Summary Report of the Adult Education Visioning Retreat:

Growing into the Future – Keeping Students at the Center

Mayor's Office of Adult Education
October 25, 2007

www.nyc.gov/adulteducation

Introduction

Thank you to all the participants in the Adult Education Visioning Retreat. Judging by the feedback we received on the evaluations and the quality of follow-up work already underway, the day was a resounding success.

95 percent of you agreed or strongly agreed that the day was a success. You also – as a group – left the room more optimistic about the process than when you responded to the on-line survey in the weeks before the retreat. 92 percent of you indicated that you are "hopeful" or at least "somewhat hopeful" about the prospects for success of this visioning process.

Creative ideas started flowing right from the opening notes of Diane Francis' song, "Bluffing is What You Do (When You Can't Read or Write)" and continued through the gathering exercises of the "history wall" and the discussion of the maze-like system maps all the way to the closing comments of the afternoon plenary.

The success of the day was helped by the considerable amount of pre-retreat work done by many of the retreat participants who attended workshops, met in strategy sessions, and made many productive comments and suggestions on the pre-work survey. A special note of thanks to the retreat steering committee members[1], our consultants from CFAR[2], and our graphic recorder, Kim Love from Group Memory LLC.

This report, along with materials from the day and the pre-retreat survey results, are available on the website of the Mayor's Office of Adult Education (www.nyc.gov/adulteducation).

This report is divided into the following sections:

- o Keeping students at the center
- o Designing effective instruction contextualized for students' goals
- o Managing for continuous improvement of results
- o Enhancing professional skills and supporting a community of practice
- o Building pathways to higher education and job training

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[1] The following individuals met several times over the course of the summer to help plan the retreat and played a key role in co-facilitating many of the discussions during the day: Linda Avitabile, Bruce Carmel, Richard Fish, Lianne Friedman, Azadeh Khalili, Ellen Levine, Calvin Miles, Maureen O'Connor, Leslee Oppenheim, Elyse Rudolph, Georgia Salley, Wendy Wen, Pauline Young, and Rong Zhang.

[2] CFAR has been working with the Mayor's Office of Adult Education for the past few months to design and implement a broadly participatory visioning process that will include a plan for the future and new ways of doing our work in early 2008.

Preliminary Vision for the Future –
State of the Art System that Delivers Results

We heard several recurring themes throughout the day that resonated with many of the responses to the on-line survey and the voices we heard during the pre-retreat workshops. Together these themes inform a simple draft vision for the future:

> **To serve more people with greater results, rooted in the learners' goals, using the best educational practices.**

Participants also described many attributes of the kind of system they would like for the future:

➢ The opposite of "one-size fits all" – practice is learner-centered and reflective of a wide variety of cultures, interests, demographics, educational needs and learning styles among the student body

➢ A system that transforms adult's lives by enhancing their functional literacy skills and English language proficiency and by supporting them on pathways to mainstream credentials needed to achieve their individual goals

➢ A network of learning organizations with a culture of innovation that supports a community of professionals in full-time jobs who implement evidence-based strategies and reflect on practice to improve outcomes

➢ A rich array of organized learning opportunities engage and inspire adults outside the classroom

➢ Performance metrics are reliable, transparent, authentic and equitable across different types of programs and different learner characteristics so that adult learners can make informed choices

➢ Performance metrics and accountability frameworks are used in a rational and transparent manner to support continuous program improvement

➢ Funding mechanisms enable programs to achieve outcomes and improve performance year-to-year

➢ The system has capacity to make measurable contributions to interventions that reduce poverty, prevent recidivism among ex offenders, promote the competitiveness of the City's workforce, and enhance K-12 student performance

➢ Resources are prioritized towards organizational and instructional models that deliver the highest value

What You've Been Hoping For –
Elements of a Better Adult Learning System

During the morning session, our consultants from CFAR facilitated the "histories of the future" exercise. You articulated a wide diversity of alternative futures for the field and identified many important issues as you "remembered" how the field grew from its current state into a more idealized system in 2012. Some of these "memories" were practical and sounded like things we have already done together; others were ambitious and stretched our thinking of what might be possible. Among the more notable "memories" were:

> ➢ When companies handling international remittances recognized their business interest and civic responsibility and invested in the education and training of immigrant workers in NYC.

> ➢ When laptops for learners and broadband internet connections for programs became the norm.

> ➢ When we created the technologically advanced and user-friendly intake and referral system that helped learner find the right program.

> ➢ When state-of-the-art on-line, distance learning, and other self-study resources engaged hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

> ➢ When publishers decided to grow their market by trying to eliminate illiteracy.

> ➢ When we guaranteed a slot for every adult learner the way we guarantee a jail cell for every criminal.

Getting Specific on the Way Forward – Working Sessions on Five Key Issues

The afternoon workgroups revealed many good ideas, points of convergence and areas of divergence in our thinking. As you may recall, participants each selected the systems issue they wanted to explore in further detail. We then asked each group to report out their vision for their chosen topic by answering the following three questions:

- What would it look like in 2012?

- Why does that matter?

- How do we get there?

The report-outs are summarized on the following pages. We have incorporated discussion points from the afternoon that were not reflected in the brief report outs and those from earlier in the day across all the tables. We have also drawn upon a limited amount of the pre-retreat survey results.

The five key themes – emerging from the work during the retreat and from the pre-retreat work – were as follows:

- ➢ **Keeping students at the center**

- ➢ **Designing effective instruction contextualized for students' goals**

- ➢ **Managing for continuous improvement of results**

- ➢ **Enhancing professional skills and supporting a community of practice**

- ➢ **Building pathways to higher education and job training**

Keeping students at the center

What would it look like in 2012?

- Resources to help adults find programs that are right for them – e.g., public awareness campaign, referral hotline, welcome center to help families navigate the system and meet their complicated needs

- Interconnected system so when some seats are empty and some places are full students can be placed where there is room.

- Learner-centered educational programs are well-defined and valued, akin to value of patient-centered care in the health care system

- Programs understand and mobilize the strengths of their students to make tangible contributions to their programs and their fellow learners (e.g., peer mentoring)

- On-going student leadership initiatives are common and involve multiple programs and new partners

- Students have more opportunities to connect to a larger advocacy or volunteer movement

- Career track exists for adult learners who want to work in the field

- More programs are linked to child care and other support services

- Program staff are well trained and happy

Why does it matter?
- Student centeredness is an important perspective in designing programs that meet student needs

- More actively engaged students will result in a more vibrant community of learning and greater levels of retention and achievement

How do we get there?

- Start with goals counseling and how it is connected to instruction and student support for persistence.

- Technical assistance to programs to implement "student-centered" elements of curriculum design, instructional practices, scheduling, and other issues while still meeting standards and achieving outcomes

- Develop alumni association to take on leadership roles in the system – e.g., to increase awareness of the system, advocate for resources, and strengthen programs by tutoring, counseling on goals and persistence, telling their own stories re: college and jobs, and contributing to student leadership initiatives

- Organize student leadership training/conference

- Create space and time for students to talk/network on their own

Designing effective instruction contextualized for students' goals

What would it look like in 2012?

- Overall design starts from "where the learner is" and what their goals are, accounting for a variety of authentic goals

- Performance outcomes are built into the design so that expectations of different kinds of student progress are clear to all those involved

- Explicit frameworks are used to ensure coherence and integrity to curriculum and instructional practices so that short- and longer-term student goals can be met

- Curriculum builds meaningful relationship to future for individuals.

- Most literacy programs incorporate vocational skills, life skills, and critical thinking in a systematic way — e.g., based on the Equipped for the Future framework

- The system utilizes non-GED certifications that are meaningful to employers

- Instruction and learning opportunities are easily accessible, flexible, and take place in a wireless city

Why does it matter?

- Outstanding instructional design will lead to more educational gain and better overall outcomes

- More learners will be motivated to complete the level and to stay engaged through the next steps

How do we get there?

- Many programs have elements of state-of-the-art instructional design; there is a need to identify more systematically what is being done locally and elsewhere

- A module-based approach could give programs flexibility to meet a diversity of learner needs in a coherent framework that is based on standards rooted in best practices and professional wisdom

- More work needs to be done to define the range of real life objectives students have, identify the specific functional and academic skills required for each objective, write or identify curriculum to address them, and support teachers to teach and/or coach learners to develop those skills

- We should identify best practices in clustering students with similar goals at similar literacy and language levels, including ESL students' native literacy skills

Managing for continuous improvement of results

What would it look like in 2012?

- We should collectively articulate and define a common set of outcomes for our system and have a more informative, reliable and authentic system for measuring, reporting, and being held accountable for achieving them

- In defining outcomes, we should pick indicators that reflect a range of student-articulated goals along with standard measures of academic progress and functional skills development

- Programs should start with authentic goal setting/counseling students at the time of in-take and repeat periodically thereafter to track student progress towards their goals – both short-term and long term (short-term goals should be milestones towards longer-term goals)

- Programs then need to manage towards the outcomes, using curriculum design, student counseling and case management, on-going staff training and reflective practice, and data analysis, informing their management strategies and organizational offerings with best practices from the field

- Programs should report on, and be held accountable for, their performance on outcomes measures relevant for their student population

Why does it matter?

- Outcomes say what a program values and where their emphasis is going to be put

- Greater attention to outcomes and management to achieve them will improve programs and help more students reach their goals

- If report cards are going to be published and funding decisions made based on outcomes, we need a valid, reliable, and authentic system to measure and report them

How do we get there?

- Need to put a price tag on what a program that did these things would cost and then say "this is what education would be funded at," but each program would be required to actually achieve the outcomes

- We need to focus on systematic/standardized ways of defining and measuring short-term student goals

- Technical assistance could be arranged for programs to help connect instruction and counseling approaches to the goal-setting and monitoring process

- Some programs have already done work in defining short-term goals when students come into the program

- State Education Department staff can also provide good professional development to programs about how to help students set goals

- Pilot project could also develop innovative ways of assessing what our students are doing

- New standardized tests need to be identified/developed that assess student progress better

Enhancing professional skills and supporting a community of practice

What would it look like in 2012?

- A systematic approach to ensure that teachers know the context really deeply and can organize instructional resources around content that is vital, interesting, and engaging for particular groups of students to help them gain the skills and knowledge they need

- Teachers and other staff would spend more time engaged in a greater variety of professional development activities than today – especially the part-timers

- Central resources for developing the basic skills of all teachers and for facilitating networks of practitioners/communities of practice with opportunities for cross-site collaborations, peer-based learning, and mentoring

- System designed for programs with adequate staffing patterns and greater percentage of full-time staff than today

Why does it matter?

- Important to recruiting, retaining and supporting quality staff

- More effective teaching will lead to more learning and better outcomes

- Critical to evolving program models and instructional design

How do we get there?

- The Regional Adult Education Networks are implementing small-scale training on foundations of adult education that could serve as a model for pre-service "basic training"

- Programs can identify and prioritize a limited number of key areas for improvement and plan more intensive professional development activities to address them

- Programs with similar priorities can collaborate and share resources

- Teachers should have an increase in the number of hours they are paid for professional development – especially part-time instructors

Building pathways to higher education and job training

What would it look like in 2012?

- Pathways into higher education are distinct from workforce training pathways; both need to start with a realistic educational plan for students, supported by counseling and guidance

- The goal of the pathways is to get participants transitioned into the next step by addressing the relevant literacy and language issues, helping them obtain the GED, and preparing them for entrance exams and requirements of the initial phase of study or training

- Entrance requirements of the training or college program become graduation requirements of the adult education program; functional requirements for success in training and college become the skills-related goals of the education program

- To prepare adult learners for success at the next level on a large scale, program links are not just from point A to point B, but are more of a systemic connection that takes into account the "pre-A" and the "post-B"

- Vocational training centers focus on employability and hard skills training while bringing mid-level literacy students up to speed on the required literacy and language skills; pathways are not implemented just by traditional adult education programs

Why does it matter?

- Long-term outcomes for GED holders are better when the credential is used as a stepping stone on the path to college or hard skills job training

- Traditional GED preparation programs do not actually prepare students for academic success in college, nor for the CUNY entrance exams

How do we get there?

- Convene stakeholders to assess what is already being done, review best practices, and develop a common vocabulary

- Pull in successful training programs in 3 or 4 different industries and find out what are the characteristics of successful trainees and what are the specific levels of preparation required and any predictors of success

- Define "college ready" in terms of the skill set and necessary content knowledge

- CUNY can start by offering a suite of "booster classes" in math, reading and writing, study skills, prep for CUNY entrance exam, etc. to GED students who score well on the exams and have a good chance of success

- Programs can start by developing adult basic education and ESOL courses contextualized for specific employment opportunities and build relationships with the job training programs that are logical next steps for students

- Create the expectation at the pre-GED level that students will be going to college

- High level ESOL programs can blend in GED preparation having GED and ESL teachers co-teach