

Literacy, Education and Economic Development: Changing the Odds in New Orleans

Stephen Reder
Portland State University

Loyola University March 23, 2011

Presentation Outline

- We have a big problem in the U.S.
- It's an even bigger problem in New Orleans
- The service delivery system is in need of repair
- Research that suggests how we should respond
- New strategies for adult literacy development
- A *learning support system* for New Orleans
- Conclusion

We Have a Big Problem in the U.S.

- It's not just the large number of adults who lack essential literacy skills
- It's not just the large number of adults who have too little education
- It's our broken "ladder of opportunity"

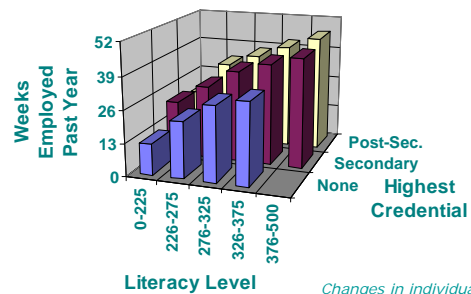
Adult Literacy and the Ladder of Opportunity

- We need to rebuild our "common good" – the combination of things that make the great promise of America widely accessible- - as a *ladder of opportunity*
- The ladder of opportunity is..
 - Not a government ladder, not a business ladder
 - Built by us all in public/private partnership, working together
 - Built with a sense of history, purpose and hope
 - Allows individuals to exercise initiative and make use of their talents and energies

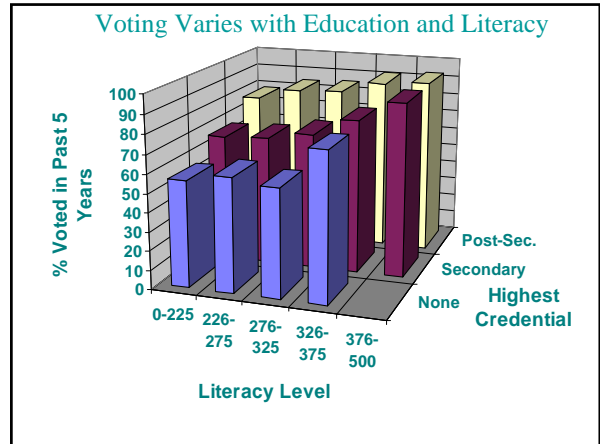
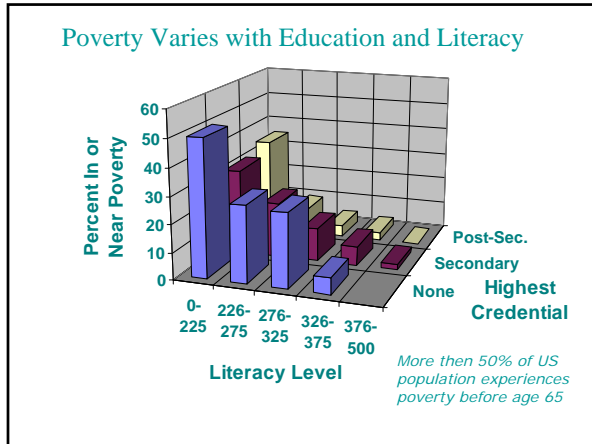
Adult Literacy is Deeply Embedded in our Nation's Ladder of Opportunity

- Educational attainment
- Employment & earnings
- Poverty
- Health care (health status, cost of care, ...)
- Civic engagement (voting, volunteerism, ...)
- Burden on society (crime, welfare, ...)

Employment Varies with Education and Literacy



Changes in individuals' employment and earnings are associated with changes in their literacy



Literacy and Health Care

- About 30% of Medicare & Medicaid recipients have "below basic" health literacy
- Health care costs substantially higher for low skilled adults (with education controlled)
- Lower health status and higher mortality for older adults with poor literacy skills (at constant levels of education)

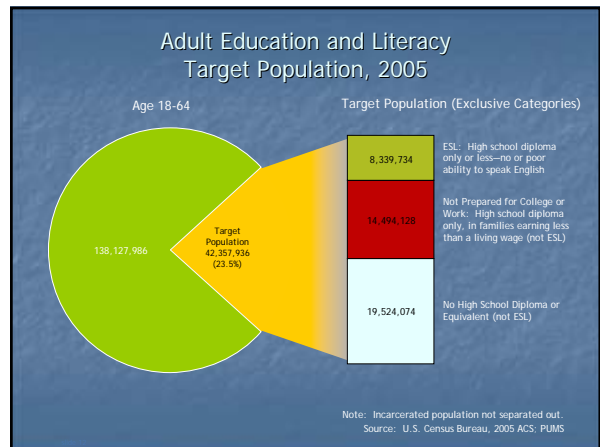
Some Signs that Our Ladder of Opportunity is in Need of Repair

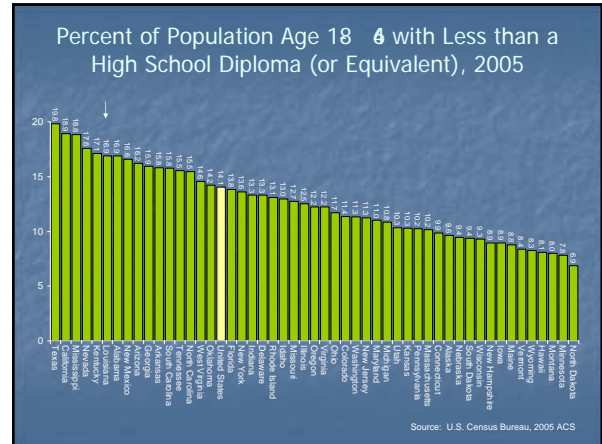
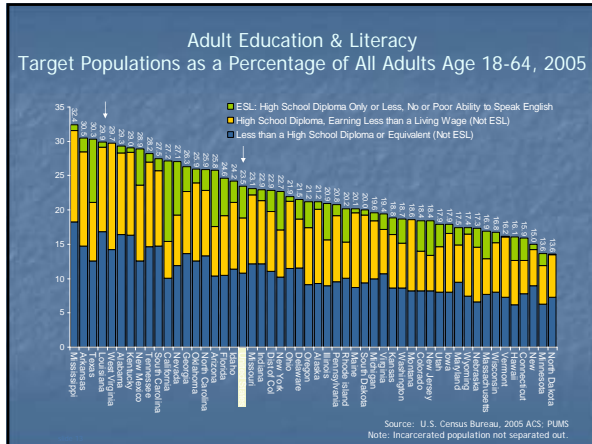
- Distribution of wealth getting more concentrated & skewed
- Educational attainment slipping in international comparisons amidst increasing globalization
- Stagnant trends in skills with persistent racial & ethnic disparities
 - NAEP trends in high school reading & math
 - NALS/IALS trends in adult literacy
- Mounting tensions between Jared Bernstein's YOYOs & WITTS

Moving Up the Ladder of Opportunity: Segmenting the Population in Need

- 25.4 million Age 18-64 have not completed high school (or equivalent)
- 8.1 million Have dropped out before 9th grade—a population for which the GED is even more difficult to attain
- 28.8 million With a high school diploma or less are not earning living wages—an indication they are not succeeding in the workforce and probably not prepared to enter college
- 8.3 million Age 18-64 with high school diplomas or less have difficulty speaking English or speak no English at all
- 42.4 million Total in need of adult basic education and literacy (all combined, accounting for residents in two or more of the above categories)
- 1.5 million Included in this group are incarcerated in state and federal prisons

From Jones & Kelly (2007) National Commission paper





Our Adult Education & Literacy Problems Aren't Going Away

- 3 sources of adults with basic skills needs
 - Continuing high rates of high school dropouts
 - Continuing immigration
 - Ageing of Baby Boomers
- Changing economy and skill demands
- Divergent skill distributions (growing disparities of skill & economic status)

Indicators that We're Not Doing Enough

- 14.1% of adults age 18-64 have less than a high school diploma or equivalent
- Almost 13 million adults age 18-64 with less than a high school diploma are living in poverty
- More than 8 million adults age 18-64 speak English not well or not at all
- Of the target population for adult education
 - age 16-24: only 28% enrolled in a state-administered adult education program in 2005
 - age 25-44: only 11% enrolled
 - age 45 & older: only 2% enrolled

New Basic Skills and Literacies

- Both access to the new technologies and the skills to utilize them in social, educational and economic activities are important
- Digital literacy is becoming a domain of adult education and a medium of learning
- Digital literacy will increasingly involve the capacity to navigate complex networks of people and things
- These developments will create new demands and opportunities for adult learning
- Emerging body of research shows the power of these technologies & social formats to support learning in K-12 settings; much more research is needed for adult education

Adult Literacy is an Even Bigger Problem in New Orleans

- Before the storm: 18% of adults in NO lacked "basic" prose literacy skills
- Individuals age 18 & 64 lacking a high school diploma or GED:
 - NO: 25%
 - LA: 17%
 - US: 14%

National Adult Literacy Survey, 2003 (estimates)
 2000 U.S. Census

After the Storm (2009)

- 16% lack a high school diploma or GED
- 24% have incomes below the poverty line
- 13.8% are unemployed
- 39.5% do not use the internet

Data from ACS 2009 and CPS 2009

These problems are racialized and are not going away in Louisiana

- 42% of Black youth live in poverty, compared to 12% of White youth
- 59% of Black children in 8th grade read at a "Below Basic" level, compared to 29% of White Youth
- In 2009, more than half (54%) of Black male students did not meet Basic skill levels measured on their state LEAP tests, compared to only 29% of their White counterparts who failed

Louisiana Council on the Status of Black Boys and Men, 2010

So the Ladder is Broken – Especially for Minorities – What are We Doing About It?

- We have an adult education system that receives federal and state funds to help adults improve their basic skills, prepare for the GED and hopefully transition to college and employment

Population Age 18-64 without a High School Diploma or GED

- US: 14%, 19 million adults
- LA: 17%, 465,000 adults
- NO: 25%, 75,000 adults

2000 US Census

Funding for Adult Education (2009)

- Louisiana received \$6.9 million in federal funds and allocated \$4.8 million in state funds for a total of \$11.7 million that served 23,250 (5%) of the 465,000 in need, which calculates to ~ \$500 / person enrolled
- New Orleans received a total of ~\$450,000 in federal and state funds to serve ~3,800 (5%) of the 75,000 in need, which calculates to ~\$120 / person enrolled

Literacy Alliance of New Orleans

The Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL)

Portland State University



funded by
U.S. Department of Education
National Institute for Literacy

LSAL Research Questions

1. To what extent do adults' literacy abilities continue to develop after they are out of school?
2. What are adult learners' patterns of participation over time in literacy training and education? In other learning contexts?

LSAL Research Questions, Cont.

3. What life experiences are associated with adult literacy development? How do formally organized basic skills programs contribute to these learning trajectories? Workplace training? Other contexts and activities?
4. What are the impacts of adult literacy development on social and economic outcomes?

Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL)

- Long term panel study of Portland youth and adults who, at the start of the study, were age 18-44 not in school and did not have a high school diploma or GED
- Representative sample of ~1,000 drawn from local rather than national population of dropouts
- Periodic in-home interviews and literacy assessments and SSN-linked administrative data (with individuals' permission)
- Examines program participation & other learning activities, social and economic changes, & changes in literacy skills, practices & technology use over time
- Smaller-scale qualitative components

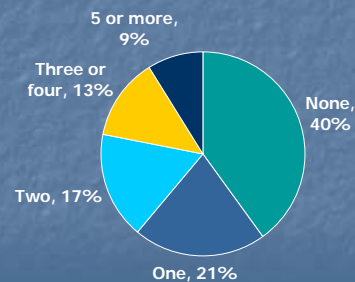
Clip 1: Larry

- Age 34 at beginning of study, 41 when this video interview was conducted
- Left high school in 11th grade – was held back a grade and decided to leave.
- Worked on oil rigs in Texas for ten years after dropping out of high school
- Single parent of one son, age 7
- Trained as a house painter and plumber's apprentice; currently laid off
- Did not have GED at the time of this interview
- Current job goal: to become a plumber
- Current education goal: to get GED
- [4670new.wmv](#)

Clip 2: Sarah

- Age 24 when study began, 30 at time of this video interview
- Left school at age 16 at principal's suggestion due to the way she dressed
- Works at a social service agency
- Participates in theater and would really like to get an art degree
- Does not have GED
- Current job goal: to get a better paying job; something administrative
- Current education goal: to get an administrative assistant certification
- [317new.wmv](#)

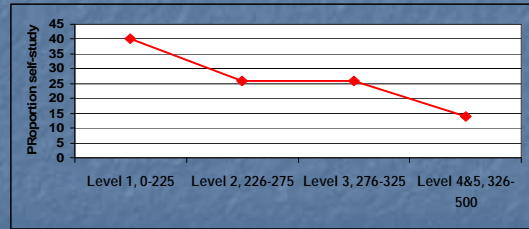
Periods of Participation in Basic Skills Programs Since Leaving School



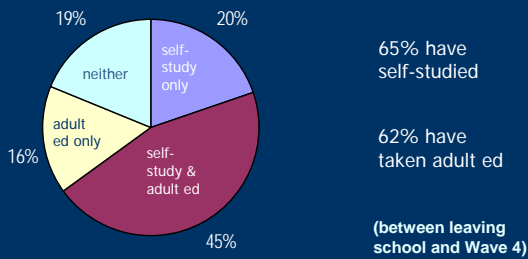
Self-Study in the LSAL

- Defined as “studying on your own to improve your reading, writing or math skills or prepare for the GED”
- Probes distinguished such self-study from activity conducted in school or as part of a basic skills or GED class
- In-depth qualitative interviews confirmed the validity of these self-reports

Self-Study by Literacy Proficiency (wave 1)



Self-Study and Participation

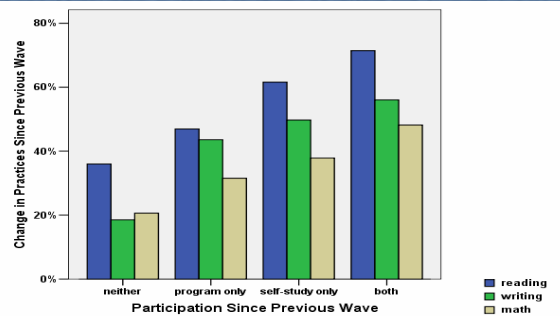


65% have self-studied

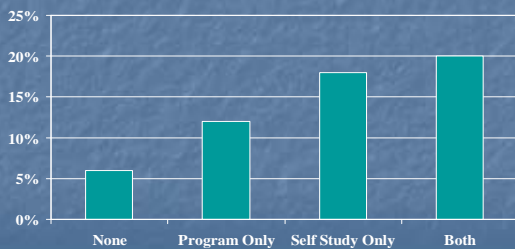
62% have taken adult ed

(between leaving school and Wave 4)

Self-Reported Change in Literacy Practices by Participation & Self-Study



Percent GED Attainment by Participation & Self-Study (through Wave 4)



Self-Study Summary

- Widespread mode of basic skills development among adults
- Occurs widely among adults who participate in programs and ones who never do
- Does *not* depend on literacy level
- Self study appears to bridge between periods of program participation and facilitate persistence
- Fits into a continuum of delivery strategies along with programs and tutoring programs
- About half of those who self study use the computer to improve their basic skills or prepare for the GED
- Major policy and program design implications

Program Participation..

- ..is often fragmented by life circumstances
- ..is better thought of as a busy intersection among life and learning trajectories rather than as a parking lot
- ..should support students' trajectories not just their activities in the intersections
- ..is expanded by a *learning plan* that learners can follow and that services can be wrapped around

Key Findings

- Measures of *literacy proficiency and literacy practices* show systematic change over time across the adult lifespan
- Growth curve models of these literacy measures show impressive *heterogeneity* of change: some adults show literacy growth, others little change, and others literacy loss over time
- Age, birthplace, parental education, intergenerational reading practices, K-12 schooling experiences, and health systematically influence adult literacy development

Key Findings (con't)

- *Key life history events* – such as changes in family composition and employment changes -- influence adult literacy development
- The dynamics of change are quite different for literacy proficiency and literacy practices: e.g., program participation directly affects literacy practices measures but not literacy proficiency

Outcomes & Program Impact

- Literacy proficiency growth over relatively short periods of time is *not* affected by program participation
- Pre-post test accountability data, that apparently show systematic gains in participants' proficiency, do not contrast participants' gains with those of comparable non-participants; LSAL indicates those gains are equivalent
- Literacy practices growth over relatively short periods of time *is*, on the other hand, directly affected by program participation
- These findings are reinforced by cross-sectional research (e.g., Smith & Sheehan-Holt) and by classroom studies (e.g., Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener)
- Proficiency measures thus do not reflect the impact that programs have or support evidence-based program and policy improvement processes

Outcomes & Program Impact

- Literacy proficiency growth over relatively short periods of time is *not* affected by program participation
- Pre-post test accountability data, that apparently show systematic gains in participants' proficiency, do not contrast participants' gains with those of comparable non-participants; LSAL indicates those gains are equivalent
- Literacy practices growth over relatively short periods of time *is*, on the other hand, directly affected by program participation
- These findings are reinforced by cross-sectional research (e.g., Smith & Sheehan-Holt) and by classroom studies (e.g., Purcell-Gates, Jacobson & Degener)
- Proficiency measures thus do not reflect the impact that programs have or support evidence-based program and policy improvement processes

Practice-Engagement Theory

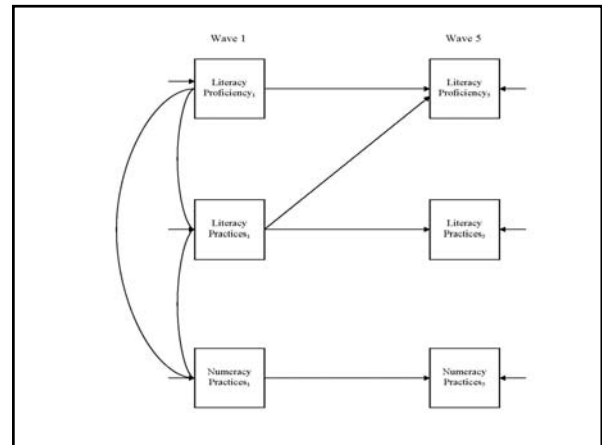
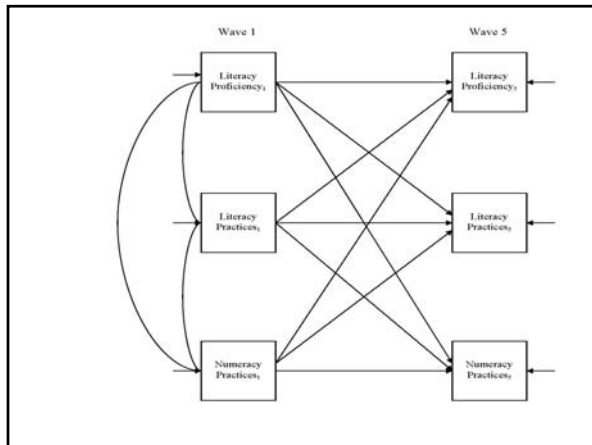
- Predicts that engagement in literacy practices over time leads to proficiency growth
- Proposed by Reder from ethnographic work and later by Smith & colleagues in analyses of NALS
- Has not been tested longitudinally until LSAL:
 - Among adults at the same proficiency level at one point in time: Higher levels of engagement in literacy practices at that point in time are associated with significantly higher levels of literacy proficiency 6 years later

Programs as Practice-Building Contexts

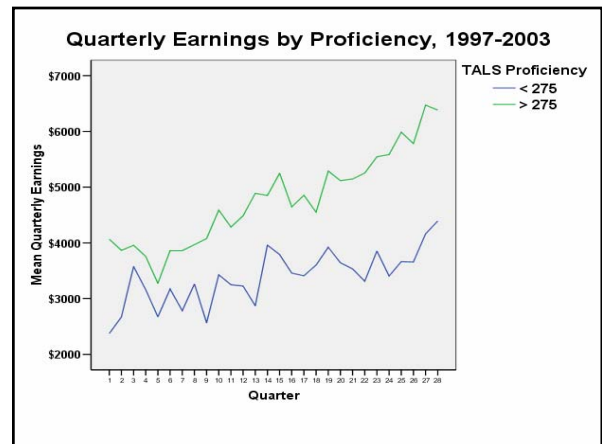
Programs that build engagement in authentic literacy practices thus may lead to long term proficiency growth even though it is not evident in short term pre post testing regimes

Programs as Facilitated Learning Contexts

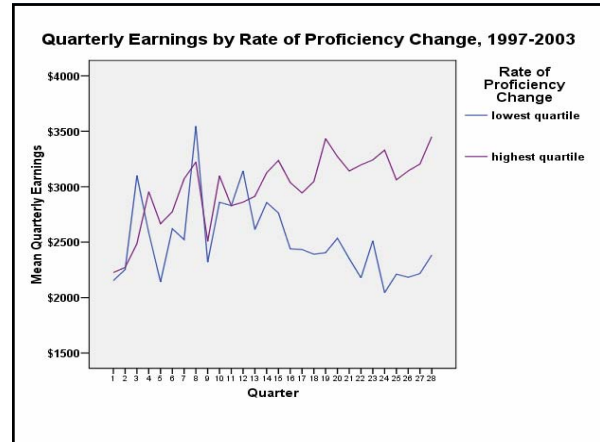
- Programs often blend classroom instruction & time in learning centers
- There may be a continuum of facilitated learning with classroom activities on one end and self study (outside of programs) at the other end, with facilitated use of learning centers and tutoring in between



Although Program Impact on Proficiency Takes a Long Time to Emerge,
Literacy Proficiency Matters!



Although Program Impact on Proficiency Takes a Long Time to Emerge,
Literacy Growth Matters



Some Implications: Literacy and Economic Change

- Literacy proficiency is deeply embedded in individuals' employment and earnings histories
- At higher proficiency levels, school dropouts experience less unemployment and greater earnings
- *Changes* in their proficiency over time are positively associated with economic outcomes: those who gain (lose) proficiency tend to be those whose earnings increase (decrease)

Literacy and Economic Change (con't)

- In economic downturn (recession), those with less proficiency tend to be selected out of employment while those with more proficiency remain employed & experience increased earnings
- Literacy may thus play an active role in economic change, though the causality is likely quite complex and reciprocal
- Use of communication and information technologies in the workplace appears to mediate relationships between literacy growth and microeconomic changes

Some Implications (con't)

- The close relationship among literacy, GED attainment and postsecondary education outcomes points to the need to coordinate K-12, adult literacy and postsecondary education programs more closely
- The close relationship between literacy change and economic change in adult life highlights new equity concerns in employment policies and workplace practices

Clip 3: Don

- Age 30 when study began, 37 at time of this video interview
- Left high school at age 17 because he didn't see the point of it when he could be working, having fun and helping out at home
- Currently working in a warehouse making theatrical & industrial lighting fixtures
- Previously interested in doing movie makeup & special effects or writing
- Earned a high school equivalency
- Current education goal: learn something for pleasure, like guitar
- Job goal: stay at current job
- [442new_0001.wmv](#)

Clip 4: Carmen

- Age 30 when study began, 37 at time of this video interview
- Left school at age 16 due to pregnancy
- Single parent of three daughters ages 19-23
- Currently not working due to job-related injury
- Favorite job was working with disabled & mentally challenged children
- Dream job: interior designer
- Has high school equivalency
- Current education goal: get more education and learn more about a career
- [41025new.wmv](#)

Thinking Outside the Box: New Approaches Suggested by Research & Experimentation

- From NCSALL's *Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning & Persistence Study*:
 - Build *persistence* in adult learners
 - Gather data and build accountability around *longer-term* outcomes
 - Develop *learning support systems*
 - Utilize *technology* to increase system capacity

New Approaches (con't)

- Experiment with ways to combine language, literacy and job skills training
 - Differentiated instruction
 - Long term basic skills support, not just a pipeline "handoff" from adult educ programs
 - Flexible career pathways models
 - Private/public partnerships to break down traditional distinction between basic and job specific skills training for incumbent workers

New Approaches (con't)

- Extend postsecondary education effectively to adult literacy students
 - Bridge adult education and postsecondary programs
 - Minimize need for remedial courses
 - More flexible delivery models (break away from linear Carnegie models)

Redefining Program, Participation, & Persistence

- Focus on engagement in literacy practices rather than on persistence in classrooms
- Broaden definition of program to include facilitated engagement in literacy practices
- Technology has broader role here than just delivering distance learning

Broadening Role of Technology

- Many adults engage in periods of "self study" before or after periods of program participation
- Programs could increase their outreach and enrollment and increase their students' persistence by using technology to connect these self directed learning activities with traditional classes
- This would broaden the role of technology from offering distance education to connecting different learning modalities & activities over time

Learning Support Systems

- To increase persistence, adults need *learning support systems* that provide portable, personalized learning plans they can follow
- These plans might include periods of attending programs, working independently or with tutors, or receiving support services from community based organizations or volunteer programs
- Grants can assist communities to develop local learning support systems, utilizing technology to facilitate collaboration and information sharing among the various organizations working with learners

An Example of an Evolving Learning Support System

With credits to Jen Vanek, Tom Cytron-Hysom, Judy Mortrude and team in St. Paul MN

Ramsey County WIB Healthcare Initiative

Background

Legislative concern over effectiveness of workforce development

Resulting Legislation

- Four collaboratives mandated to develop and implement collaborative plans
- Included are ABE, MnSCU, WorkForce Centers, school districts, community action agencies, public housing
- Final report to legislature March 2011 will form basis for potential legislative changes

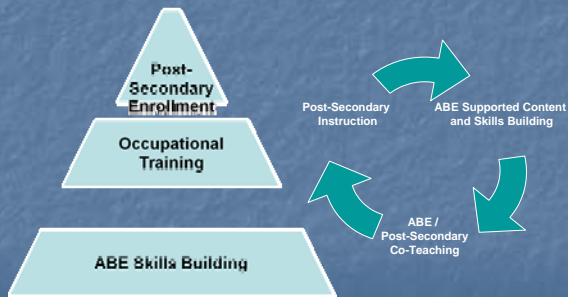
SAINT PAUL COLLEGE
 A Community & Technical College

positively Minnesota
 Department of Employment and Economic Development

MINNESOTA
 GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

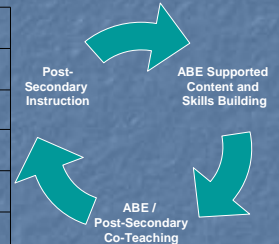


Bridge vs. Blended Models



Medical Admin and Coding Career Track Course Design

Content	Contact Hours
Technology	30
Medical Terminology	30
Medical Assistant Administration	40
Medical Billing and Coding	80
Integration to Employers /Internship	60
Certification Exam Preparation	



A Second Example of an Evolving Learning Support System:

Literacy Zones in New York State

With credit to Bob Purga, Jim Matt & team

Literacy Zones

- Place based strategy using an all hands on deck approach
- Cross lifespan
- Cross education: full continuum from prenatal, baby basics and early childhood, K-12 and postsecondary, adult
- Cross sector: including vocational rehabilitation, cultural, labor and one stops, health services, social services, foundations, volunteer sector, benefits and support services

Literacy Zone Characteristics

- High needs neighborhood or community of concentrated poverty/concentrated immigration
- Effective adult education provider as lead
- 14 priority partnerships for programs, service and referral
- 10 pathways out of poverty
- Family welcome center as hub
- Guiding coalition to develop LZ

Family Welcome Center

- Stabilize family: benefits counseling, supports, program access, referral
- Skills to navigate complex systems: health literacy, financial stability, postsecondary access, immigration, school
- Pathways out of poverty
- Intake point for Learner Web

Learning Plans are being Developed for Ten Pathways Out of Poverty

1. Raise literacy levels, birth through adult (100% literacy)
2. Programs to enable at risk in school youth to complete high school and move to postsecondary
3. Postsecondary transition for out of school youth and adults
4. Programs for public assistance recipients and 200% poverty leading to employment and advancement.
5. Incarcerated transition
6. Veterans transition
7. Pathways to citizenship and English language proficiency
8. Support for individuals with disabilities and their families
9. Support for mature workers and senior citizens to enable them to stay out of poverty
10. Workforce development programs, including apprenticeship and career pathways

What Will Learner Web Look Like in New Orleans?

- New Dept of Commerce-funded project getting ready to launch
- Numerous local community partners
- Initial focus will be on digital literacy, broadband consumer education, with an introduction to career pathways and other Learning Plans being added later
- Blending support from technology and tutors
- Goodwill is lead organization with close collaboration with Loyola (Lindy Boogs center) and the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans

For More Information
and References

www.lsal.pdx.edu

www.learnerweb.org

reders@pdx.edu