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# ABLE in Context

FOR AND ABOUT ADULT BASIC AND FAMILY LITERACY EDUCATION IN PENNSYLVANIA

## Career Pathways: Where adult basic education and workforce readiness converge

By Sheila M. Sherow, Ed.D., The Pennsylvania State University

Career pathways programs provide a systemic framework for reconfiguring education programs to meet the current and future needs of employed and unemployed learners, employers and industry sectors. Like the related transition, bridge or career ladder programs, they help learners acquire the knowledge and skills they need to secure employment within a specific occupation and then advance to successively higher levels of education and employment in that occupation. Adult learners can support their families through obtaining, maintaining or advancing in a job while pursuing education to develop durable skills that can be used at different levels of an industry sector and across occupations, thereby increasing opportunities for career advancement.

Research clearly indicates that as educational attainment increases, so does access to jobs with benefits and stability. Global shifts in the economy have resulted in a demand for workers with advanced and diversified skills and knowledge. Increasingly, some form of postsecondary education or training is essential to obtaining marketable skills that pay off in the local labor market, including technical degrees or

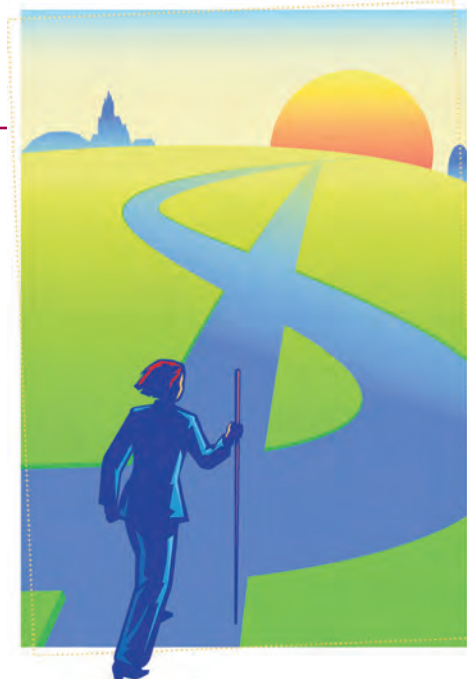
certificates and occupational training programs. Studies show that workers with little education and few skills can rarely work their way out of low-wage, dead-end jobs without job-connected education or training (Jenkins, 2006).

### LOCAL LABOR MARKETS

Career pathways programs target career clusters—groups of occupations that share common knowledge and skills—of importance and customized to the needs of local labor markets. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) defined 16 career clusters that offer 81 pathways, and Pennsylvania has identified regional high-priority occupations. Career pathways lead to credentials of demonstrated value to local labor markets.

### CAREER PATHWAYS CURRICULUM

A career pathways curriculum integrates academic and employability or career content in a coordinated progression of rigorous learning activities. The curriculum is modularized, with clear connections between education and training programs and jobs at different levels. Each pathway has multiple entry and exit points, offered at times and



places convenient to working adults, and multiple levels of industry-recognized credentials. For example, the National Association of Manufacturers-endorsed Manufacturing Skills Certification System offers industry-recognized skill certifications that provide meaningful and relevant credentials with real value to the workplace and workers. These “stackable” industry credentials are integrated, through entry and exit points, into postsecondary education, and create a skilled and flexible workforce prepared for employment in high-quality

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### MISSION STATEMENT

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### ABOUT THE BUREAU OF ABLE

The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE), Pennsylvania Department of Education, administers a full range of instructional services that address the basic educational needs of adults and families. Programs are funded by grants under Title II of the Federal Workforce Investment Act, or WIA, known as the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act of 1998, and State Act 143 of 1986. The objective of the programs offered is the improvement of the literacy skills of educationally disadvantaged adults to levels of proficiency necessary for them to meet their needs and goals in their roles as citizens, workers and family members.

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*The mission of the Pennsylvania Department of Education is to lead and serve the educational community, to enable each individual to grow into an inspired, productive, fulfilled lifelong learner.*

## FROM THE BUREAU DIRECTOR




**A**s a field, we find ourselves in the midst of changing times. The challenge to teach and support adults and their families as they improve their basic education and work skills seems as great as it ever has been. The impetus to think of new and better ways to support them is upon us in the form of the continued economic downturn, reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and shrinking public dollars for adult education and family literacy services. Yes, our iceberg is melting and we need to find a new place. When we reach that new place we will have reinforced what was good about past practice past and incorporated new ideas into our services that will benefit adult learners in Pennsylvania for years to come.

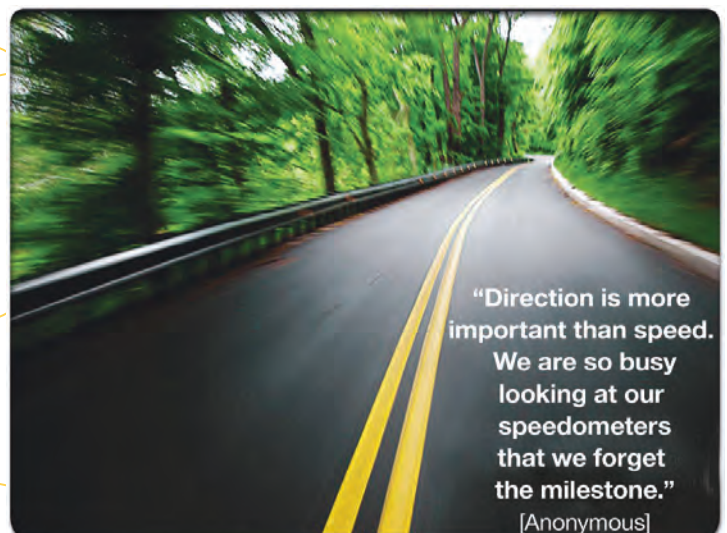
Career pathways education is an important element in our new place. In these pages you will find useful information on the background and importance of career pathways programming for adult learners, brought to you through summaries of research and resources. This issue also features ABLE programs that are closely examining traditional adult education practices and making bold decisions about how and to whom services are provided.

This issue of *ABLE in Context* sets the stage for a series of issues delving into the planning and provision of career pathways services in the context of adult basic and family literacy education. Subsequent issues will follow the quality elements of adult education for work programs as outlined in the One Step Forward Initiative's *Guide to Adult Education for Work: Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce*, published by the National Center on Education and the Economy. Look for exciting material on program design, curriculum and instruction, assessment and credentialing, high-quality teaching, support and follow-up services to encourage access and retention, connections to the business community and monitoring and accountability systems (well, that last one might not be so exciting).

Thank you for persisting in your efforts to provide the best education and support services to Pennsylvanians who seek your help to improve themselves.



**Michael Westover**  
Director, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education





## CAREER PATHWAYS, CONTINUED

jobs in the manufacturing workplace (NAM 2009).

Ideally, career pathways programs align adult basic education services to meet both high school exit and postsecondary education entry requirements, without the need for remedial or developmental courses at postsecondary institutions. The outcome standards for each level are aligned to the requirements of education and employment at the next level. Support services enable learners to persist and achieve ever higher levels of education and employment.

Basic skills are taught within the context of employment and specific job tasks, problems and situations. Research supports contextualized instruction; in fact, ABE and job training programs report that students learn basic skills faster, retain their knowledge and skills longer and have higher rates of both persistence and program completion if they learn basic skills in the context of particular occupational tasks, and if they can see immediate benefits in terms of mastering knowledge and skill requirements of an occupation or higher education. Adult educators report that these programs achieve persistence, completion and transition rates of 50% to 90%—much higher than those of traditional adult education programs (Chisman, 2009).

### COLLABORATION, ALIGNMENT

Collaborative relationships among ABE providers, postsecondary education institutions, job training programs and workforce partners, including one-stop centers such as PA Career-Link®, determine the success of career pathways programs. To be successful, ongoing and extensive communications and alignment among systems are necessary to create seamless transitions for learners; however, total alignment doesn't happen easily and often necessitates changes in policies and funding requirements.

Successful transitioning of adults to postsecondary education requires alignment of academic content and assessments between ABE and postsecondary education systems. ABE

instruction must align with the content and cut-off scores of college placement tests (ACCUPLACER®, COMPASS®) and syllabi, textbooks and other requirements of entry-level postsecondary courses.

**Career pathways are a series of connected education and training strategies and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within a specific occupational sector and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector. Each step on a pathway is designed to prepare the participant for the next level of education and employment.**

*United States Department of Education  
Office of Vocational and Adult Education*

Successful transitioning of adult learners into job training and careers in local high-priority occupations is equally challenging; ABE services must align with job training requirements. The involvement of local employers is critical in the determination and sequencing of knowledge and skills required by specific occupations within the local labor market, thereby ensuring the viability and relevance of pathways as a pipeline of choice for local employers (League for Innovation in the Community College, 2007).

Research indicates that two career pathways models, in particular, may have an impact on service provision through their design of collaborative relationships (Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy):

- A coordinated network of adult basic education, postsecondary education and workforce development through collaboration, alignment and shared performance goals.
- A college-based blended system that integrates adult basic education, developmental education and degree programs.

### BENEFITS

Effective career pathways programs produce several positive outcomes. Initially, programs experience in-

creased persistence and academic/skill achievement at both the ABE and postsecondary education levels; this includes a decrease in the amount of remediation necessary upon entry into postsecondary education. As a result, there are increases in the attainment of postsecondary credentials and successful entry into occupations that offer family-sustaining income and career advancement.

Career pathways programs contribute to the economic well-being of individuals, employers and regions, and maximize the return on investment in education (Jenkins, 2006). "Career pathways, done well, don't just build workforces. They change lives." (McClenney, 2006, as cited in League for Innovation in the Community College, 2007, p. 2.) ■

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# What career pathways programs look like in Pennsylvania

By Tana Reiff, ABLE Communications/TIU 11 Community Education Services



Career Gateway was an initiative of the Commonwealth's Workforce Development System partners, especially ABLE-funded adult basic education programs and their local PA CareerLink®, working together to improve adults' ability to enter and persist in postsecondary education and training. Adults who qualified for an Individual Training Account (ITA) or other training assistance, but who did not demonstrate sufficient basic skills, were referred to ABLE providers. There, they received instruction and support to acquire the necessary skills to successfully transition to postsecondary education or training.

In 2005–06 and 2006–07, Career Gateway was a pilot project funded by a federal incentive grant. In 2007–08 and 2008–09, the initiative was supported with some of the \$4.9 million increase in the state budget for adult basic education and family literacy. Over Career Gateway's four years, 870 adults participated and 382 (44%) successfully transitioned into postsecondary education or training within six months following their participation.

Career Gateway provided intensive career pathways services in the context of adult education, and a model for the entire state. But what is happening now?



**Luzerne County Community College's** ABLE-funded Adult Learners' Training and Assistance Program (ALTA) was a Career Gateway pilot site that developed a comprehensive transitions model, along with an array of adaptable lesson plans and other tools. Currently, the program infuses career pathways into everything they do. "When students come into orientation, we start sharing information with them about the labor market and what's available locally—high-priority occupations," reports ALTA director

Peg Rood. "We lead them into that using NIFL's Equipped for the Future tools, such as why you've decided to come to the orientation, why you want to get your GED®."

During orientation, students are guided to the [PA Work Stats website](#) to investigate in-demand careers of interest. Next, they go to the [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#) to learn more about the nature of the job and how to prepare. "They get their feet wet, knowing the GED is one of the goals as they're going to transition to work, training or postsecondary education," Rood says.

In class, ALTA uses a combination of materials that reflect work, CASAS assessment focusing on employment and curricula such as [Workplace Essential Skills](#). The program works closely with PA CareerLink®, the community college, training programs, Educational Opportunity Centers, Inc. (EOC) and community resources. College-bound students prepare for the ACCUPLACER® assessment. "What helped transform things for us was the ITA partnership," Rood notes.



**Intermediate Unit 1**, another former Career Gateway pilot, is one of several agencies engaged in a strong partnership with the Westmoreland-Fayette Workforce Investment Board. "With WIB support," explains ABLE coordinator Angela Kenes, "we provide transitioning classes to individuals served at the PA CareerLink® Fayette County who have indicated they would like to pursue a postsecondary program." IU 1 offers "brush-up" classes in reading, writing and math, as well as workshops featuring study skills, test-taking strategies, time and stress management and career exploration.

Students research a career of interest and do a posterboard presentation about

that career. "We invite other partners as guest speakers, such as EOC, as well as maintain a close relationship with the CareerLink counselors" says Kenes.

IU 1 also partners with Penn State Fayette, providing classes to provisional and prospective students. "These classes focus on the transition skills, but include more advanced skills, such as research writing and algebra, that are needed in the two-year postsecondary programs," says Kenes. "We also work in close association with the admissions and continuing education departments."



**District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund** in Philadelphia always has its sights set on students' next steps. "The ABLE program is a feeder, preparing people who become part of a pipeline," stresses director Cheryl Feldman. "You want to make that pipeline as big as possible to feed into additional training."

"The whole world is changing and workers have to be able to function in this environment," Feldman emphasizes. "All of the work we do in ABLE will be a necessity. It's not sufficient for people to be sitting in an ABLE class and not be connected to something else." A "career coach" or "case manager" works with students to make sure the next step is happening, such as the exercise in an ABLE transitions class where students develop a business plan for themselves.

District 1199C is closely involved with Philadelphia WIB programs aimed at specific careers. (See page 6.)



**Community College of Allegheny County** builds its GED program on the foundation of transitioning. Starting with orientation, students review the Foundation Skills Wheel and discuss the evolving workplace environment. Based on pre-enrollment assessments

**CONTINUED NEXT PAGE**

and analysis, students enter the program at appropriate academic levels, and then, in 10-week managed enrollment sessions, they accumulate 50 to 100 hours of instruction. Instructors use contextualized workplace resources while exploring postsecondary and career pathways with the case manager, enabling students to visualize their journey toward sustainable wages in high-priority industries.

An EOC representative comes on site to help students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and provide other grant and scholarship support. Students participate in CCAC's College for a Day event as well as its Enrollment Express One-Stop Shop for application, placement testing, advising, registration and financial aid.

The case manager provides the essential component of intensive support and counseling. He helps current students navigate through barriers to persistence and employment, such as housing, childcare and other basic needs. "Since our program maintains an open-door policy," says Sandy Scanlon, GED program director, "graduates return for assistance in their postsecondary education and for career guidance. Rapport development with our students starts at orientation and grows throughout their stay in the program."

**Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13**, along with the Lancaster Workforce Investment Board and Lancaster County Career and Technology Center, operates a targeted Health Career Preparation program. "We saw a huge need for adult students to get academic skills remediation for entrance exams," says Trish Link, who supervises the program and teaches one of the classes. A pre-Licensed Practical Nurse class prepares students for the Nurse Entrance Test, while a pre-Certified Nurse Aide class prepares for the Test of Essential Academic Skills. Classes utilize college textbooks to build reading comprehension skills, along with contextualized math for health occupations.

The CTC refers people who have failed the entrance exams and allows

retesting only after completing IU 13's preparation course. A referral who is not quite ready for the Health Career Preparation program starts in a GED class. Other students transition from GED and higher-level ESL classes. Link effectively doubles as case manager because she "knows everything about what's going on," talking to students individually and referring them to training programs.

At **Community College of Philadelphia (CCP)**, students who test below remedial English on the college placement exam are referred to the college's ABE program, where they beef up their basic academic skills. "They are not allowed to retake the college placement test without our permission," explains Don Butler, assistant to the dean. "In order to retest they must have a TABE posttest in the low or high adult secondary levels in reading and language and a passing essay using the college placement test scoring rubric. In our ABE Coalition meeting, we worked it out that if a student is in another ABE program in the city they can notify us of the posttest scores and we will give the okay for a retest."

Walk into the PA CareerLink® Mifflin County and a receptionist greets you as a CareerLink customer, no matter what services you are seeking. Carol Shefrin, Adult Director for **TIU 11 Community Education Services**, describes the arrangement as "a giant puzzle with interlocking pieces that produce a complete picture of comprehensive education and job-readiness services."

TIU currently offers four managed-enrollment classes a year for adults with the goals of transitioning to postsecondary education or employment. These "next steps" programs offer instruction in basic and soft skills so that adults are prepared for higher education or workplace environments that may present challenges.

Referrals are made externally from the community and internally through the deliberate customer-flow processes that have been developed and nurtured. When CareerLink customers

come through the door, staff begin to work with them to explore their needs. "The customers don't care which partner is serving them as long as their needs are met," says Shefrin. The ABE transition activities provide an important step as customers move through the system and access the wealth of support available to them.

**Community Learning Center** in Philadelphia revamped its program this year based on analysis of student data. The result is a transitions program spanning three class levels: pre-literacy, ABE/pre-GED and GED. The transitions focus begins at orientation by "refining where people go, so classes are based on common goals, common levels, common abilities," describes CLC executive director Rebecca S. Wagner. Students practice skills together, developing self-direction and teamwork.

Class meets four days a week in 12-week cycles. Modeling the workplace, CLC enforces its "4 and the door" policy, meaning a student who misses four days in the course cycle is replaced. And, to encourage punctuality, the classroom door is locked at 9:00.

CLC not only refers students to the PA CareerLink® (and vice-versa) but also uses *The PA Career Guide*. "It gets you started, gets you thinking," says Wagner. "Students find out from a short survey what jobs would fit and what are the training programs and costs. The process is very, very time-consuming, but it's best to focus on a smaller number [of students] well. The student is in the center of everything we do."

The case manager refers students to free clinics, helps them organize childcare, sets them up with e-mail accounts and accompanies them to CCP to see what college is like.

CLC partners with other agencies to place students in appropriate adult education classes. A CLC teacher provides specialized lessons on interviewing, stress management, anger management and parenting, while community resources fill in other needs.

These are just a few illustrations of functioning adult education career pathways or transitions programs in Pennsylvania. Fingers in the wind indicate they are the wave of the future. ■

# Aligning adult education and the labor market in Philadelphia

By Cheryl Feldman, District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund, and Diane Inverso, Mayor's Commission on Literacy

The Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board is working “to align the skills of the region’s labor force to meet the needs of industry, in support of the region’s growth and prosperity.” That involves a close working relationship between the city’s employers and its adult literacy providers, who came together at a March event called “Celebrating Progress, Standing Up for Change.” There, a top U.S. Department of Labor official, a top economist and representatives of three jobs programs laid out the case for a productive joining of forces.

Paul Harrington, Associate Director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, outlined the state of the labor market in the current economy. The recession that hit in 2007 is now in what Harrington called a “sideways recovery,” meaning the economy and the labor market haven’t rebounded in the same way. “It’s been very much a blue-color recession,” he said, with the heaviest-hit areas being construction, manufacturing and wholesaling, outside the college labor market and 75-80% of layoffs being men. “This is an economy that is extremely unforgiving for high school dropouts,” he added. However, “investments in education have very high returns.”

“Migration doesn’t work anymore because there’s unemployment everywhere,” said Harrington. People stay put, settling for part-time employment or withdrawing from the labor market altogether. Community college enrollment has spiked, even though “it’s not clear how to process people through to employment, so it’s a matter of ‘train and pray.’”

“The recovery,” Harrington predicts, “is likely to come at the higher end of

the economy: finance, health, education, scientific research. If we can’t close the literacy gap, those at the lower end will never recover.” The strategy he emphasized is based on skills development, literacy and direct ties to employers.

Next up was Jane Oates, a Philadelphia native who is Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. She reported that the Department has



Jane Oates (right) of the U.S. Department of Labor chats with Philadelphia workforce investment leaders.

funded only 8% of grant applications, focusing on areas of the country where 15% or above are at or below poverty level. “These people tend to be the least educated, the least solid work history, on the edge,” she noted. Therefore, she said, “It’s about targeting people who need the most help.”

Oates is enthusiastic about how the Departments of Labor and Education are working together to link the two systems. “We have got to shore up adult literacy,” she stressed. “Contextualized adult literacy is the only thing we’re going to put forth in partnership with OVAE [U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education]. We have to invest more in learn-while-you-earn models such as internships and cooperative education.”

“We are doing contextualized literacy in Philadelphia,” said Sallie

Glickman, President and CEO of the Philadelphia WIB, “but we’re starving, starving for the resources to continue that work.”

## PERSONIFIED IN THREE PROGRAMS

Job Opportunity Investment Network (JOIN) is a “workforce partnership” of the Philadelphia WIB, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Knight Foundation, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania and William Penn Foundation that is building training programs and career pathways and then providing support to move low-skilled workers into these pathways. Current training programs target “green” and healthcare jobs, two high-demand areas in need of mid-skilled workers. Low-skilled workers get customized training and businesses get a “talent pipeline.”

Connecting Literacy to Work is a Jobs for the Future ([www.jff.org](http://www.jff.org)) project funded by the Dollar General Literacy Foundation. Partnerships including representation from workforce development, higher education, employers and adult education are documenting a set of lessons and practices to develop the knowledge base on adult literacy-workforce development linkages. Results have been dramatic: in just 10-12 weeks, participants testing below the 7<sup>th</sup>-grade level in both reading and math made average gains of 2.5 grade levels.

Jobs to Careers, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Hitachi Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor, is a JFF project focused on work-based learning leading to college credit and career advancement. In District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund’s Jobs to Careers project, behavioral health workers developed competencies, qualifying them for 21 college credits and wage increases and/or promotions.

So, as Philadelphia grapples with a difficult economy, its sights are set on practical solutions, and adult education is an integral part of the effort. “We are learning how to connect literacy to work,” said Diane Inverso, Director of Education, Mayor’s Commission on Literacy. “It requires a mind change, but we’re getting everyone in the same room ... literally.” ■

# A contextual pathway for future Nurse Aides

By Anita Cola, Lackawanna College

Carbondale is a town in north-eastern Pennsylvania that had a real need for adult education services, but none were easily accessible. So the mayor reached out to local agencies and higher education institutions to determine the needs and obstacles facing the community. They came up with a plan that involved Scranton’s Lackawanna College—as both ABLÉ and postsecondary provider, SCOLA Volunteers for Literacy and PA CareerLink®, along with space provided by the Carbondale Public Library and some federal “stimulus” money.

PA CareerLink® provided information regarding high-priority occupations in Lackawanna County. They encouraged us at Lackawanna College to apply for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funding for a career pathways program that would lead from GED® attainment to employment in nursing.

Although Lackawanna College had participated in ABLÉ’s Career Gateway, instructional services for that initiative were designed to address the needs of learners preparing for any type of postsecondary education or training. The ARRA Pathways to Employment grant addressed the specific requirements for entering Nurse Aide training.

Pathways to Employment launched at Lackawanna College with a cohort of six learners who met eligibility requirements established by all partners. These included financial eligibility determined by PA CareerLink® staff and eighth-grade reading and math levels determined by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The program provided 100 hours of GED Tests preparation that the students were mandated to complete. Classes were held Monday through Thursday, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Students were expected to show up for class on time every morning, and if an absence was

unavoidable, they were to call in and make up the day on Friday.

The curriculum covered instruction in all GED content areas using authentic Nurse Aide instructional materials, along with GED-specific materials. Bureau of ABLÉ advisor Luke Suereth lent us a curriculum he had used while working at Tri-County OIC in Harrisburg. The material included Nurse Aide prep work such as safety and accident prevention, communication skills, legal and ethical aspects of long-term care, abuse issues and infection control.

Instructors also incorporated workplace activities including reading skills at work, writing skills at work and math skills at work. Students completed résumés online and explored careers at the PA CareerLink®. After completing this portion of the career pathway, all students passed the GED Tests. Because of the intensity of instruction, they were academically prepared to transition to Nurse Aide training offered through Lackawanna College’s Continuing Education Department.

## BEYOND ACADEMICS

Although we were confident about the students’ skill levels, we had not anticipated other challenges that they and their instructors encountered. While able to succeed in the academic portion of vocational training, learners were not as well prepared in the “soft skills” necessary to complete the next level of training, let alone employment. They lacked the Basic Employability Skills as identified in the Foundation Skills Framework, such as working in teams, demonstrating self-management strategies and demonstrating effective interpersonal relationships. We had seen our primary goal as preparing learners to pass the GED Tests; however, once the cohort transitioned to Nurse Aide training, it became apparent that soft skills are a vital part of



Photo by Jennie Jamieson, Somerset County Technology Center

the preparation process. Interactions with Nurse Aide instructors helped us understand exactly which skills we needed to address.

Before we began our second cohort in Carbondale, we consulted our partners and took a long, hard look at our curriculum. The 100-hour GED class would continue to provide academic instruction, yet include the soft skills so critical to success in postsecondary education and, ultimately, employment. We invited the Nurse Aide staff to provide presentations to the GED class outlining “non-negotiable” employability skills such as punctuality, regular attendance, appropriate appearance, privacy issues and, above all, respect for patients. Students formulated back-up plans for child care or other emergencies before beginning the Nurse Aide component when attendance would be mandatory and non-negotiable.

Another suggestion from Luke Suereth was to stay connected with the students after moving on to Nurse Aide training. The GED instructor and the students had already formed a bond, so she helped them work together on forming a carpool and editing each other’s writing assignments. Working in groups and pairs is the key to survival in their chosen profession.

After passing the GED Tests, the initial cohort of six students successfully transitioned to and completed Nurse Aide training. They were referred to PA CareerLink® for employment placement. Meanwhile, Carbondale is well on its way to getting exactly the adult education it needs. ■

## Support for transitioning students

By Jamie Preston, PathwaysPA



The college-bound student asked a simple question: “May I please have a pencil?” Before reaching reflexively into his desk drawer to find one, the instructor paused to ask a question of his own: “When you get to college, do you think any instructor will provide pencils?” The question, raised by Pathways PA instructor Jack Logan, underlines the importance of developing the self-reliance that is essential for students who graduate from ABLÉ programs with the goal of transitioning to postsecondary education or training that qualifies them for the jobs of their dreams.

To help students make successful transitions, ABLÉ programs find they need to do far more than help participants pass the GED® Tests. Like most of us, students need supports to help them navigate unfamiliar territory. To that end, ABLÉ programs can provide information on career exploration, financial aid, application forms and processes, stress and time management, study skills, personal support and orientation to college life. They also can enlist the aid of mentors, who can help orient learners to new experiences and provide individual encouragement and support.

A career or college mentor can be anyone who has been where the student wants to go and can provide the direction and contacts to make it easier to venture into a new arena. Mentoring can be provided by a tutor with good contacts, a community organization that is willing to assign a volunteer to help open doors or an ABLÉ graduate who has made a similar transition and is ready to serve as a guide.

Counseling and case-management activities should be coordinated by the ABLÉ staff who work most closely with students and track their goals and interests. Above all, ABLÉ programs need to ensure that any counseling and

mentoring is aligned with the student’s own goals, which usually are arrived at only after careful career exploration activities that help the student chart a career destination customized to individual skills, interests and goals.

### TRACKING PROGRESS

A designated case manager or advisor monitors student progress toward career and postsecondary transitions. They can work individually and in groups to help students identify interests, resources and barriers, then plot a series of realistic next steps toward successful transitions.

“Our ABLÉ coordinators have begun using case management strategies with students who are transitioning to college, training programs and employment,” reports Nicole Jackson, Foundations Programs Manager at the District 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund in Philadelphia. “Case management is centered on barrier removal and transitioning students into employment, training or college. It helps students identify the steps they need to take and the people and programs

they need to contact as their next steps beyond classroom instruction. The primary focus with transition counseling is identifying their occupational interest and then identifying any skill gaps and/or credentials needed, barriers to employment or school, financial aid and support systems.”

More than 80% of those who responded to ABLÉ’s recent Career Pathways survey indicated they provide career-awareness activities in their programs, and more than half offer counseling for transitioning students. Counseling can be as informal as having an instructor walk a student through the process of enrolling in a PA CareerLink® from a classroom computer or as complex as the tracking process mapped out by Angela Kenes and Rachel Zilcosky of Intermediate Unit 1, detailed in *Career Gateway: Tool Kit*. Their comprehensive planning document encapsulates much of the work ABLÉ practitioners in Pennsylvania have developed to ensure that graduates of our programs go forward on career pathways with goals clearly mapped, resources aligned and pencils in hand. ■

### THE COUNSELING COMPONENT AT INTERMEDIATE UNIT 1

In our transitioning programs at Intermediate Unit 1, we provide a counseling component that addresses numerous issues adult students often face. We begin, during the intake process, to discover each student’s goals and inform them of the skills needed to enter a particular program and expectations throughout a course of study. We provide classes to develop study skills, test-taking strategies and time- and stress-management techniques. We emphasize that these skills will be necessary for success in any postsecondary program. For those whose skill levels are not adequate for a profession, we are honest in what they will need to do to achieve their goal.

The Career Gateway Student Barrier Information Form in *Career Gateway: Tool Kit* guides in-depth individual discussion about potential deterrents to completion, such as childcare or transportation issues. We refer individuals to appropriate agencies for assistance.

Once students have entered a postsecondary program, we follow up with telephone calls to monitor their progress. We also encourage students to return to us with any questions or concerns, as well as to share their successes and support their peers, and many do just that. —Angela Kenes

## NCTN provides direction for transitions to college

An interview with Priyanka Sharma, NCTN Coordinator on behalf of the National College Transition Network team

**Q** What does the National College Transition Network (NCTN) have to offer ABE programs?

**A** The National College Transition Network (NCTN) is a project of World Education, Inc.'s New England Literacy Resource Center in Boston. The NCTN supports ABE staff, programs, state agencies and professional developers in establishing and strengthening ABE-to-college transition services through technical assistance, professional development, collegial sharing, research, advocacy and increased visibility for this critical sector of the adult education system. We bring together the various efforts of educators, professional development providers, policy makers and researchers concerned with effective college transitions to postsecondary education and training. NCTN currently has more than 2,100 members. We provide professional development and technical assistance throughout the nation. For more information, please visit us online at [www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org).

**Q** NCTN's paper, *Transitioning Adults to College: Adult Basic Education Program Models*, was published in 2006 by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy ([www.ncsall.net](http://www.ncsall.net)). How has the benefit of postsecondary education changed in the current economic environment?

**A** Having a postsecondary degree or certificate has become more crucial than ever in the current economic environment. There are a number of reasons why access to and success in postsecondary education is important for adult education students. The most compelling are:

- **Increased earnings.** The most often cited benefit of postsecondary

education is the economic gains made by adult workers, although the amount varies considerably depending on a number of factors (e.g., type of degree, academic major, region of the country, etc.).

- **Reduced unemployment.** Unemployment for individuals with less than a high school education is 7.6% compared to 3.3% for those with an associate degree and 2.6% for those with a bachelor's degree.<sup>1</sup>
- **Benefits to children.** The poverty rate among children under age six decreases from 62.5% for parents with less than a high school degree to 15.2% for parents with some college.<sup>2</sup>
- **Enhanced workforce.** Communities increase their competitiveness by increasing the skills and education level for all members of their current workforce. For many states, this means significantly increasing opportunities for key contributors to their future workforce—members of immigrant and minority groups.<sup>3</sup>

Several research studies have demonstrated that the GED<sup>®</sup> provides the most consistent economic gains when used as a steppingstone to a postsecondary education credential, rather than an end in itself.

**Q** *Transitioning Adults to College* describes five models in detail. Can you summarize each model in just a few words?

**A** A model is often a simple representation of a complex system. For this discussion, a model is a representative form of transition services. Transition programs use a variety of strategies to prepare students for postsecondary education. What puts a particular program into a specific model category is the reliance on a main strategy—a



Priyanka Sharma, NCTN Coordinator

main way of thinking about how to address student needs. The five models detailed in the *Transitioning Adults to College* study are named below, followed by the main goal and key features of each of the models.

1. **Advising Model** raises students' awareness of postsecondary options and admissions processes through presentations and workshops with follow-up through individual advising. Advising models vary in intensity from as little as a few hours of student contact to programs.
2. **GED-Plus Model** aligns the existing GED preparation so that students interested in postsecondary education who complete their GED are prepared to enter college-level course work. The model focuses on alignment of the GED curriculum to include academic or student success skills needed for entry into postsecondary education with concurrent preparation for the GED.
3. **ESOL Model** reduces the time and expense of additional ESOL/ESL coursework for ESOL students by focusing on advanced language skills. The model has a focus on advancing language skills required for academic settings with little or no math preparation and well-articulated curricula with clear academic benchmarks for admittance.
4. **Career Pathway Model** provides contextualized learning that allows

**CONTINUED NEXT PAGE**

students to participate in college-level technical education leading to high-wage, high-growth employment sectors. This model focuses on accelerated teaching and learning of basic education through contextualized technical skill development with multiple levels of instruction. The curriculum is usually “chunked” to create clear steppingstones that are recognized by employers and coincide with academic and career advancement pathways.

5. **College Prep Model** allows students to successfully transition into college-level or, at the very least, the upper tier of developmental education by providing direct academic instruction and college success skills. This model centers around direct instruction to address the gaps between the knowledge and skills required to complete adult education and those needed for success in college. There is a strong focus on comprehensive counseling.

Several factors dictate which model or set of strategies you might consider. The factors fall roughly into three categories and include the needs of your students, the resources available to your program and transition efforts supported by your state adult and postsecondary education agencies.

### **Q** What are the components of effective transition instruction?

**A** Many factors will influence how you prepare your students for postsecondary education, such as the level of academic ability you use as the benchmark for choosing students and the overall design of your program. There are, however, key elements that contribute to a successful college transition component:

- Clear understanding of the academic expectations of the collaborating college,
- Flexible curriculum that is responsive to student needs,
- Meaningful, ongoing student assessment and feedback,
- Multiple modes of instruction (with

clear identification of the modes most often used in postsecondary education) and

- Clear classroom and homework expectations.

We know from the research on community colleges that over 40% of first-year students are not ready for college-level course work and must enroll in remedial reading, writing and/or math classes.<sup>4</sup> While one or two remedial courses can benefit first-time students, multiple courses can have a negative impact on long-term persistence and access to financial aid.<sup>5</sup> Your transition program should aim to help students bridge the gap between a high school credential and college-level courses or the highest-level developmental (remedial) courses.

### **Q** Why is the counseling component so important?

**A** In an effective college transition program, the counseling responsibilities fall into the hands of not only the counselor and the instructor, but also the staff at collaborating colleges, the staff at the local One-Stop Career Centers, the staff at other local organizations and, of course, the student. Students need to learn about the process and how to take control of their own progress within this new context. This shared responsibility allows the counseling to begin prior to student enrollment, persist throughout and continue after the student transitions to college.

### **Q** What is the difference between [www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org) and [www.collegeforadults.org](http://www.collegeforadults.org)?

**A** The website for NCTN is [www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org) and is geared to the adult education or transitions program administrators and instructors. The website has a wealth of promising practices and research-to-practice briefs from all around the country. Some excellent counseling resources are available too.

Our direct-to-student website is called [www.collegeforadults.org](http://www.collegeforadults.org). This website helps them with career planning, college selection and the appli-

cation process. It also suggests ways to find money to pay for college, and directs them to resources to help them prepare for college-level work. This website can be used as a self-study tool for students who are preparing to go to college as well as a classroom resource for a transitions or a GED class.

### **Q** How can an ABE program help prepare students for postsecondary education or training?

**A** College transition programs require additional resources. Besides transition initiatives and state-level support, you could make some modifications to your existing adult education program to incorporate college transition objectives to classroom instruction, supplementary workshops or individual or group counseling sessions. The counseling sessions or workshops could focus on career awareness and career planning, economic benefits of college, college success stories, learning styles, college success skills, etc.

You could also offer academic components to help students prepare for college. For example: academic skills beyond those needed for GED or upper-level ESOL, computer skills and test-taking skills or preparation for college placement tests.

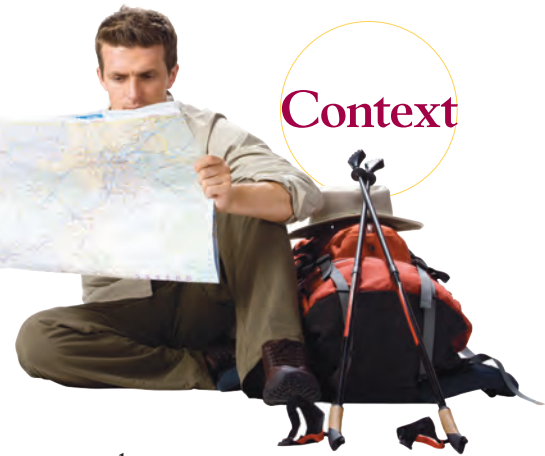
All the best for your journey into transitions! ■

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# Advice from transitions trailblazers

*Adult educators from all over Pennsylvania are providing transitioning services for students seeking career pathways. They share what they've learned so far.*



**B**uild a rapport with students from the first day they engage in your program. This rapport leads to trust and open communication through sincerity and demonstration of effort. This rapport allows the student to feel comfortable to return to the program even after completion.

**Sandy Scanlon, Program Director  
Community College of Allegheny County**

**T**o be truly comprehensive, a formal transition program needs to address two components that may be negatively impacting ABE/ASE students: the culture of poverty and managing barriers. There are sensitivity training sessions that address the culture of poverty with ABE/ASE instructors, but that is only half of the equation. Students need to become aware of attitudes and behaviors that may be holding them back from success. They must also learn ways to strengthen their management skills in regard to the barriers that hinder them.

**Valerie Luebke, Move Up Instructor  
Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit 5**

**N**etworking with other professionals and utilizing their suggestions can be a great opportunity to diversify your classroom.

**Ashley Altavilla, Workplace Literacy Instructor  
Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18**

**I**t is important to develop partnerships with other agencies who support the program.

**Angela Kenes, Program Coordinator  
IU 1 Bridge Program at Penn State Fayette**

**P**artner with EOC\*. They're free and provide great service!

**Laurie Cybulski, Program Director  
Focus on Renewal Learning Center**

**D**on't be afraid to try new approaches with your clients. Make it a point to sit down with co-workers and brainstorm ideas to achieve new approaches and then make it a point to implement them. If they work, great; if not, then we learned how not to do it and try something new.

**Dave Smith, Workplace Literacy Instructor  
Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18**

**L**isten to your students and learn what their goals are. Do not assume that they want the same things you might. Encourage them to keep moving forward and point out their successes to them, as many of these students focus on their failures.

**Mike Brenneman, Instructor  
PENNCREST Adult Education Program**

**P**rovide realistic feedback to help students shape realistic goals.

**Jamie Preston  
Senior Director of Workforce Education  
PathWays PA**

**P**rogram participants who are incarcerated have many more needs for transition planning, which include basics such as housing, clothing, D&A counseling, family reintegration counseling and community support, in addition to the standard transitional activities related to employment and postsecondary education. Ignoring the basic needs of inmate transition (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs) is a recipe for failure.

**Mary Mulroy, Director  
Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3**

**F**ocus on writing skills, finding and using reference tools and how to ask for help from professors.

**E. Cathie Whitmire, ESL Instructor  
Multicultural Community Resource Center, Erie**

**Y**ou have to know the entrance requirements for your local postsecondary education or training programs. Don't forget about math skills. They are often included as a graduation or completion requirement.

**Donald Butler, Assistant to the Dean  
Community College of Philadelphia**

1. Structured attendance policy—we want serious students.
2. Provide a comprehensive syllabus.
3. Do not accept students who are too low academically. We have them go through the ABE brush-up class prior to entering the transition classes. This level needs to be set with the cooperation of the instructor and referring agency.
4. Keep in contact with schools and make them aware of the transition programs. They can assist in referring students.
5. Teach to all learning styles.
6. Guest speakers are wonderful for giving firsthand experience stories and motivation!
7. Provide tours of educational facilities.
8. Find out what entrance exams are being utilized in schools of interest and gear lessons toward those exams. Study guides are usually available.

**Susan Simpson, Adult Education Instructor  
PA CareerLink/Huntingdon County**

**P**rovide lots of hands-on materials (college catalogs, completed applications, financial aid information, etc.), have guest speakers from schools, PA CareerLink® and/or employers and start out at a slow pace.

**Lynn L. Jaffe, ABE/GED Counselor  
State College Area School District**

\* Educational Opportunity Centers, Inc. is a federal TRIO program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. TRIO refers to a number (originally three, now eight) of federal programs to increase access to higher education for economically disadvantaged students.

# Essential resources for your transitions program

By Wendy McDowell, Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy (ISAL)

Adult education encompasses a wide variety of programs including family literacy, adult secondary education, life skills and English as a second language. You can successfully blend work-readiness skills into any adult education program by preparing low- and middle-skilled adults to attain the skills needed to transition to postsecondary education, training or work. Here described are a selection of resources to help you do that.

**Career Gateway: Resources for Practitioners** is a curriculum guide and practitioner guide focusing on successfully transitioning adult learners to postsecondary education or training for high-priority occupations. Resources were produced through Pennsylvania's Career Gateway project, a collaboration of the Departments of Education and Labor and Industry.

**Career Gateway: Tool Kit** contains stories from each of the transitions pilot sites, as well as examples of resources the agencies used throughout the program. Among the resources are syllabi designed to work with the Pennsylvania Workforce Development System to increase the number of adult basic education (ABE) students successfully transitioning to postsecondary education or training.

Developed at Pennsylvania State University Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy through ABE funding from the Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, the **Foundation Skills Framework** is a useful tool for identifying skills needed in the workplace. These skills can be taught in the ABE classroom and transferred to the workplace. Learning basic workplace skills increases the rate of success entering the workforce.

Another resources compilation is

**Transitions to Work Abstracts**, also from ISAL. Key themes on transitioning, for workforce development system directors, educators and employers, were pulled from the abstracts.

**PA Career Guide**, a publication of the PA Department of Labor and Industry, is available free online and at your PA CareerLink®. It is a very useful classroom tool for career exploration.

## IN LINCS

The National Institute for Literacy's (NIFL) **Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS)** provides access to research and resources that have undergone a rigorous review process. Three LINCS collections contain resources particularly applicable to transitions: Workforce Competitiveness, Basic Skills and Program Management.

One Step Forward Initiative's **Guide to Adult Education for Work: Transforming Adult Education to Build a Skilled Workforce** describes how a career pathways system could be structured by focusing on elements in seven areas: program design, curriculum and instruction, assessment and credentialing, high-quality teaching, support and follow-up services, connection to the business community and monitoring and accountability systems.

**Building the Bridge Between Community College and Work for Students with Learning Disabilities**. This article describes the teacher's role in teaching learning-disabled students to define the accommodations they need to successfully transition to postsecondary education or training or to work.

**Learning Disability: Life after High School**. Recent legislation has mandated people with learning disabilities receive additional supports when

transitioning to postsecondary education or training. This article describes the challenges, accommodations, available services and eligibility requirements.

**Challenges in Assessing for Postsecondary Readiness**. This 2007 policy brief examines current assessments used in adult

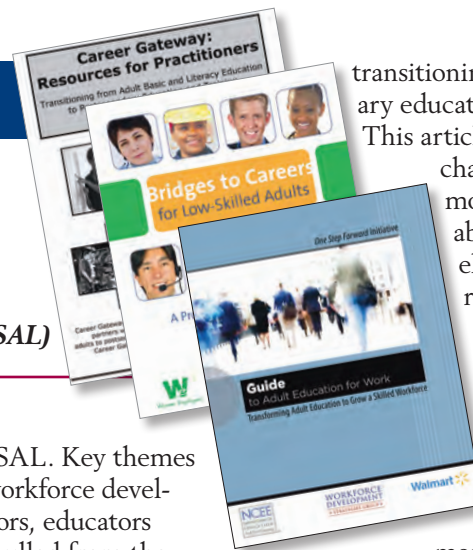
education and recommended changes to align assessments to measure success in postsecondary education.

**GED Career Bridge to Hospitality Curriculum**. This career-oriented teacher's guide is a good example of how to incorporate workplace context into GED® instruction.

**The Integration of Immigrants in the Workplace** defines "bridge" programs and reports the research results of implementation. It also discusses the role of adult education in immigrant integration in the workforce.

NIFL recently launched the **Career Pathways Instructional Materials Library**. Although not all the materials in this collection have been expertly reviewed, they are free and all are about transitioning to work. The materials are organized according to the U.S. Department of Education's **16 Career Clusters**. For example, **Bridges to Careers for Low Skilled Adults: A Program Development Guide** focuses on the skills low-level learners need to enter the workforce. This NIFL library will continue to expand.

The success of transitioning the adult learner to work relies on many factors, and the role of adult education in preparing learners with the basic skills and knowledge they need to take the next steps has certainly increased. Understanding the labor market in your area and the skills needed for available jobs, knowing your learners' goals and putting it all together in lesson plans can be time-consuming and challenging. Exploring the resources described here will help guide your own transition to a career-oriented curriculum. ■



# Clearing a path for career pathways services

By Amanda Harrison-Perez, Bureau of ABLÉ

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), the legislation that provides federal funding for adult basic education as a mandated partner in the workforce development system, is long overdue for reauthorization.

In the last year, there has been considerable work at the national level to inform and influence WIA reauthorization. All the activities emphasize the importance of creating career pathways that ensure that Americans have the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the workforce, today and in the future. Adult basic education and family literacy programs must focus on the educational and support services needed to prepare the people in our communities to take advantage of and advance in the employment and postsecondary opportunities that are available to them in these career pathways. We need to work closely with all of our partners in the workforce development system and with local employers to align our services to the needs of the community.

## WIA REAUTHORIZATION

According to a Congressional Research Service memo, proposed changes to the WIA, contained in the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act of 2009 (HR-3238, S-1468), Title I, Workforce Investment Systems and Title II, Adult Education, Literacy, and Workplace Skills, would include definitions for “integrated education and training,” “career pathways” and “workplace skills.” Title I would require “opportunities for career pathways” in WIA youth programs and “integrated education and training” as a statewide activity. Under Title II, the purposes of adult education and family literacy would be expanded to include helping adults prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and career

pathways.

To that end, integrated education and training, along with services to support transition to postsecondary education and training and career

## Services to support transition to postsecondary education and training and career pathways will be additional allowable activities under Title II.

pathways will be additional allowable activities under Title II. New core indicators of performance would be included for attainment of work readiness, workforce skills and certificates that are “nationally or industry recognized or approved by the State or local board.” States would be required to use some state leadership funds to coordinate with Title I workforce systems.

## GRADUATION GOALS

The American Graduation Initiative (AGI) was initiated by the White House and introduced in House Bill H.R. 3221–Title V. A fact sheet issued by the White House states that a key goal is an “additional 5 million community college graduates by 2020, including students who earn certificates and associate degrees or who continue on to graduate from four-year colleges and universities.” The AGI would support community colleges in working with business to develop career pathways and integrated basic skills and training programs, improving remedial and adult education programs by integrating developmental classes into academic and vocational classes and providing career-planning and other services to help students persist in and complete a certificate or diploma program. The National Council of State Directors



of Adult Education (NCSDAE) has made a series of recommendations to include adult basic education providers as partners in AGI activities. (Note: According to *The New York Times*, on March 25, 2010, as part of the final healthcare reform package, funding for the AGI was cut from the proposed \$12 billion to just \$2 billion to community colleges specifically for job training. The NCSDAE expects that some of the provisions of AGI will be included in either a jobs bill or WIA reauthorization.)

## CORE STANDARDS

At the K-12 level, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) are working on the Common Core State Standards Initiative to have states “collectively develop and adopt a core set of academic standards in mathematics and language arts” (Dane Linn in an NAEPDC Webinar). The goal is to ensure that all students in the U.S. finish school with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and a career, and the ability to compete on a global level. Reflecting the importance of college and career readiness, the first set of standards developed and presented to the public for comment were the college and career readiness standards. While the work does not directly mention career pathways, the emphasis on college and career readiness reflects the understanding that basic education providers have a responsibility to ensure that, when students graduate, they are ready to pursue and succeed in postsecondary education or training and ultimately a career. Pennsylvania has already indicated its intention to adopt the Common Core standards.

**CONTINUED NEXT PAGE**



## ON THE HORIZON, CONTINUED

### NEW GED®

The AGI and Common Core Standards may appear only tangentially related to adult basic education, but they are closely related. Last October, the General Educational Development Testing Service® (GEDTS) announced that it would not release the GED Test, 5th Edition in 2012 as planned. Instead, in response to the Common Core State Standards Initiative and the American Graduation Initiative, GEDTS is developing GED 20/20, which it calls “a new, more comprehensive assessment program.” GEDTS hopes to increase the number of people who take and pass the GED Tests as well as the number of passers prepared to transition successfully to postsecondary education. GEDTS is working to align the new edition of the GED Tests with the college and career readiness standards in the Common Core State Standards.



As evidenced by the activities described above, educational providers at all levels will be expected to prepare students to succeed in an ever-changing workplace. Basic skills education providers will be expected to help students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to earn a secondary school credential and transition

to and succeed in employment and/or postsecondary education or training. Postsecondary providers need to ensure that the majority of students who enter their programs are able to leave with a certificate or degree. Adult basic education and family literacy providers, workforce training programs and postsecondary education institutions need to communicate, collaborate and partner to provide seamless services.

The NCSDAE is working hard to ensure that any federal legislation to develop career pathways and support transition to and completion of postsecondary education include adult education as an integral part of the plan. Adult education providers need to be prepared to align services with education and training providers to ensure that our students have the skills and knowledge they need to take advantage of all opportunities available to them. ■

### MORE INFORMATION

The website of the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education contains recommendations and other documents related to WIA reauthorization: [www.ncsdae.org](http://www.ncsdae.org).

The website of the General Educational Development Testing Service® provides a FAQ about the next edition of the GED® Test: [www.gedtest.org](http://www.gedtest.org).

## Do-it-yourself professional development

Many ABLÉ-funded programs are looking for simple ways to fulfill professional development plans. Here's an idea: Use *ABLE in Context* as the text for a **group reflection activity**. Start by selecting an article. Print copies of it directly from the PDF and distribute to the group. Set a time to get together, or make arrangements to meet online. Everyone should have paper or a laptop for jotting notes. Decide who will be the facilitator. Then follow these steps:

1. Take a few minutes to read (or reread) the article.
2. Establish a focusing question, or purpose. For example:
  - How does the practice described in this article relate or apply to individual or agency practice?
3. Go over the rules:
  - Speak one at a time; do not interrupt.
  - No discussion or side conversations.
  - Express your point of view, but avoid judgment of other group members or the material itself.
4. Rounds: While the facilitator takes notes, each member of the group gives a very brief response to two or more questions (one at a time), e.g.:
  - What stands out about this article?
  - For what reasons do you believe or doubt the thesis of this article?
  - How does the article relate to your instructional practice?
  - How can you apply this knowledge to improve practice?
  - What would you like to know more about?
  - What would be some next steps?
5. The facilitator summarizes each round, noting common themes and significant differences.
6. Open the session for discussion.
7. Facilitator summarizes the session.
8. Follow up with an e-mail summary of the rounds and discussion and/or another meeting to further explore the topic.