



# A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY

*Strategies to Focus Adult Education  
on College and Career*

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## *about this report*

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This report is second in a series addressing the basic skills system in California. The first report, *Rethinking Basic Skills Education in California: Principles for Policymakers*, was authored by Barbara Baran and published in January 2012 by LearningWorks.

LearningWorks was founded by the Career Ladders Project (CLP) for California Community Colleges, the Research and Planning (RP) Group for California Community Colleges, and the California Community Colleges Success Network (3CSN) to facilitate, disseminate and fund practitioner-informed recommendations for changes at the system and classroom levels, infusing these strategies with statewide and national insights.

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# A Golden Opportunity

DESPITE STILL HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, over the long run California may face a skills gap that could threaten our future prosperity and competitiveness. By 2020, much of California's prime age workforce will be from population groups that are underrepresented in higher education. As a result, the Public Policy Institute of California predicts that California will face a shortage of college-educated labor. Other reports point to a shortage of "middle skilled" workers as well.<sup>1</sup>

Yet many Californians are not eligible to enter high quality postsecondary programs because they lack the basic English or math skills to do so, and California's education and training system is ill-prepared to meet their needs. Adult Education programs, which together with the community colleges provide basic skills education (see box next page), were severely cut back during the state's long fiscal crisis, and many of those that remain were created for an era in which a high school diploma or GED was sufficient for obtaining a good job. As a result, these programs are not adequately focused on preparing students to enter and succeed in postsecondary education and training and, in fact, very few students in basic skills programs in California make the transition. Lack of integration across institutions and programs—particularly between Adult Education and the community colleges—and outdated program design and pedagogy mean that remedial and English-as-a-Second Language courses are often duplicative and disconnected from career tech-

nical and academic programs, erecting serious barriers to student success. Students in basic skills programs waste time and money as a result of these problems, and many simply drop out.

California institutions and policymakers have taken some steps to address these concerns. The California Department of Education's (CDE) Adult Education program developed and hopes to implement a new strategic plan that makes transition to college and career a central goal. With legislative support, the California Community Colleges (CCC) implemented a Basic Skills Initiative to improve outcomes for students with weak basic English and math skills. Still, there is clear evidence that outcomes for students in basic skills programs continue to be poor:

- Most students in basic skills programs make minimal progress;
- An extremely small share of students in basic skills programs enter postsecondary education and attain a certificate, degree, or transfer to a four-year college;
- The length of time it takes students to move through the levels of the basic skills programs is one principal reason for these disappointing outcomes. Most students simply drop out. For those who do not, beginning at lower levels of remediation can add up to two years to a student's time to completion.

<sup>1</sup> Defined as workers with some postsecondary education or training but less than a bachelor's degree.

There has been considerable documentation of these problems over the past three years. The California Budget Project published a series of studies documenting how few students in California’s basic skills “system” make significant gains; the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges analyzed potential strategies for improving basic skills outcomes in the CCCs.<sup>2</sup> The Little Hoover Commission pointed to duplication and disappointing results in the overall basic skills system, and recommended transferring governance of the Adult Education program from the CDE to the CCCs.<sup>3</sup> Very recently, the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) released a report arguing for dedicated funding and the restructuring of the state’s Adult Education system.<sup>4</sup> Governor Brown’s 2013-14 budget proposal has given real urgency to this policy discussion by recommending reinstatement of dedicated state funding for Adult Education, while also directing the new funding to the CCCs, rather than CDE. However, the Governor’s proposal does not address broader concerns about the design and delivery of basic skills education.

Other states have confronted the same challenges with which California is now wrestling. Some have made major strides in redesigning their education and workforce systems to accelerate students’ acquisition of basic math and English skills and improve students’ success in accessing and completing postsecondary programs connected to labor market opportunities.

The purpose of this brief is to help inform the current debate by examining what California might learn from these experiences, using four policy levers utilized successfully by other states to facilitate the change: *governance structures, state strategic plans and funding guidelines, innovation initiatives, and accountability systems*. The seven states interviewed for this study were Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Washington, and Wisconsin. We begin with governance structures since that issue is raised by the Governor’s proposal.

## Basic Skills Education Roadmap

Nationally, two principal kinds of basic skills services are offered to adult learners: Adult Education and developmental education.

### ADULT EDUCATION

*Includes adult basic education (ABE), for those at the lowest skill levels of math and/or English; adult secondary education (ASE) and GED preparation, for those at higher levels; and English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) instruction. Adult Education is funded by Title II of the federal Workforce Investment Act and usually by state monies as well.*

### DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

*Offered by community colleges, largely serves high school graduates who are not college-ready (including ESL students). Developmental education is often offered for credit, although frequently that credit is not applicable toward a degree or transfer.*

In California, the Adult Education program is administered by the California Department of Education, and primarily delivered by a network of adult schools. In some communities, the community college is the designated Adult Education program provider, although some community-based and other organizations also offer Adult Education. In addition to developmental education, some California community colleges offer non-credit basic skills programs very similar in their services to the Adult Education program. Overall, there is poor coordination across California’s basic skills programs, including different approaches to assessment and outcomes measurement.

<sup>2</sup> The California Budget Project’s *At a Crossroads* series included: *Basic skills education in California* (updated April 2010); *Financing basic skills education in California* (April 2010); *Basic skills students: Who succeeds and why* (May 2011); and *Gateway to a better future: Creating a basic skills system for California* (May 2011). For the report by the Center for Student Success and the Research and Planning Group of the California Community Colleges, see Borach, et al., (2007).

<sup>3</sup> Little Hoover Commission, (2012) *Serving students, serving California: Updating California community colleges to meet evolving demands*.

<sup>4</sup> Steenhausen, (2012) *Restructuring California’s adult education system*.



# Integrating adult basic education and community college governance to help more basic skills students transition into postsecondary education

IN CALIFORNIA, the basic skills programs in the community colleges and those of the Adult Education program of the California Department of Education (CDE) have historically been under separate governance, though in a few communities the community colleges are the official Adult Education program provider. Governor Brown has now raised the question of whether outcomes for Adult Education students would be improved by integrating Adult Education and community college governance.

Looking across the country, the K-12 agency operates Adult Education in the majority of states; although recently, a number have made the decision to move their Adult Education programs to the community or technical college system, and at least one has created an overarching policy coordination body. What difference does combined governance make? Shifting governance poses real challenges and dangers; in doing so, states need to pay attention to how all the populations served by Adult Education will be affected. Most of the reform strategies described in subsequent sections of this paper can be implemented without a change in governance.<sup>5</sup> Yet the experience of some of the interviewed states points to advantages that can be gained by bringing the Adult Education and postsecondary systems under a common umbrella. Integrated governance may:

## **INCREASE THE FOCUS OF ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS ON TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

In 1991, the state of Washington transferred governance of the technical colleges and Adult Education to the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC). An Adult Education Advisory Council, charged with viewing the Adult Education system as a whole and making recommendations to the SBCTC, was created at the same time. Since then, Adult Education has been increasingly tightly integrated into the strategies of the college system, which has launched a series of innovations that are designed to move students as quickly as possible into career technical and academic courses.

Similarly, Illinois reported that moving governance of Adult Education from K-12 to the community college system was foundational in their efforts to develop programming that effectively links remediation with academic and career technical college programs. The move led to a major change in their strategic plan, including focusing programs on the need to offer basic skills “bridges” into career pathways.

In North Carolina, Adult Education has been part of the community college system from the beginning and is offered in all 58 colleges. Over the past five years, there has been a

growing emphasis on transitioning Adult Education students into college courses, which is affecting the location of Adult Education within the colleges. Some colleges now are moving Adult Education from non-credit continuing education departments, where most have been housed, into for-credit academic departments where remediation can be more effectively integrated into other course offerings.

## **FACILITATE IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTION AND DELIVERY MODELS THAT REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF TIME STUDENTS SPEND IN REMEDIATION AND IMPROVE STUDENT SUCCESS**

The fact that Adult Education and career technical education are under the same roof made it easier for Washington to develop its well-known I-BEST program that accelerates remediation and student progress overall by embedding remedial math, English, and ESL within career technical and academic courses. Similarly, in Wisconsin, the integration of Adult Education into the technical colleges has eased the development of many integrated basic skills-career technical education (CTE) programs similar to I-BEST, where Adult Education and CTE teachers coordinate their curricula and instruction. In North Carolina, a new initiative—Basic Skills Plus—has been launched that allows up to 20 percent of Adult Education monies to be used for a co-enrollment program (contextualized basic skills

<sup>5</sup> For example, although Minnesota’s Adult Education program remains housed within the Minnesota Department of Education, beginning in 2007, its Adult Education Office (AEO) joined with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), and other state partners to develop the FastTRAC Adult Career Pathway Alliance. The colleges are now integral to the initiative and the latest FastTRAC model links a series of remedial and career technical training programs to allow students with low skills to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in a given sector.



and CTE), including using those funds to support CTE instructors.

#### **MAKE POSSIBLE THE ARTICULATION OR INTEGRATION OF ADULT AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION**

The disconnect between Adult Education and the (usually) for-credit developmental education offered by community colleges often slows the progress of students in basic skills programs, sometimes significantly. In Wisconsin, where Adult Education has long been with the technical college system, the link to developmental education is particularly advanced. Adult basic education (ABE) and adult secondary education (ASE) are clearly delineated with a certified statewide curricula, but developmental education is also focused on students assessed at the 9th to 12th grade skill levels, is often taught by Adult Education teachers, and has the same content and same teacher certification. Adult basic education, adult secondary education, ESL, and developmental education in Wisconsin all prepare students to enter college-level courses.<sup>6</sup>

The governance change in Ohio allowed them to launch a pilot program in 2010 to link adult and developmental education through regional partnerships of community colleges and Adult Education providers. Despite the state not having new funding for the pilots, all 23 colleges agreed to participate and are making progress in increasing student transitions. In Washington, plans are underway to integrate Adult Education and developmental education. To date, programs for very low level ESL students have been much less affected, but the state is now also turning to link those more effectively to college and careers. In North Carolina, Adult Education is being increasingly moved into academic departments; adult basic education and developmental education programs are being blended and teachers are being cross-trained.

#### **CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Bringing together institutions that serve adult learners, particularly Adult Education and community/technical colleges, can be a foundational catalyst for change. There

are, however, substantial barriers to using this policy lever. These include the fact that changing governance is politically difficult and sometimes impossible, and can be disruptive to programs. In a tough funding environment, institutions may be too beleaguered to take on major reform; and, most importantly, states may incorrectly assume that integrating governance by itself will break down program silos and lead to improved performance. Other lessons learned from the interviewed states include:

- *A change in governance has to reflect a new vision for Adult Education.* Ohio shifted Adult Education to the Ohio Board of Regents as part of an overall reform effort that also brought together the community colleges and postsecondary vocational schools. Maybe partially because Adult Education was not the primary target of the reorganization, the change has not yet had a substantial impact on the design and delivery of Adult Education services. In contrast, there was a clear vision driving the governance

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<sup>6</sup>That is, students are not sent to developmental education after completing ABE, as they often are in many states including California.

change in Illinois: that Adult Education serve as the “foundation of a career pathways system that prepares adult learners for economic self-sufficiency.” Today, the Adult Education program is completely embedded in a career pathway context and Adult Education is built into the colleges’ performance measures. Likewise, Indiana moved Adult Education from its state Department of Education to the Department of Workforce Development (DWD). As part of the paradigm shift, DWD emphasized the alignment of Adult Education with workforce and post-secondary training. Moreover, DWD made Adult Education funds competitively available to consortia of partners across its economic growth regions. These partners included Adult Education, workforce, postsecondary education, and community service organizations.

- *Shifting governance can be a long and complicated process and stakeholder buy-in is crucial.* For example, after Illinois moved Adult Education under the authority of the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), ICCB consciously maintained a diverse delivery system composed of about equal numbers of colleges, community-based organizations, and local educational authorities, as well as the Department of Corrections. The

change had the desired effect of greater emphasis on getting Adult Education students into and through college programs. But the transition had significant challenges, including the need to establish credibility with Adult Education providers. The process took three to four years and included meetings held throughout the state and the creation of a multi-stakeholder advisory committee.

- *If shared governance is not possible or desirable within the context of a given state, many of its advantages can be achieved by developing close partnerships among key education and workforce programs and institutions.*

#### POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

As California considers its current governance structure, the experience of other states would suggest that the bigger question is our vision for a 21st century Adult Education system. There is growing evidence that the principles of an effective program include:<sup>7</sup>

- *Integration:* Whether under combined governance or not, the Adult Education program, community college noncredit basic skills programs, and community college credit basic skills programs must be tightly integrated so that students are not forced to take duplicative,

disconnected courses.

- *Opportunity:* Basic skills offerings should link students to career technical and academic pathways that provide them the opportunity to continue their education.
- *Flexibility:* Rigidly defining students by “levels” slows progress and wastes time and money; instead, interventions should be flexibly tailored to the needs of students.
- *Student support:* Students in basic skills programs are more likely to be successful if they receive adequate counseling, peer group support, and financial aid.

Effective programs also require adequate and dedicated funding, and must take into account the differing needs of the diverse populations they serve. Finally, it is important to distinguish between the governance and delivery systems. Combining governance does not mean limiting the range of providers of Adult Education services, which can include K-12 providers, community-based organizations, community colleges, and others. In fact, there is evidence that diversity, especially in the form of partnerships among these kinds of providers, strengthens programs and extends their reach.

<sup>7</sup> For example, see: Foster, Strawn, & Duke-Benfield, (2011) *Beyond basic skills: State strategies to connect low-skilled students to an employer-valued postsecondary education*; Duke & Strawn, (2008) *Overcoming obstacles, optimizing opportunities: State policies to increase postsecondary attainment for low-skilled adults*; Mwase, (2008) *Better together: Realigning pre-college skills development programs to achieve greater academic success for adult learners*; Spangenberg, Feist, & Heitner, (2005) *To ensure America's future: Building a national opportunity system for adults – strengthening links between adult education and community colleges*; Strawn, (2011) *Farther, faster: Six promising programs show how career pathway bridges help basic skill students earn credentials that matter*; Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, (2010) *Referral, enrollment, and completion in developmental education sequences in community colleges*; Hern, (2010) *Exponential attrition and the promise of acceleration in developmental English and math*; Wiseley, (2011) *Effective basic skills instruction: The case for contextualized developmental math*; Jenkins, (2011) *Get with the program: Accelerating community college students' entry into and completion of programs of study*; Baran & Lovell, (2011) *Gateway to a better future: creating a basic skills system for California*.



# Using strategic plans and Adult Education funding guidelines to signal a new focus on college and careers

REGARDLESS OF their governance structure, states are using strategic plans and other vision statements for Adult Education (and the systems that govern or partner with Adult Education) to create a new paradigm for basic skills services focused on college and career success. These goals are then implemented through the criteria set by states when they fund local Adult Education providers. A competitive process for selecting and funding Adult Education providers is required of states by the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title II, which is the primary source of federal funds for Adult Education. The state's Request for Applications (RFA) or Request for Proposals (RFP) for Adult Education funding translates the vision in the Adult Education strategic plan and the requirements in WIA Title II into concrete expectations for providers about program content, outcomes, delivery methods, and partners. Overall, strategic state plans/vision statements and Adult Education RFA/RFP guidelines can:

## SET COLLEGE AND CAREER GOALS FOR ADULT EDUCATION IN ITS STRATEGIC PLAN

States can send a clear signal about a new direction for Adult Education. In 2005, for example, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges became one of the first Adult Education systems nationally to position adult basic education as key to the state's economic future, with the potential for meeting pressing state economic development and workforce needs and for increasing economic mobility for individuals. The five-year strategic plan, *Creating Opportunities*

for Washington's Emerging Workforce,<sup>8</sup> made postsecondary transition and success key indicators of the effectiveness of the Adult Education system. Because other agency partners (such as social services and workforce development) helped to write the plan, those partners began to see how Adult Education could help their clients become more successful.

In 2009, the Illinois Community College Board adopted a new strategic vision for Adult Education, *Creating Pathways for Adult Learners*,<sup>9</sup> after extensive discussions with the field and other stakeholders. This strategic plan frames Adult Education as an integral part of Illinois' economic development efforts and makes six recommendations and associated priority actions for implementing this vision. These include: adopting "aligned assessment, curricula, and instructional practices that prepare adults for family-sustaining jobs and career advancement;" working in partnership with workforce development and other partners; providing support services to increase student retention and success; and creating pathways to employment or further education for all adult learners, regardless of their skill level on entering the program.

## BUILD COLLEGE AND CAREER GOALS FOR ADULTS WITH LOWER SKILLS INTO THE STRATEGIC VISIONS FOR BROADER SYSTEMS, SUCH AS COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

States can broaden ownership of college and career goals for the Adult Education population by making sure that other education and training partners

each include them in their own strategic visions. The Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development Council, for example, has issued a blueprint for strengthening the state's workforce and closing critical skill gaps, *All Hands on Deck*,<sup>10</sup> which recommends policy changes in K-12 education, Adult Education, workforce development, and postsecondary education. Among those recommendations are that these partners set a joint goal for increasing the number of adults with low skills earning postsecondary credentials that lead to family-sustaining wages, create plans for reaching that goal, and track progress over time. The plan also recommends expansion of the state's career pathway initiative for Adult Education students, *Minnesota FastTRAC*,<sup>11</sup> to all 25 Minnesota State Colleges.

A diverse group of stakeholders led by Washington's State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) also regularly develops a strategic workforce plan that includes ambitious goals for Adult Education students and programs. For example, the most recent plan, *High Skills, High Wages: 2008-2018*,<sup>12</sup> calls for the majority of ABE programs at community and technical colleges to become integrated with occupational skills training. In addition, the ten-year strategic plan<sup>13</sup> for the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges also supports Adult Education's new direction. In Indiana, the Department of Workforce Development established the *Customer Flow Policy*,<sup>14</sup> aligning client services to meet needs among Adult Education, post-secondary training, and workforce preparation. North Carolina Community Colleges' *SuccessNC initiative*<sup>15</sup> seeks to increase ac-

<sup>8</sup> Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, ( n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.iccb.org/accelerating.opportunity.html>

<sup>10</sup> Minnesota Governor's Workforce Development, (2012)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.mnfasttrac.org/>

<sup>12</sup> Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, (2009).

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/sbctc\\_system\\_direction\\_final.pdf](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/sbctc_system_direction_final.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/DWD\\_Policy\\_2010-13Ch1.pdf](http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/DWD_Policy_2010-13Ch1.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives>



cess, program quality, and student success by sharing best practices, changing state policy to support success, and developing new performance-based student success measures. The Student Success Framework for SuccessNC highlights *Basic Skills Plus*,<sup>16</sup> the state's career pathway initiative for Adult Education students, as one of five core strategies for improving college access in the state.

#### REWRITE STATE ADULT EDUCATION FUNDING GUIDELINES TO OPERATIONALIZE A NEW VISION FOR ADULT EDUCATION THAT FOCUSES ON COLLEGE AND CAREER GOALS

In 2005, Washington followed up its new strategic plan with an updated RFP<sup>17</sup> that introduced concepts to the field such as contextualization, integration of academic and occupational course content and instruction, and transition to college and careers. The new RFP centered on ways to implement the strategic plan's goals, such as the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)<sup>18</sup> model. In February 2012, the Illinois Community College Board issued another competitive RFP that incorporated the recommendations in its 2009 strategic plan. This RFP required all Adult Education providers in Illinois, by the end of Year Two of the grant period, to offer career pathway bridge and/or integrated models, such as those the state pioneered in its *Shifting Gears*<sup>19</sup> work and the newly developed Integrated Career and Academic Pathway System (I-CAPS)<sup>20</sup> model, drawn from the I-BEST experience in Washington.

After the Indiana Department of Workforce Development assumed state administration of Adult Education

in 2011, it issued a new competitive grant process, which led to a revised RFA<sup>21</sup> in 2012 focusing on academic and occupational skill attainment along career pathways and alignment of Adult Education and workforce development policies and funding. The RFA required programs to adopt new curricular and instructional strategies such as contextualization, accelerated learning, and concurrent enrollment in adult basic education and postsecondary education or training. One important change was that the RFA required that Adult Education in each region be delivered by a consortium of workforce development and Adult Education entities, and encouraged other public and private partnerships. The geographical boundaries of Adult Education regions also were aligned with those of economic development regions. The RFA required all regional Adult Education consortia to develop adult career pathways in priority sectors, and to create a plan for implementing at least five career certifications each year.

#### CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Strategic plans, other vision statements, and Adult Education grant guidelines can be effective tools for leading change.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, states emphasized how important it is to reinforce the new directions embedded in strategic plans and in grant guidelines with other actions. These include working with local program administrators to ensure that Adult Education providers are hearing consistent messages from the state and local level; ensuring that other partners in workforce development, postsecondary education, and human services are also hearing these messages from their state and local administrators; conducting professional

development activities that enable Adult Education providers to learn new curricular and instructional strategies; and offering new funding through state discretionary grants to help programs with the start-up costs of adopting new goals and new strategies.<sup>23</sup>

#### POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

California's Adult Education program took the important step of crafting a new vision for Adult Education that pivots around college and career success and calls for close partnerships with, among others, community colleges, the workforce investment boards, and community-based organizations. The process of implementing this new vision was slowed and made more difficult by the Legislature's decision to "flex" state Adult Education monies; that is, to allow these funds to be used for both K-12 and Adult Education at the discretion of local school boards. As a result, funding for Adult Education has shrunk dramatically, excellent programs have been eliminated, and remaining programs have been thrown into confusion.

Governor Brown's proposal for dedicated funding for Adult Education provides a critical anchor for these programs. However, as suggested earlier, neither stable funding nor a new governance structure is sufficient to address the barriers faced by students in basic skills programs in California in accessing and completing postsecondary education and training. Guidelines and incentives for new partnerships, new program design, and more effective pedagogical approaches need to be implemented.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/basic-skills-plus-accelerating-opportunity>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.sbctc.edu/college/e\\_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx](http://www.sbctc.edu/college/e_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx)

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.iccb.org/shifting\\_gears.html](http://www.iccb.org/shifting_gears.html)

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.elgin.edu/students.aspx?id=18467>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.in.gov/dwd/abe/files/PY\\_12\\_Adult\\_Education\\_Grant\\_Continuation.pdf](http://www.in.gov/dwd/abe/files/PY_12_Adult_Education_Grant_Continuation.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Several states, including Illinois, Indiana, and Washington, have used Adult Education strategic plans and major revisions to grant guidelines (RFAs or RFPs) to refocus Adult Education services on postsecondary access and success in career pathways. Two others (North Carolina and Ohio) plan to take similar actions in the near future.

<sup>23</sup> One complicating factor in using these tools is the long federal delay in reauthorizing WIA, and the resulting uncertainty over the future direction of federal Adult Education policy. However, given that the federal government has increasingly highlighted adult career pathways and basic skills bridge and integrated models in new federal grant opportunities, and has issued program guidance from the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education encouraging these strategies, more states are feeling comfortable in moving Adult Education in that direction even in the absence of reauthorization.

# Innovation initiatives to increase college and career success for adults with lower skills

EVEN AS CALIFORNIA SIGNALS a new focus on college and career success, many local Adult Education programs—both in community colleges and adult schools—will lack the resources and knowledge to adopt successful new models. Innovation initiatives can close this gap.

In some cases, innovation monies end up funding pilot programs that fail to move to scale. On the other hand, even modest funding when combined behind a common purpose can create an echo chamber where the continual reinforcement of the same message and program strategies allows innovation to take root locally. Some states have implemented innovation initiatives without any dedicated funding by allowing existing state Adult Education and career technical education funding to be used in new ways. According to the states interviewed, innovation initiatives play a critical role in driving change and can:

## SPUR ADOPTION OF NEW STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING COLLEGE AND CAREER SUCCESS THROUGH INITIATIVES THAT SPAN ADULT EDUCATION, COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Illinois' Community College Board and its Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity began partnering in the mid-2000's to fund pilots of career pathway bridge programs for adults with lower skills and/or limited English proficiency using WIA Title I and Title II performance incentive and state discretionary funds. Subsequently, Illinois received a Shifting Gears grant from the Joyce Foundation<sup>24</sup> to develop state policy changes that could scale up bridge programs and sustain them. The state also continued to invest federal and state funds in developing and replicat-

ing bridge programs. When the state reviewed outcomes of adults enrolled in five career pathway bridges (there are currently more than 50 such programs), it found that 93 percent of students completed these programs and that 85 percent of those went on to higher education or a new job.<sup>25</sup>

Also part of the Shifting Gears initiative, in 2008 the Minnesota Department of Education/Adult Basic Education, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), and the Department of Employment and Economic Development launched the *FastTRAC* initiative. FastTRAC offers a spectrum of contextualized, college and career-focused services to all levels of adult learners. Minnesota has expanded FastTRAC, braiding together multiple funding sources.

After piloting different ways to increase the number of students in basic skills programs who earned postsecondary credentials, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) chose to scale up the most promising approach: the *Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST)* model. In I-BEST, basic skills and career technical education faculty team-teach courses that combine basic skills and occupational content in order to help students succeed. With legislative support, SBCTC created an enhanced FTE (1.75) funding to support the I-BEST model. As of 2011, there were more than 140 approved I-BEST programs statewide; a quasi-experimental evaluation of I-BEST found that I-BEST students made larger gains on basic skills tests than similar students not in I-BEST, earned more college credits, and were more likely to earn occupational certificates.<sup>26</sup>

The Wisconsin Technical College System

(WTCS) began replicating the I-BEST model in the mid-2000's and created several versions, such as a model that pairs basic skills and occupational courses but is not team-taught. In 2007, a *Shifting Gears* grant brought together WTCS with the state's Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to jointly develop an initiative called *Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE)*.<sup>27</sup> That grant, together with strategic use of state and federal discretionary funding, enabled local technical colleges, workforce agencies, and industry to work together to implement career pathways, bridge programs, and integrated education and training programming. As of 2011, 14 of 16 technical colleges in the state offered RISE programs, for a total of 44 programs. According to WTCS, the technical colleges involved in career pathway bridges consistently report high postsecondary certificate completion rates and good employment and/or postsecondary continuation outcomes for students. The final evaluation report for Shifting Gears shows a completion rate of 68% for programs that were operating in the 2010-11 academic year.<sup>28</sup>

North Carolina's legislature created the *Basic Skills Plus* program in 2010 to allow local Adult Education providers to use up to 20 percent of their existing Adult Education grant to offer certificate programs that concurrently enroll students in job training and linked, contextualized GED preparation. By November 2012, 43 colleges had been approved by the State Board of Community Colleges to offer at least one Basic Skills Plus program.<sup>29</sup>

In 2011, the Indiana Department of Workforce Development (DWD) created the *WorkINDiana* initiative, which concurrently enrolls students in GED or high school diploma classes and occupational training that leads to one of more than 20

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.shifting-gears.org/illinois/61-state-progress-illinois-.html>

<sup>25</sup> Illinois Community College Board and Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, (2011) *The early impact of bridge programs in Illinois*. <http://www.shifting-gears.org/images/PDF/ProjectResources2/illinoisearlyimpactofbridgeprograms.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Zeidenberg, Cho & Jenkins, (2010) *Washington State's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST): New evidence of effectiveness* <http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/publications/i-best-new-evidence.html>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://risepartnership.org/>

<sup>28</sup> Roberts & Price, (2012). For more on Wisconsin's career pathway bridges, see <http://www.shifting-gears.org/state-progress-wisconsin/66-state-progress-wisconsin.html> and <http://risepartnership.org/>

<sup>29</sup> For current program data and more information on Basic Skills Plus, see <http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/basic-skills-plus-accelerating-opportunity>.

industry-recognized certifications. The training is pre-college level and noncredit, and articulates to for-credit occupational programs at Ivy Tech, the statewide community college. DWD initially used WIA state performance incentive funds for WorkINDiana, and also gave Adult Education regions mini-grants for program development and administrative overhead. As of spring 2012, 62 WorkINDiana programs had been developed.<sup>30</sup>

#### INSTITUTIONALIZE INNOVATION THROUGH STATE POLICY CHANGES THAT ALLOW EXISTING FUNDING STREAMS TO SUPPORT THE NEW SERVICE MODEL

Washington's policy actions to institutionalize I-BEST include the enhanced FTE reimbursement rate and the emphasis on postsecondary transition and progress along career pathways in the state's renewal application for current Adult Education providers.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the state has adopted complementary policies, such as *Opportunity Grants*<sup>32</sup> and the *Student Achievement Initiative*.<sup>33</sup>

Illinois has made a number of state policy changes to sustain its basic skills bridges: including creating a common statewide definition of bridge programming for use in Adult Education, developmental education, and WIA Title I services; requiring that, in WIA Title I, 40 percent of all local adult and dislocated worker training funds be spent on training such as bridge programming; creating new course classifications for bridges; and making bridge programming a core element in the Adult Education strategic plan and new competitive RFP.

Wisconsin's steps to institutionalize its innovations include statewide definitions of operational elements for career pathways and career pathway bridges that define expectations for industry engagement, provision of support services, and

development of partnerships. WTCS also created an expedited process for colleges to submit career pathways certificate programs to the state for approval. Prior to that, only one-year technical diploma and two-year associate degree programs were recognized statewide. Wisconsin is incorporating into its accountability data system and ABE scorecard additional measures of Adult Education to postsecondary transition and success.

To institutionalize its career pathway innovation, Indiana is working with the state legislature to secure permanent funding while requiring in the state's Adult Education RFA that regional Adult Education consortia develop at least five WorkINDiana certification programs each year. Indiana also launched an innovation fund for 2012 using WIA Title II Adult Education state leadership funds.

#### CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

States have learned much about how to use innovation initiatives well. The lessons offered by their experiences include:

- *Allow for a period of early experimentation but then move to create clear parameters for the model before scaling up.* Those parameters can allow local flexibility but need to include program features that are essential for success.
- *Extend funding and apply state guidelines for new innovative models to all the partners in the initiative,* rather than limiting them to the Adult Education programs.
- *Take inventory of how supportive current state policies are to the new models for transitioning Adult Education students to college and careers.*
- *Think about the whole college and*

*career pathway.* States have chosen to build out different sections of adult college and career pathways; but in order to avoid dead-ends, a state must have the vision for complete career and educational pathways in mind from the outset.

- *Create the capacity to collect the right outcome data.* Solid data on outcomes is critical for winning support for sustaining innovative models and for improving them over time.
- *Anticipate at the outset how to sustain the innovation.* Private and public special grants can jump-start innovation, but new models are likely to be abandoned when the grants end unless thought is given in advance to ongoing funding streams to sustain them.<sup>34</sup>

#### POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

California has implemented important innovation initiatives in the area of basic skills. These include the California Community Colleges' Basic Skills Initiative (BSI)<sup>35</sup> and its Career Advancement Academies (CAAs).<sup>36</sup> The BSI both allocated supplemental funding to colleges to address basic skills needs and provided professional development to faculty and staff. The CAAs are designed to improve students' foundational skills in reading, writing, and mathematics in the context of career technical programs that lead to jobs or continued education. More recently, California's Adult Education program launched the *Policy to Performance Initiative* as part of a federal effort to focus the Adult Education program on college and career. As important as these efforts have been, to be transformative, innovative programs such as these must be extended.

<sup>30</sup> For more information on WorkINDiana, see <http://www.in.gov/dwd/adultedadmin/workin.htm>.

<sup>31</sup> The enhanced FTE reimbursement rate is based on based on the additional costs of having two instructors co-teach.

<sup>32</sup> Opportunity grants provide financial aid and support services for nontraditional students to reach the "tipping point," defined as taking at least one year's worth of college credits and receiving a technical certificate or other occupational credential over five years; benchmarks that led to higher wage gains. [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/s\\_opportunitygrants.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/s_opportunitygrants.aspx)

<sup>33</sup> [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e\\_studentachievement.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx)

<sup>34</sup> For examples of how states and communities have tackled these funding challenges, see Conway, (2011) *The price of persistence: How nonprofit-community college partnerships manage and blend diverse funding streams*, & CLASP, (2010) *Funding Career Pathways and Career Pathway Bridges*, <http://www.clasp.org/postsecondary/pages?id=0003>

<sup>35</sup> Illowsky, (2008).

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.careerladdersproject.org/initiatives-programs/career-advancement-academies/>



# Using goals, metrics, and data to refocus programs: state accountability policies

NATIONALLY THERE IS A growing emphasis at both the state and federal levels on accountability for public dollars spent on education and workforce programs. One result is that some states are using data to drive change in Adult Education. To effectively use data as an accountability tool, states are bringing the data systems of the many relevant programs together including K-12, Adult Education, postsecondary public institutions, and workforce programs.<sup>37</sup> Another accountability lever states are using is pay-for-performance systems, although these efforts have met with mixed success. By refashioning their accountability systems, states can:

## USE DATA TO MAKE THE CASE FOR REFOCUSING ADULT EDUCATION ON COLLEGE AND CAREERS

The story of Washington's "tipping point" study<sup>38</sup> is one of the most dramatic examples of the strategic use of data. That study found that students who took at least one year's worth of college credits and received a technical certificate or other occupational credential over five years earned substantially more than students who did not reach that threshold. Publication of the report unleashed a cascade of policy innovations beginning with the development of the I-BEST program, and then leading to Opportunity Grants designed to help students reach the "tipping point," and a system of financial incentives (the Student Achievement Initiative) designed to reward colleges for moving students toward the tipping point. Washington is similarly serious about monitoring its programs. The State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating

Board, and the Higher Education Coordinating Board produce a [biennial joint report](#)<sup>39</sup> used by policymakers to determine how well Washington's education and training system meets employers' needs. The SBCTC also has developed a partnership with Columbia University's Community College Research Center to conduct in-depth evaluations of some of the state's innovative programs.

Wisconsin has been using data to influence policy in a more modest way. As part of their RISE Career Pathway and Bridge Program, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, together with the Center on Wisconsin Strategy at the University of Wisconsin, has published "pipeline" data<sup>40</sup> examining how effectively the state's technical colleges are moving students (including students in basic skills programs) toward the achievement of key educational milestones. One finding of the pipeline report was that if ABE students make it into college programs, they are as successful as other students. The data have been used to increase support for bridge programs.

Similarly, as part of its [LiftEd](#) initiative<sup>41</sup> to improve student transitions between Adult Education, developmental education, noncredit workforce education, and college programs, the Ohio Board of Regents defined a set of transition metrics, gathered and linked data from each education sector, and created a [student transitions report](#).<sup>42</sup> The report is intended to support the work of regional consortia that bring together the different education sectors in order to help more adults earn marketable postsecondary credentials.

## USE DATA AS AN ACCOUNTABILITY TOOL, IF STATES DEVELOP INTEGRATED DATA SYSTEMS

To support its culture of evidence, Washington has been developing an increasingly comprehensive data system. Similarly, as Indiana moved to implement a new vision and strategy, they developed a new data system that began in 2007 with a data-sharing agreement between the Department of Workforce Development, the Commission for Higher Education, the Department of Education, and the Indiana Business Research Center at Indiana University. Indiana used the new system to produce its own "tipping point" study that was developed by the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and began a serious process of analyzing student pathways, key milestones, and barriers to success. North Carolina partnered with Duke University on the North Carolina Education Research Data Center (a data warehouse designed to facilitate the exchange of data among the Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Community College System, and the University of North Carolina), to do longitudinal studies of student progress from K-12 through postsecondary education.

Some states also have implemented pay-for-performance systems. Washington has one of the most nationally watched performance-based funding systems. *The Student Achievement Initiative (SAI)*<sup>43</sup> was designed to support the state's goals for underprepared students and to avoid the pitfalls of other performance-based funding systems by adding new funding for performance incentives rather than making existing funding performance-based. Through

<sup>37</sup> These efforts have gained momentum in recent years, fueled by federal funding and several multi-state collaborations (such as the Data Quality Campaign), supporting data system integration.

<sup>38</sup> [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research\\_reports/resh\\_06-2\\_tipping\\_point.pdf](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/docs/data/research_reports/resh_06-2_tipping_point.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SkilledEducatedWorkforce2011.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Chung, Cociña, & Dresser, (2012) *Toward college success for working adults: The pipeline to credentials in the Wisconsin Technical College System*.

<sup>41</sup> <http://ohiolifted.ning.com/page/key-strategies>

<sup>42</sup> [http://api.ning.com/files/2KkqvqBBEjFWxFMCZnh0O2BHJs6DD63hg0OwEIFmbtw\\*8xQ1q7JQK8OeWt257Lva6X39UGecP0VPtkWBBPnYYDnM097vPYev/USOTransitionMetricsSystemFocustextformatv2.pdf](http://api.ning.com/files/2KkqvqBBEjFWxFMCZnh0O2BHJs6DD63hg0OwEIFmbtw*8xQ1q7JQK8OeWt257Lva6X39UGecP0VPtkWBBPnYYDnM097vPYev/USOTransitionMetricsSystemFocustextformatv2.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> [http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e\\_studentachievement.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx)

the SAI, colleges receive performance funding for increasing student attainment of critical academic milestones, or “momentum points,” and are judged against their own baseline performance, rather than the performance of other colleges.<sup>44</sup> Evaluations of SAI found gains in student achievement and no evidence of disincentives for colleges to serve disadvantaged populations. Since 2010, budget cuts have seriously undermined the effectiveness of SAI, although the approach continues to enjoy support and the metrics are now being revised.

Even more than Washington, Indiana sees performance-based funding as a key policy lever. Beginning in 2011, the state implemented outcomes-based funding for Adult Education to encourage best practices in enrollment, fast-track curriculum delivery, GED or high school diploma attainment, and postsecondary transition. The reimbursement schedule calls for differential funding based on how long it takes a participant to reach one of eight outcomes.

Illinois’ recent integration of Adult Education under the authority of the Illinois Community College Board led the state to integrate Adult Education metrics into performance measurement and a [new college performance incentive system](#).<sup>45</sup> While Adult Education in Illinois has long had performance funding, the new system-wide college metrics are designed to support the state’s growing emphasis on the creation of bridge programs and their [Accelerating Opportunity](#)<sup>46</sup> project. As in Washington, Illinois intends for performance funding to inform the allocation of new incentive dollars, rather than redistributing existing base funding.

## CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

States face serious challenges in trying to implement effective accountability systems: 1) many states, including California, do not have the data systems needed to track the progress of students

in basic skills programs from remediation through postsecondary education and training and into the labor market; and building a multi-agency, longitudinal data system is complex and expensive, with tricky legal, technical, and political stumbling blocks; 2) an equally vexing challenge is ensuring that the data are used to inform policymaking; and 3) the recent swell of interest in pay-for-performance is controversial. The experiences of the states we interviewed offered some useful lessons in implementing new approaches to accountability:

- *A commitment to accountability and evidence-based policymaking fuels political support for high quality data systems.* In several of the states, good data is one component of a widely shared commitment to accountability and evidence-based policymaking that in turn fuels political support for the data system itself.
- *States that are serious about accountability set meaningful, measurable goals and have in place an established approach to reviewing progress toward those goals.* This can be the result of a legislative mandate that requires the development of cross-institutional strategic plans and/or requires regular accountability reports that provide data in a form that is designed to answer key policy questions.
- *Setting goals and monitoring performance matter only if policy and practice change as a result.* Administrators in Washington pointed to a close working partnership with the legislature as essential to their iterative approach to innovation. Other states talked about administrators and faculty using data to advocate for changes in program and instructional design.

- *There are serious questions about the effectiveness of performance-based funding.* Several states were positive about the extent to which pay-for-performance funding could provide useful incentives for program providers. However, other states reported that performance-based funding systems have been ineffective because they represented such a small share of total funding, because the systems were “gamed” by the programs, or because the metrics were not useful. Academic reviews of performance-based systems raise similar concerns and, more importantly, warn that they could have the unintended consequence of discouraging providers from enrolling students with the greatest barriers to success.

## POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR CALIFORNIA

Efforts to develop a comprehensive integrated data system in California have long been stymied, but informal attempts to more effectively track community college and workforce program participants have gained ground and are beginning to produce useful results. For example, the CCCs and workforce system (through the Employment Development Department), along with the University of California and California State University systems, have forged a draft “federated” database design that allows for segmental management of data while also promoting ease of data sharing. The CCC Chancellor’s Office also has developed a “scorecard” that, among other measures, tracks progress of students in basic skills programs. These are important steps but, to date, have not included Adult Education. It would be useful for the current debate about redesigning Adult Education to include the question of how California will track students in basic skills programs and their educational outcomes across institutions and programs.

<sup>44</sup> The momentum points were: increasing basic skills; completing developmental courses in math or writing; earning the first 15 and 30 college credits; earning the first five math college credits; and earning a first certificate or degree.

<sup>45</sup> [http://www.ibhe.org/PerformanceFunding/Materials/111024/ICCB\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.ibhe.org/PerformanceFunding/Materials/111024/ICCB_presentation.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.iccb.org/accelerating.opportunity.html>



# Conclusion

THERE IS NO STATE in which basic skills education looms larger in importance than California. California's ability to expand the share of students from low-income or underrepresented communities who successfully complete postsecondary education and/or who are able to secure jobs with real career opportunity may well hold the key to our future. For many students, weak English and math skills are among the principal barriers to success and so the current spotlight on Adult Education is long overdue. Hopefully, the renewed attention will lead to serious policy discussion on the goals California should establish for its basic skills programs and the changes we need to make, both to Adult Education and within the community colleges, to achieve that vision. The stakes could not be higher.



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## Additional Links and Resources

*Basic Skills Plus, North Carolina Community Colleges*  
<http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/basic-skills-plus-accelerating-opportunity>

*Career Advancement Academies (CAAs), Career Ladders Project*  
<http://www.careerladdersproject.org/initiatives-programs/career-advancement-academies>

*I-CAPS Program, Integrated Career & Academic Preparation System, Elgin Community College.*  
<http://www.elgin.edu/students.aspx?id=18467>

*Funding Career Pathways and Career Pathway Bridges: A Federal Policy Toolkit for States*  
<http://www.clasp.org/postsecondary/pages?id=0003>

*Illinois Community College Board, Accelerating Opportunity (formerly ABE to Credentials)*  
<http://www.iccb.org/accelerating.opportunity.html>

*Illinois Community College System, Performance Based Funding Principles and Metrics*  
[http://www.ibhe.org/PerformanceFunding/Materials/111024/ICCB\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.ibhe.org/PerformanceFunding/Materials/111024/ICCB_presentation.pdf)

*Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Model, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)*  
[http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e\\_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_integratedbasiceducationandskillstraining.aspx)

*Minnesota FastTRAC*  
<http://www.mnfasttrac.org/>

*Ohio Higher Ed, University System of Ohio Transition Metrics: Statewide Summary*  
<http://api.ning.com/files/2KkqvqBBjFWxFMCZnh0O2BHJs6DD63h->

[g0OwEIFmbtw\\*8xQ1q7JQK8OeWt257Lva6X39UGecP0VPtkWBBPnY YDnM097vPYev/USOTransitionMetricsSystemFocustextformatv2.pdf](http://www.successnc.org/initiatives/basic-skills-plus-accelerating-opportunity)

*Ohio LiftEd: Elevating Individual and System Success*  
<http://ohiolifted.ning.com/page/key-strategies>

*Opportunity Grants, Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges*  
[http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/s\\_opportunitygrants.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/s_opportunitygrants.aspx)

*Policy to Performance: California's Project Transitioning Adults to Opportunity*  
<http://www.otan.us/cap2p/>

*Policy to Performance: Transitioning Adults to Opportunity, State ABE Transition Systems Report*  
[http://lincs.ed.gov/lincs/resourcecollections/careerpathways/profile\\_51](http://lincs.ed.gov/lincs/resourcecollections/careerpathways/profile_51)

*Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE), Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development*  
<http://risepartnership.org/>

*SuccessNC, Student Success Framework*  
<http://www.successnc.org/initiatives>

*Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, Student Achievement Initiatives*  
[http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e\\_studentachievement.aspx](http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx)

*WorkIndiana Initiative, Indiana Department of Workforce Development.*  
<http://www.in.gov/dwd/adultedadmin/workin.htm>

*WorkOne Customer Flow Policy, Indiana Department of Workforce Development*  
[http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/DWD\\_Policy\\_2010-13Ch1.pdf](http://www.in.gov/dwd/files/DWD_Policy_2010-13Ch1.pdf)

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## Credits

**Photography**

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LearningWorks works to facilitate, disseminate and fund practitioner-informed recommendations for changes at the system and classroom levels, infusing these strategies with statewide and national insights. LearningWorks seeks to strengthen the relationships that offer the greatest potential for accelerating action, including those between policy makers and practitioners, among overlapping initiatives, and across the 112 colleges. LearningWorks founding partners include the Career Ladders Project for the California Community Colleges, the Research and Planning Group for the California Community Colleges, and the California Community Colleges Student Success Network.

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