Turning Points

A Case Study of Family Literacy – Community College Partnerships

With support from MetLife Foundation
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**Acknowledgments**

*Turning Points: A Case Study of Family Literacy-Community College Partnerships* is one of several products for The Family Literacy-Community College Partnership Initiative, a project developed and implemented by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) with generous support from MetLife Foundation.

The products of The Family Literacy-Community College Partnership Initiative are designed to support the likelihood of Hispanic parents and children transitioning into college and other postsecondary educational opportunities. The purpose of the case study is to provide a window into three family literacy programs that have partnership agreements with community colleges and are providing transition services for their students. This publication and other postsecondary transition products can be found at [www.famlit.org/myfamilygoestocollege](http://www.famlit.org/myfamilygoestocollege).

NCFL gratefully acknowledges each of the programs described in this report: Columbia Even Start Family Literacy, Lake City, FL; Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center, Providence, RI; and Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) Family Education Program, Louisville, KY.

Our appreciation goes to the program administrators who arranged interviews and observations and who shared the creative methods they use to encourage students to continue their educational pursuits. We also appreciate the attention and time required for administrators to craft the details for their partnership agreements and their perseverance in pursuing the funding to provide the system of support needed by their high-risk students.

Thank you to the educational staff who season their professional excellence with a healthy dose of the personable, caring and energetic encouragement that makes all the difference for many students.

We also wish to acknowledge the many students who took time to meet and share their personal stories. We applaud your courage and determination for continuing your education amid the many responsibilities and concerns you face. This shows remarkable dedication and a desire to provide well for your families.

Finally, thank you to all the communities that surround the students and family literacy programs—employers, friends and family members who give the day-to-day encouragement and support to help students stay the long course in earning diplomas, certificates, and degrees. You guide and support students at that turning point in their lives that changes their educational path and their future.

**MetLife Foundation**

MetLife Foundation supports education, health, civic and cultural organizations. It is committed to opening access and opportunity for education at all levels, and across the lifespan. The Foundation places emphasis on strengthening teaching and learning in public schools and on preparation for, access to and success in education beyond high school, particularly in community colleges. Its grantmaking in education is informed by the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*. For more information see [www.metlife.org](http://www.metlife.org).

MetLife Foundation has recognized in NCFL a commitment to encourage the aspirations and academic achievement of both parents and children together, and to enable study beyond high school, increasingly necessary for jobs and economic security. In its support for community colleges, the Foundation has recognized the need to help bolster student success, including adult students who may have received General Educational Development (GED®) diplomas, need additional work to be college ready, and face financial and family challenges. This NCFL initiative helps bridge in practical ways a significant gap for students and families most in need.
The need for a well educated adult population that is ready to move competently and efficiently into 21st century careers is becoming critical. “According to the U.S. Department of Labor data, 62% of all U.S. jobs in 2010 will require higher skill levels. While 97 million people will be needed, only 43 million Americans will have the educational qualifications for these jobs. On the other hand, 38% of all U.S. jobs in 2010 will still be low-pay/low-skill requiring 61 million workers, but 115 million Americans will be competing for these jobs” (Gordon, 2009).

Job growth over the next 25 years is expected to be in positions that require higher levels of education and skills. If trends continue, there will be an increasing number of jobs requiring higher skill levels with an inadequate pool of candidates to choose from and a decreasing number of low-pay/low-skill jobs available with a disproportionately high number of applicants for them. The task is to equalize this situation and in order to do so, we must increase the education and work skills of those who currently are competing for the low-pay, low-skill positions. They must be prepared to take on the jobs that require higher skill levels.

The low number of adult students entering and completing postsecondary education is perplexing. Why do so few eligible adults transition to college and of those who do, why do so few actually complete a degree? What can programs do to remedy this problem? How can we prepare students for the rigorous academic environment and often lengthy time commitment required to obtain a college degree or technical school certificate?

Family literacy programs can be critical turning points in the lives of their students. According to Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (Eleventh Edition), p. 1350, a turning point is defined as:

“Turning point (n). —a point at which a significant change occurs.”

What can family literacy programs do to ensure that their adult education students move on to postsecondary education or training and are prepared to fill the need for jobs that require more advanced skills? Current statistics indicate that moving adult education students beyond the General Educational Development (GED®) diploma has not been a very successful endeavor.

Despite increasing economic returns and social benefits associated with postsecondary education and training, research indicates that only 30-35% of General Educational Development (GED®) diploma recipients obtain any postsecondary education; only 5-10% obtain at least one year of postsecondary education; and only 3% complete an associate’s degree. (Murnane, Willett and Tyler as cited in MPR Associates, Inc., 2007, p. 1).
Introduction

Even the economic benefits gained with a college degree don’t seem to supply the necessary degree of incentive for adult education students, but they are worth noting. Although median annual earning potential improves from $21,788 to $30,940 with a GED, even some college education increases that annual income to $35,048. With an associate’s degree, annual income rises to $37,492 (25% more than average income with a high school diploma). It jumps again to $50,024 for those with a bachelor’s degree and again to $74,932 for a doctoral degree (see Figure 1).

Clearly, education pays—for individuals, for their families, for the communities in which they live, and for our national economy.

Adult students in family literacy programs often face a number of barriers to attending their adult education classes. These barriers can include child care, transportation, lack of English language skills, learning disabilities, and negative experiences with the school system. Some of these same obstacles often persist for those who pursue a postsecondary education. Missing class is not as easily excused at the junior college/college/technical school level as at the adult education level. Does this mean that adult education programs need to institute more stringent requirements for attendance, such as those that normally accompany a managed enrollment system? Should adult education students be held as accountable for their attendance as they are for their jobs and in a postsecondary educational environment?

For many adult students, college has never been considered an option and they may be the first in their family to consider extending their education beyond a GED or high school diploma. There was never an expectation for college or anyone at home to support them in considering such an option. Often, they have not had prior educational success and their self-efficacy is limited. Without support and access to someone who understands the procedures of preparing for and entering college, it is very easy to toss the idea aside or try it on one’s own only to find that the procedures are too difficult, the work too strenuous, the lack of knowledge about the culture of college too intimidating, or their adult education classes.

FIGURE 1: Education & Training Pays, 2006: Unemployment & earnings for workers 25 & older by educational attainment; earnings for full-time wage and salary workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Attainment</th>
<th>Median Weekly Earnings ($USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>$1441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Degree</td>
<td>$1474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s Degree</td>
<td>$1410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree</td>
<td>$952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Degree</td>
<td>$721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>$674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Grad</td>
<td>$595</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some High School</td>
<td>$419</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the task too difficult or frustrating. How can educators address students’ lack of confidence and lack of knowledge about the culture of college? How can programs introduce their adult education students to the college environment and continue to provide support as they begin their college experience?

Many students enter college academically unprepared to take on college level work. Community colleges have what is called an “open door policy”—all students with a high school diploma or GED can enroll. This does not mean that all students are prepared for college level work, and an increasing number of students with a high school diploma or GED are placed in remedial courses. Remedial courses do help students develop necessary skills, but they do not count toward program requirements or degree completion. And they cost the student the same amount of money as any other course they take. Tuition for English language classes and remedial or developmental courses consume students’ federal aid money, scholarship funds, grants and loans. They add extra classes to a student’s curriculum and extend the length of time students must be enrolled. This, in turn, creates yet another obstacle.

Low income students need financial aid to attend college, yet to qualify for financial aid they generally must take a minimum of six credit hours (or what typically equates to two courses per semester). Adult students often are not able to attend the requisite number of hours to qualify for financial aid because of the pressing responsibilities of work and family. Although they have a sense of the importance and need for continuing their education, their families and jobs take priority and limit the time and money available to attend college.

As a result, most students who do enroll find that it may take five to six years to complete a two-year degree, and some of these students take even longer if, in fact, the degree is ever completed (MPR Associates, Inc., 2007). This slow progress and long term commitment can become discouraging and may lead many students to stop- or drop-out and often they never return. What can family literacy programs do to address the issue of adult students being academically under-prepared for college? What can programs do to help students gain the necessary skills to by-pass the remedial level courses, so they begin earning academic credit immediately upon enrollment?

**PROMISING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS**

Adult education providers, such as those in family literacy programs, serve high need students at a crucial juncture—when students enter the program to earn a GED and possibly, continue their education beyond the GED. The support, encouragement, and knowledge that students receive through adult education are essential pieces in creating a desire and an ability to transition to postsecondary education.

**USING THE CASE STUDY AS A PROGRAM TOOL**

Family literacy programs throughout the country are working to make the successful transition of adult students from the GED to postsecondary education a reality. Three of these programs are presented in the following case studies. They are Columbia Even Start Family Literacy Program, Lake City, Florida; Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center, Providence, Rhode Island; and Jefferson County Public Schools Family Education, Louisville, Kentucky.

These programs have addressed the problems previously discussed by creating innovative transition partnerships with community colleges as a means of increasing the number of students entering postsecondary educational settings and successfully completing programs. Hopefully, these cases will help answer the following three
primary questions introduced previously—and if addressed, can help to eliminate obstacles confronted by adult students continuing their education.

- **Should adult education students be held as accountable for their attendance as they are for their jobs and as they would be in a postsecondary educational environment?**
- **How can programs introduce their adult education students to the college environment and continue to provide support as they begin their college experience?**
- **What can family literacy programs do to address the issue of adult students being academically under-prepared for college?**

In addition, as you read these program case studies, look for examples of best practices and replicable strategies by asking yourself the following questions.

- **What do programs do to make students’ transition to postsecondary education successful?**
- **What are the essential ingredients of a viable family literacy–community college transition partnership?**

Then reflect on your own program and the transition practices and strategies you are implementing.

- **Can you be doing more to support your students’ successful transition to postsecondary education?**
- **Might you do things differently to address specific student needs and challenges to the transition process?**
- **Is a community college partnership a viable option for your program?**

Take time to address the “Questions to Consider” in the conclusion of the case study in regard to your own program. Consider whether your program can be a ‘turning point’ for students in their educational and career development beyond the program. Think about your program as a solution to the critical need for a better educated and more highly-skilled workforce.
Population of Columbia County, FL

Columbia Even Start Family Literacy
is a single-site, year-round program that operates 32 hours per week and is open mostly Tuesday through Thursday during the day with evening classes provided for Adult Basic Education (ABE), GED and for credit/community education. The program serves an average of 45 students each year, 27% of which are students of English as a second language (ESL).

Main Location
409 SW St. Johns Street, Lake City, FL 32025

Personnel
Three full-time and three part-time staff

Partnership Program
Project NET (Need to Expedite Transition)

Partner
Lake City Community College (LCCC)

Transitioning Practices
Family literacy parents access adult education through the Columbia Career and Adult Education Program. All adult students receive transition support as part of a three-tier service model that serves students from entry through their first semester of postsecondary educational training. Parent education sessions address study skills for college success and focus on developing background knowledge in content areas. Students visit the college campus and college staff attend monthly student meetings to provide information about their programs.

Data
Ten percent of students completing this program typically apply to a continuing education or college program each year, with a 50% completion rate.
Brenda attended the Columbia Even Start Program and earned her GED in June of 2008. She volunteered at the program for six or seven months after that and while working at the program, began taking courses at the community college. The family literacy program helped her feel more comfortable with the college situation. She says, “They helped me find out information about the college and showed me lots of things, not just for my two kids, but also for me. It opened a window to new things for me.

“My parents brought us here from Mexico when I was like four or five years old, but five years later, we returned to Mexico and I came back after I got married. We’ve been here about eight years. My husband, my children and my parents have all been very supportive. When we were little, my dad would always tell us you got to go to school to get your education so you can have a better job. Then when I got married, I dropped out of school. In our culture, when you get married you’re not supposed to go to school, you’re not supposed to go out, you’re not supposed to socialize, all those things. Some people follow these customs more than others, but my husband did not as much as some other people I knew. As my kids got a little older, I thought to myself, What am I going to be doing when my kids are 15 and 20 years old? Where am I going to be? Am I going to be working out in a field? I really didn’t want that. I told my husband I really wanted to get my GED, and if I could, I want to go on to college. That’s how I started.

“This program did great things to prepare us as parents. But as a Hispanic woman, I would have wanted a Hispanic speaker to come to the school just to chat or talk so we would know there are Hispanic people in this area that have been through the kind of things that we’re going through—to give us, as Hispanics, the motivation that other people can do it. For me it wasn’t that difficult because I already knew English. But for other moms, I know it’s very difficult because they just know very small, simple words. For them it’s more difficult and frustrating sometimes. That’s what I try to do now that I work here at the program.

“The family literacy program gives me a lot of support. There’s no way I can get another job that has flexible scheduling. I always wanted to go to college and get a four-year degree. But I have to take care of my two kids, help with homework, do this and do that at home, so I was kind of frightened about going for that. Working at the program allows me to do it at my own pace, taking two to three classes at a time and not rushing through it. My brother has even started taking classes. I told my husband that one day when I get finished and I get my degree and everything, I hope I’ll get a better job, and you’re going to have to at least handle part-time, and you’re going to get your GED and go to college.” Brenda laughed and said, “He’s like, okay.”
The Columbia Even Start Family Literacy Program is a small rural program located in north central Florida. With six staff members, three full-time and three part-time, this program serves approximately 45 students each year. Several staff members are former students who are currently taking classes at the community college, and their first-hand experience as family literacy students makes them credible contacts for current students. For example, one minute a staff person may be encouraging a student, in the next minute she is calling another student to help with a computer glitch, and then talks to a third student about that student’s attendance, accepting no excuses for missing classes.

Some students who complete the requirements for the GED certificate begin working as volunteers at the program and move into paid positions once funds become available, which allows them uninterrupted child care. Working as a volunteer also serves as a short-term solution for students who are waiting for the next semester to begin at the college, keeping them in the regular routine of an academic setting while completing the application and financial aid process. The director describes this group as a close-knit team that operates like a family. A student who is enrolled concurrently in the family literacy program and the community college stopped by the office after dropping off her child in the early childhood program. This parent needed transportation from the program to the college campus and staff quickly arranged for her to ride with a fellow student.

The adult education component of this family literacy program is provided by the Columbia Career and Adult Education Program which is located in the same building as the family literacy program. Instruction includes classes for ABE, GED, post-GED, and ESL students. The program operates Tuesdays through Thursdays for a total of 32 hours each week, offering day classes from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and evening Adult Basic Education (ABE) and GED classes as well as community education credit-bearing classes in a variety of subjects, such as business or computer technology.

The program uses managed enrollment, and also has steps in place to encourage attendance and getting to class on time. These requirements seem to make a big difference, and set the stage for what is expected on a job or in college. According to the Florida Department of Education, after six absences students must be withdrawn. However, teachers call after the second or third day of absence and send letters home in an effort to retain students. Personal contact tends to make a difference with this very transient population. The program also has open enrollment, allowing students to enroll and then if they encounter problems following the attendance requirements for managed enrollment, they can take a few weeks off and then re-register. Students who find it difficult to adhere to the attendance policy must decide between attending class regularly and arriving on time or waiting until a later time when they are ready to commit to making class attendance a priority.

Staff used to say that their policies were similar to those of a high school, but now they say policies are more like those of a college and attendance is of paramount importance—it’s college preparation. Staff are shifting their own way of thinking as well as shifting the mindset of their students to think of the program as a transition program. They are considering receiving a GED as a transition to something higher—in some cases, to a better job and in others to postsecondary education or training. This program provides preparation for both high school equivalency completion (the GED) and college. As the program director explained, “This change in perspective is important if
you’ve always been stuck on passing the GED as a last resort for finishing high school—what they considered the end of the road for their education. It’s a big deal because it makes it quite clear that that’s not the final goal. It’s a step. If they don’t come in with goals, they’re not going to be successful. Even from the get-go, I already talk college to them.” Both family literacy and adult education directors agree that all success depends on the relationship with the students. If you want to see them move forward, “you’ve got to have a relationship with the students.”

Transition services have evolved gradually, beginning with just the basics and including support services, such as how to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), continued child care, and flexible scheduling which is a huge benefit. When both the Child Care Coalition (the county child care resource and referral agency) and Florida Crown Workforce Board (which provides federal financial aid for undergraduate education) allowed families to continue participating in the family literacy program, student transitioning began to increase. Without that partnership, Even Start could not pay the child care to sustain the program and still meet other state performance indicators.

Lake City Community College staff serve on the county public school advisory council and their presence on the board as well as the association with Even Start were a boon to beginning the transition program. The partnership program

STUDENT PROFILE: Felicia

Having completed her GED through the family literacy program, Felicia has kept her children enrolled and stayed on as a volunteer until she can begin classes at the local community college. When asked about her plans for the future, she explained, “When I started at the program I wanted to become a nurse, but I completely changed. I want to be a teacher. That’s the long term goal, but right now I am trying to get a job here. I had been working at the front office, but I’m waiting for a grant to go through to pay for a real position, and then I hope to start college in the fall. I’ll take basic classes at the community college and then go for a bachelor’s in teaching. I was in the program a week, and I took my GED. I knew I passed it, right off the street—even though it had been six years since I have been in school. I have been really good in school and I had advanced classes until the point where I quit, so I knew that it would be easy for me. I have two kids at home. And then whenever I am here, I am busy. I don’t really have time to sit down and study. I have to take the prep course. Everyone in Even Start has helped me figure out what my next steps are.”

Felicia explained that she’s pretty much on her own with her two young children, and the only real support she’s gotten has been through the family literacy program. Her greatest obstacle is having enough time—to study, to take care of her two- and three-year-old children, to deal with transportation problems, and everything else—but her ‘family’ at the program is helping her figure those things out.
began with a simple agreement to make reciprocal referrals as needed. From there, a formal partnership was forged, resulting in monthly meetings and an agreement identifying specific contributions and benefits to both parties. Since then, Project NET—Need to Expedite Transition—has expanded into a close working relationship between The Columbia Even Start Family Literacy Program, Columbia Adult Education, Lake City Community College and various community agencies. Students receive transitioning support through a three-tier model. The level and intensity of services delivered to students is based on the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or pre-GED test scores, teacher input, student academic and personal goals, and the district guidelines for minors.

Tier 1 includes all students in the day and afternoon program. Many students have disabilities, have had negative school experiences in the past, and have social barriers to school success. All students participate in goal-planning activities during registration. Soft case management, such as counseling and accessing prior school records and documenting participation for students identified with special needs, is provided as requested and appropriate. English, math and computer skills are assessed to place students appropriately for instruction. Monthly meetings are held where all students participate in a workforce activity or staff from various college programs visit to share information and to help students develop a personal contact at the college. The college academic advising staff also visit quarterly. Students at the Tier 1 level may be referred for additional social services, and they have access to referral networks.

STUDENT PROFILE:
Ronniann

Ronniann answers the phone to speak with a student and quickly changes pace to speak with someone who walks in the office, and then takes care of business on the computer. As a former program parent and transition student at the Columbia Even Start Program, she knows what to tell others to expect and has well-earned credibility with program students. She was a welder with her husband and began the program with her two children who both have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Her first step was to complete her GED and then she became the program’s first college transition student.

Ronniann feels that the key to her own progress and to helping other students succeed is making a personal connection. “Personal follow-up is important. From GED to college transitions, we do all the little things to help students not fail. Program staff gave me the support to keep going, helped me figure things out in the beginning when I didn’t know what to expect, and helped me with the financial aid forms. Even Start was like a family. We do things together and they backed me up when I went to college. My first semester I wanted to take a full load, but had to first take prep classes, and a really hard part was the homework. I’m sitting out of school right now, but I’ll get it done. One thing you can say about me is that I’m very persistent.”
to small-group tutoring and additional voluntary tutoring services. Success is recognized early and regularly with a perfect-attendance award that acknowledges attendance between student meetings, and with a teacher-nominated student-of-the-month award.

Tier 2 serves students who have passed at least three sections of the GED tests, or have a score of 450 or better on each subtest of the GED Official Practice Test (OPT), or have other personal factors as determined by the student and staff, such as challenges meeting the college registration deadline. Also included in Tier 2 are students who have a strong work ethic or are highly committed to goal achievement.

In addition to the Tier 1 services, students at this level receive:

- Coordinated access to soft case management through individual teacher-student conferences
- Academic guidance and counseling
- Tutoring and cooperative learning opportunities tied to academic goals
- Personal guidance and counseling, including mental health counseling and crisis intervention
- Career counseling
- Help with transportation
- Visits each semester to the community college
- Dual enrollment in adult education and the student success class.

These students are eligible to enroll in Project NET, the partnership transition program, where they participate in a three-part goal planning and goal setting workshop that also includes discussion of one-on-one goal planning with a transition specialist, and a focus on accountability to oneself and one’s cohort.

Students in Tier 3 have successfully completed the GED, are entering the workforce and/or waiting for the postsecondary education entrance window to open or they have enrolled and are attending their first semester of postsecondary educational training. In addition to the services available at Tier 1 and Tier 2, Tier 3 students are eligible to participate in a mentorship program, project-based learning activities and service learning activities, weekly study and support group meetings, and coordinated volunteer opportunities. They receive assistance in obtaining classroom supplies, and family literacy program-eligible participants can access wrap-around services, such as child care and transportation. These continuing services for GED certificate recipients are an important and unique part of the “NET” of support available through this program. At the end of the first quarter of postsecondary school learning, a “Celebrate Success” event is held to recognize students.

At student meetings, students are told of the expectation that they will move on to postsecondary education. Program staff feel that planting that seed early is very important, because it encourages students who have grown up believing that postsecondary education was out of their grasp. They see students who never thought about extending their education beyond the GED beginning to think “Well, maybe that’s a possibility for me.”

The program recently hired a transition specialist, which will allow them to expand and intensify adult education transition services. Services will now include: Project NET participant orientation; shadowing opportunities at area business sites; twice-monthly meetings for Project NET student cohorts; and individual counseling and assistance with form completion, and college and career advising. Other support services available to students include career counseling through the Florida Crown Workforce Development Board, remedial coursework through the Lake County Community College (LCCC) Transition Computer Lab, and services through the Early Childcare Coalition.

The family literacy and adult education programs also use their close partnership
to leverage services and funds from a range of community providers, including the Exceptional Student Education Program, Lake City Community College, the Florida Crown Workforce Development Board, and local businesses. Examples of services include student scholarships funded with contributions from various community businesses, job shadowing, and a mentorship program. According to the Project NET Program Plan, program graduates are all “encouraged to give back to the community in a tangible way, through volunteering or donating to a non-profit, or developing their own community project.”

Practices that enhance this transition program’s success include:

- Twice-weekly test preparation classes that meet prior to regular adult education class for review, remediation, or skill-strengthening preparation
- Monthly GED refresher workshops targeting GED-ready students
- Student exit satisfaction surveys
- Student newsletters
- Assistance with college and financial aid application forms and processes
- Monthly staff meetings to review, assess and modify services to best accommodate student needs.

The greatest challenge this transitioning program faces is making sure that the students are college ready beyond the GED. Typically, transitioning students have to take prep courses because they do not score high enough on the college entrance exams. This seems to happen more frequently in math than it does in reading or writing. Staff met to generate ideas for how they might offer a more advanced math class in the afternoons and teachers decided to come in a bit later each morning in order to shave off some work hours. This released enough money to pay someone to teach an afternoon math prep class for students before entering college, as well as some former program students who are currently enrolled in college and need extra help. Teachers are passionate about students being ready for postsecondary education or preparing them for a better career, and they seek to find creative ways to provide the needed assistance.
The instructor explains a writing task in a crowded afternoon class with approximately 30 ABE and GED students who are mostly in their 20s – 30s, but ranging in ages from recent high school drop-outs to women most likely in their 50s. She then moves around the room to provide individual assistance. The room is quiet, but not silent because some students are working together on a math assignment. Following oral directions and an example on the board for mapping a main idea and then providing supporting information and details, many students work independently on essays about themselves—“what education means to me,” “a turning point in my life,” “why I came to the United States,” or “let me tell you about someone I admire.” They focus on mapping their thoughts and then writing the essay, the instructor explains, “that’s what they will need to do when they take the GED.” Aside from worksheets, notebooks and an occasional calculator, the only resources being used are a few dictionaries.

A group of five students is seated at a large table at the front, and they talk about the math assignment, one explaining a strategy to the others who disagree and explain why they think he’s wrong. The instructor moves around the room, stopping to provide assistance that is usually phrased as a question to provoke thinking, give a suggestion, and provide encouraging support. She listens to a student read a paragraph from his paper and suggests he add details that explain and support the paragraph’s main idea. The instructor demonstrates a firm but friendly adherence to attendance policies and there is a personable, yet polite and respectful relationship between the instructor and the students, a mutual respect for one another’s purpose for being in the class. Halfway through the class, the male student sitting in front of me gets the nod to pass around a bag of candy—something everyone seems accustomed to as appreciation and encouragement to keep up the hard work.

A later interview with the instructor confirms the ambiance in the classroom to be what she genuinely believes is important for students to succeed. She shares her realistic, but high expectations, and acknowledges students’ efforts and work while pushing for a higher level of performance. Program staff noticed that advanced students needed an extra class in the afternoons and they all cut back on their own hours in order to have the funds to offer this afternoon class. The classroom packed with students confirms the need and the instructor explains that they work on social studies and science on Mondays, math on Tuesdays, English and essays on Wednesdays, and then Thursdays are for catching up. When I comment that some students wrote fairly long essays, she explains that they write an essay about every two weeks and that some students are more advanced than others, because the more experience they have, the better they’re getting. The instructor also works at the Florida Crown Workforce Board which gives
her access to the Money Makeover program—a basic budgeting program that the credit union provides on site. Her work at Florida Crown has given her access to materials on writing résumés, cover letters, and job searching skills. Once they have passed their GED test, she tells students to go to Florida Crown to sign up so that they might get help with college expenses. She encourages them to go to the college and find out what they have to do to become a nurse, a welder or a heating, air-conditioning, ventilation and refrigeration technician. For career knowledge she uses the “Targeted Occupation List” that shows the fastest growing occupations in the region. She tells them to “look over the list and figure out what you want to do. Then we’ll figure out what it’s going to take to get there. I tell them, five years from now I want to see you making a ton more money than me.”

She uses the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) in order to keep each student on track. As she explains, “If they get complacent and it gets easy I might lose them, so I challenge them to work a little harder.” Another strategy she uses is to break students’ big goals into shorter two-, three-, or four-week goals to keep them working hard. “Students have to see the importance of learning the skills that boost their scores a bit higher. My goal is for them to graduate, and I’ll tell them to graduate first time. In a loving way, and I hope they all take it in a loving way, I tell them ‘I can’t wait till you’re out of my class, so let’s hurry up and get going!’” She pushes her students to learn college-ready skills. If students can’t multiply, she uses geometry so they have a picture for it to make sense. She explains that “it has to be concrete. If they can’t multiply I have them work with physical materials. They can use a ‘cheat sheet’ until they get tired of searching for the answers. Then they just need to memorize their facts.”

When asked if the attendance policy was a problem, she laughed. “My students have the opposite problem. If class starts at one o’clock, they’re generally standing at the door at 12:30. I’ve got a full classroom by 12:45. But, I told them up front that if it’s 1:15, don’t bother showing up because you’re not welcome. You have to be here on time or not at all.”

At this time her class has an 89% first-time pass rate. When asked what she does that gets that level of success, she laughingly replies, “I give them candy. It keeps them coming back.” In a more serious tone she explains that when students first walk in, the biggest barrier is low self-esteem. Every day about two-thirty it starts getting noisy, and that’s okay. I have two girls in class that are taking the test next week, so I’ll tell students to go ask Jessica or Bev to help you with it. That way, they get more practice and if you can explain it, you know it.”

She describes herself as a better cheerleader than a teacher and explains how she celebrates the small steps so students are willing to take the next step. That’s where the cheerleading comes in—“let them know that they can do it and they take off. Not everyone is appropriate for college, but everyone is capable of doing something, so everyone needs transitioning support. I remind them that there are opportunities out there. I like to say that the light at the end of the tunnel needs to be something besides a train.”

She tells about a GED teacher she observed who would just sit there and give students books to work out of, “a real snooze.” She “wanders,” just to keep them all on track, and they don’t have to be quiet or studious all the time. For the most part, she says “they’re giving it their best. Our students’ greatest strength for transitioning is their desire.”
This program has a small-size, personal feel, yet delivers a variety of high-quality services one might expect of a larger program. Academic and personal challenges that could easily overwhelm students facing multiple risk factors and inhibit success are met head-on by this tight-knit team of highly-focused staff. The family literacy program director and adult education coordinator work in tandem, sharing resources, responsibilities and services. Integrated into all services is the focus on building and supporting relationships with students—knowing students personally as well as professionally—in order to intervene early and as often as needed. Staff work with students to set goals and through individual case management together identify the best path for each student to follow. Student success is regularly celebrated, providing incentive and acknowledging progress. Qualified students have been hired by the program while they take classes at the college. One prior student is a full-time administrative assistant. A young Hispanic mother began as a volunteer after getting her GED at the program, but now works as an ESL parent educator while attending college part time. Their cultures, backgrounds and experiences in the family literacy program make them credible examples of success for others.

Multiple partnerships provide access to many resources that help address student barriers while actively engaging students in the community as recipients and contributors. Community partners fund two annual scholarships, and through the partnership agreement, Lake City Community College provides:

- A minimum of one college course at the adult education program site
- Two “College for a Day” activities per year
- A minimum of one “College Overview Session and Field Trip” per semester
- Two college classes provided on site at the adult education center each year
- Academic advising for adult education students throughout the year
- College placement testing at the adult education program site
- Professional development for adult education staff about online college preparatory classes
Population of Providence, RI

Dorcas Place Adult and Family Learning Center
is a multi-site community-based program that provides a variety of education services including instruction at the beginning, intermediate and advanced literacy levels; specialized instruction and support for learning disabled students; math and computer classes; beginning, intermediate and advanced ESOL; leadership development; and workplace literacy classes.

Main Location
220 Elmwood Avenue, Providence, RI 02907

Personnel
As a whole, Dorcas Place has 51 full- and part-time staff, all of whom are multilingual; there are 8 staff within the Adult and Family Learning Center.

Partnership Program
The Bridge-to-College Program is an internal program assisting first generation college students with wraparound support services.

Partners
Dorcas Place, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) collaborate to define the best college transition/college preparatory pathways for non-traditional adult learners seeking postsecondary education in RI.

Transitioning Practices
ABE curriculum is aligned with college-ready standards. Dorcas Place is able to differentiate instruction across various classes and programs in order to more specifically serve student needs and goals. Before being placed, students are assessed regarding their English language skills, academic level, career interests and goals, and barriers to participation.

Data
Over 80% of Dorcas Place students who participated in their college preparatory program went on to college.
Dorcas Place is a large community facility located in Providence, Rhode Island, that offers a broad range of programs with the singular focus of providing educational and social services to support the success of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. One of these programs—the Adult and Family Learning Center—serves approximately 120 low-income ESL families each year at seven different sites. Following the four-component model of family literacy, which includes adult education, Parent Time, Parent and Child Together (PACT®) Time, and child education, parents learn ways to support their children’s learning while improving their own education.

There are 51 full-time and part-time employees at Dorcas Place who manage and deliver the education, career and social services programs. The broad range of services provided through Dorcas Place allows the Adult and Family Learning Center to differentiate instruction in order to target specific academic levels of participating parents and families.

The primary goals for most students are learning English and getting jobs. However, there is also a group of students whose employment options are very limited because they are undocumented. Even within Dorcas Place, workforce program students need to be employable, especially for internships. However, the vast majority of parents are adamant about wanting their children to have a college education. Parents and children visit the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) college campus in the summer program and also have visited Brown University. These visits have made a big impact on parents’ dreams of educational possibilities for their children.

In addition to educational support, Dorcas Place helps students access other community services.

As one student explained,

In the United States I didn’t know where to go for help—where you need to go for many things. Like you need housing, you need food, if you need health care, anything. They know about all those programs and they have leads for where to go and who to contact. It’s a wonderful thing. They have a lot of people who want to get into the program. They are doing a great job. (student interview, February 2010)

Dorcas Place uses a variety of programs to support students in meeting their personal and academic goals. There is a pipeline of programs and instruction for students to meet their educational needs at each level, so students are accustomed to transitioning within the program itself. Often students enter wanting only to learn English in order to get a job, but goals are regularly revisited and revised. When students graduate out of family literacy ESL, they can go straight into a GED program at Dorcas Place, and then straight into the transition college program. The director explained that “undocumented students can get a GED, but must pay cash for postsecondary learning. They can go to school, but aren’t eligible for financial aid. It’s a hard road for those students to continue their learning.”

Programs offered at Dorcas Place are:

- **English as a Second Language:** beginning, intermediate and advanced levels
- **Fast Track GED:** a fast-paced GED refresher course for eligible students needing to prepare for GED testing
- **Workforce Education:** a variety of fully integrated programs provide ESL and literacy instruction in a work skills context with an emphasis on computer skills
• **The Bridge-to-College Program:** free support services and a one-semester preparatory course for low-income, first generation college-going adults; students also are eligible to take one credit-bearing course at the Community College of Rhode Island

• **Learning Resource Center:** Internet access and assistance with educational and vocational skills, and technology

• **Support Services:** all entering students develop an individual education and career plan with short- and long-term goals, and are assigned a case manager to assist with and regularly review educational or career planning and barrier resolution

• **The Clothing Collaborative:** provides free, work-appropriate clothing to low-income job-seeking adults completing job training and education programs

• **Welcome Back Center:** an adult education and workforce development initiative designed to prepare internationally-educated health workers to enter the health care workforce in Rhode Island

• **The Developmental Education Institute:** a pilot project that provides learning assistance, including intensive technology-assisted college-level reading and math instruction, as well as personal, academic and career counseling, prior to entering college as a way to preserve financial aid dollars and increase retention

• **Providence Full-Service Community Schools:** an interagency collaborative that integrates comprehensive services for children and their families within existing school systems and curriculum (e.g., family literacy, before and after-school programming, case management, nutrition services, family engagement at school)

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**STUDENT PROFILE: Margarita**

After earning a GED certificate, Margarita stayed in ESL classes and completed the Bridge-to-College program at Dorcas Place. She has a goal of becoming a translator and is currently enrolled at CCRI in English language studies and a developmental math class. Margarita said, “I want to get a certificate. I want to keep doing when I get old. An important part of this program, I think, prepares you to deal with your children, helping at home with homework, and the communication with the school. Then, how do you say in English, they enroll or suggest you go to Bridge-to-College. And they prepare you so you won’t feel lost when you go to the community college.”

The Bridge-to-College course is free. It’s taught by college instructors, books are provided, and students earn college credit. “They do the tour of the campus. And they introduce you to teachers and staff so you get more familiar with everybody and it’s easier for you to join. For me it was too hard when I thought about what to do, where to go, who to speak to. I learned how to select a class. That’s one of the things, you know. I could go into the magazine, see what I want to do and where to look for it. They even helped me enroll. I didn’t know how to do it on the computer. I learned a lot of things.”
The following provisions are included in the transition to college partnership initiative between Dorcas Place, Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI):

- The college refers students needing transitional or remedial services to Dorcas Place.
- Partners share program and student data to track and evaluate services and for transitioning students.
- College assessment tools are shared with Dorcas Place.
- CCRI developmental courses are provided on site at Dorcas Place.
- CCRI and Dorcas Place collaborate in providing support to students.
- Dorcas Place students have access to a variety of college support services and resources.

This initiative has been supported through renewable three-year pilot project funding, which has allowed Dorcas Place, RIDE and CCRI to develop, evaluate and revise services to support the preparation, persistence and postsecondary educational success for low-income adult students. There are two main funding streams for transitioning—Nellie Mae, a large, nonprofit financial institution that makes student loans and packages them as securities for sale on the secondary market, and the Rhode Island Department of Education, with supplemental funding from private sources. Nellie Mae requires that partners focus not only on developing a transition partnership, but also on creating a system that could be sustained beyond the funding period.

One of the goals of the partnership is to support many different non-traditional paths that lead to postsecondary education. Every program at Dorcas Place incorporates transition to college information, building awareness and knowledge about college with information that is relevant to where students currently are on their educational journey. Some information is related to what parents need to know and do for their children, some focuses on careers, and some on stages of adult education specific to individual needs. For example, if a student was a doctor in another country and wants to qualify for a medical career in the United States, the Welcome Back Center focuses on options for that individual student and outlines steps to follow in reaching that goal.

Building personal connections between staff and students is central to all services and key to this program’s success in transitioning students into postsecondary education. An important goal at Dorcas Place is to open students’ minds to the idea that they can be better, with a focus on moving students forward.

Upon entry, all students are given an academic placement test and participate in goal-setting activities to identify short- and long-term goals. Barriers to success are identified and staff help students access appropriate community services as students plan their path. Postsecondary education is discussed with everyone as a possible path for achieving their goals. For students expressing an interest in attending college, standard transitioning activities are provided, such as a campus tour and exploration of courses needed prior to and during program enrollment. Early exposure to information about postsecondary education is important as is an effort to continue moving students toward their goals. Student goals are reviewed every trimester. Monitoring daily attendance allows staff to respond to barriers in a timely manner. Even though postsecondary education is not the goal of all students, over 80% of the Bridge-to-College students have continued their education. Within the community, students become advocates for the program, and they expand and strengthen...
Rosa is a Guatemalan mother of two children. Her husband tried, but gave up on the ESL class. Rosa’s goal for being in the family literacy program is to learn English. She also is thinking about her future. “I know how to speak English, but not as well as I want to. Someone told me I have to learn it to get my GED. I started English at Dorcas Place, but my friend Alma told me to come to the family literacy class to learn more English. So that’s why I came to this place—to learn more English. Right now I don’t know what kind of opportunities I can have, you know? I don’t know what I expect to do. I’m trying to see. I’m not so sure right now, but I’m looking for better opportunities. I know what I need right now is my English. I want to learn to write, to read it, to translate it. I want to learn everything.”

When asked what keeps her motivated, Rosa says her children. “I don’t have a good job because my English is not good! And I try to explain to them in my country I have my secretary’s diploma, but not here. Over here it doesn’t work if my English is not good. So I try to tell them you want to be a good professional, you got to study. So right now, I do what my teacher says for learning English: I watch TV and sometimes I go to the library and I get the video tapes. And I speak English at home with my kids. My son says, ‘Mommy, you want to learn English, you got to speak in English.’ So I speak in English, but he answers me in Spanish because I want my kids to speak in both languages. I want my kids to attend college. I want my kids to study a lot so that we can get help for them to go to college. That’s the hard part, if they don’t do that well, then I can have something to help them to pay the college. Right now I study because I want to push my kids to go on.”
In a classroom at Dorcas Place

In an ESL family literacy class with about 12 parents is a young male instructor who has an elementary education teaching certificate and is himself a first-generation American citizen, with one parent from Columbia. His personal story serves as an example of the opportunities available through perseverance and education. He says his Spanish is weak, but he is able to communicate well enough with students who are not fluent in English and when he struggles with an explanation, one or more students jump in to translate, which they seem to like. This group seems to have worked together for a while, because, for the most part, they all participate and laugh with one another. No established curriculum is used regularly, although he uses activities from the Stand Out I Lesson Planner by Rob Jenkins. A new student comes in to observe and sits outside the U-shaped arrangement of desks. Shortly after the new student arrives, a parent leaves to visit her child’s classroom.

The instructor follows a routine that he does most days. Students seem comfortable and willing to participate in these familiar activities. Class begins with discussion of the local, state and national news.

The instructor mentions a local news event using the news article title, writes a few key words on the white board and has everyone say the words aloud. He then reads one or two key sentences from the article. He asks what they know about this and several remember discussing it previously. He encourages students to contribute new information but only one student does, so the instructor gives an update on the event. He then discusses the Haitian disaster which leads to a discussion about the relief funds students are collecting and planning to send. There is a relaxed and friendly atmosphere and he regularly commends their participation—“Excellent. You are right!” After class, the instructor explains that none of the students get a newspaper and many struggle to understand the news on television, so they rarely watch. He tries to keep them up-to-date on major events so hopefully they will listen to the news as a way to improve their English. His big focus is on vocabulary, fluency and comprehension, which he supports by praising participation, expanding on what students say as a way to correct any errors, and then having them repeat again. “That’s right. The disaster in Haiti has many people sleeping in the streets. They are without necessities, such as water and electricity and there continue to be smaller earthquakes called aftershocks. So, explain again some of the difficulties the people of Haiti face.”

Next, everyone stands in a circle and participates as the instructor role plays an informal conversation with individual students during an encounter while shopping. “Rosa. Good to see you here at the grocery store. How are you? I’m planning on making a pizza tonight and am shopping for the ingredients. What would you suggest I get?” He moves around the circle having a similar conversation with each student. “Good morning, Egle. How are you today? My brother is celebrating his birthday and...”
I wanted to take a dish for the dinner. What would you suggest I make? What ingredients will I need to buy?"

Each student participates although several struggle and others jump in with the Spanish translation to explain what he has said. One parent is embarrassed that she doesn’t understand and he encourages her to try to respond. She makes an attempt which he praises, but she shakes her head no and he says, “That’s okay. Listen and try to repeat what Margarita says.” Margarita says he should make enchiladas and names a few ingredients. Belinda shyly says, “Yes. Make enchiladas,” and the conversation moves to the next person in the circle.

The last activity is a worksheet with information and vocabulary related to describing work history on a job application. Just as the activity begins, the parent returns from observing her child’s class and completes a brief form that describes the experience, and then gives it to the instructor. She is able to participate in this activity, and he later asks the parent about the visit and then files the form. The instructor reads aloud the directions and students respond chorally twice. “What was your last job?” Students together read the written response in the sample conversation, “I was an office worker.” “What did you do as an office worker?” The conversation ends with the instructor asking the final question of “What do you do now?” and the student responding “I am a student. I study English.” They use the jobs and descriptions on the worksheet to practice this conversation for four different jobs and then they look at the form to see where the information would be entered. This lesson ends with students working on the assignment individually—they will check their work the next day. As students work, a few talk and compare forms. He speaks with a student and answers her question in Spanish and the room is quiet as everyone works.

With all the activities, this instructor addressed the goal of learning English through practicing vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. He praised participation, expanded student responses to include more information, made necessary corrections and asked students to repeat the correct response. The courtesy and respect given to students sets a positive tone for the class and the instructor encourages student progress in a comfortable, yet focused manner.

The instructor describes his main goal for his students as “helping them develop the skills and confidence needed in order to help their children succeed.” Students enter with the primary goal of learning to speak English, knowing this will help them get a job. They soon decide they want to get a GED or get a certified nursing assistant certificate. There are many different classes at Dorcas Place for students with ambitions of continuing their education, but the first step for these students is to speak and read English. At least once a week they review goals. He praises their progress and encourages them to reach a little farther each time.

He uses his background in elementary education to give parents the most important aspects of what their children are experiencing. In Parent Time they talk about homework, report cards, reading levels, and use observations and parents’ questions to help decide what topics to review again and new things to cover.

“Students feel there are plenty of people who put them down, criticize and do not believe in them. The language barrier is big. They can survive, but can they thrive? No. They need confidence and that’s one important thing I try to instill.” He finishes by saying, “Students’ are motivated by wanting to give their children a better life. They believe that in the United States, if you’re dedicated there is an opportunity for you. It’s possible and they feel empowered.”
The instructor and coordinator conduct a home visit with one of the parents from the morning class. Parents are visited once every three months as a way to communicate individually with them in the comfort of their homes. Belinda welcomes them into her home and they meet her third-grade son and preschool-aged daughter. The instructor follows a similar format for the visits and has an agenda that begins with an introductory conversation to review the purpose of the visit—“to ask about your goals and ideas you might have for our class.” He reviews the attendance policy and then moves into asking about her concerns, questions, and requests regarding the ESL class.

This parent is timid, especially about speaking in English, and the instructor uses a series of prompts from his agenda to encourage her to share. He apologizes for his weak Spanish and the director jumps in to translate whenever there is need for clarification. He reminds her that the purpose of the questions is for him to improve instruction. This is followed by a discussion of her learning goals, progress and achievements. She says that first she wants to speak English better. In the future she wants to get her GED, but says that she is only 10% ready. He says that she has made great progress and asks how ready she was before she joined the class. She smiled and says, “Not ready at all... maybe 3%.” Finally, she wants to get her citizenship. She says that she would like to be able to understand more on television and when people talk, so the speaking activities really help. She also mentions that the presentation about report cards really helped and she would like that lesson to be repeated. She wants to be able to help her children with homework and understand more at their school. She agrees that she has improved. “I now can go to the doctor’s office alone and speak for myself.” She laughs and says, “I also help you in class with translations.” She now understands what the teacher is doing when she visits her child’s classroom, and finally feels comfortable, “except for the third-grade math.”

Next, the parent practices English skills and the home visitor models ways to involve the child using a read-aloud experience. This activity will inform instruction during Parent Time. The instructor lets the parents and young daughter choose from several books, and they begin reading *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*. Her reading is a bit shaky in spots, but the book is familiar and the daughter is able to chime in as well.

The visit ends with a brief conversation in Spanish between the parent and the director. She asks if there is anything else the parent wants to say and the parent mentions that there is a small group of ladies in the class that tends to talk too much, and that bothers her. The instructor thanks her for that suggestion and together they thank the family for allowing them into their home.

This home reflects the personal connection between the instructor, the program coordinator, and the families. Much of the visit was conducted in English, but being able to converse in Spanish gave this parent the opportunity to clearly voice her questions and concerns. Although she is very shy, being in the non-threatening setting of her own home allowed her to ask questions and voice her opinion, which she may not attempt in class.

Staff explained that these regular visits are important for building a strong relationship with families and give staff and students an opportunity to review individual goals one-on-one, express concerns, assess progress, and plan next steps together.
Having a formal transition agreement that identifies a unified purpose, defines responsibilities, and describes strategies is very important, as is securing the funding to support implementation. Many of the transitioning supports could be provided by Dorcas Place independent of the partnership agreement, since most supporting services occur prior to college entry. However, funding and the formal partnership agreement strengthen these services by authorizing an aligned curriculum, the use of common assessment tools, integrating college-ready standards into the ABE/ASE programs, facilitating the application process, and providing current program information.

The success of this partnership relies heavily on Dorcas Place, which is a champion for the families represented—staff have an understanding of the population and serve as inexhaustible advocates. Also, the ability to differentiate instruction allows the program to target goals and specific educational levels of program adults. Obstacles to students advancing their education are thoughtfully addressed within the capabilities of Dorcas Place and by accessing available community resources that are equally important in supporting student success.

There is a single-minded focus on supporting students’ success in reaching their goals, and the personable yet professional approach to that support cannot be overemphasized. Case management is at the heart of all services and is where the student-staff relationship begins. Regular home visits are an example of the focused individualized support provided.

Some of this program’s effectiveness can be attributed to the fact that all staff are bilingual, and many have had experiences similar to their students. Staff respect and empathy for students are matched with encouragement and problem-solving resolve that support the perseverance students need to tackle and achieve goals. Staff demonstrate perseverance themselves through various advocacy efforts—developing community partnerships, approaching diverse funding sources, reassessing student and community needs, examining and refining current programs, and developing creative approaches to provide appropriate high-quality services.

STUDENT PROFILE: Aura

A case manager for the family literacy program, Aura entered the program as a student speaking no English when she arrived in the United States.

As a case manager, she meets with new Hispanic students and helps them resolve problems. “When no come to the school, I call them. ‘What happened?’ Always, I motivate them to honor being a student.” Having completed the Bridge-to-College program, Aura is currently enrolled part-time in an ESL class at the community college. When asked if she would like to go back to teaching, she responds, “I think so, but I need to validate my degree. First thing is my English. Then complete the degree.”

Since she already has two degrees in the Dominican Republic where she taught elementary school for 15 years, Aura knows it’s a long journey. The Bridge-to-College program has prepared her for what to expect at her local college, and Aura stated, “I feel ready. Family literacy for me is a wonderful program. Family literacy helped me and my children. They know English when we come here and it give me the opportunity to learn English. My youngest is six years; my older son, 13; my daughter is 11 years. They speak English very, very well and they speak Spanish too. When somebody speak to me in English, my youngest say ‘Mommy, use English. You can do it.’”
Population of Jefferson County, KY

Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) Family Education Program
serves an average of 200 families each year, and the adult education component is provided through Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education (JCPSACE)

Main Location
546 South First Street, Louisville, KY 40202

Personnel
There are 25 part-time staff and 1 full-time staff person with 10 program volunteers. Leaders of both the adult education program and the community college serve on the partnership committee.

Partnership Program
Transitions to Success Program, a formal agreement between JCPSACE and the partnering college, is available to all JCPS adult education students.

Partners
Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC)

Transitioning Practices
This partnership provides several programs to serve different audiences, address different needs, and provide targeted support for transitioning students into postsecondary education.

Data
At this time, 70% of the program’s adult students are ESL, and 3% of GED completers enter postsecondary education, although approximately 300 adult education students in JCPSACE transition into postsecondary education each year. Partners have recently established a plan for tracking students once they enroll at the college, which will provide more detailed and accurate data as well as indicate types of services that result in greater success rates.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Jefferson County Public School (JCPS) Family Education Program has four program sites in accessible urban locations that serve an average of 200 parents per year. Seventy percent of the parents are English as a second language learners (ESLs) with children ages 3 to 14 years old, and the remaining 30% are adult basic education parents with children 12 weeks to 3 years old. Adult education and ESL classes for the family literacy parents are provided through Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education (JCPSACE), a managed enrollment program with 30 sites serving more than 5,000 adults annually. Family literacy parents therefore are eligible for services provided to all JCPSACE adult education students, including transitioning services available through the partnership with Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC).

JCPSACE has a centralized intake and orientation process used with all adult students. They take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), participate in an orientation meeting, receive a packet of information, meet with an advisor to select a program, set goals and use a barrier analysis to identify issues that need to be addressed in order to make educational progress. Some common issues that flag students as potential dropouts include transportation, homelessness, drug use, violence and abuse. To help students work around some of these issues, the program added a student advocate specialist and in six months, attendance increased from 50% to 60% as did retention of these high-risk students.

Transportation is a major obstacle for students attending programs, so one criteria for selecting program locations was that sites need to be on bus routes, and the program negotiated free bus fare for family education students.

Participants sign an attendance policy agreement, which has helped the focus shift from encouraging students to attend as often as possible to asking “is this the right time for you to enroll?” There is a waiting list with lab time available for people waiting to get into the program, and the “carrot” is childcare, so parents know that if they don’t attend regularly their spot could be taken by someone else. Due to the limited size for childcare classes, the family literacy adult classes are smaller and parents build some of the strongest cohort groups.

INSTRUCTION

Based on observations of three adult family literacy classrooms—beginning ESL, intermediate ESL, and an ABE-GED class—several common instructional characteristics emerged. Instructors are positive and encouraging while relating expectations that students can improve. In individual interviews, they shared their vision that learning is a lifelong experience, with learning English and completing the GED achievable steps along the way. No identified transitioning curriculum is used, but a variety of activities are interspersed into topics of financial literacy, health literacy and development, and general child development. Many learning activities correspond to life skills as well as students’ personal, academic and career goals, and information related to transitioning into postsecondary education is woven into general classroom activities.
TRANSITION SERVICES

A partnership between JCPSACE and Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) supports transitioning through various programs that have successfully served more than 6,000 non-traditional students since 2003. These programs, which support students upon entry to either institution, are: GED Express and the Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.) Program, both of which serve students who enter through the adult education program; Educational Enrichment Services (EES) that serves students entering college who need additional preparation on basic skills; College Bound, a program for GED completers intending to transition to college; and GED to Healthcare, a program for students interested in a healthcare career.

The range of courses offered by JCPSACE and the developmental courses at JCTC allow students to be served in homogeneous classes, providing instruction that focuses on student goals, and contributing toward better retention and faster student advancement.

Transition support is provided through goal-setting exercises during the intake process when students identify short- and long-term goals. At this time, staff share the idea that postsecondary education is available to everyone. Students revisit and revise their goals at various stages of their academic progress, and these occasions provide opportunities to share information about postsecondary education. The program coordinator explained that “students take field trips to the college, receive information and help in applying for financial aid, learn about predatory colleges and look at possible occupational outcomes for attending college. The children are not included in these activities because most of them are infants and toddlers, but many parents have college as a goal for their older children.” Although many parents express the desire that their children attend college, parents have limited knowledge about the support they should provide and mainly see their job in preparing children for college as helping them with homework. The transition coordinator feels that the key for successful transitioning is

STUDENT PROFILE: Nicola

School was never emphasized at home when Nicola was growing up, so she didn’t care about doing well and dropped out of high school early. That has all changed. Her husband is a college graduate and he and his family have encouraged her to become a registered nurse. She is ready to get her GED and has been exploring college information online. Once she realized she could do the work, Nicola just needed to overcome the emotional obstacles—the fears of tackling the unknown. Her husband is there to help with the studying, and now she is moving forward. The youngest of her four children begins preschool next year and with childcare under control, she wants to start right away while everything is fresh in her mind.

She and her husband are adamant about their children going to college. “I’m going to keep going and working, regardless of any obstacles. And all four of our children will definitely attend college. Not going won’t even be an option.”
building student confidence and giving them the college knowledge to successfully navigate the postsecondary educational system. She would like to begin integrating social services into educational services, but funding is a barrier for doing that and staff are not prepared to provide these services. The family literacy program director would like to provide mentors for female students finishing their GED, to coach them as they begin planning for postsecondary education and help with issues such as childcare, navigating online courses, and introducing these students to the college experience. She has been thinking about using college textbooks in the GED classrooms as a way to expose students to beginning college courses for English and college algebra.

Adult education offices are located adjacent to the college, a definite advantage for supporting the partnership agreement through shared staff, facilities, and concurrently enrolled students. Students tour the college campus, access information about financial aid and become familiar with support services available at the college. Because this is also a technical college, credentialing programs (such as auto detailing) are available and information is provided about the timeframe for program completion and expected salaries.

Buy-in and ownership by partnering institutions’ top leaders is a prominent feature of the success of this transitioning partnership agreement. The director of adult and continuing education, the adult education transitioning director, the college president, the provost, dean, and the program coordinator for developmental education all serve on a committee that meets regularly and draws in other representatives as needed. When leaders at the table are committed to the collaboration between the adult education program and postsecondary education, issues are discussed, and decisions are jointly made and carried out.

**GED Express**

GED Express is an intense GED preparation program with the goal of expediting higher-level students’ progress toward earning a GED. This 32-hour course has a team that travels to various community locations in the metropolitan area to deliver fast-paced instruction, including information on postsecondary education, to highly motivated students. All students who pass the GED Official Practice Test (OPT) receive the added incentive of a voucher from the public library foundation to pay $25 of the GED test fee. The GED Express program reports GED pass rates of 82-100% with students quickly moving into jobs or postsecondary education.

**Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.)**

The Youth Opportunities Unlimited (Y.O.U.) Program is a fast-track opportunity that provides career guidance, instruction, and connections to community resources for out-of-school 16- to 21-year-old students. This program provides free job-readiness training and monetary incentives for regular attendance, active participation, and grade-level gains. Having first unsuccessfully looked to the business community to provide pay increases or other incentives for employee credential completion, JCPSACE embarked on a much more successful approach with support from various local funding sources. The allocation of dollars from the adult education program allows all participants to be treated equally, regardless of where they are employed. Students also receive a one-time monetary reward when they achieve their educational goal.

**Educational Enrichment Services (EES)**

The EES program is unique in this transition partnership in that it allows students who score low on their college entrance exam to upgrade basic skills for free through the adult education program. Students who enter the college, but are functioning below a 7th grade level enter skill-focused classes provided by the adult education program rather than being placed in
In order to reach her goal to speak and comprehend English, Jacinia is enrolled in an advanced ESL class through the JCPS Family Education Program. She wants to be able to communicate well with her children’s school staff and others, like the doctor. “I want to be able to tell what I am thinking, not to a translator,” she explains. Jacinia is very focused and practices speaking English as much as possible—with her American friend, when she goes to the store, and when she speaks on the phone.

Her long-term goal is to attend college to become an assistant nurse. The next hurdle she intends to tackle is getting her GED. However, those classes are taught at another site and if she can’t arrange child care, she’ll have to drop out because she can’t afford to pay a private provider. Her three girls are young—20 months, four years, and nine years old—but she has big plans for all of them to go to college.
This advanced ESL class has a group of about 20 Hispanic parents who are seated theater style in two rows while the instructor is in the front of the room at the white board. The instructor shows an article about their program that was in yesterday’s newspaper. She uses the article to review new vocabulary and points out students who are quoted or appear in the photo. None of the parents get the paper, and she has made copies of the article for anyone interested. They are delighted and smile appreciatively.

Students are taking notes about the lesson, which the instructor later explains is her way of having them practice note-taking skills. She says she models study skills such as how to find information, using graphic organizers and note taking as ways to build skills they will need in college or the workplace. The white board is filled with prior activities of mapping ideas and new vocabulary, things students can use as they prepare for the GED exam.

Students then participate in a goal setting activity where they identify a long-term goal and web related short-term goals. This helps prepare students for a writing assignment where they will write a sentence stating their goal and describe it further in a paragraph that includes some of their short-term goals. The instructor explains that they will be setting educational goals for their children in Parent Time, following the same process of identifying long-term and short-term goals. They also will be talking about learning elementary school math vocabulary because several parents mentioned confusion about things they had observed in their child’s classroom. The instructor later tells me, “We talk about goals regularly to identify a direction and the steps to follow for reaching the goals. I then design activities that relate to helping them reach goals and we look for helpful resources.” She says, “We talk about the international GED course. I get their CASAS scores and see how those translate to the TABE. If students are motivated, then I find out where they want to go with their education—ABE, GED, OPT, continue ESL, or advanced ESL.” She uses their TABE scores to help identify vocabulary words.

The instructor’s laptop computer sits on a table at the front of the room. She has an Internet connection and a projector allows her to show students her daily agenda and then she models how to access information online. There is a wireless printer in the back of the room, and the instructor is able to print information for students to use or take home. Together they look online for English conversation classes available on weekends through the public library and find the location, dates and times. Several students say they will attend together, and they write down the location and times. Students seem very comfortable with technology and were encouraged to follow up on in-class exercises with out-of-class computer lab time.

The instructor says that the greatest barriers for her students being able to continue their education are the lack of a prior formal education, their lack of money, and the biggest issue is that many are undocumented. She takes students by bus to JCTC where they get information about admissions and financial aid. Their children are infants and toddlers, so this visit is for parents only. She says it helps for students to see faces and know a real person that they can connect with. “I have a friend at JCTC who knows how things run—where to go and when to apply. This really helps.” She works to give students the academic vocabulary they need for helping their children and for moving forward themselves. “College might not be the goal for everyone, but they are motivated, they value their education and they are very resourceful. I try to help them follow through to reach their goals.”
Student Profile: Victoria

Victoria is a Spanish-speaking mother of three daughters, ages 5, 14, and 17, who is enrolled in a beginning level ESL class for her adult education component of the family literacy program. Her main goal is to speak well with others and she explained that she needs to know how to support her daughters. Victoria wants to pass the GED and have a good job—“become a professional.” Her first step is to learn English and besides attending the family literacy program, she also practices her English when she can, such as at the store or the doctor’s office.

Placement scores indicate the need for beginning developmental courses are sent to JCPSCACE for free courses, and students ready to move into higher level developmental or college level courses are sent to the college. Having decision-makers at the table who advocate for the transition program within the community has enabled these partners to provide appropriately focused services with meaningful incentives.

A well-structured intake process and the use of managed enrollment lead to a firmer commitment on the students’ part to attend, getting them accustomed to the commitment required for a postsecondary education program or job attendance. Case management identifies and helps students address barriers and closely tracks student progress. Differentiated instruction allows students to be regularly assessed and reassigned as appropriate. Everyone expects and plans for ways to support student progress.
The three transition partnership programs described in this case study face similar issues. Their initial focus was on helping students learn to speak English and moving them from ABE to GED. When students completed the GED, they were considered successful and moved on—that was the final goal. However, even though the GED helped them find and keep jobs, many of these parents often were not prepared to move into jobs that would adequately support their families and provide the quality of life they desired. They also were not prepared to succeed in a postsecondary education setting. They were unaware of the culture, language and expectations of higher education, and so they were unable to transfer that understanding to support their children’s success.

**Questions to Consider**

*Which students should receive information about postsecondary education and when should this information be provided? Why?*

*Is it important to expose children to the notion of college as well? Why or why not?*

**Program Characteristics that Support Transition**

Something that is evident in these programs is the active involvement of decision-makers—people in leadership positions with the authority to commit and deliver. Key players need to be present when developing the agreement, but they also must communicate regularly and remain actively engaged in making decisions, monitoring services, making revisions as needed, and they must authorize others to resolve obstacles along the way in order to advance partnership services.

Staff support also is evident in each of the programs. Program staff help clear the path for students by identifying and addressing common obstacles. Each program helps students take an honest look at the barriers to their learning. Solutions can be found for some problems, but for some students, waiting until the next enrollment period may be their best option.

Each of these programs guides students through identifying their goals during the intake process. Goals are set and steps are identified, so students know the path they must follow to achieve success. These goals are then used to guide placement for instruction and each program uses an individualized case management process to regularly review and adjust goals as “life happens.”
Conclusion

A characteristic of each program that appears closely related to its transitioning success is the personal relationships built with students. Program staff, college staff, and the partners of these three sites have a shared vision for improving student success rates for transitioning and completing postsecondary educational programs. The programs each make individual contact with students through services such as intense case management, regular review of goals and learning progress, and home visits. Relationships remain professional, but staff are able to say hello, ask about students’ children, and make contact if attendance changes or there is a crisis where a student may need help. Students fall through the cracks less often, and regardless of program size, administrators, assistants and instructional staff know them by name. Through regular program visits, college staff meet and become familiar with students, so students can connect with a familiar face once they arrive on campus.

An ingredient found in each program is the expectation that students will accept responsibility for their own learning. To encourage students to do this, programs have instituted the process of managed enrollment or having students sign a contract or letter of intent. The programs emphasize goal setting and the fact that goals will not be reached easily or within reasonable time periods unless students are present. Although each program considers individual student circumstances, managed enrollment and attendance policies support the intensity and duration required for measurable progress.

Many adult students deplete financial aid resources while taking developmental courses that offer no credit and do not fulfill program requirements. The three programs offered some developmental coursework through the adult education program at no cost to students in an effort to help students move past one more barrier to their postsecondary education.

All three programs have formal partnership agreements in place that support transitioning students into postsecondary education. These agreements define the purpose of the partnership and describe the contributions of, and benefits to, each partner. Many aspects of the agreements describe services the program or college already has in place, but intends to capitalize on for this particular group of students, such as adjusting hours of services or delivering a particular service at a more convenient location. Taking a fresh look at current practices in light of the needs of adult learners may be far simpler than designing and delivering new services.

As has been noted, GED preparation does not guarantee that students have college-ready skills and knowledge. The programs described here have made some efforts in this regard. Two programs use a curriculum that articulates with the next educational level in an effort to support a smooth and successful transition that will lead to retention and completion. Though not all of the programs use an articulated curriculum, each provides college developmental courses on site as a benefit to students and a way to ease the transitioning process.

Questions to Consider

Which characteristics of transition support are essential for program success? Why?

How did these programs address the issue of students being academically under-prepared for college?

Are there any characteristics of transition support you feel are not important?

Should program curricula be aligned with the college?
Other Kinds of Program Support

Each partnership program continues services of some kind during and immediately after students enroll in postsecondary educational programs in order to provide the extra support to persevere and overcome ongoing, as well as new obstacles. Some partnership programs provide dual enrollment where students take a free developmental course at the family literacy program and receive the childcare benefit, while also being enrolled in a credit-bearing course at the college. One program has a “Celebrate Success” event for students who successfully complete their first semester in college, a time when high-risk students often drop-out. As a way to provide financial support, childcare, regular follow-up, and flexible scheduling for transitioning students, two of the programs have hired former students for positions such as administrative assistants or liaisons for ESL parents.

As do many family literacy programs, each of the programs described in this case study serves a large number of ESL families, some who are citizens and some who are not. Unless the trajectory is altered, these families will compete for the limited number of low-pay/low-skill jobs described in the introduction to this report. There is a seriously low percentage of adult students who enter college and far fewer who actually earn a degree. Of those who enter college, most are placed first in developmental courses rather than college level coursework that fulfills program requirements.

The challenge for family literacy programs is to establish and sustain partnerships that facilitate the transition of adult education students to postsecondary education. These partnerships must ensure that students receive not only the academic foundation, but also the support and encouragement they need to compete in the postsecondary educational environment. Family literacy programs in partnership with postsecondary institutions can be the turning point in the lives of many nontraditional students and their families.

Questions to Consider

Knowing that our nation needs a better educated workforce, what can programs do to help students successfully transition to postsecondary education?

Do these programs exemplify qualities that are essential for a viable family literacy–community college transition partnership?

Who needs to be involved and what structures are required for a successful transition partnership?

What conclusions regarding transition partnerships can be drawn from these examples?

Should coursework be more rigorous?

Should developmental or preparation courses be offered at the program level?

What must programs do to better prepare students to continue their education beyond completing a GED?

What characteristics of transition support might you add to those identified above?
References


Brochures, flyers, and other documents provided by the programs were also used in preparing this report.