



STAYING THE COURSE: FACTORS
INFLUENCING ENROLLMENT AND
PERSISTENCE IN ADULT EDUCATION

by

Michelle Tolbert, MPR Associates, Inc.

This background paper
is part of a series
funded by



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education



STAYING THE COURSE

Factors Influencing Enrollment and Persistence in Adult Education

Michelle Tolbert, MPR Associates, Inc.

INTRODUCTION

Millions of our nation's adults lack the skills or competencies necessary to be successful in the workplace and society, but they are not enrolling or persisting in adult education programs. They may be unaware of the services available, believe that they would not benefit from participating, or have responsibilities that conflict with such activities. For adults who do enroll in federally funded programs, approximately one-third drop out or "stop out" before completing one education level.¹

While many adults do not participate or persist in adult education for reasons that are personal and beyond the control of programs, some do not enroll or remain in a program because of its quality or limited access to the courses and services they need. As noted in *A Blueprint for Preparing America's Future* (2003) by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, "Adults who make the personal investment in learning deserve a broad array of high-quality program options that best meet their needs."² The fact is that involvement in adult education and training is a choice, and participants often make considerable sacrifices to attend. If adults feel the program is not helping them achieve their goals or is not structured for their specific needs, they may decide the personal investment is not worth it and drop out.

To gain a better understanding of the factors influencing enrollment and persistence in adult education programs and what providers

can do to improve program quality and access, this paper will

- Examine who enrolls and does not enroll in adult education programs.
- Identify specific subpopulations needing assistance with basic skills.
- Describe promising practices used by programs to target subpopulations in need and to motivate and retain learners.

WHO ENROLLS IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS?

Adults needing assistance with their reading, writing, math, or English language skills can turn to a range of adult education providers, including school systems, community colleges, businesses, community- and faith-based organizations, libraries, public housing authorities, and volunteer organizations. Some programs receive federal and state dollars earmarked for adult education under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (P.L. 105-220). Many others do not, including some library literacy programs supported by their state library system and private donations. Only 38 percent of programs affiliated with ProLiteracy, the nation's leading volunteer literacy organization, reported receiving AEFLA dollars in 2003–2004; these programs serve more than 200,000 individuals a year.³ In addition, many community- and faith-based organizations do not receive AEFLA funds.

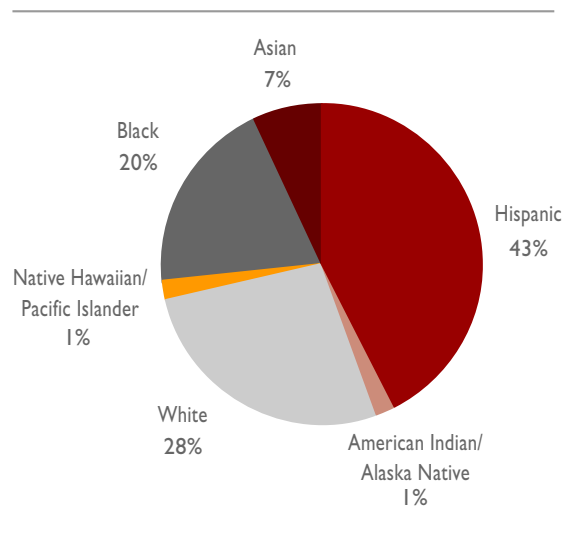
Institutions of higher education and businesses also provide adult education of various types. For example, 76 percent of Title IV degree-granting two- and four-year postsecondary institutions offered their freshmen developmental education courses during the 2000–2001 academic year, and 28 percent (670,880) of freshmen enrolled in such courses.⁴ Some manufacturers also provide their employees—hourly and managerial—with education and training. According to a 2001 National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) survey, 61 percent of the approximately 600 respondents reported dedicating 1 percent or more of payroll to training; 33 percent allocated 2 percent or more; and 17 percent spent 3 percent or more.⁵

Some adults, however, work independently on improving their skills and competencies, as the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) has documented. They found that a large proportion of adults preparing for the General Educational Development (GED) exam have chosen self-directed learning over enrolling in adult education programs.⁶ These adults have access to a variety of resources. For example, a search for GED resources on Amazon.com resulted in 870 books, 26 videos, and 17 DVDs. A Google.com search produced more than 20,000 GED-related websites.⁷

This diversity in sources for adult education services makes it difficult to determine an accurate total number of adults receiving literacy assistance. Enrollment data are available, however, for federally funded adult education programs. In 2003, more than 2.6 million adults enrolled, 40 percent of them in adult basic education, 17 percent in adult

secondary education, and 44 percent in English literacy instruction.⁸ In fact, enrollment in English literacy programs has more than quadrupled from 1980 to 2000 and is expected to continue rising.⁹ Hispanics now make up the largest racial/ethnic group receiving federally funded adult education services (Figure 1).¹⁰

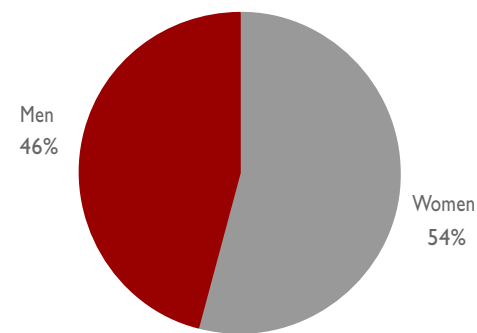
Figure 1—Race and Ethnicity of Participants in Federally Funded Adult Education Programs: 2003–2004



SOURCE: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.

Enrollment figures also show that 54 percent of adult education participants are women (Figure 2), 45 percent are between the ages of 25 and 44, and 39 percent are between the ages of 16 and 24 (Figure 3). Of these youth, a larger percentage (39 percent), representing more than 1 million young people, is enrolled in ABE programs than in years past (35 percent).¹¹ These statistics suggest that more young people are dropping out of high school with lower reading levels and less preparation for the GED exam than previously. This shift in youth enrollment has prompted the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S.

Figure 2—Gender of Participants in Federally Funded Adult Education Programs: 2003–2004

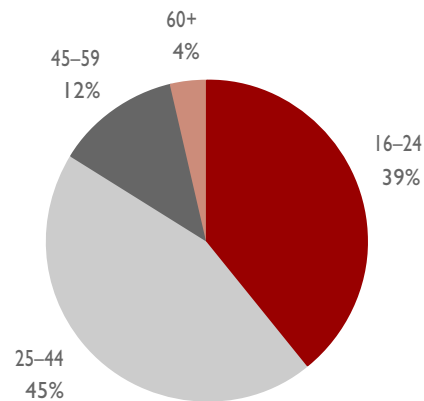


SOURCE: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.

Department of Education, to fund an analysis of state-level data on the out-of-school youth population to learn more about their characteristics and needs.

Regardless of race/ethnicity, gender, or age, a significant number of adult learners struggle with learning disabilities. While federal law does not require collection of data on adult learners with learning disabilities, it is estimated that between 15 and 30 percent have some form of learning disability. Some suggest that the percentage is even higher among adults with a seventh-grade reading level or below.¹² Assessing the number of adults with learning disabilities is particularly difficult, however, since many are unaware of their disability or have not had their disability documented. It is also likely that few immigrants have been screened for learning disabilities before coming to the United States. With or without documentation of their disability, these adults face an array of difficulties that can significantly affect their academic achievement and life.¹³

Figure 3—Age of Participants in Federally Funded Adult Education Programs: 2003–2004



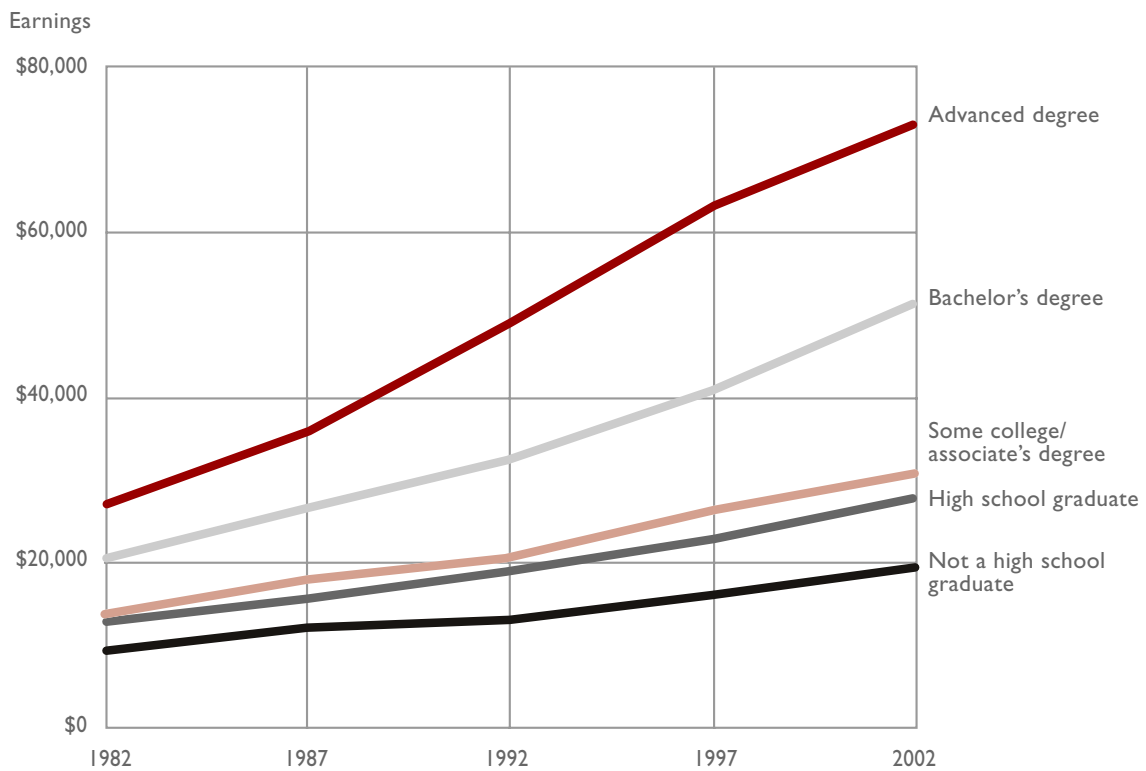
SOURCE: Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education.

WHICH ADULTS DO NOT ENROLL AND PERSIST IN ADULT EDUCATION?

Based on an analysis of the 2000 Census, more than 51 million adults have not earned a high school diploma or its equivalent.¹⁴ Of these adults, it is estimated that more than 20 million Americans are functioning at the lowest levels of literacy, and tens of millions lack the reading, writing, math, or English skills needed to be successful in the workforce and in their daily lives. Many of these adults, however, do not enroll or persist in adult education and literacy programs, even though today's workers face a labor market that increasingly requires more than a high school diploma.¹⁵

Educational attainment levels have always been strongly predictive of future earnings, but the income gap between highly educated and less educated Americans has grown rapidly in recent years (Figure 4). For example, in 2002, black and Hispanic college graduates

Figure 4—Mean Earnings of Workers 18 Years and Over, by Educational Attainment: 1982–2002



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.

earned 46 and 41 percent more, respectively, than those who held only a high school diploma (Figure 5). High school dropouts face even more difficult circumstances, as they earn 28 and 21 percent less than their black and Hispanic counterparts with only a high school diploma.

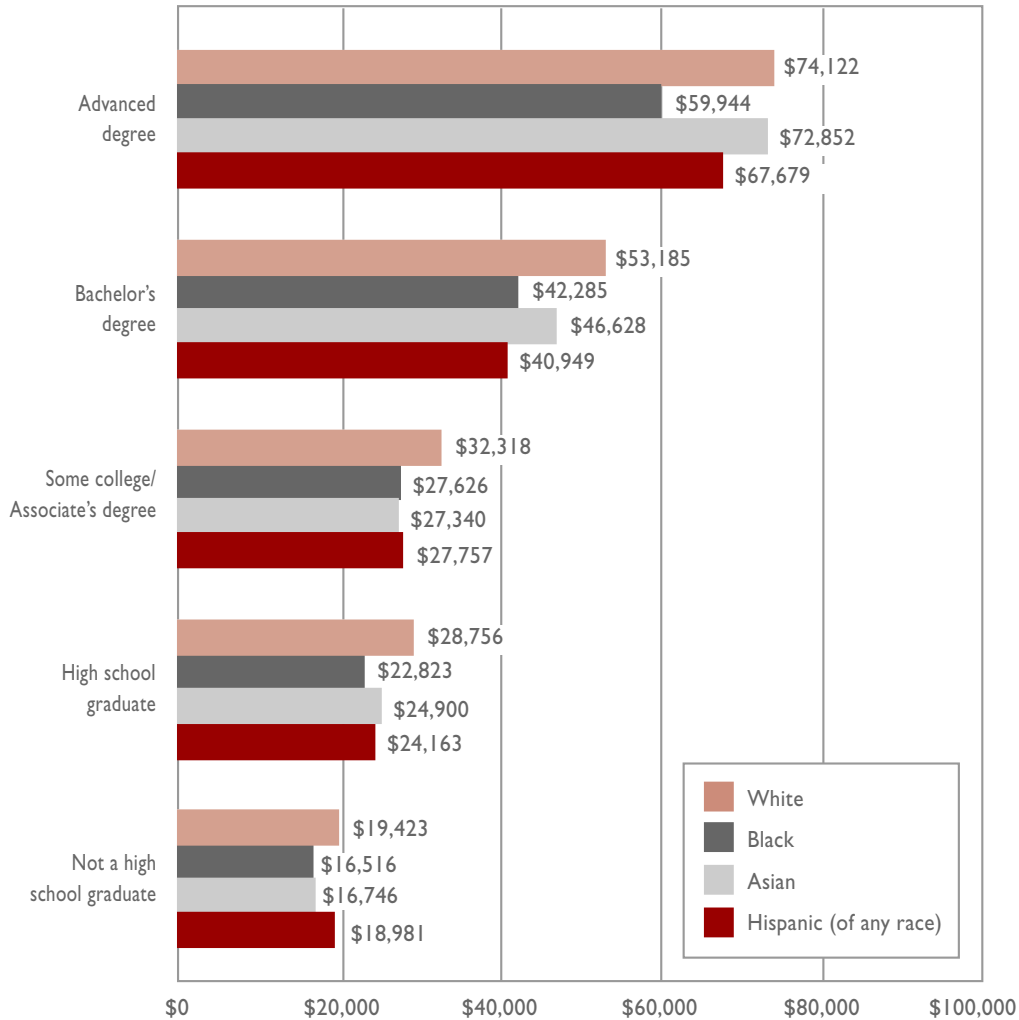
There are three overlapping subpopulations—adults with a combination of English literacy and basic skills needs, incumbent workers, and the working poor—that face significant academic and literacy challenges that, if left unresolved, could have far-reaching consequences for the economic strength of the nation. The following is a discussion of these groups, the challenges they face, and the

costs to society if their participation and persistence in adult education programs do not increase.

Adults with English Literacy and Basic Skills Needs

While many immigrants have successfully obtained employment, others lack jobs or work for little money. In 2002, nearly 17 percent of foreign-born residents were living in poverty, compared with 12 percent of native-born Americans. Many of those living in poverty have English literacy and basic skills needs. As the 2000 Census figures show, approximately 9 million foreign-born individuals reported not speaking English well or at all. In addition, 22 percent have less than a

Figure 5—Average Earnings in 2002 by Educational Attainment, Race, and Hispanic Origin for All Workers, 18 Years and Over



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce.

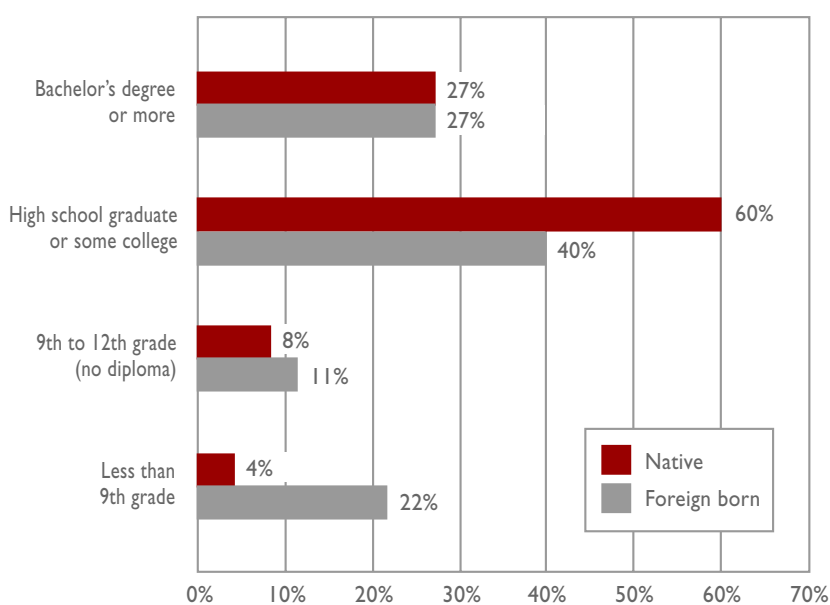
9th-grade education and 11 percent fall between 9th- and 12th-grade levels, compared with 4 and 8 percent, respectively, of the native population (Figure 6). These statistics are significant considering that one in eight workers today is foreign-born, compared with one in 17 in 1960. In fact, foreign-born workers constituted nearly half of the labor market expansion between 1996 and

2000.¹⁶ As a result, the strength of the U.S. economy has become increasingly dependent on the quality of immigrant workers.¹⁷

Incumbent Workers

Many immigrant workers also fall into another group that could benefit from more education and training: incumbent workers. According to the American Management

Figure 6—Educational Attainment, by Nativity: 2003



SOURCE: *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003* (P20-551), U.S. Census Bureau.

Association (AMA), firms requiring job applicants to complete basic literacy and math tests reported a 34 percent failure rate in 2000, down slightly from 1999 but still higher than in previous years (Figure 7).¹⁸ Similar results were found on a 2001 survey by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM); 80 percent of the executives polled said they had a “moderate to serious” shortage of qualified job candidates in areas ranging from entry-level production work to craft specialties. Thirty-two percent complained that their employees lacked important reading and writing skills, and about one-quarter cited deficiencies in math, verbal communication, and spoken English.¹⁹

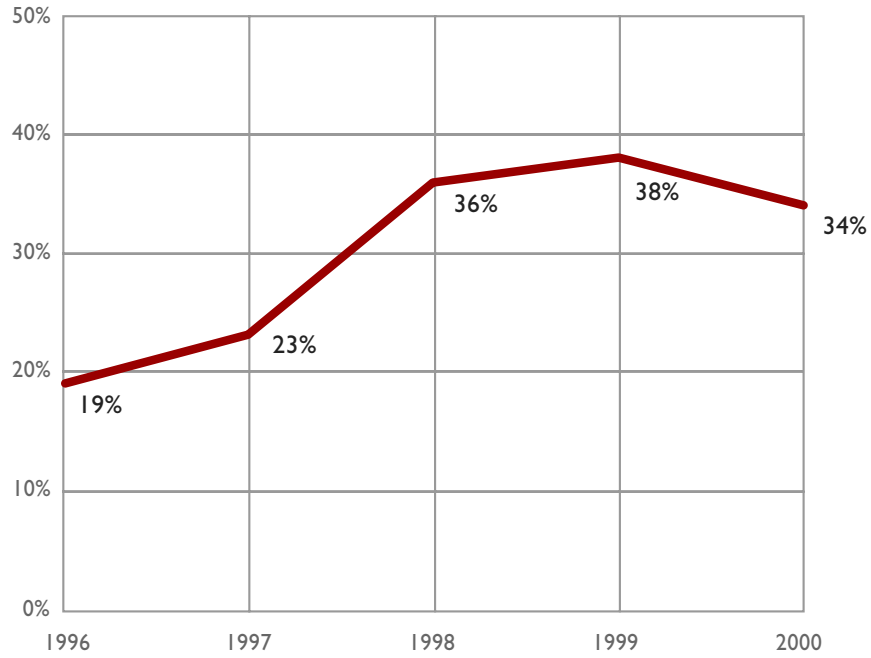
Despite the clear need to offer many workers help in developing their skills and competencies, the AMA found that some businesses stopped offering education and

training as part of their mid-1990s cost-cutting initiatives. Its survey detected a drop in the percentage of businesses providing their employees with remedial programs. Only slightly more than 12 percent offered such programs in 2001, compared with nearly 16 percent in 1999.²⁰ While these declines may be small, it is likely that the need for adult education in the workforce far exceeds the supply.

The Working Poor

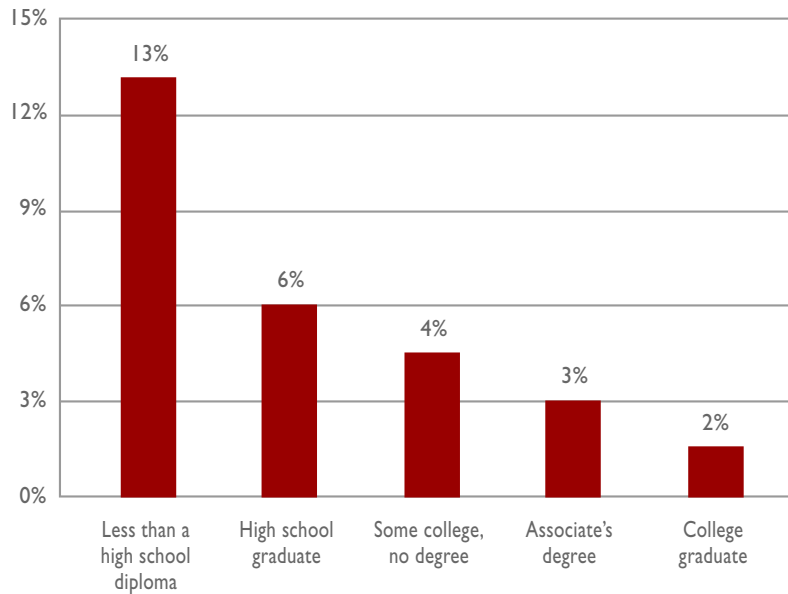
The working poor also often lack the basic skills and competencies needed to be successful in today’s economy. Of the 34.6 million children and adults who lived at or below the official poverty level in 2000, 7.4 million qualified as the “working poor” (individuals who spend a minimum of 27 weeks each year in the labor force, but whose income is below the poverty level).²¹ According to the U.S. Department of Labor, lack of education was closely correlated with an individual’s inability to earn a living wage. Among those considered the working poor, 13 percent were high school dropouts, 6 percent were high school graduates, and only 2 percent were college graduates (Figure 8).

Figure 7—Percentage of Job Applicants Tested and Found to Be Lacking Skills Necessary for the Positions They Sought: 1996–2000



SOURCE: American Management Association.

Figure 8—Percentage of Individuals Classified as Working Poor, by Educational Attainment: 2001



SOURCE: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

The connection between increased education levels and moving out of poverty is noteworthy. According to an analysis based on five of the largest welfare-to-work studies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *National Evaluation of Welfare-to-Work Strategies* conducted by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, simply enrolling the working poor in adult basic education courses is not the answer, nor is a rigid training-first policy. This examination of welfare programs between 1985 and 1999 found that the best results, regardless of program goals (e.g., reducing poverty, reducing dependency, lowering costs, or helping children), came from programs that struck a balance between job search activities and work-related education and training. Although the emphasis on employment is important, the researchers contend that the benefits of education and training should not be ignored.²² They believe more research is needed to understand what types of programs are most helpful: “We still know little about the success of more innovative pre- and post-employment training and community college programs, yet innovation is clearly called for if welfare reform is to deliver on its potential not only to save money but also to help families increase their income.”²³

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE PARTICIPATION AND PERSISTENCE?

While connecting more adults with education and training services could help them develop the skills and competencies required in today’s workplace and society, some adults will continue to perceive that they will not benefit from participating because they are unaware of their own skill gaps. In fact, the majority of adults who demonstrated limited skills on the National Adult Literacy Survey of 1992 (NALS) described themselves as reading

or writing English well.²⁴ Other adults are simply unaware of the services available. Many adults with literacy needs also face numerous obstacles, such as lack of child-care, transportation difficulties, learning disabilities, personal or medical problems, embarrassment, and scheduling conflicts, that prevent them from participating.

As noted previously, many adults who do enroll do not remain in programs long enough to achieve their educational goals. Many drop out because they feel the program is not serving them effectively. In 2003–2004, for example, 31 percent of adults who participated for 12 hours or more in federally funded programs dropped out or stopped out before completing one educational level.²⁵

These numbers, however, do not tell the whole story. Many of the personal obstacles that keep adults from enrolling in education and training programs also were cited by learners as reasons for dropping out. Indeed, competing responsibilities make it difficult for adults to persist in any type of education program, including higher education.²⁶ But while adults may drop out of an adult education program because of personal obstacles, many return later to continue working toward their goals. Distinguishing between those who are “stopping out” and planning to return from those who leave because they are dissatisfied with available services is not possible with the current enrollment data collected by the federal government.²⁷ The federal government is encouraging states, however, to develop their capacity to track adults throughout their learning process by reconfiguring state databases to generate longitudinal data across reporting years. For example, the Policy and Program Studies Service, U.S. Department of

Education, is funding a study, *Using State Administrative Records for Analyses of Student Attendance, Student Achievement, and Economic Outcomes: A Three-State Pilot Study*, examining the usefulness of linking state and local administrative data and student-level information to identify patterns of student attendance and persistence for longer than a single year or 18 months. Examples of how states can accomplish this will also be documented by the ongoing study.

WHAT PRACTICES HELP IMPROVE PARTICIPATION AND PERSISTENCE IN ADULT EDUCATION?

Adults are more likely to participate and persist in programs if the courses and services offered match their needs and are of high quality.²⁸ While some programs have made great strides in achieving these goals, others have not. As noted in the *Blueprint for Preparing America's Future*, "Across the Nation, thousands of teachers and volunteers work hard to help low-literate adults, and there are remarkable stories of individual and program achievement. Still, as a whole, there is little consistency or guarantee of rigor in the content or quality of instructional methods among the loose network of programs."²⁹ It is therefore the responsibility of states and the federal government to encourage programs across the system to adopt practices that will ensure program quality and access, and in turn help adult learners achieve their goals. These practices include:

- Leveraging resources and forming partnerships to market and expand program offerings and other services to learners.
- Targeting instruction and content to meet specific needs in the community.

- Improving program quality by setting challenging expectations for students, aligning instruction to meet those expectations, and using meaningful assessments.

Palm Beach County, Florida, offers an example of how leveraging resources and forming partnerships can help a community market, raise funds, and recruit for adult education. When a senior executive of a local newspaper researched the literacy services in the community, she found that adults were unaware of the services available and that the community had little knowledge about the need for adult education. With the help of local leaders, she created the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition. Today, the Coalition manages a literacy hotline, hosts several annual fund-raising and awareness events, provides volunteer training, and runs learner and volunteer recruitment campaigns throughout the year. Multiple funding sources, including grants and donations, support the work of the Coalition. In 2001, the Coalition recruited 1,078 adult learners and 511 volunteers and directed them to more than 60 learning sites. With the help of a corporate foundation, it also hosted a spelling bee for adult learners that raised more than \$25,000 for literacy programs.³⁰ To learn more about these and other activities, read the Coalition's profile on the Community Partnerships for Adult Learning (C-PAL) website, <http://www.c-pal.net/profiles/florida.html>. Event implementation guides and a report about its faith-based partnerships also can be found on the Coalition's website, <http://www.pbcliteracy.org/>.

Partnerships and leveraged resources also have helped programs expand their services

and address the needs of specific populations. For example, in Louisville, Kentucky, Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education (JCPSAE) has teamed up with the Metro Louisville Community Action Partnership (CAP) to create Project ACHIEVE, a partnership that serves low-income adults who need to acquire marketable employment skills. The partnership began in 1989 when CAP, a local government agency with a nonprofit arm, lost federal funding for its instructors and turned to JCPSAE for help. Over the years, the partnership has evolved into Project ACHIEVE. The two partners provide low-income adults with a seven-week, skills-based job-readiness class, with an emphasis on office technology and the goal of placing students in jobs with growth potential. Each organization contributes resources. Instructors, a computer lab, and software are provided by JCPSAE, and some funding, recruitment, job placement, case management, and follow-up are provided by CAP.³¹

Partnership funds have come from different sources at different times, but this lack of consistency and certainty has not stopped the partners from continuing their work. JCPSAE and CAP have learned to adapt to shifting funding sources and changing demands by remaining committed to the ultimate goal—helping low-income adults—and by being flexible and creative with their dollars. They do not rely just on the usual sources of funds; they continually seek new resources.³² To learn more about ACHIEVE and other partnerships in Louisville, Kentucky, read the profile for Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education at <http://www.c-pal.net/profiles/kentucky.html>.

On a larger scale, the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) works with experts in

the field, local programs, and Toyota to improve and expand the services available for Hispanic and other immigrant families with the lowest literacy skills. Culturally relevant strategies for working with these families are being developed and studied by NCFL's Hispanic Family Learning Institute. With a grant from Toyota, the Institute has established the Toyota Family Literacy Program, which includes 15 model programs in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Providence, and Washington, DC.³³

Since its inception, the Institute has created a number of instructional materials and tools that are available to programs and communities nationwide, including a Practitioner Toolkit funded by the U.S. Department of Education and designed to assist educators who work with English language learners (<http://www.famlit.org/Publications/Practitioner-Toolkit-ELL.cfm>). Through collaboration with Fairfield Language Technologies, NCFL also is providing some programs with free access to Rosetta Stone English Language Development software. Other initiatives are pending, including a special curriculum called *Parenting for Academic Success*, aimed at parents whose native language is not English and who have children in kindergarten through third grade.³⁴ For further information about the Hispanic Family Learning Institute at NCFL, go to <http://www.famlit.org/ProgramsandInitiatives/HFLI/index.cfm>.

Partnering, leveraging resources, and targeting services to disadvantaged subpopulations are only part of the equation, however. Providers must also develop and expand their use of data to assess and improve the quality and management of their programs. To encourage this, the U.S. Department of Education and five states—Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and

Washington—have sponsored an initiative, the Northwest Quality Initiative, to increase the program improvement capacity of local providers using the AIDDE³⁵ implementation model. Developed and implemented by Abt Associates, the AIDDE model is a problem-based learning process that involves state adult education officials, local adult education program managers, and ABE instructors and staff working together toward systemic change and program improvement in adult education.

Since 2001, approximately 100 ABE programs have been trained to use the AIDDE model in: 1) analyzing data and current practices to identify program areas requiring change, 2) identifying priorities for improvement and new practices that can be used to address current problems, 3) developing a plan to implement new practices, 4) documenting the extent to which new practices are used to improve a program, and 5) evaluating the outcomes of new practices. The ABE programs in the Northwest Quality Initiative have enhanced their recruitment, orientation, and learner intake processes; strengthened their learner assessment procedures; and increased retention through improved program operations and instruction. As a result of using the AIDDE model, staff are better able to identify the processes in their programs that are not operating effectively and to use data and research to identify new ways to improve program services.³⁶ More detailed findings from this study will be summarized in a final report that will be available on Abt's website, www.abtassociates.com.

The Adult Education and Flexible Evening High School in Frederick County, Maryland, is also exploring ways data can be used for program improvement. It requires instructors

to collaborate with learners in developing Individual Learning Plans (ILP) to help learners track their achievement. The ILPs include educational goals and benchmarks evaluated by the learner and instructor on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Instructors also are provided with benchmarks of their own in their professional development plans, which include goals identified and periodically reviewed by the instructor, the lead teacher, and the administrator. Yet, like many other programs, Frederick County continues to face the challenge of ensuring that learners attend class for a sufficient period of time to make progress. Even if a program takes the steps necessary to provide high-quality instruction and a range of courses, persistence remains an issue. As the director of Frederick County's adult education program pointed out, his English literacy classes are full in the winter, but attendance drops significantly in the summer when landscaping and other popular summer jobs for immigrants become available.³⁷

CONCLUSION

There are no easy solutions to the problem of improving participation and persistence in adult education. Adult learners' many competing responsibilities may discourage them from enrolling or require them to drop out of programs before reaching their educational goals. By providing high-quality content and instruction and a variety of courses, however, programs have a better chance of engaging new learners and giving dropout or stop-out learners a reason to come back. The nation's economic prosperity depends on having a workforce with strong workplace skills and competencies and the ability to communicate in English. Although some programs have developed effective strategies to recruit, motivate, and retain learners, much work remains to be done.

NOTES

¹U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2005). *National Reporting System: Reports of Aggregate NRS Tables*. Washington, DC: Author.

²U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2003). *A Blueprint for Preparing America's Future*. Washington, DC: Author.

³ProLiteracy America. (2003). *2002–03 Statistical Report*. Retrieved March 8, 2005, from http://www.proliteracy.org/proliteracy_america/asr.asp.

⁴Parsad, B. & Lewis, L. (2003). *Remedial Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions in Fall 2000* (NCES 2004-010). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

⁵National Association of Manufacturers. (2001). *The Skills Gap 2001: Manufacturers Confront Persistent Skills Shortages in an Uncertain Economy*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁶Reder, S. & Strawn, C. (2001). Program Participation and Self-Directed Learning to Improve Basic Skills. *Focus on Basics*, 3(D) Boston: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

⁷Searches on Amazon.com and Google.com were conducted on March 8, 2005.

⁸U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2005). *National Reporting System: Statistical Reports*. Washington, DC: Author. Enrollment figures for workplace education and family literacy programs are incorporated in the enrollment figures for adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English literacy.

⁹U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2001). *Adult Education Data and Statistics*. Washington, DC: Author.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Vogel, S. (November 1998). *How Many Adults Really Have Learning Disabilities?* LD Online. Retrieved October 28, 2005, from http://www.ldonline.org/Ld_indepth/adult/vogel_howmany.html.

¹³Corely, M. & Taymans, J. (2002). Adults with Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Literature. In J. Comings, B. Garner, and C. Smith (Eds.), *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy* (Vol. 3, pp. 44–83). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

¹⁴Lasater, B. & Elliott, B. (April 2004). *Profiles of the Adult Education Target Population: Information from the 2000 Census*. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI International.

¹⁵Cheeseman Day, J. & Newburger, E. (July 2002). *The Big Payoff: Educational Attainment and Synthetic Estimates of Work-Life Earnings* (P23-210). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁶Larsen, L. (2004). *The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 2003* (Current Population Reports ed.) (P20-551). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau.

¹⁷Mosisa, A. (May 2002). *The Role of Foreign-born Workers in the U.S. Economy* (Monthly Labor Review). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

¹⁸American Management Association. (2001). *2001 AMA Survey on Workplace Testing: Basic Skills, Job Skills, Psychological Measurement*. New York: Author.

¹⁹National Association of Manufacturers. (2001). *The Skills Gap 2001: Manufacturers Confront Persistent Skills Shortages in an Uncertain Economy*. Washington, DC: Author.

²⁰American Management Association. (2001). *2001 AMA Survey on Workplace Testing: Basic Skills, Job Skills, Psychological Measurement*. New York: Author.

²¹U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (September 2004). *A Profile of the Working Poor, 2002*. Washington, DC: Author.

²²Gueron, J. & Hamilton, G. (April 2002). *The Role of Education and Training in Welfare Reform*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution.

²³Ibid., p. 7.

²⁴The 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) was designed to measure the progression from simple to more complex cognitive skills associated with everyday tasks involving prose, document, and quantitative skills. Five performance levels were designated. Adults (16 years old and older) performing at Level 1 generally could read a little, but not enough to fill out a job application or read a children's book. The majority of those scoring at Level 2 could compare, contrast, or integrate pieces of information, but did not exhibit higher-level reading and problem-solving skills. Most adults who scored at Levels 3 through 5 could apply more complex cognitive skills to long and dense texts and documents.

²⁵U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2005). *National Reporting System: Reports of Aggregate NRS Tables*. Washington, DC: Author.

²⁶Kerka, S. (1995). *Adult Learner Retention Revisited* (ERIC Digest No. 166). Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education.

²⁷Belzer, A. (March 1998). Stopping Out Not Dropping Out. *Focus on Basics*, 2 (A), Boston: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

²⁸Porter, K., Cuban, S., Comings, J., & Chase, V. (January 2005). "One Day I Will Make It": A Study of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs. New York: MDRC.

²⁹U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2003). *A Blueprint for Preparing America's Future* (p. 4). Washington, DC: Author.

³⁰Anderson (Bobbitt), S. & Zimmerman, C. (2004). *Community Partnerships for Adult Learning, Partnership Profiles: The Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition and its Partners in Palm Beach County, Florida*. Retrieved October 28, 2005, from <http://www.c-pal.net/profiles/florida.html>.

³¹Fowler, D. & Chernus, K. (2004). *Community Partnerships for Adult Learning, Partnership Profiles: Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education and its Partners in Louisville, Kentucky*. Retrieved October 28, 2005, from <http://www.c-pal.net/profiles/kentucky.html>.

³²Ibid.

³³Information was provided by Ginger Wilding with the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) on March 9, 2005.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵AIDDE stands for: Analyze current practice and determine focus for change. Identify information for changing practice. Design an implementation plan. Document practice. Evaluate.

³⁶Information was provided by Judy Alamprese with Abt Associates, Inc. on April 12, 2005.

³⁷Information was provided by Richard Ramsburg with the Adult Education and Evening High School of Frederick County Public Schools on June 24, 2003.