The Student Voices Study

In the spring of 2008, the Mayor's Office of Adult Education initiated the *Student Voices Study* (SVS) to engage adult education students and alumni as partners in a visioning process aimed at strengthening the City's adult education system.

The SVS was designed as a small, rapid, participatory study of current adult education students and alumni to better understand learners perceived needs, assets, and perspectives about the adult education system. The study was also meant to help develop more robust learner input and leadership in reforming adult education in New York City.

The SVS engaged 141 adult learners in 13 focus groups from ESL and ABE programs across the city to understand their goals, experiences and priorities for adult education. During the focus groups, students and alumni had the opportunity to voice their perspectives using participatory research methods such as listing and ranking, a stakeholder focused SWOT analysis, and to craft recommendations for improving the adult education system. Students, recent program graduates, literacy managers and teachers then met to analyze the data together.

Key findings are that adult learners:

- Seek quality education programs with strong academic outcomes where they can progress quickly toward specific goals.

- Have specific career and education goals in mind and the majority plan to eventually attend college or pursue career-related technical training.

- Are motivated to succeed in their studies and want services tailored to help them achieve their specific goals.

- Want government to increase funding and support job and career development partnerships.

- Want government to assure better pay and benefits for teachers.

- See themselves as assets and recognize an important role for themselves in efforts to improve the City's adult education system.

The *Student Voices Study* and its findings demonstrate that adult literacy and ESL students are capable of sophisticated analyses of the current conditions of adult education and have important recommendations for how to improve the system.