New York Adult Education Pre-Retreat Survey

Preliminary Summary of Participant Responses

Prepared for:

The Adult Education Visioning Retreat

September 20, 2007

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Mayor's Office of Adult Education

www.nyc.gov/adulteducation

Prior to the Adult Education Visioning Retreat in Prospect Park, we posted an on-line survey for retreat participants to share their opinions and priorities on a number of key issues. This report presents a summary of participant responses on eight important topics:

1. **Keeping Students at the Center – Engagement, Goal Setting and Retention**

2. **Creating Effective Enrollment Mechanisms**

3. **Contextualizing Instructional Design to Meet Student Goals**

4. **Enhancing Professional Development and Staffing Patterns**

5. **Managing for Results**

6. **Creating Pathways to Higher Education and Workforce Development**

7. **Improving Accountability and Metrics**

8. **Advancing Important Social Goals**

For each topic, we have synthesized the responses into a consensus goal and have included direct quotes from the participants to reflect the range of opinion on each topic.

This preliminary analysis was shared with participants during the September 20th retreat to frame the work of the day (with the exception of "Improving Accountability and Metrics", which was prepared after the retreat).

We are posting this analysis on-line to encourage dialogue throughout the adult education community on these important issues.

Keeping Students at the Center – Engagement, Goal Setting and Retention: *To use literacy skills (reading, writing, math, computer) to interact with the world around them and to achieve their goals.*

Consensus goal: The opposite of "one-size fits all" in which practice is learner-centered and reflective of a wide variety of cultures, interests, demographics, educational needs and learning styles among the student body, but resources are prioritized towards organizational and instructional models that deliver the highest value

How? Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o Mechanisms for student participation in program design and evaluation, planning, policy, advocacy...

o The development of curricula that are contextualized to reflect the concrete goals of participants.

o Making the traditionally unwelcome feel that education is possible for them.

o Operating schools effectively in jails has engaged some young people who have never had a positive school experience.

o Developing civic literacy and student leadership.

o Full-time counselors to support learners to achieve their goals and to access and take advantage of social services throughout the city.

o On-ramps and re-entry points for those who need to leave system due to job or life issues.

o Teens need to work and be active and feel like they are a part of something. After they get the GED, what's the next step? You can get them in and get funding for their program, but they need a blueprint/plan.

o Flexible schedules.

o Programs should consistently prepare students to negotiate their needs and wants well and critically in English through listening, speaking, reading and writing well and critically.

o We don't know what happens to the people put on the waiting lists or referred elsewhere.

o Connecting learning to practical goals.

o The ability to learn on their own.

o There is a need for mentors that have already succeeded in the same field that you want to enter. A doctor if you want to be a doctor, who is willing to let you be a shadow once a week. If you want to get your GED, be with someone who has gotten their GED already. Role models.

o A seat in a class. Currently most people can't even get in a class.

Creating Effective Enrollment Mechanisms: *Student participation should not feel like chance.*

<u>Question:</u> How should enrollment into programs be conducted (based on 47 survey responses)?

Response	Percentage of Respondents
On a first-come, first serve basis	19.1%
On a random basis (by lottery)	4.3%
Be managed to ensure that the right Students get to the right programs and all available seats in the City are filled	**76.6%**

<u>How?</u> Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o   Do good (comprehensive, relevant) assessment to determine learner's interests, needs, availability; -- Have collaborative relationships among providers, in which they make it clear what they can best provide so that learners can be properly matched to them. -- Have a centralized referral system; -- Provide adequate, well-trained and well-equipped staff to manage the above process of assessment and referral/placement.

o   It is incremental and begins with: 1) borough-wide networks of providers who understand which program offers what; 2) a hotline and database system with adequate funding to maintain an updated list of programs (no small feat); 3) examination of data to determine where there are empty seats; 4) PD for programs to improve retention strategies.

o   Programs need to have much more explicit organizational missions and they should use this mission to recruit motivated students and staff. Student participation should not feel like chance. This can be accomplished by urging programs that want to focus on job training to specialize and then recruit students who are interested in re-entry or upward mobility in the job market.

o   Management system should not be burdensome and bureaucratic. And shouldn't deplete resources needed to support programs. It is essential to have basic info on who is providing what services where and when, and where are open seats available.

o   I'd like to use DOE's multiple pathways program as an example. The multiple pathways program selects students that are the most likely to succeed in their program.

o   Given that there are limited resources and space available for adult ed programs, enrollment can be based on predictors of likelihood of success.

o   Programs could manage individual waiting lists and report any vacancies to a central organization. In turn, this organization could regularly post these openings for literacy programs and/or students themselves.

o   Central clearinghouse and/or automated system that matches clients with slots.

Contextualizing Instructional Design to Meet Student Goals: *Connecting learning to practical goals.*

Consensus goal: A vibrant system that transforms people's lives by enhancing their functional literacy skills and English language proficiency and by helping them to obtain mainstream credentials and resources to achieve their goals

How? Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o   More programs are offering a greater intensity of instruction, having a greater proportion of classes meeting at least 10 hours per week. Two organizations compared educational gain among classes of the same instructional type and level within their own programs have found a positive correlation between having classes meet for at least 10 hour per week and higher rates of educational gain.

o   We have created a more intensive class structure and at the same time offered some space for students who can't fit into that to study semi-independently with the support of volunteer tutors.

o   More instructional hours for very low ABE/Literacy learners, Non-literate ESOL learners.

o   More recognition of contextualized training for literacy as a requirement.

o   Tie literacy training to the needs of vocational training programs and consult with these programs.

o   Critical content as curricula. This includes family, health, and financial literacy. I think this trend has made literacy relevant to outside stakeholders, improved persistence and therefore skills, and helped teachers feel more connected to the work.

o   Sustained-content instruction—movement away from skill and drill.

o   Computer literacy and a core package of computer skills should be mainstream offering of all programs.

o   ESL population needs more literacy skill building – oral fluency is no longer enough.

o   Self-paced work via Internet/computer programs.

o   Education practices aligned with the construct of new knowledge upon learners' prior knowledge and classes are workshops for rigorous literacy apprenticeship.

o   Screening students better for likely persistence, authentic goal setting that is based in reality and linked to curriculum design/instructional methods, and narrower level classes.

o   Learning disability evaluation and PD for teachers working with diagnosed students.

o   Need better counseling for persistence and overcoming prior educational trauma.

o   Additional capacity, including distance and distributed learning resources and an organized volunteer network.

Enhancing Professional Development and Staffing Patterns: *We are passionate about adult literacy and helping students.*

Consensus goal: A network of learning organizations with a culture of innovation that supports a community of dedicated and creative (full-time) professionals who implement evidence-based strategies and reflect on practice to improve outcomes.

How? Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o Re-design the "system" so that the majority of teachers are full-time.

o Would like instructional hour rates to support, where possible, the hiring of full time staff, and the provision of adequate paid time for all staff to enable them to participate in staff development and conduct lesson preparation, assessment, and curriculum development activities.

o Would like programs that can support full-time staff who specialize in the field of adult education, increasing their expertise and deepening their ability to provide effective service to learners.

o We have a "very dedicated to the adult learner", passionately committed, socially-conscious field of practitioners (who may soon be retiring).

o Instructors should have a couple of hours of professional development each week and focus on applications of lessons learned/best practices and home-grown innovations.

o Additional resources for prep time and staff development for part-time teaching force. It is hard to move forward when we don't invest in this group.

o Teachers in adult education generally have to train themselves, so we should provide a centralized internet forum for teachers to access and share information.

o I'm not convinced that the quality of teaching is at a high level throughout the system.

o Should have minimum credentials/standards for teachers.

o Increase counseling staff.

o Helping programs provide support services such as case management, and employment services to students would have a significant impact on student retention and achievement.

o We have improved our tutor training by adding a basic literacy training component so tutors can be truly prepared to teach either beginner, intermediate or advanced students.

Managing for Results: *We should realize that we can always do better and seek to innovate more often.*

Consensus: Where a culture of innovation has been nurtured, priorities established, and a sufficient level of resources applied, impressive gains and program improvements are possible at all levels of instruction and across demographic groups.

How? Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o Disseminating research and best practices to program managers, as well as funding that allows program managers to spend time analyzing their own data and research from the field would also have an impact on increasing the quality of services.

o A statistics expert is needed to teach programs how to collect data intelligently and how to learn from it.

o Individualized Technical Assistance Program (ITAPS). I think programs learning, through intensive onsite intervention and professional development, to use data for program improvement is helping effective programs articulate their success and ineffective programs turn things around. It also finds wasted money and helps to build capacity in the system.

o Using database as management tool – use program data as basis for decisions with regard to curriculum, materials, class schedule, intensity, length, etc.

o Flexible class schedule varied program activities to increase retention.

o Professional development activities designed on the basis of needs identified.

o Counseling, case management, employment and support services are a component of student retention and goal achievement.

o Some programs have embraced self-assessment and reflection and are changing culture to support continuous quality improvement – it feels new.

o More attention should be paid to standards and curriculum.

o Motivation of program coordinators could be strengthened with more administrative help.

o Improve CBO's overall organizational capability and quality of services. Specifically: Self-evaluation and classroom observations by managers and peers.

o I really don't think of the field in terms of "innovations." A successful program is one that meets its students' needs, and is willing to evolve in order to meet those needs. … Programs that have support services (onsite, or through networks) meet the out-of class needs. I think too much time and energy is spent on trendy "innovations."

Creating Pathways to Higher Education and Workforce Development: *Easy transitions from one level to the next.*

Emerging consensus: there should be clear pathways towards – and into – post-secondary education and job training programs; along the way, there should be realistic milestones (ideally linked to wage or job "pay-offs") at attainable intervals for learners of all levels; curriculum, professional development, and support services will need enhancing to support pathways.

How? Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o I think helping students find a reasonable-to-navigate path from skill building to job ready is really important. Programs that have pre GED and certificate or workforce training programs at the same site seem to have something extra special to offer learners in terms of achieving goals. Workforce development is still too far apart from literacy classes for those who come into the system looking for work.

o Far greater focus on transition to college.

o Cooperation is needed between providers to move students on more smoothly.

o The PRE GED program that serves as a viable bridge to secondary education.

o Workplace-contextualized basic skills and ESL classes are needed.

o Move to contextualize adult education classes and link with sector based strategies.

o Connecting education to earnings that allow students to live and support families while they learn.

o There's a need for career guidance/exploration, pre-employment sector specific services and also a need for more forums, ways to connect with employers and unions to discuss workforce development, access to entry level jobs and upgrading of incumbent workers.

o In-depth basic skills assessments for new students. One dimensional exams are not good indicators.

o Preparation for College and Career, not just passing the GED or just obtaining reading skills.

o Recruit students with complimentary objectives.

o A referral pipeline so that students are placed in the area they need, which may not necessarily be where they think they belong.

o Roadmap for what jobs/employment they are suited for at different points of literacy attainment.

o People sometimes are left on their own after completion of program.

Improving Accountability and Metrics: *Transparent and fair ways we can measure whether goals are being achieved.*

Consensus goal: A system of measuring inputs, progress, and results that is realistic, reliable, and monitored to ensure the needs of learners are being met and that students, program managers, funders, and other stakeholders understand the type and level of results being achieved.

How? Quotes lifted from survey responses:

o Learners should have access to a system where they can learn whatever is needed in well-equipped classrooms and taught by capable professionals.

o Once engaged, make staying engaged easy and build in measures of progress that communicate that learning is possible.

o To set, achieve and evaluate progress towards self-identified goals. The system should be able to accommodate people with different goals.

o Establish realistic education goals.

o A well monitored Adult Education System focused on giving the much needed education that each participant is aspiring to achieve.

o Learners should be able to hold jobs previously unavailable to them due to lack of reading, writing or math skills or should be able to get a higher paying job.

o A system that has flexibility to recognize that some learners are not going to achieve NRS standards in a year and has different and accountable standards for these learners.

o Establish system wide performance and accountability standards.

o A system to not only track participants, but also those waitlisted.

o System wide database that can be indexed and easily accessed to provide data for use in evaluation and program planning.

o Publish regular reports on how the system is doing.

o Provide easy access to learn about existing opportunities. Develop a true understanding and respect for the education system.

o Programs need to use their data more often and disseminate what is working well.

Advancing Important Social Goals

Improving adults' literacy and language skills contributes to a number of important social policy objectives. Below is a summary of survey responses to a question asking respondents to select the top five goals according to the amount of difference adult education could make in achieving each goal assuming the system prioritized it and the necessary collaborations were established.

		Number of Votes Received for Each Ranking						
		1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	# Votes	Total Score
1	Reducing poverty	10	5	8	3	6	32	106
2	Having a high-skilled workforce in the City	11	6	2	2	0	21	89
3	Increasing school performance of struggling K-12 students	4	6	5	5	1	21	70
4	Increasing the number of New Yorkers going to college	5	6	2	5	4	22	69
5	Decreasing the number of people relying on public assistance	4	4	6	3	5	22	65
6	Helping formerly incarcerated individuals (ex offenders) re-integrate into society	2	5	2	8	3	20	55
7	Improving the health of New York City families	1	3	7	4	8	23	54
8	Helping survivors of domestic violence to gain self-sufficiency	0	1	2	2	4	9	18
9	Reducing chronic homelessness	0	0	1	3	3	7	12

Based on 39 respondents ranking top five.
Maximum possible score is 195