

## **Student Leadership in New York City: Voices of adult learner leaders and program allies**



**February 1, 2010**

## Summary

This brief report presents the results of several structured discussions from a Student Leadership Experts Meeting that was part of a leadership recognition event - the Calvin Miles Award for Student Leadership Ceremony - in November 2009. The Calvin Miles Award Ceremony and Experts Meeting were jointly sponsored by the Mayor's Office of Adult Education and the Adult Education Alumni Alliance.

**Purpose of Experts Meeting:** To discuss ways to strengthen and expand the role of adult learners as partners in adult education and to make initial recommendations for action as a group.

**Who Was There:** 60 experts in adult education, including: Calvin Miles Award winners; the program allies (teachers and managers) who nominated them; members of the Adult Education Alumni Alliance and Mayor's Office Transition to College Internship; several invited guests and staff from the Mayor's Office of Adult Education

**What was done:** Using an assets-based approach and participatory research methods, participants worked in small groups to answer four questions:

1. **What is Going Well?**
2. **What Challenges Do We Face?**
3. **How Can We Expand and Strengthen Learner Leadership in Adult Education?**
4. **Priorities for Action**

The results of these discussions have been organized, categorized into themes and are presented below. The report begins with the recommendations generated in response to Question 4, "Priorities for Action"

The Appendix includes the Experts Meeting Agenda and Discussion Question Guides.

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## **Section 1**

### **Priorities for Action**

Following Caucus Group meetings, where students and allies met separately, all participants reconvened to present their top three priorities for action to strengthen the role of adult learners as partners in adult education. The entire group categorized the top choices into common themes and gave each clump of priorities a name.

The Priorities for Action themes are presented in order of emphasis (most stressed to least stressed). We can assume that the themes with the most proposed ideas were seen as important priorities for action. Each proposal is followed by a letter to indicate if that idea came from a student caucus (“S”) or an ally caucus (“A”).

#### **Build networks for support and communication for students, alumni, teachers and programs**

- Follow-up/tracking of former students and alumni -- keeping in touch with students that graduate from adult education programs (S)
- Provide support in work environments (workforce development) and continued support after adult education (S)
- Bridge gap between GED and college using students to help create a bridge; e.g. Alumni Association (S)
- Replicate model of Re-entry Education Network: centralize program information / lively archiving/ web-site (A)
- Build connections for/with adult education programs (A)
- Support for developing and maintaining a network for student leaders (A)

#### **Create authentic learner leadership and capacity building opportunities**

- Recognition of leadership qualities/skills in students by teachers (S)
- Making students aware of leadership opportunities (A)
- Giving students opportunity to develop leadership skills (S)
- Create meaningful opportunities for students to develop leadership skills and academic skills at the same time (A)
- Adult education helps student leaders to be the future advocates for tomorrow (S)

#### **Provide effective training and development for everyone to expand capacities and shift culture and practices**

- Academic requirements for administration staff (S)
- Training and follow-up for all student leaders (stakeholders) in accomplishing effective partnerships (A)
- Positive attitude - students and providers (S)
- Training student leaders (A)
- Training for administrative staff for development of vision (A)

**Emphasize peer leadership (modeling, mentoring, support and motivation)**

- Students helping to motivate students over barriers (to next level of education) (S)
- Motivation of GED students by GED recipients in programs and prisons (S)
- Educating and motivating other students prevents drop out rates (S)
- Peer mentorship and effective role models (A)
- Sharing our experiences to motivate other adult learners (S)

**Active student engagement by programs**

- Involve student in program planning: every aspect, hiring and research (A)
- Student involvement in governance and in program planning (A)
- Invite Calvin Miles Awardees to the next Re-entry Education Network meeting (S)

**Diversity and culture are assets in leadership**

- Understanding cultural backgrounds by sharing stories (S)
- Inclusion of Community, family & life experience (A)
- Cultural Capital (A)

**Increase funding and compensation**

- Funding/Resources (S)
- Compensation (S)
- More funding to improve adult education (S)

**Use a mission-guided approach**

- Emphasize the importance of Mission (S)



## **Section 2**

### **What is going well?**

Unedited responses from all eight Caucus Groups have been combined and sorted by theme. These themes are presented in order of emphasis (i.e. largest to smallest). Responses followed by an “(A)” are from an ally caucus. All others come from a student/alumni caucus.

#### **Peer to peer activities (mentoring, tutoring, support, etc.)**

- More advocates to promote peer leadership
- More mentors involved in the transitions for incoming students
- Peer model
- Mentoring/Tutoring
- Student interaction and support
- Support-Student/Student
- Encouragement
- Peer mentoring (A)
- Peer mentoring/tutoring (A)

#### **Partnerships and Communication (student to student and student to teacher/program)**

- Students more comfortable sharing experiences
- Communication among student/teacher/staff
- Communication
- Communication between teachers & students
- Emphasis on the concept (of learner leadership and partnerships) (A)
- Partnerships with teachers (A)
- Students reaching teachers (A)

#### **Student Unity**

- Unity among students and alumni
- Respect others & then learn from there and build on that
- Looking out for each other
- Studying together
- Unity (with everyone)

#### **Learner Leadership and Skills**

- Strong leadership in students
- Students are able (A)
- Students are smart (A)
- Students taking roles and responsibilities (A)

### **Community Involvement / Giving back to society**

- Students giving back to society (at their programs)
- Calvin Miles Award
  - Recognition of student leadership increases
  - Community involvement increases
- Community (A)

### **Strong adult education programs - ESOL, ABE, GED (that emphasize participation and leadership of learners)**

- Many good adult education programs: ex. ESOL, G.E.D.
- More programs emphasizing participation and leadership of students and alumni
- Building classroom meetings (A)

### **Impact of good academic education on leadership development (increases skills and capacities)**

- Improving character & changing behavior -- becoming a better person, because you have gained more knowledge
- Gaining English skills & life skills

### **Emphasis on transitions**

- Support to go to college
- Transitions between education levels

### **Hiring students and other work development opportunities (hiring students, community service, interns, volunteers)**

- Hiring students with pay (A)
- Former students on public assistance working in classroom as community service (A)

### **Involvement of corporate sector**

- More businesses giving more funding

### **Support of Mayor's Office of Adult Education**

- This forum addressing adult education leadership (A)

## **Section 3**

### **What challenges do we face?**

#### **Challenges faced by learners**

##### **Students face stigma and lack of information, support, resources.**

- Stigma of GED/Adult Education
- Lack of motivation
- Not enough resources or tools
- Have the knowledge, but now have to learn how to apply the knowledge
- Lack of support & motivation
- Lack of information/resources
- Rejection
- Fewer incentives for students
- Alienation (A)

##### **Internalization of oppression faced by adult learners**

- Negative stereotypes due to stigma
- Low self-confidence
- Fear of sharing past experiences
- Fear of making others uncomfortable
- Feeling left out
- Mental challenges; fear to fail and hesitation of students
- Convincing students they are smart (A)
- Student insecurities (A)

##### **Demands on students' time / time management**

- Time management
- Personal/family life. Child care.
- Time management
- Helping students avoid stalling in their education while taking on leadership roles (A)
- Student time management (A)

#### **Need for training and professional development**

##### **For administrative and teaching staff (*some stuck in traditional' service provision' viewpoint*)**

- Lack of confidence in students
- Lack of acceptance
- Not open to new ideas
- Not enough programs where students can promote ideas and empower other students
- Administrative staff need degree in education and experience in teaching
- Top-down training of some administration (A)



- Educators stuck in their ways (A)
- Not encouraging student leadership- programs not open (A)

### **Training needed to build strong partnerships**

- Helping staff to recognize student voices
- Training of teachers and students for effective partnership (A)

### **Lack of financial resources/funding**

#### **For programs**

- Program funding (A)
- Funding (A)

#### **For students**

- Face lack of financial resources
- Students do not have enough funding
- Finances
- Financial challenges including childcare

### **Calls for more inclusion and opportunities**

#### **Need to include more students/alumni in administrative positions**

- Need more students (alumni) to be hired for jobs for the administrative piece
- Challenges in advocating for students to be volunteers and as academic researchers (A)





## **Section 4**

### **How can we expand and strengthen learner leadership in adult education?**

#### **Student/Alumni Caucus Group #1**

- More communication between alumni and current students
- Sharing self experiences to motivate other adult learners
- Understanding cultural backgrounds by sharing stories
- Better opportunities: academic, job, family
- Be leaders: changing lives, communities
- Staff administrative

#### **Student/Alumni Caucus Group #2**

- Support in a work environment (Workforce)
- Relationship with employers to support adult education learners
- Take a good model and duplicate
- Learners giving back to community
- Learning what changes work
- Follow-ups: former students, alumni keeping touch with students that leave programs
- Tracking: To improve program & expand
  - Student development
  - Ideas
  - Feedback

#### **Student/Alumni Caucus Group #3**

- Participation- having numbers go up, decrease drop out rate
- More communication
- Empowering others adult learners helps with motivation
- Helping the education to grow
- Students listen to peers from their program more than administrators
- Student helping students
- Help students to move to the next highest level of education

#### **Student/Alumni Caucus Group #4**

- Role of adult learners
- Giving students opportunities to develop leadership skills
- Positive attitude (student and providers)
- Recognition of leadership skills in adult learners by providers
- Student sharing knowledge with other student/providers

#### **Student/Alumni Caucus Group #5**

- Compensate student leaders
- Spread the word

- Create opportunities
- Peer motivation

### **Student/Alumni Caucus Group #6**

- Motivation of GED students by GED recipients in programs and also in prisons
- Get more funding for the improvement of adult education
- Invite Calvin Miles Awardees to the next Re-entry Education Network meeting

### **Ally Caucus Group #1**

- Speakers from Adult Education Alumni Alliance
- Inclusion of family
- Centralize information from diverse programs and show success of prior adult learners
- Broadening exposure to other communities
- Cultural Capital
- Student involvement in every aspect of program planning - diversity of roles
- Student government

### **Ally Caucus Group #2**

- Training
- Peers mentorship/effective role models
- Student opportunities in the classroom/communities
- Outreach by programs and student leaders
- Making students aware of leadership opportunities



## Appendix: Agenda and Discussion Questions

### **The 2009 Calvin Miles Award for Student Leadership Experts Meeting Agenda**

#### **Welcome / Overview**

Katy Taylor, Director of Program Support, Mayor's Office of Adult Education

#### **Luncheon Keynote**

*The Missing Piece: Learners as Partners in Adult Education*

Jeniffer Herrera-Andujar, Leadership Coordinator, Future Now / IMPACT

#### **Video Screening**

"Living Proof" – Film trailer on adult learner leadership. Directed by  
Darren Methlie with assistance from Mayor's Office Transition to College Interns

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#### **Focus of our discussion today:**

How can we strengthen and expand the role of adult learners as partners in adult education?

- **Assumptions, Agreements and Methods**
- **Discussion #1 (by table)** – Focused questions about student leadership and engagement
- **Discussion #2 - Caucus Groups** – Learners and Allies
- **Listing and Ranking exercise** - Harvest caucus discussion & identify themes
- **Discussion #3 (by table)** – **Action planning** – Next steps

#### **Closing Reflections**

## **The 2009 Calvin Miles Award for Student Leadership Experts Meeting**

### **Discussion Questions used during the Experts Meeting**

(Feel free to use these questions yourself. Perhaps you can lead a discussion about strengthening the role of learners in adult education in your program. If you have questions or would like assistance, please contact Katy Taylor at 212-341-9076)

#### **Discussion #1: At Your Table**

Based on the keynote speech and the video presentation, have a FAIR discussion:

**F** = Facts (WHAT?) -- What did you hear?

**A** = Attitudes (GUT?) -- What is your reaction?

**I** = Interpretation (SO WHAT?) – What does this mean?

**R** = Response (NOW WHAT?) – What will you do?

#### **Discussion #2: In Caucus Groups**

- 1) What is going well? Brainstorm list of strengths or assets we have now that can support the leadership of students. (List answers on chart paper)
- 2) What challenges do we face as we work to make learners partners in adult education? (List on chart paper)
- 3) What is most important to do to strengthen and expand the role of adult learners in adult education? What opportunities await us? (List these on chart paper)
- 4) Decide which of the ideas in Question 3 you think are most important. As a group, pick your top 2-3 ideas. (Write each idea on a giant post-it - 1 idea per post-it. Write in big letters. Write clearly. No more than 7 words per post-it.)

#### **Discussion #3: At Your Table**

**Next steps** – In small groups, talk about the action steps adult learners, alumni, teachers, program managers and other allies can take. Remember to build on the ideas identified as priorities by the group (Section 1). Think of concrete steps you can take right now to strengthen and expand the role of adult learners in adult education. Also think of things that may take more time. What are the first action steps you will take? *Be prepared to report to the group on one of your good ideas.*