

# Policy Points

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## The Next Frontier in Adult Education: Adult Education to College Transition Programs

An emerging area of practice within the national adult education field is adult education to college transition programs. This brief discusses various kinds of transition programs, and in particular a variation of such programs being developed in several northeastern states as part of a demonstration project titled the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

Statistics on the success of the programs under this demonstration are presented, as well as a listing of resources to learn more about these programs and other adult education to college transition practices.

Adult education to college transition programs are needed in Arkansas and presented below are several policy recommendations Arkansas can adopt to begin to promote the development of such programs.

### Why Arkansas Needs Adult Education to College Transition Programs

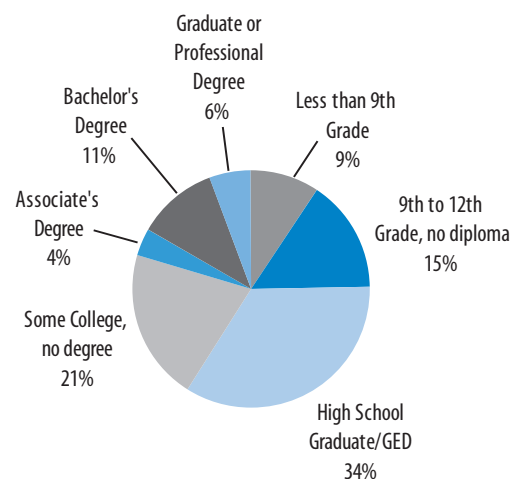
Arkansas needs to begin to develop adult education to college transition programs for several reasons:

- **College level training is increasingly needed to get a good job in today's economy.** A General Educational Development (GED) or high school diploma is no longer sufficient to ensure access to most of the better jobs being generated by the modern economy. Fifty years ago, a high school diploma was sufficient to access most good jobs, but today the state's existing businesses increasingly need workers with higher education credentials. By one estimate, 44 of the 100 occupations expected to experience the most growth by 2008 require postsecondary training. Of those, 75 percent require a bachelor's degree or more; 14 percent require an associate's degree; and 11 percent require vocational training.<sup>1</sup> And the businesses the state is trying to bring

to Arkansas, those with good paying jobs, require a workforce with a variety of postsecondary credentials.

- **Most adults in Arkansas lack college credentials, and many lack a GED or high school diploma.** As the educational attainment data in the chart below indicates, Arkansas has more adults that lack college credentials—associate's or bachelor's degrees—than most states. Arkansas also has many more adults who lack a GED or high school diploma.

### Educational Attainment of Adults 25 and Over

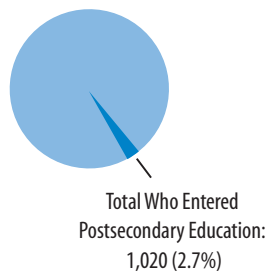


Source: 2000 Census

- **Too few adult education students make the transition to college.** In 2004-2005, 2.7 percent of all students enrolled in adult education services (including Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, and GED) moved on to postsecondary education. Specifically, 36,986 students enrolled in adult education, and 1,019 were contacted and reported that they had enrolled in postsecondary education. (Note: the 1,019 figure only captures those adult education students who said entering college was their goal when they came to adult education; no doubt more students made the transition to college but simply did not indicate college enrollment as their goal.)

**Adult Education Students Who Entered Postsecondary Education, Program Year 2004-2005**

Total Adult Education Enrollees: 37,102



Source: Arkansas Department of Workforce Education (ADWE)

The problem is that at this time it is not possible to determine when the 2,992 GED students who entered college actually completed their GED. It is likely that some if not many completed their GED in years before 2004. In Kentucky, where better data is currently available, approximately one-third of GED graduates enrolled in postsecondary programs over a five-year period.<sup>2</sup> Kentucky also has relatively sophisticated adult education to college transition efforts underway.

Unfortunately, data on the success of adult education students at the college level is not yet available. Soon, data will show how many of these students enroll in developmental education courses at the college level; how many complete these courses; how many go on to enroll in college credit courses; and how many ultimately complete these credit courses and obtain a postsecondary credential.

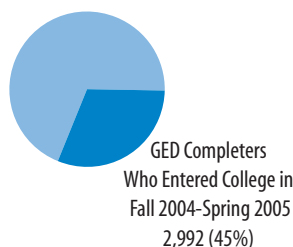
It is very likely that many of the adult education students who do move on to college end up taking some developmental education courses because their basic academic skills still need improvement to enroll in college level programs. This is the situation for the overwhelming majority of the student population at the state’s two-year colleges. As discussed below, the success or completion rate for most students who enroll in developmental education classes is very low (see Table 2). So even if 45 percent of those who complete their GEDs enter college in Arkansas, many of these students likely struggle to complete their studies once there.

- **Not enough adults in Arkansas enroll in college, and too many of those who do struggle to complete their studies.** In Arkansas, adult education students are not enrolling in college in high enough numbers, and neither is the adult population overall. As Table 1 indicates, Arkansas has fewer adults aged 25 to 54 enrolled in college (only 4.6 percent) than the nation overall and most states. Arkansas’ 4.6 percent ranks Arkansas 50th (last) among all states.

When looking at only those who completed their GED, the picture appears to improve significantly, but still could be better. Unfortunately, the available data probably overstates the number of students who complete their GED and transition into college. The data indicates that 6,687 individuals passed the GED test in 2004. In the fall 2004 and spring 2005 semesters, 2,992 GED students entered public postsecondary institutions: 1,947 full-time and 1,045 part-time. These numbers suggest that almost half of those who completed GEDs (44.7 percent) in 2004 entered college.

**GED Completers Who Entered College**

Total GED Completers in 2004: 6,687



Source: ADWE and Arkansas Department of Higher Education

**Table 1: Arkansas Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion Data**

Data Definitions	U.S.	Range among States	Arkansas
Percent of Adults 25-54 Enrolled in Postsecondary Institutions	6.5%	4.4%-9.7%	4.6%

Source: American Community Survey 2003 prepared by Population Reference Bureau.

**Table 2: Arkansas Postsecondary Enrollment and Completion Data**

Data Definitions	Arkansas
Percent of First-time Students Enrolled in Community Colleges Requiring Remediation	85%
Percent of Full-time Two-Year College Students in Remedial Education Obtaining a Certificate/Degree or Transfer to a Four Year College (in three years)	15%
Percent of Full-time Two-Year College Students NOT in Remediation Obtaining a Certificate/Degree or Transfer to a Four Year College (in three years)	32%
Percent of All Full-time Two Year College Students Obtaining a Certificate/Degree or Transfer to a Four Year College (in three years)	19%

Source: Arkansas Department of Higher Education, 2003 Enrollment Data. This data does not include part-time students.

However, adult under-enrollment is only part of the problem. Completion among students who enroll in college is also a challenge. As Table 2 indicates, only 19 percent of all full-time students at Arkansas’ two-year colleges complete their studies in three years. Only 15 percent of full-time students who take developmental education courses complete their studies in three years. Data on completion rates for part-time students is not yet available. However, national research clearly shows part-time student completion rates to be lower than full-time student completion rates.<sup>3</sup>

Given such low college enrollment and completion rates, Arkansas simply must develop innovative strategies to improve college enrollment and completion rates, especially among newly enrolled students with relatively low basic academic skills—again, the overwhelming majority of entering students at the state’s two-year colleges.

A key goal of the ABE-to-College Transition Programs is to prepare students to enroll and succeed in college. ABE-to-College Transition Programs not only help more adult education students transition to college, they also help transitioning students succeed once they are there.

The more intense ABE-to-College Transition Programs build the basic academic skills students need to enter and succeed at college-level courses without any further basic academic skills or developmental education instruction.

In other words, they are intended to prepare students not to need any further remediation once enrolled in college, which according to the data in Table 2 doubles the chances that a student will graduate.

The unique curriculums of ABE-to-College Transition Programs, and more importantly the skills they impart to students, provide insight into how these programs improve student postsecondary success.

In summary, Arkansas can and should use ABE-to-College Transition Programs as one more strategy to help adults in the state attain higher education credentials. Given how important improved educational attainment among the adult workforce is to the economic and social development of the state, Arkansas must employ every possible strategy that can make a contribution to this critical need.

### Components of ABE-to-College Transition Programs

Currently there are 25 programs participating in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project. Program designs and settings vary from site to site; however, each one was built upon the same basic components. For more details about the particular programs, see <http://www.collegetransition.org/profiles/program.html>

The programs are free to adult learners, and target primarily those adults who recently obtained a GED. The programs consist of instruction in three areas: 1) **College Academic Skills**, 2) **PC and Internet Skills**, and 3) **College Survival Skills**. Students also receive educational and career counseling and assistance enrolling in college. All programs work directly with colleges in the community to make the transition process as seamless as possible. A typical program covers 14 weeks of instruction at six hours per week.

In the **College Academic Skills** instructional segment, students develop the reading, writing, and pre-algebra skills necessary for success at the college level. A variety of teaching and learning methods are employed to produce the specific skills colleges expect of first-year students. In the more intense programs, the goal of this instructional segment is to prepare students to enter any academic program at the college level without the need for further remedial or developmental education coursework. In other words, this segment is intended to bridge the gap between the skills acquired by a GED and the skills required to do well enough on the ASSET test to place out of developmental education courses within the college. Typically the instruction time needed to complete this segment of the program is 10 weeks.

In the **PC and Internet Skills** instructional segment, students learn in a hands-on, interactive format the basic Personal Computer and Internet skills necessary for students to complete class work in a manner expected at the college level. Instruction in keyboarding is typically provided if needed. This instructional segment typically takes two weeks to complete, with additional and ongoing outside the classroom work.

In the **College Survival Skills** segment, students learn in an interactive, problem-solving format how the college system works and how to navigate it from enrollment to completion. They also learn other practical skills such as goal setting, time management, stress management, listening and note-taking skills, and test-taking strategies, all of which are critical for success in college.

### ABE-to-College Transition Program Outcomes

A formal evaluation of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project was completed in June 2005. Highlights from the evaluation include:

- **69 percent of all project graduates (116 students out of 168) had enrolled or were expected to attend postsecondary education.** Sixty-nine percent is considerably higher than the estimated 33 percent to 45 percent of GED graduates in Arkansas currently making the transition from adult education into college.
- **51 percent of all project graduates had a high school diploma, but on average had been out of school for 15 years.** This is noteworthy in the sense that ABE-to-College Transition programs can serve the GED as well as high school diploma population. In other words, they can serve any adult needing basic academic skills preparation prior to entering college.
- **The average age for graduates was 32.** Sixty-eight percent were employed; 79 percent had incomes below \$25,000, with 28 percent reporting incomes below \$5,000; and 38 percent were receiving some type of public assistance.

Unfortunately the evaluation did not provide information on the college placement test scores of graduates, or the kinds of courses graduates were enrolled in and their retention and success rates with those courses. These kinds of data were identified to include in a future longitudinal study of project graduates that will be completed over the next five years.

However, some of these kinds of data are available by looking at the outcomes of a specific program within the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project: the SUCCESS Program.

### Some Outcomes for the SUCCESS Program

The SUCCESS Program is operated by Cape Cod Community College and its adult education program. Some outcomes from the first six semesters the program was operational include:

- 94 students entered the program, and 78 completed it (83 percent).
- Of the 78 who completed, 61 (78 percent) went on to at least one or more semesters of college.

Six enrollees have been selected for Phi Beta Kappa; one student has already completed a LPN degree; two are preparing to transfer to a four-year college; and four enrollees have received academic scholarships from Cape Cod Community College.

Clearly, the SUCCESS Program is helping adult education students not only transition into college, but succeed at college once enrolled.

### Other Adult Education to College Transition Practices

ABE-to-College Transition Programs are just one of many practices that adult education and community college partners are experimenting with to facilitate better transition into college among adult education students. A recently released report from the Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy (CAAL) titled *To Ensure America's Future: Building a National Opportunity System for Adults* highlights other practices. The practices can be grouped into several categories:

- **Awareness building and recruitment**, which includes such practices as providing information to adult education students about postsecondary education benefits, familiarizing them with the college environment, offering financial aid information, and encouraging students to make college a goal. These are the most basic kinds of adult education to college transition practices.
- **Bridge programs**, which are a more sophisticated practice, can be described as instructional modules aimed at assisting students with GEDs or high school diplomas acquire the basic academic skills needed for success at the postsecondary level. These programs take many forms. Some, like the ABE-to-College Transition Programs described in this brief, extend the standard ABE curricula to include a module that prepares students to enter a broad range of college academic programs.

Others supplement the standard ABE curricula with “high intensity, individualized gap” instruction intended to develop very specific basic academic skill competencies students need to enter postsecondary training. Others target specific college vocational programs, which often do not require as high of a level of basic academic skills as college academic programs. For a thorough discussion of bridge programs, including examples from across the nation, see the report *Building Educational Bridges to Careers for Low-skill Adults: Program Development Guide* at [www.womenemployed.org](http://www.womenemployed.org).

- **Synergy with developmental education**, which is a practice that uses various combinations of adult education and developmental education instruction to help students acquire the basic academic skills needed to enter postsecondary training. Specific examples include using adult education to develop lower levels of academic skills and developmental education to develop higher levels. Another example is using adult education to teach reading and developmental education to teach math.

The CAAL report’s main recommendation is to create a “national opportunity system” through widespread local adult education to college transition programs that establish a “seamless curricular continuum from adult education through postsecondary education,” supported by coordinated assessment and placement systems that facilitate student progress.

This curricular continuum builds upon the existing adult education to college transition practices summarized above and represents a comprehensive vision for transition efforts. However, a good way to get started building such a system for most adult education and postsecondary training providers is to implement some of the pieces of such a system, which would include ABE-to-College Transition Programs. A series of follow-up reports by CAAL highlights details about specific adult education to college transition practices in certain states including Kentucky, Massachusetts, and Oregon. See [www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org).

## Policy Recommendations

Making adult education to college transition programs an explicit goal of the state’s adult education program and/or the community college system is the most basic way state public policy can support the development of ABE-to-College Transition Programs or other transition practices described here. Kentucky has such a policy and it has led to significant adult education to college transition practices among adult education and community college partners. **Arkansas should include adult education to**

**college transition programs as a part of the mission of both the state’s adult education program and the two-year college system.**

Kentucky and several other states have gone a step further by dedicating funding for the development and implementation of adult education to college transition programs. Florida has established the GED Plus College Preparation Program to facilitate program development. Kentucky and Massachusetts are providing demonstration grants to adult education and community college partners to develop and implement programs.

**To further facilitate the development of adult education to college transition programs, Arkansas should fund a demonstration project that provides grants to local adult education and two-year college partners to develop such programs.** \$300,000 could fund six local initiatives at \$50,000 apiece, which was the average start-up funding provided to local adult education programs under the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project. The demonstration should fund a broad range of practices, including ABE-to-College Transition Programs as described in this brief, as well other practices including the “curricular continuum” idea articulated by CAAL. There are many proven strategies and Arkansas would not want to emphasize only one kind of strategy.

Given that state funding for adult education has not increased for decades, and existing resources are stretched thin, a new state appropriation would be the best way to fund such a demonstration project. Alternatively, the state’s 15 percent discretionary funds under the Workforce Investment Act could be used, or as a last resort existing state adult education funds could be reallocated.

## Conclusion

Arkansas needs to be doing all that it can to improve the attainment of postsecondary credentials among the adult population in the state. The economic and social benefits of doing so are immense, and cannot be postponed any longer.

The ABE-to-College Transition Programs, or any of the other adult education to college transition practices described in this brief, are one more strategy Arkansas can add to its growing collection of strategies aimed at achieving this critical state goal. Given the relatively high number of adults with low levels of educational attainment in Arkansas, there simply is no proven strategy Arkansas should not be willing to employ. With a nominal state investment, Arkansas could create a demonstration project to help local adult education and two-year college partners develop adult education to college transition programs.

A demonstration project of this kind also would complement several recent strategies the state has undertaken to improve the attainment of postsecondary credentials among the adult population. Adult education to college transition programs would complement the new state Career Pathways Initiative, which is aimed at helping adult students obtain college credentials, by providing alternative or new practices for remediation, which again many students need.

Such programs would also complement the new Workforce Improvement Grant program, which is a need-based college scholarship program for adults, by providing alternative or new ways to get prepared for college.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Good Faith Fund, *What the Current Debate on Improving Education in Arkansas is Missing: Workforce Development*, Policy Points, Vol. 14, October 2001.
- <sup>2</sup> Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, *To Ensure America's Future: Building a National Opportunity System for Adults*, February 2005.
- <sup>3</sup> Crosta, P., Calcagno, J.C., Jenkins, D. and Leinbach, D.T, *Balancing Work, Family and School: Enrollment Patterns and Outcomes of Older Community College Students Compared to Traditional Age Students*, October 2005.

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