for student focus group excerpts.) In addition, New England ABE-to-College Transition Project administrative staff provided supplementary information on program models based on their annual site visits to these programs.

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### CASE STUDIES

#### A. Nashua Adult Education Learning Center

##### **Program Description**

The GET READY FOR COLLEGE program of the Nashua Adult Education Learning Center (ALC) is a comprehensive college transition program designed to assist those adults who have a GED or have graduated from a high school diploma program to make a successful transition into college. The program was established in January, 2000, and serves students from small towns and rural areas in the greater Nashua, New Hampshire, area.

GET READY FOR COLLEGE is a 15-week program that offers six hours of direct instruction in math, reading and writing, college study skills and computer skills. The program offers assistance in career choice testing and career planning, the college admissions process and financial aid planning. The program serves approximately 30 students each year and

runs two academic cycles. Classes are held two evenings a week. From spring, 2000, through summer, 2004, the program served 127 students: 90 students (70 percent) completed the program and 51 students (56 percent) completed one or more college semesters. Five have earned Associates degrees and one has transferred to a four-year college.

### **Program Startup and Evolution**

The ALC started a college transition program in 2000 with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. Initially, the program had three ten-week terms (including a summer program). This schedule was thought to be unnecessarily complicated. The program now utilizes two 15-week cycles to align better with the college schedule.

At the outset, ALC met some resistance from its college partner, New Hampshire Community Technical College's Nashua Campus (NHCTC). NHCTC's college recruiter saw the ALC as a threat to the college's own developmental education program. However, ALC saw a change in attitude occur with key administrators as relationships developed and some changes in college personnel took place. Interestingly, student tours served not only students' needs, but also built trust between the ABE-to-College Transition program and the college. Today, ALC enjoys an excellent relationship with NHCTC and works primarily with Mary Gillette, NHCTC Director of Institutional Services. Mary has prior experience working with other ABE programs and her involvement has made a big difference regarding the ease with which students make a transition between the two programs.

### **Program-College Relationship Success Factors**

ALC works primarily with NHCTC's Department of Institutional Services; Mary Gillette directs the department. Mary is personally aware of which students completed the ALC program, information that is not widely known to others on campus.

ALC staff stressed the importance of their relationship with Mary specifically, and with the college in general as factors in their success. They stressed the importance of building commitment from the college and felt

that the partnership needs to start with the leadership of the postsecondary institution. They suggested that a deeper partnership with the college could only be accomplished if a program has this type of relationship.

Administrators also emphasized the importance of adequate planning time and the necessity of allowing time for organizations to get to know one another and demonstrate the benefits of working together. They considered this time key to forming the good and productive relationship they enjoy with the college. Mary stressed that, if one were starting a new program, the college partner should be involved in the earliest planning conversations.

NHCTC's openness to ALC students can be attributed, in part, to the college's positive attitude towards diversity: the college welcomes all types of students. NHCTC staff work hard at not labeling students. They consider ALC students to be "*just like all college students*" except that they are provided with extra support services.

### **Program Success Factors**

The interviews conducted at each case study site brought to light how a knowledgeable and passionate leader can make a big difference to transition programs. In the case of Nashua, those leaders were an administrator at the college, Mary Gillette, and Linda Vaughn, an instructor at the ABE-to-College Transition Project program. Mary Gillette's warmth, experience and skill were critical to the re-entering adult learners. She personally connected new students with current students so that they could learn to manage their time better and build connections to others on campus. ALC staff recognized Mary's passion and felt that students who worked with her recognized it and found meaning in it. "*Her investment and passion tells students that they, and their work at the college, are important and worthy of effort and pride.*"

Linda Vaughn was critical as the program staff person upon whom the students relied heavily for support. The students commented on her importance and how she encouraged them to be independent and confident. "*If we want to find her, we know where she is, but she doesn't hover.*" Students felt the staff were "*wonderful*" and stated that they continue to be a help and keep in touch with them.

Students spoke of the importance of both the academic preparation and the ever-critical life and study skills. There was broad recognition that an important part of the program was the “college survival skills” course. This course helped students learn to study, manage their time and improve their efficiency as students. Students viewed this course as a “dress rehearsal” for college. One effective program practice in preparing students for the college experience was a field trip to campus midway through the term.

Program staff responded thoughtfully to a question about the factors they consider necessary to replicating their success:

- ▶ It was important for prospective students and staff to understand that ALC is not a “GED prep” program, but is substantially more intense with greater staff and student demands.
- ▶ It was critical that students be exposed to the “real world of college,” such as understanding what is expected in a typical college course and going on a field trip.
- ▶ It was important to keep the program small, limiting the class size to 15 students in order to provide effective instruction and individualized attention to each student.
- ▶ It was critical that the program design remain flexible and responsive to different types of students in order to meet a variety of educational and college readiness needs.

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### **Student Success Factors**

Students—particularly older students—found personal growth and confidence building to be key to their success. During their 15 weeks at ALC, students answer a key question for themselves: “Why college?” Students usually focused on achieving new careers that would be better than their current jobs.

Program staff put a lot of effort into recruiting students who they thought would succeed in postsecondary education. They looked for students who were willing to make the commitment to the program demands and who had the desire to succeed and change their lives.

Mary has found that the students who made the most of available support services succeeded and remained enrolled at the college.

In summary, the ALC staff and the NHCTC report that, to ensure student success, both program and college partner staffs' knowledge of and commitment to the needs of nontraditional adult learners is important. Also necessary is a balance between quality academic courses and college readiness skill building work, careful and thorough student screening process and orientation, and the effective communication and collaboration over time between the ABE-to-College Transition Program and its postsecondary education partner.

## **B. Sumner Adult Education**

### **Program Description**

Sumner Adult Education (Sumner) has been providing college transition services to students in Hancock County, Maine since 1990. The program serves a large, rural region; students drive as far as 50 miles each way to attend. In 2000, the program received a grant from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and expanded the college transition services into a comprehensive college transition program. The Sumner Adult Education College Transition program shares space with the University College at Ellsworth, Maine.

The program runs two 15-week cycles, in the spring and fall, and an eight-week cycle over the summer. Classes are held on Tuesdays and run for a full eight hours to accommodate long commutes. The day is divided into two-hour classes in math, college survival/life skills, language arts and an hour and a half computer class. The program provides assistance with the college admission process and with accessing financial aid. The program serves approximately 30 students a year. From spring, 2000, through summer 2004, the program served 154 students. Of these, 63 percent (98 students) completed the program and 89 percent (88 students) have completed one college semester or more. Nine students progressed from Associate's degree to baccalaureate degree programs. The first to graduate should graduate in December, 2005. Although Sumner does an admirable

job of tracking students after program graduation (i.e. once they enter the college system), they continue to try to improve their tracking still further.

### **Program Startup and Evolution**

Sumner began as a part-time public school adult education program in the mid-1970's with local funding, which later led to a subsidy from the State Department of Education. In 1988, Roger Woodworth, Program Director, was active on a statewide committee planning a distance learning initiative. This initiative's goal was to utilize Interactive TV (ITV) technology to provide students the opportunity to get their GED, Associates, Bachelor's and Master's degrees in conjunction with the University of Maine (UM). Classes were broadcast from the university over a closed circuit television network statewide. Students were provided a telephone link via which to call in questions to the lecturer. As a result of this project, Sumner and UM were closely aligned from the start and recognized their common interests and goals.

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In 1989, UM established a satellite site, the University College at Ellsworth, at the Hancock County Center where the ABE-to-College Transition Program is now located. From inception, the satellite collaborated with Sumner. Director Woodworth served on a Chancellor's committee at UM that was formed to explore how adult education could serve the university system through the provision of college preparation. UM leadership recognized that, given the size, rural nature and range of student preparedness in Maine, they would need these types of college readiness programs. However, they knew that they would require assistance in establishing and implementing them successfully.

Therefore, prior to NMEF funding, Sumner and the University of Maine had already come together to acknowledge the need for developmental course work and preparation. Marty Duncan, the Sumner program teacher and student services coordinator, spoke of an early class that she taught for which students were charged \$50. Thus, the crucial relationship between UM and Sumner, and their shared purpose, was already well established. When NMEF funding was made available, staff were anxious and ready to implement a full-fledged ABE-to-College transition program.

### **Program-College Relationship Success Factors**

One successful element of this program is the co-location of the transition program with the college program. In addition to being centrally located and easily accessible in a local strip mall, the program and college share classrooms, computers and office space, which encourages maximum communication among staff, and allows for seamless transitions when students move from the transition program to the college.

In addition, the long-standing history of collaboration between adult education and the UM system has been key and continues to evolve for the better. Early on, UM administrators recognized that Sumner's program had a superior understanding of adult learning styles and the ingredients necessary for nontraditional student success. In our interviews, college administrators spoke of the integrity of Sumner's ABE educators and of the educators' understanding of the amount and type of support needed by students.

Sumner's success is also, in large part, a reflection of the quality of their staff, staff members' personal commitment to the program and their ability to connect with, support and motivate individual students. Program staff expressed confidence in their ability to leverage postsecondary education staffs' expertise in accessing both human and financial resources on behalf of their graduates once they entered the college system. Students recognized and spoke of this network of support and resources within the UM system, as well as their continued reliance on the staff at Sumner and, more importantly, the confidence and skills they had gained in their time at Sumner.

### **Program Success Factors**

The Sumner transition program is run by two key staff people: Marty Duncan, the program coordinator, and Sally Daniels, program counselor. Marty is responsible for the building of a highly effective, academically rigorous program with strong college partners. She has creatively aligned

the transition program curriculum with that of the college courses into which many of the program's students enroll. She has extensive knowledge of academic benchmarks of developmental college courses and 101 level college courses.

Sally Daniels, the program counselor, is particularly responsible for Sumner's emphasis on thorough recruitment, academic guidance and financial aid. She understands the challenges of nontraditional students, many of whom are the first generation college students in their families. She recruited students to the program through the Maine Educational Opportunity Council, where she is employed part-time. Sally combines a deep knowledge of financial aid with practical assessments of student abilities and is able to recognize those who will excel.

Students and staff identified the key ingredients of the success of Sumner's program. Staff and students alike identified the following skills and knowledge—all of which are integrated into the core program curriculum—as central to their success:

- ▶ How to balance and prioritize demands
- ▶ How to organize one's work
- ▶ Incremental studying (e.g. 15 minutes/break/15 minutes)
- ▶ Note-taking
- ▶ How to tape classes and put the tapes to good use
- ▶ Rigorous math, writing and reading courses

Sumner's assessment process utilizes a thorough screening checklist to assess student readiness for the program. The assessment process involves a number of steps, including: interactive counseling assessment; Accuplacer testing and follow-up review with the college counselor, instructor and student about how the placements relate to the transition course; and an interview. Ongoing assessment of learning gains, including self-assessment, rubrics, checklists, quizzes, in-class writing and portfolio

reviews are implemented during the courses. Self-assessment takes place during mid-cycle evaluation of the courses. Exit assessments in reading, writing, math and study skills take place during the final sessions of the courses. The initial instructional assessment, including the initial interview, takes approximately three hours and may be conducted over two sessions, if necessary.

### **Student Success Factors**

Sumner staff articulated their thoughts on the key characteristics of successful students (those who complete the program and enroll in postsecondary education) and the key obstacles their students encounter. Successful students:

- ▶ usually displayed a willingness to embrace change;
- ▶ sought out new perspectives and were quick to challenge their entrenched, initial beliefs (i.e. they exhibited an openness to new skills and perspectives);
- ▶ were prepared for the significant challenge of overcoming financial aid barriers (e.g. persevering through roadblocks, returning to school after extended absences or semesters of more limited activity, etc.) despite being first generation college students; and
- ▶ were self-starters but were also willing and able to take advantage of program resources, accept feedback and capitalize on skills and resources to which the program (and the college) exposed them.

In summary, the key findings from the site visit to Sumner included the program staff's knowledge and experience working with and teaching adult learners, the practical mix of academic and college readiness curricula, and the longstanding relationship between the ABE-to-College program and its higher education partner.

### C. Cape Cod Community College's SUCCESS Program

#### Program Description

The Students Utilizing Cape Cod Educational Support Services (SUCCESS) Program GED-to-College Transition Program was established in November, 2001, at Cape Cod Community College. Classes held at the Hyannis Center are convenient for adult learners who reside in southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

SUCCESS is an 18-week program that offers three hours each of math and writing/study skills weekly. Stress and time management workshops are included as well as assistance with college admissions and financial aid information. Students produce as a final product a research paper and an oral presentation about the college major the student plans to pursue. Also, the program provides a three-credit college computer course. The program serves approximately 30 students annually. Classes are held two evenings per week during the fall cycle, and two mornings per week during the spring cycle. Orientation and the computer course are held on the weekends during both cycles. From spring, 2002, through summer, 2004, the program served 94 students of whom 83 percent (78 students) completed the program; 78 percent (61 students) completed one or more college semesters. One student completed an LPN degree and is enrolled in an RN degree granting program. Four students are transferring to four-year colleges.

#### Program Startup and Evolution

In 1990, Cape Cod Community College administrators saw the need to bring together a wide range of functions related to adult education. With funding from the Massachusetts Department of Education, Cape Cod Community College's administrators established the Adult Collaborative of Cape Cod for Education and Support Services (ACCESS) in Hyannis. In addition, the Cape already had a Massachusetts Department of Education-funded transition program for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students.

Therefore, when Nellie Mae Education Foundation funding became available, there was an established cadre of administrators and program staff on Cape Cod who recognized the need for academic and support services and could build on an existing base of experience. In 2001, the Students Utilizing Cape Cod Educational Support Services program (SUCCESS) was established with an NMEF grant. As with Sumner in Maine, there was a pre-existing, working relationship with a higher education partner (Cape Cod Community College) prior to NMEF funding, but the grant enabled the program to solidify and strengthen the relationship.

#### **Program-College Relationship Success Factors**

Several characteristics are central to this successful relationship. Cape Cod Community College and the SUCCESS program have clearly defined roles and responsibilities that help in managing student transitions.

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In addition, there is enormous collaboration between the two. SUCCESS students are concurrently enrolled at Cape Cod Community College from the beginning of their participation in the program and enjoy access to a range of services provided by the college. While enrolled in SUCCESS, students receive college credit from Cape Cod Community College for the computer classes offered through the program.

SUCCESS is clearly and completely a part of Cape Cod Community College. This, in large part, reflects the personal commitment of the President of Cape Cod Community College, Dr. Kathleen Schatzberg. President Schatzberg is known to tout the college's motto: "Opportunity, access and equity." College administrators interviewed for this study repeatedly made comments that reflected an understanding of, and commitment to these core principles. SUCCESS' staff are Cape Cod Community College employees. They attend departmental meetings at the college and are well known across campus. Like other administrators at the community college, the SUCCESS program director reports to the vice president who reports directly to the president. The program enjoys a good relationship with college administrators, characterized by cooperation, problem solving, and give and take.

SUCCESS staff is equally committed to the goals espoused by President Schatzberg. SUCCESS staff work closely together to prepare students for the transition to college. For example, assessment testing is carefully organized and coordinated; groups of SUCCESS students travel to Cape Cod Community College together for testing each semester. Not only does this help smooth students' way for test-taking, but it also helps students to overcome the intimidation associated with their first visit to "college".

We heard repeatedly from Cape Cod Community College and SUCCESS staff that the quality of the relationship between college and program staff is based on mutual respect, trust and flexibility. They listen to each other and together make decisions to try new approaches. If the approach doesn't work, they learn, move on and try something else, hand-in-hand.

While proud of program performance and retention, program staff and the college administration agreed that measures of retention, which are defined by the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project as stipulated from the project funder, should be broadened and improved. One-year retention in post college enrollment was thought to be too narrow a definition. They agreed that the focus should be on longer-term retention. They noted that some students need four to five years, or more, to reach their goals. It is not uncommon for students to take breaks from coursework because of family, health or financial pressures. Program staff felt that, as long as students are making steady progress, they should be considered "successfully retained." President Schatzberg said that a measure for retention should be the number of courses a student takes for *all* semesters, over a four-year period. She added that looking at data over a broader timeframe would generate a better understanding of interventions needed to increase retention rates.

### **Program Success Factors**

Students and staff at Cape Cod Community College remarked upon the intense personal contribution, investment and power of Joan Kieran, the SUCCESS program director. Joan feels a personal commitment to preparing every entering student for college and makes sure they become connected to the other student support services programs at the

college. Students and college staff gave glowing endorsements of Joan's approach and leadership. She, and by extension, her staff, display a blend of commitment, toughness and attention to the individual needs of the students, combining academic support and skill building with personal support and life skill building.

An example of Joan's leadership and commitment is the program's unique orientation model. The SUCCESS orientation was created in response to an identified need to develop a sense of community and trust in the classroom in a short time period. In addition, the program sought to address the emotional and psychological barriers that can undermine student success in the transition class and in college. The program orientation gives students a strong sense of belonging to a group, provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the academic and social goals of the program and increases motivation for success in the program and in college.

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The orientation is a two-day, ten-hour commitment. The agenda includes an ice breaker, community building activities, introductions from students and all program staff, and a group activity in which students articulate what they will need to feel comfortable and to thrive in the classroom. Additional activities include learning to manage time, learning to use a college planner, and reviewing the program's syllabus and the materials needed for the program.

The building of self-esteem, confidence and commitment is a key part of SUCCESS students' preparation. The integrated approach to this preparation was apparent in the visits to Cape Cod Community College, the conscious connection of students to Cape Cod Community College resources, and the recognition of the underlying psychosocial challenges of *"the first generation of college students from working class families,"* as articulated by President Schatzberg. She also spoke eloquently of the *"unique psychology"* of the first generation of college pioneers, and emphasized the importance of familiarizing these pioneers with the supports and resources available at the college.

One strategy for accomplishing this, traveling together to Cape Cod Community College for testing, provided other benefits for students. By using Cape Cod Community College's assessment services and office, the SUCCESS students received a full orientation to the test, extra support, and began using the college's support services. They took the Accuplacer test while enrolled at SUCCESS, yet the administration of the test took place at the college's own testing site.

An emphasis on other practical skills, beyond testing and accessing campus resources, also builds SUCCESS students' confidence and skills. Computer skills were listed by students as some of the most valuable skills they obtained while at the program. Students learned to overcome fear, build competence and grow confident in computer use. Many of these students had been away from school, working in jobs that did not require computer use: they were nervous and full of self-doubt about their ability to succeed in college. However, after hands-on practice and program support at SUCCESS, students entered Cape Cod Community College feeling quite confident, and they used computers as an integral part of their school work. One student commented, *"I was always good at math. Though I started off knowing little about computers, the spreadsheet stuff came pretty easily to me."* Other key life and study skills the students said were important to their success at college included the use of libraries (for research and study support), time management strategies and study groups.

### **Student Success Factors**

Staff at SUCCESS identified several characteristics of students most likely to complete the program:

- ▶ clear career goals;
- ▶ focus and good attendance;
- ▶ good self-esteem;
- ▶ an ability to connect with others and build a learning community.

In the focus group, students were visibly comfortable. They were clearly happy to see one another and had many connections across SUCCESS classes. They also described SUCCESS graduates as an informal network of “familiar” and “supportive” students with shared experiences and the ability to support one another on the Cape Cod Community College campus, where class schedules and commutes from all over the Cape make socializing difficult.

In summary, key findings from the SUCCESS site visit included: the importance of individual staff’s creativity and knowledge associated with meeting the academic and college readiness needs of adult learners; the full integration of the program into the college partner’s administrative infrastructure and the mutual respect between the ABE-to-College Transition Program staff and the higher education administrative staff.

### BACKGROUND

The literature review was conducted in order to compare the data gathered through this evaluation with other similar or related qualitative and quantitative research that has been conducted on nontraditional adult learners and their experiences transitioning and attending postsecondary education. We were not able to locate any studies on other college transition programs and their outcomes to compare with the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

### METHODOLOGY

Articles and reports were identified that examined GED students' postsecondary education enrollment and persistence data, challenges faced by postsecondary education bound students with risk factors that might prevent either their successful enrollment or completion of postsecondary education, or both, and research that focused specifically on Massachusetts and its adult education and community college system. This review offers a starting perspective for understanding how the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project compares with what is known about the field of nontraditional learners' pre-postsecondary education and postsecondary education experience. More research is needed to fully comprehend the scope of this field, as it evolves and grows.

### FINDINGS FROM STUDIES

*A. Getting Through College: Voices of Low Income and Minority Students in New England.* Institute for Higher Education Policy, Washington, D.C., 2001.

The New England Student Success Study includes the results of a telephone survey, interviews with low-income and minority students enrolled in four-year institutions in the region, and analysis of national data collected by the U.S. Department of Education. The telephone survey included low-income students, two-thirds of whom were 18 to 23 years old, 82 percent were single, and 84 percent did not have children. Nearly half lived on campus during the most recent semester. The analysis revealed four issues affecting New England low-income and minority students' ability to succeed in college: pre-college preparation, financial aid, feeling connected to institutions, and attendance patterns.

The key findings of the New England Student Success Study include:

- ▶ Pre-college programs (such as the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project) had an impact on those who participated in them: two-thirds of the participants felt the programs were very helpful. However, only one-quarter of low-income students in New England had participated in such programs.
- ▶ Of the students in the study, 90 percent received assistance in paying for college.
- ▶ Minority students were less likely than non-minority students to have taken time off from their studies, attended part time, or transferred. Other positive behavior was seen among Pell Grant recipients, first-generation students, and pre-college program participants in general.
- ▶ Students' involvement and attachment to college were critical factors for success.

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Of the researchers' recommendations, these are the most relevant to this evaluation:

- ▶ Increased awareness of pre-college programs and greater support through additional funding.
- ▶ Greater efforts to link the experiences and successes of pre-college, transition, and in-college programs to provide continuous support for students.

This study's findings are consistent with the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project model and provide additional support for the provision of these kinds of pre-college programs.

**B. *College Persistence on the Rise? Changes in the 5-Year Degree Completion and Postsecondary Persistence Rates Between 1994–2000: Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report.* National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C., 2004.**

This study contextualizes the at-risk issues many New England ABE-to-College Transition Project students face. Students are considered at risk if they enter postsecondary education with one or more characteristics that place them at risk of not completing their postsecondary studies. The risk factors include those who delay their postsecondary enrollment by a year or more, are financially independent from their parents, first enroll part-time, work full-time while enrolled, have children or dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or do not graduate from high school (drop out or earn a GED). Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), this study found that the Bachelor’s and/or Associates degree completion rates of students with one or more of these risk characteristics was 17 percent in 2000. Their likelihood of remaining enrolled in a four-year or two-year institution after five years was 16.7 percent and 47 percent had no degree and were no longer enrolled. These data highlight the obstacles that transition programs students face in successfully completing a Bachelor’s or Associates degree.

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**C. *Profiles of Undergraduates in US Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999–2000, Statistical Analysis Report.* Horn, Peter, & Rooney, Kathryn, MPR Associates Inc. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2002.**

This report looked at 1999–2000 undergraduates with respect to seven risk factors found to be negatively associated with persistence and degree attainment (listed in the previous paragraph). In 1999–2000, three-quarters of all undergraduate students reported at least one risk factor. Overall, the average number of risk factors reported by all undergraduates was 2.2. More risk factors were reported by African-American students (2.7), American Indian/Alaska Native students (2.8), and Hispanic students (2.4). Parents were at greater risk than other undergraduates (since they are financially independent, have children, and may be single parents). Undergraduates with children or other dependents averaged 4.3 risk factors and single parents averaged 4.7 risk factors. Female

undergraduates were more likely than male undergraduates to be parents, therefore they averaged more risk factors (2.3 versus 2.1). However, men were more likely to work full time, so no statistical difference was found between men and women in their likelihood of having at least one risk factor (75 percent).

The implications of these findings are important in understanding the challenges faced by students in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project. Previous research on college persistence found that 64 percent of beginning students with one risk factor persisted in their postsecondary program or completed a degree or vocational certificate within five years, compared with 43 percent of those with three or more risk factors (Berkner et al., 1996). Looking at the data on 1999–2000 undergraduate students with three or more risk factors, at least half might be expected to leave postsecondary education without completing a degree or certificate. The majority of students in the transition program fall into the group with three or more risk factors, as all are delayed enrollees and a large percentage work full-time, have children or dependents, are single parents, dropped out of high school or have a GED. Therefore, it can be expected that without specialized support services and transition programs, less than half of these students will successfully complete their college programs in five years.

***D. Nontraditional Undergraduates.*** Choy, Susan, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2002.

The first part of this research on nontraditional students uses the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 2000) to examine demographic characteristics, enrollment patterns and school and work balancing. The second part explores the relationship between nontraditional status (having a risk factor) and college persistence using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Studies (BPS), which followed cohorts of students enrolling in postsecondary education for the first time in 1989–90 and in 1995–96.

This study found that the “traditional” student is not typical since close to 75 percent of all postsecondary students in 1999–2000 had at least one nontraditional characteristic (risk factor). More than 60 percent of highly nontraditional students identify themselves as an employee, which presents the impression that college is not their priority when it comes to their time and energy.

Among beginning postsecondary college students, nontraditional students were much more likely than traditional students to leave college prior to earning a degree and they were likely to drop out in their first year. Compared with traditional students, nontraditional beginning students who left their first college were more likely to leave postsecondary education altogether and less likely to transfer elsewhere.

Using longitudinal data, this study examined the relationship between nontraditional characteristics and persistence and attainment after three years for students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in 1995–96.

This research supports the point of view we have heard previously from President Schatzberg at Cape Cod Community College, that persistence is best studied in relation to students’ goals. Some students enroll for a limited number of courses without intending to earn a degree or certificate. Without knowing the students’ specific goals, it cannot be known whether they were achieved, so only students with a degree or transfer goal were included in this analysis of persistence: 88 percent of the 1995–96 beginning postsecondary students.

With the exception of single parenthood, each of the nontraditional characteristics has a direct or indirect association with persistence and attainment. This study found that, controlling for the covariation of the other factors, the following nontraditional characteristics were negatively associated with persistence: delaying enrollment, enrolling part time,

being financially independent, and having a GED or other certificate of completion. Interestingly, the remaining three nontraditional characteristics—working full time in the first year of enrollment, having dependents and being a single parent—did not have an independent association.

Again, this study highlights the challenges associated with persistence in college when faced with the nontraditional characteristics of the students in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

***E. Adult Education and Literacy in Community Colleges in Massachusetts. Liebowitz, Martin, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, New York, NY, 2004.***

Community colleges are among a wide range of organization types, including public schools, nonprofit organizations and other types of provider organizations, which provide adult education services in Massachusetts. This study found that community colleges serve a slightly different population of adult learners, and they place greater priority on obtaining a GED and transitioning to college, which is of relevance to this evaluation.

This study reported that college transition programs, such as the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, are achieving success in enabling a sizeable proportion of students to transition to college. The study found that these types of programs offer a useful structure for communication between the community colleges and adult education providers, consistent with our case study findings. Other findings were also consistent with our case study analysis, in that the researcher found building these types of partnerships was critical but required considerable effort to develop and maintain.

The study also found that there has been progress made in increased integration between adult education services into community colleges and in the provision of college-based support services that are critical to many students making the successful transition to college. These findings

highlight the importance and potential impact that transition programs can have, in working closely with community colleges to develop and expand these critical services.

The Massachusetts community college system is a critical partner for programs such as the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, as was noted by the findings of this study, as well as by the case study results reported earlier.

**F. “Adult Literacy and Postsecondary Education Students: Overlapping Populations and Learning Trajectories.” Reder, Stephen in *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Vol. 1*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2001.**

This study examined the experience of adult learners as they become participants in the postsecondary education system. Of particular interest is the discussion and analysis of data pertaining to nontraditional students, similar to those who participate in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

As was noted earlier, research on postsecondary persistence and attainment finds being a GED graduate or receiving a certificate of high school completion to be one of seven risk factors for dropping out of postsecondary education without attaining a degree. Other studies (Boesel et al., 1998) reviewed follow-up of GED recipients, which report that 50 percent to 63 percent of GED recipients get additional postsecondary education or training (most of which occurs in two-year and vocational-technical colleges and most of which is focused on acquiring occupational skills).

In this study, Reder analyzed data provided by the Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. The BPS survey reports on the type of high school credentials beginning postsecondary students obtained: high school diploma, GED, or other certificate of high school completion. Although almost 20 percent of students entering certificate programs have a GED

or equivalent considerably smaller percentages of students beginning postsecondary education in two- or four-year institutions have a GED or equivalency certificate. Only 2 percent of students entering four-year and 7 percent entering two-year institutions had a GED. Since 15 percent to 20 percent of all high school credentials awarded were GEDs, this indicates that relatively few GED recipients go on to postsecondary academic education. This finding is consistent with research that contrasts the relatively large numbers of adult education students who report planning to pursue college degrees with the small numbers who actually enter or complete postsecondary academic programs.

Looking at the BPS data on the persistence rates for beginning postsecondary students who enter two-year colleges with a high school diploma or a GED, Reder found 54 percent of students entering with high school diplomas had either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry, while only 28 percent of students with GEDs entering postsecondary education had either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry. The highest persistence rates occurred among students entering four-year institutions and the lowest rates for students entering two-year institutions.

The policy implications of these findings are significant. The fact that relatively few adult literacy students who obtain GEDs eventually enroll in postsecondary education (given the large number who express an interest in doing so) is an important finding that requires further attention. Also of concern is the finding that the GED holders who do enroll have significantly lower rates of persistence at college. Reder argues that these findings reflect a disconnect between basic skills instruction in the adult education and the postsecondary education system, as well as between counseling, financial assistance, and other student services provided in the two systems. These types of problems disrupt the longer-term learning goals that adult learners need to achieve in order to gain literacy skills and desired postsecondary education.

**G. “Who Benefits from a GED? Evidence for Females from High School and Beyond.” Tyler, John H.; Murnane, Richard J.; and Willet, John B in *Economies of Education Review*, 22 (2003) 237–247.**

This study explored the value of the GED credential for women in the labor market, using the data set *High School and Beyond*. The primary finding of the paper was that among women who left high school with poor math skills, the group who went on to get a GED had more experience in the labor market and had higher earnings, when compared with women who did not go on to get a GED.

Of particular relevance to this evaluation, the study reviewed data on GED holders and their acquiring of postsecondary education credits. The study found that 34 percent of GED holders acquired at least one postsecondary credit and only 11 percent of the GED holders completed at least two years of college credits. This rather low rate of enrollment compares markedly with the 69 percent of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project graduates who enroll in postsecondary education. While 51 percent of New England ABE-to-College Project graduates had a high school diploma, they had been out of school an average of 15 years and are considered non-traditional college attenders, so comparing the project outcomes with the Tyler study is valid.

**H. *A Promise of Empowerment: Results of the GED 1992 Follow-up Survey*. Kroll, Bonnie, American Council on Education, Center for Adult Learning and Education Credentials, Washington, D.C., 1995.**

This study examined information on the education, employment and other related experiences of GED students for three years following their taking the GED test. The GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education conducted a national survey of students who took the test between October 1, 1989, and November 15, 1989. Nine hundred and sixty-five (965) participants took part in a follow-up survey in 1992. This population was similar demographically to the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project students. The average age of survey respondents was 31.6 years old, 70 percent were women and 47 percent

were married. Incomes of 54 percent were less than \$10,000. Of particular relevance, only 27 percent of the GED graduates were working towards a postsecondary degree at the time of the survey, 9 percent were working on their Bachelor's degrees, 10 percent were working on their Associates degrees and 8 percent on technical or trade certificates. This is significantly less than the 69 percent of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project graduates who were enrolled or were expected to enroll in postsecondary education by the fall of 2004. Again, while 51 percent of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project graduates had a high school diploma, they had been out of school an average of 15 years and are considered non-traditional college attenders, so comparing the project outcomes with this study is valid.

This research helps to demonstrate the impressive results the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project has accomplished regarding postsecondary education enrollment for program graduates.

The evaluation of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project sought to answer the following questions:



1. Who are the program participants?
2. Do program participants enter college at higher rates than comparison students?
3. What can be learned from the most successful programs about their relationship with their college partners?
4. What was the experience of dropouts?



### WHO ARE THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS?

While the typical student in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project was a 32-year-old, white, English-speaking woman, 39 percent were students of color and 20 percent were non-native English speakers. Nearly one half (49 percent) of the students were never married, 57 percent had children and 15 percent were single parents. The majority of all students were employed and 47 percent worked more than 35 hours per week. Remarkably, 79 percent of all students had incomes of \$25,000 or less, and 28 percent of all students reported incomes of less than \$5,000. Of the students, 38 percent received some type of support such as Medicaid or Social Security. GED certificates were held by 43 percent of the students; 50 percent had high school diplomas. Past college experience was reported by 25 percent.

The students in this project fell into the highly nontraditional or high-risk category, when considering the seven characteristics that define this risk level. These risk factors are: delaying postsecondary enrollment by a year or more, financial independence from parents, initially enrolled part-time, working full-time while enrolled, having children or dependents other than a spouse, single parent status, and not graduating from high school (dropping out or earning a GED). Therefore, these students were at risk for not succeeding in postsecondary education, substantiating the need for college transition services to give them the support needed to persist in postsecondary education.

### DO PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS ENTER COLLEGE AT HIGHER RATES THAN COMPARISON STUDENTS?

The spring, 2004, data revealed the following information:

- ▶ 241 students enrolled in the program
- ▶ 168 students completed the program (70 percent)
- ▶ 49 students dropped out (20 percent)
- ▶ 24 students (10 percent) were unaccounted for, since neither graduate survey forms nor dropout forms were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in the data collected in future semesters.

Of the 168 students who completed the program, 69 percent (116) were enrolled in or expected to attend college in the fall, 2004. This figure is considerably higher than the percentage reported in research by Kroll (1995) that found only 27 percent of GED recipients were enrolled in postsecondary education programs three years after completing the GED test. Of the students who reported they were enrolling in postsecondary education, 53 percent had high school diplomas and 47 percent had a GED or External Diploma.

Much of the data and research that was reviewed focuses on college retention. Reder's study demonstrated that 54 percent of students entering with high school diplomas either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry, while only 28 percent of students with GEDs entering postsecondary education had either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry. While some programs report on college retention past the first semester, this data is not gathered and tabulated by the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project due to the complexities of tracking students in more than 40 postsecondary institutions across six states.

In addition to the exemplary college enrollment, the project has had a positive impact on participating students by improving their readiness for postsecondary education. At program completion, students felt better prepared for postsecondary education in six areas: overall academic

readiness, math, reading, writing skills, computer skills and knowledge about what college is like.

These positive changes represent an important finding: students perceive the valuable impact the program has on their readiness for postsecondary education. The students feel they are better prepared to successfully enroll and participate in postsecondary education as a result of the concrete skills they gained through the program. In addition, students feel they will encounter fewer barriers related to financing their postsecondary education as a result of knowledge gained through the program.

#### **WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR COLLEGE PARTNERS?**

From the qualitative data analysis several key features of successful programs were identified:

- ▶ Successful programs have knowledgeable, experienced, resourceful, and committed program staff and leadership. The staff demonstrate their skills through the development and implementation of effective program elements such as thorough student assessments, creative orientation models and rigorous academic courses.
- ▶ Successful programs have strong college partnerships, formed over significant time, characterized by collaboration and coordination of students' experiences in preparing for college, leading to mutual respect. Elements of these partnerships include:
  - ▶ Outstanding commitment, understanding and flexibility on the part of college partners to serve effectively those students who completed the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project;
  - ▶ Carefully integrated information about college expectations, systems, standards and support services, which is introduced to students prior to their completion of the transition program.
- ▶ Successful programs have staff who understand the distinct mix of challenges and needs of a unique target population: adult learners returning to school after a long absence, or pioneering the way to college as the first of their family to enter higher education.

- ▶ Staff care about the adult students and are interested in seeing the potential of adult, nontraditional students fulfilled.
- ▶ Staff know that much of what students are encountering is completely new to them, and involves issues of socioeconomic class and substantive personal and financial challenges.

#### WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF DROPOUTS?

The 49 students who dropped out of the program prior to completion appeared to have additional obstacles to overcome, compared with the obstacles encountered by most New England ABE-to-College Transition Project students. In addition to the barriers that all students enrolled in the transition programs faced, such as returning to school after a long absence, low-income, having a GED, these students had other concerns and personal motivation challenges.

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Interestingly, the information gathered from these students at intake on their perceptions of their academic and college readiness raised additional questions, as the mean scores in specific areas (reading, writing, computer skills and knowledge about college) were higher than the same scores for the overall student population. This data is self-reported and only comprised of the 49 students for whom dropout data was collected. Therefore, these findings raise more questions which are best answered through additional research and analysis on who the dropout students were and what were their individual as well as collective experiences in the ABE-to-College Transition Project.

We do know that the student population who dropped out had a higher proportion of females and Latinos, with a larger proportion of non-native English speakers than the students who completed the program did. The dropout group also had higher percentages of single parents and higher percentages of recipients of public assistance. This knowledge should inform future efforts.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

- ▶ To gain increased knowledge of GED recipients' persistence in postsecondary education, implement a longitudinal study using five to eight programs from the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project and focus on students attending postsecondary education. Focus data collection on assessment testing, college level course enrollment and college persistence for five years post enrollment in a postsecondary institution.
- ▶ Implement further evaluation of the postsecondary education transition needs of non-native English speaking adult learners. Student intake data showed that students who dropped out of the project were more likely to be non-native English speakers than those who successfully completed the project. Additional efforts should be made to study and understand the needs of this specific population.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- ▶ Maximize replication of successful practices by pairing effective programs (demonstrated by transition program completion rates, entries into postsecondary education, and academic learning gains while in the transition program) with less experienced programs. Through these pairings, encourage the sharing of promising practices and opportunities for ongoing learning. Continue to identify and document promising practices as is currently being carried out by New England Literacy Resource Center. Areas of promising practices could include student recruitment techniques, creative program design approaches, lessons learned through college partner management, professional development and human resources expertise.
- ▶ Expand college partnerships, focusing on maximizing the shared responsibility for providing educational opportunities to nontraditional adult learners. While college partnerships are an important facet of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, the primary onus of responsibility still rests on the project itself. Efforts should be made to encourage college partners to increase their role in serving these students. Specifically, consider further integration of the New England ABE-to-College Transition programs

into the college infrastructures through the co-location of programs on college campuses and the development of structured memoranda of agreements between colleges and programs. In addition, build relationships on multiple levels of both the program and college entities and pursue joint professional development initiatives.

- ▶ **Revise Intake and Graduate Survey Tools:** The current intake and graduate survey tools were created to capture a wide range of data to be used for this evaluation. Two specific issues have arisen, that require revision.
  - ▶ The tools are too long and cumbersome to be used by program staff every semester, unless the data are being used in an evaluation. Therefore, it is recommended that shorter versions of the forms be created to capture the essential information that program and New England ABE-to-College Transition Project management staff need for program improvement and monitoring purposes.
  - ▶ Several sections of the forms remain of interest to management staff but continue to be difficult for program staff to complete: Accuplacer test scores, college level course enrollment, college enrollment data. These sections of the forms need to be carefully assessed to determine if there are better methods for capturing these types of data.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- ▶ **Share evaluation findings to inform policy and funding priorities.** The findings from this evaluation support the value of college transition programs. Nontraditional adult learners have become an increasingly larger percentage of students attending postsecondary education in the United States. Projects like the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project represent a model more states should consider in providing essential college preparation programs that maximize nontraditional students' likelihood of persisting in college.

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**Note regarding totals:** Whenever totals do not equal the total number of intakes within groups, this discrepancy is due to missing data from intake forms.

**Table 1A: Gender, Race, Age and Language Intake Data**

| Question        | Data from All Intakes (N=241)  | Data from Graduates (N=168)   | Data from Dropouts (N=49)  |
|-----------------|--|---|--|
| <b>Gender</b>   | Males<br>94 (41%)<br>Females<br>138 (59%)  | Males<br>68 (42%)<br>Females<br>94 (58%)  | Males<br>18 (38%)<br>Females<br>28 (62%)   |
| <b>Race</b>     | White<br>148 (61%)<br>Hispanic<br>33 (14%)<br>African American<br>38 (19%)<br>Middle Eastern<br>1 (.4%)<br>Native American<br>7 (3%)<br>Asian<br>5 (2%)<br>Other<br>4 (2%) | White<br>105 (63%)<br>Hispanic<br>20 (12%)<br>African American<br>26 (16%)<br>Middle Eastern<br>1 (.6%)<br>Native American<br>5 (3%)<br>Asian<br>3 (2%)<br>Other<br>10 (6%) | White<br>28 (57%)<br>Hispanic<br>10 (20%)<br>African American<br>8 (16%)<br>Middle Eastern<br>0<br>Native American<br>1 (2%)<br>Asian<br>1 (2%)<br>Other<br>3 (6%) |
| <b>Age</b>      | Range:<br>16–58 years old<br>Mean age:<br>32.5 years old   | Range:<br>17–56 years old<br>Mean age:<br>31.8 years old  | Range:<br>18–53 years old<br>Mean age:<br>32.4 years old   |
| <b>Language</b> | Primary English<br>171 (80%)<br>Primary Spanish<br>23 (11%)<br>All Others<br>19 (9%)   | Primary English<br>121 (83%)<br>Primary Spanish<br>14 (10%)<br>All Others<br>11 (7%)  | Primary English<br>34 (69%)<br>Primary Spanish<br>7 (14%)<br>All Others<br>8 (16%)   |

*Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.*

Table 2A: Marital and Family Status Intake Data Ê

| Question                  | Data from All Intakes (N=241)   | Data from Graduates (N=168)   | Data from Dropouts (N=49)   |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Marital Status</b>     | Never Married<br>100 (41%)<br>Married<br>65 (28%)<br>Lives with Partner<br>14 (6%)<br>Separated<br>7 (3%)<br>Divorced<br>41 (18%)<br>Widowed<br>2 (1%)                    | Never Married<br>72 (45%)<br>Married<br>43 (27%)<br>Lives with Partner<br>11 (7%)<br>Separated<br>4 (3%)<br>Divorced<br>30 (19%)<br>Widowed<br>(1%)                     | Never Married<br>23 (49%)<br>Married<br>11 (23%)<br>Lives with Partner<br>2 (4%)<br>Separated<br>3 (6%)<br>Divorced<br>7 (15%)<br>Widowed<br>1 (2%) |
| <b>Has Children?</b>      | Yes<br>37 (57%)   | Yes<br>92 (55%)   | Yes<br>29 (59%)   |
| <b>Number of Children</b> | 1 child<br>51 (36%)<br>2 children<br>53 (37%)<br>3 children<br>24 (18%)<br>4 children<br>8 ( 6%)<br>5 children<br>5 ( 3%)<br>6 children<br>1 (1%)<br>9 children<br>1 (1%) | 1 child<br>40 (42%)<br>2 children<br>30 (31%)<br>3 children<br>18 (19%)<br>4 children<br>4 (4%)<br>5 children<br>2 (2%)<br>6 children<br>1 (1%)<br>9 children<br>1 (1%) | 1 child<br>8 (26%)<br>2 children<br>13 (42%)<br>3 children<br>5 (16%)<br>4 children<br>3 (10%)<br>5 children<br>2 (6%)                              |
| <b>Single Parent?</b>     | Yes<br>37 (15%)   | Yes<br>23 (14%)   | Yes<br>11 (22%)   |

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 3A: Employment Intake Data Ê

| Question                 | Data from All Intakes (N=241)   | Data from Graduates (N=168)   | Data from Dropouts (N=49)  |
|--------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Work Status</b>       | Employed<br>104 (68%)<br>Unemployed, seeking work<br>9 (6%)<br>Homemaker<br>2 (1%)<br>Unemployed, not seeking work<br>17 (11%)<br>Retired<br>21 (14%)                           | Employed<br>65 (65%)<br>Unemployed, seeking work<br>9 (9%)<br>Homemaker<br>1 (1%)<br>Unemployed, not seeking work<br>9 (9%)<br>Retired<br>16 (16%)                            | Employed<br>25 (71%)<br>Unemployed, seeking work<br>0<br>Homemaker<br>0<br>Unemployed, not seeking work<br>7 (20%)<br>Retired<br>3 (9%)                                |
| <b>Hours per Week</b>    | 1–14 hours<br>13 (13%)<br>15–21 hours<br>18 (18%)<br>21–35 hours<br>23 (23%)<br>35+ hours<br>48 (47%)   | 1–14 hours<br>7 (11%)<br>15–21 hours<br>10 (16%)<br>21–35 hours<br>15 (23%)<br>35+ hours<br>32 (50%)  | 1–14 hours<br>3 (12%)<br>15–21 hours<br>7 (28%)<br>21–35 hours<br>5 (20%)<br>35+ hours<br>10 (40%)   |
| <b>Family Income</b>     | \$0–\$5,000<br>43 (28%)<br>\$5,001–\$15,000<br>36 (23%)<br>\$15,001–\$25,000<br>43 (28%)<br>\$25,001–\$35,000<br>15 (10%)<br>\$35,001–\$45,000<br>9 (6%)<br>\$45,001+<br>8 (5%) | \$0–\$5,000<br>30 (29%)<br>\$5,001–\$15,000<br>27 (26%)<br>\$15,001–\$25,000<br>29 (28%)<br>\$25,001–\$35,000<br>7 (7%)<br>\$35,001–\$45,000<br>4 (4%)<br>\$45,001+<br>7 (7%) | \$0–\$5,000<br>9 (26%)<br>\$5,001–\$15,000<br>9 (26%)<br>\$15,001–\$25,000<br>9 (26%)<br>\$25,001–\$35,000<br>5 (15%)<br>\$35,001–\$45,000<br>2 (6%)<br>\$45,001+<br>0 |
| <b>Public Assistance</b> | None<br>24 (62%)<br>TANF<br>13 (7%)<br>Unemployment<br>15 (8%)<br>Food Stamps<br>10 (5%)<br>Social Security<br>17 (8%)<br>Medicaid<br>17 (8%)<br>Other<br>6 (3%)                | None<br>86 (62%)<br>TANF<br>9 (7%)<br>Unemployment<br>10 (7%)<br>Food Stamps<br>6 (4%)<br>Social Security<br>12 (9%)<br>Medicaid<br>13 (9%)<br>Other<br>2 (1%)                | None<br>23 (55%)<br>TANF<br>4 (10%)<br>Unemployment<br>4 (10%)<br>Food Stamps<br>2 (5%)<br>Social Security<br>5 (12%)<br>Medicaid<br>3 (7%)<br>Other<br>1 (2%)         |

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 4A: Education Experience Intake Data Ê

| Question                           | Data from All Intakes (N=241)   | Data from Graduates (N=168)  | Data from Dropouts (N=49)*  |
|------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Last Grade Completed</b>        | 7th Grade<br>2 (0.1%)<br>8th<br>9 (4%)<br>9th<br>28 (13%)<br>10th<br>30 (14%)<br>11th<br>26 (12%)<br>12th<br>107 (51%)<br>Other<br>7 (3%)   | 7th Grade<br>1 (0.6%)<br>8th<br>7 (5%)<br>9th<br>20 (14%)<br>10th<br>21 (14%)<br>11th<br>16 (11%)<br>12th<br>78 (53%)<br>Other<br>4 (3%)   | 7th Grade<br>1 (2%)<br>8th<br>1 (2%)<br>9th<br>4 (9%)<br>10th<br>7 (16%)<br>11th<br>8 (19%)<br>12th<br>20 (47%)<br>Other<br>2 (5%)  |
| <b>Age at Last Grade Completed</b> | 12 years old<br>1 (0.6%)<br>14 years<br>8 (5%)<br>15 years<br>13 (8%)<br>16 years<br>25 (15%)<br>17 years<br>32 (19%)<br>18 years<br>48 (29%)<br>19 years<br>14 (8%)<br>20 years<br>4 (2%)<br>21 years<br>2 (1%)<br>22+<br>9 (5%) | 12 years old<br>1 (0.8%)<br>14 years<br>7 (6%)<br>15 years<br>10 (9%)<br>16 years<br>16 (14%)<br>17 years<br>25 (22%)<br>18 years<br>32 (29%)<br>19 years<br>12 (11%)<br>20 years<br>2 (2%)<br>21 years<br>1 (0.8%)<br>22+<br>6 (0.5%) | 12 years old<br>0<br>14 years<br>0<br>15 years<br>2 (5%)<br>16 years<br>6 (14%)<br>17 years<br>4 (9%)<br>18 years<br>12 (28%)<br>19 years<br>2 (5%)<br>20 years<br>0<br>21 years<br>1 (2%)<br>22+<br>3 (7%) |
| <b>Any Past College?</b>           | Yes<br>61(25%)  | Yes<br>42 (25%)  | Yes<br>13 (27%)   |
| <b>Type of Diploma</b>             | GED<br>98 (43%)<br>External Diploma<br>15 (7%)<br>High School<br>113 (50%)  | GED<br>66 (42%)<br>External Diploma<br>12 (8%)<br>High School<br>80 (51%)  | GED<br>22 (47%)<br>External Diploma<br>0<br>High School<br>25 (53%)   |

Table 4A: Education Experience Intake Data (continued)

| Question                                  | Data from All Intakes (N=241)   | Data from Graduates (N=168)   | Data from Dropouts (N=49)*   |
|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Age When Received Diploma</b>          | 16–18 years old<br>109 (51%)<br>19–21 years old<br>52 (25%)<br>22+ years old<br>51 (24%)  | 16–18 years old<br>72 (50%)<br>19–21 years old<br>32 (22%)<br>22+ years old<br>40 (28%)   | 16–18 years old<br>27 (59%)<br>19–21 years old<br>12 (26%)<br>22+ years old<br>7 (15%)   |
| <b>Parent with Highest Degree</b>         | Mother<br>113 (58%)<br>Father<br>81 (42%)   | Mother<br>81 (60%)<br>Father<br>53 (40%)  | Mother<br>27 (60%)<br>Father<br>18 (40%)   |
| <b>Highest Degree Completed by Parent</b> | None–8th grade<br>32 (15%)<br>9th–12th (no diploma)<br>24 (11%)<br>High School graduate<br>88 (41%)<br>Some College–<br>Associates Degree<br>40 (19%)<br>Bachelors, Masters,<br>Doctorate Degrees<br>32 (15%) | None–8th grade<br>22 (15%)<br>9th–12th (no diploma)<br>15 (10%)<br>High School graduate<br>66 (44%)<br>Some College–<br>Associates Degree<br>24 (16%)<br>Bachelors, Masters,<br>Doctorate Degrees<br>24 (16%) | None–8th grade<br>8 (18%)<br>9th–12th (no diploma)<br>7 (16%)<br>High School graduate<br>13 (29%)<br>Some College–<br>Associates Degree<br>13 (29%)<br>Bachelors, Master,<br>Doctorate Degrees<br>4 (9%) |

\*An additional 24 students (10 percent) are unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form or a dropout form were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in future semesters.

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 5A: College Preparedness Data upon Intake Ê

| For the following areas, please rate your preparedness for college (1-4 scale: poor/fair/good/excellent) |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| Question   | All Data from Intakes (N=241)   | Data from Graduates (N=168)*  | Data from Dropouts Upon Intake (N=49)*  |
| <b>Overall Academic Readiness</b>  | Mean Score = 2.37   | Mean Score = 2.41   | Mean Score = 2.32   |
| <b>Math</b>  | Mean Score = 2.03   | Mean Score = 2.09   | Mean Score = 1.87   |
| <b>Reading</b>   | Mean Score = 2.79   | Mean Score = 2.73   | Mean Score = 2.96   |
| <b>Writing</b>   | Mean Score = 2.38   | Mean Score = 2.37   | Mean Score = 2.52   |
| <b>Computer Skills</b>   | Mean Score = 2.38   | Mean Score = 2.38   | Mean Score = 2.43   |
| <b>Knowledge About College</b>   | Mean Score = 2.38   | Mean Score = 2.33   | Mean Score = 2.45   |
| <b>What do you plan to study?</b>  | Accounting<br>9 (3%)<br>Business<br>38 (13%)<br>Computer Science<br>12 (4%)<br>Culinary Art<br>11 (4%)<br>Education<br>24 (8%)<br>HealthCare<br>52 (18%)<br>Social Work<br>41 (14%)<br>Other<br>105 (36%) | Accounting<br>7 (3%)<br>Business<br>31 (15%)<br>Computer Science<br>10 (5%)<br>Culinary Art<br>7 (3%)<br>Education<br>16 (8%)<br>HealthCare<br>37 (18%)<br>Social Work<br>25 (12%)<br>Other<br>69 (34%) | Accounting<br>2 (3%)<br>Business<br>4 (6%)<br>Computer Science<br>2 (3%)<br>Culinary Art<br>4 (6%)<br>Education<br>5 (8%)<br>HealthCare<br>11 (17%)<br>Social Work<br>11 (17%)<br>Other<br>25 (39%) |

\*An additional 24 students (10 percent) are unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form or a dropout form were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in future semesters.

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 6A: Challenges to Success at College at Intake Ê

| To what extent do you think the following are likely to challenge your ability to successfully attend college?<br>(1–4 scale: not at all/ not very likely/likely/highly likely) |                               |                              |  |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Question  | All Data from Intakes (N=241) | Data from Graduates (N=168)* | Data from Dropouts Upon Intake (N=49)* |
| <b>Needing Childcare</b>  | Mean Score = 2.28             | Mean Score = 2.30            | Mean Score = 2.23                      |
| <b>Needing Transportation</b>   | Mean Score = 2.39             | Mean Score = 2.38            | Mean Score = 2.37                      |
| <b>Lacking FA</b>   | Mean Score = 2.50             | Mean Score = 2.46            | Mean Score = 2.56                      |
| <b>Cost of Tuition</b>  | Mean Score = 2.48             | Mean Score = 2.41            | Mean Score = 2.62                      |
| <b>Needing to Work</b>  | Mean Score = 2.43             | Mean Score = 2.38            | Mean Score = 2.49                      |

\*An additional 24 students (10 percent) are unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form or a dropout form were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in future semesters.

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 7A: Graduates' Career Goals  
Comparing Intake and Graduate Survey Data Ê

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| Question                          | Data from Intake (N=168) |          | Data from Graduate Survey (N=168) |          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|----------|
| <b>What do you plan to study?</b> | Accounting               | 7 (3%)   | Accounting                        | 3 (3%)   |
|                                   | Business                 | 31 (15%) | Business                          | 31 (6%)  |
|                                   | Computer Science         | 10 (5%)  | Computer Science                  | 9 (3%)   |
|                                   | Culinary Art             | 7 (3%)   | Culinary Art                      | 6 (6%)   |
|                                   | Education                | 16 (8%)  | Education                         | 19 (8%)  |
|                                   | HealthCare               | 37 (18%) | HealthCare                        | 36 (17%) |
|                                   | Social Work              | 25 (12%) | Social Work                       | 25 (17%) |
|                                   | Other                    | 69 (34%) | Other                             | 58 (39%) |

Discrepancy between N and data in the cells is because more than one answer could be selected.



**NASHUA ADULT EDUCATION CENTER**

Nashua's focus group was small; all four participants were white women in their late twenties or early thirties who had gone back to school to improve their career and work options. Before learning of the program, none had thought themselves capable of going to college. They had all been out of school for some time; one person had been out of school for 22 years. At the time of the focus group, two were attending NHCTC and one was at the University of New Hampshire.

The following quotes and observations, taken directly from the Nashua student focus group notes, are intended to substantiate this report's conclusions and provide readers with a greater feel for the tone and type of feedback we encountered:

- ▶ *They gave me the confidence to return to college and get through it.*
- ▶ *The staff was wonderful...I still keep in touch with them...they are always there to help.*
- ▶ *The study skills I learned here, and the financial aid information I got, were key.*
- ▶ *On the tour, we met Mary Gillette and learned of the support services available there.*
- ▶ *I wouldn't have made it in college without ALC program, which gave me the confidence. I was nervous to be sitting next to so many younger students.*
- ▶ *I think we were all surprised at college, the fast pace of the courses by teachers, the challenge of dealing with computers.*
- ▶ *By talking to other students from the program, I learned about which teachers to avoid!*

Overall, the students' felt that the program led to an improvement in the quality of their lives. They have greater expectations for themselves and their children as a result of participating in the transition program. One student said that her life has changed a lot.

- ▶ *I am a totally different person than when I started the program. My kids are proud of me and they are very encouraging of me, which makes me feel good. They saw me do it, and work for it, and it has an effect on them and the way they think of themselves, of their future.*

### SUMNER ADULT EDUCATION

Evaluators were struck by the diversity in the focus group participants' stages of life and educational needs. The group was comprised of one male and six females. Two were in their mid to late thirties; five were in their mid to late twenties. Two had children. Their stories had many common themes but also reflected many different perspectives, experiences and needs.

The following quotes and observations, taken directly from the Sumner student focus group notes, are intended to substantiate this report's conclusions and provide readers with a greater feel for the tone and type of feedback we encountered:

Students began the program thinking it would be easy. However, largely because they were anywhere from a few years to a few decades removed from their last school experiences, students had to learn anew how to retain, organize and put to use lectures and study resources. Many reflected that Sumner

- ▶ *Helped me 100 percent. Without it, I couldn't have made it.*

Students recognized the role of program staff in setting the performance bar high while instilling confidence in them that they could achieve their goals.

- ▶ *Each of them individually, as humans, instilled in you that you are not stupid, there are no stupid questions and anything you want to do, if you are willing to work at it, you can do.*

A number of quotes or themes also reflect students' perspectives on their college experience to date:

- ▶ *Staff at UM campus are incredible.*

Many students pointed to particular advisors or individual professors, who had been particularly helpful. Their relationships with Marty and Sally gave students the confidence to establish mentors as they began to travel to the college campus and encountered a diversity of teaching skills and personalities.

- ▶ *They really prepared us to get to know each professor; they each can be different.*
- ▶ *Marty was actually harder than any of the college stuff I've come across!*

Many comments highlighted the critical role that personal connection, and feelings of inclusiveness or exclusiveness played. For example:

- ▶ *No, I don't feel part of the campus experience, because I am a distance student.*
- ▶ *I found the transition from the program to college challenging emotionally.*

But many reflected the strength they derived from a feeling of belonging or community:

- ▶ *I feel very connected though I haven't really met [other students] or spent time with them.*
- ▶ *I feel very connected to my ITV nursing training group (there are seven of us doing ITV through UM!).*
- ▶ *I actually feel connected here at Ellsworth because I continue to be an ITV student primarily!*

### SUCCESS PROGRAM

The students who participated in the SUCCESS focus group were, on the whole, young and mobile: they were recent residents of Cape Cod and had lived in many different locations. The group was comprised of three males and five females. Two were in their mid to late thirties, the rest in their late teens to early twenties. Two had children. The group was not as diverse in terms of their ages as those we saw in New Hampshire or Maine, which is also not reflective of the overall transition project student population. Most were, however, first generation college students who heard about the GED program at ACCCESS or came directly into SUCCESS after hearing about it through friends or family members.

Key skills and competencies attributed to participation in SUCCESS:

- ▶ *I got my identity here...it gets tough with work, school, etc. it's frightening...but it's the foundation that we got here and Joan follows up with you and is a resource/support.*
- ▶ *Now I feel prepared to deal with the diversity of styles of teaching and teachers.*
- ▶ *Joan helps us pick and choose courses/professors.*
- ▶ *I learned at SUCCESS that I had to do the work on my own, and work hard.*

Comments included those about the importance of having built a supportive network of peers:

- ▶ *We had a great group, really bonded.*
- ▶ *AT CCCC, people weren't super friendly, etc...here, we knew one another so well, socialized, etc.*
- ▶ *Here, we're all equal, "misfits"; we all needed this and made a mistake somewhere previously (or didn't have an opportunity).*
- ▶ *Joan calls and checks in, keeps up relationships...people call Joan when there is a problem/issue/challenge...she advocates...Joan has set up people at the college who know the program and are there to support you.*

Some commented on the group and the visit to the college campus:

- ▶ *Made me feel special to know I would be there someday.*
- ▶ *When we started attending classes at 4C, we knew where to go and we weren't so overwhelmed.*
- ▶ *It really gives you a preview of what college life is actually like, really prepares you.*
- ▶ *Getting to know the right professors and advisors at the CCCC, some came from similar roots and advocate/motivate/inspire us.*
- ▶ *If you weren't directly related to the program (and had to go out and find a college and everything), it'd be much worse. You come out of the Success program, and you feel like CCCC is right there. You can always make other choices later, but it's a great place to start and the transition is easy.*





## ABOUT NEW ENGLAND LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

[www.nelrc.org](http://www.nelrc.org)

The New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC) works to strengthen adult literacy services in New England through sharing and collaborative projects among adult literacy professional development providers, practitioners and policy-makers in Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

To achieve this mission, NELRC:

- ▶ develops practical, state-of-the-art products
- ▶ encourages collaborations across state lines
- ▶ coordinates and manages projects for funders
- ▶ generates knowledge to improve practice
- ▶ implements practitioner-based projects that promote inquiry and innovation
- ▶ advocates for adequate funding and sound policies for adult literacy, locally and nationally

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NELRC is part of World Education, a Boston-based non-profit whose mission is to improve the lives of the educationally disadvantaged through economic and social development programs.

NELRC's professional development is currently focused on the following topics:

### **College Transitions**

[www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org)

- ▶ Planning and designing college transition programs
- ▶ Developing instructional content and support services
- ▶ Serving students with learning disabilities
- ▶ Creating program management & evaluation tools
- ▶ Forming partnerships with postsecondary institutions
- ▶ Developing program guidelines and funding programs

### **Civic Literacy and Participation**

- ▶ Incorporating civic participation and community action into instruction
- ▶ Teaching and assessing EL/Civics, and citizenship
- ▶ Using *The Change Agent* in instruction
- ▶ Popular education

### **ESOL**

- ▶ Participatory Adult ESOL Instruction
- ▶ Putting the “Civics” into EL/Civics
- ▶ ESOL for the Workplace

### **Multiple Intelligences and Brain-Based Learning**

- ▶ Multiple Intelligences in Adult Learning
- ▶ Multiple Intelligences in Adult ESOL Instruction
- ▶ Building Community through Multiple Intelligences
- ▶ Multiple Intelligences in Career Planning
- ▶ Teacher Research in the AMI Study
- ▶ Brain-based Learning

### **Organizational Development for Adult Literacy Programs**

- ▶ Strategic planning
- ▶ Program improvement
- ▶ Board development
- ▶ Equipped For the Future (EFF) standards-based instruction and assessment
- ▶ Using the EFF standards for program improvement
- ▶ Implementing curriculum frameworks

### **Computer-mediated Instruction**

- ▶ Using the Web in instruction
- ▶ Using computers to teach reading
- ▶ Using computers as a tool for project-based learning

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT**

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