

Planning for the Future: Career & Education Counseling in ABE

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Background

The design and delivery of Adult Basic Education (ABE) nationwide continues to adapt to reflect the notion that adult learners should be pursuing a continuum of education, training, and employment options, as opposed to viewing the acquisition of a GED or English language literacy as an end point. In this continuum, ABE is a critical “launching off” point for many adults, the place where they receive the foundational skills and baseline credentials needed to transition to work and/or postsecondary programming. Representative of this repositioning, the U.S. Department of Education – Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) spearheaded an initiative in 2011 to adopt K-12 Common Core State Standards for ABE learners “to forge a stronger link among adult education, postsecondary education, and the world of work.”¹ The resulting **College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards for Adult Education** are content standards tailored to adult students and intended to guide curriculum and instruction decision that can meet the needs and recommendations of employers and educators.

In addition to national endeavors like the CCR, some states are significantly revamping their adult education programs to emphasize a much stronger workforce preparation orientation. Virginia, for instance, has redefined its approach to adult education and literacy programming to extend beyond a focus on the high school equivalency credential to “the skills and knowledge required for adults to excel in the 21st century economy.”² As part of this strategy, the state’s Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAEL) has set complementary goals for 2017: a) that 100% of ABE students participate in career pathways activities, and b) that 100% of OAEL programs operate at least one integrated education and training program “in which students develop the essential basic and workplace skills necessary to gain entry-level jobs in targeted industries.”³

Whether or not state or local programs set strategic goals and establish performance measures around career readiness, many ABE students likely find themselves with myriad questions about what education, training, and career choices to make, and how to make those choices

¹ Susan Pimentel, MPR Associates for the US Department of Education – Office of Vocational and Adult Education, “College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education.” April 2013. <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf> Note, also, that beginning in 2014, the GED test is aligned with the common core standards, and as such, is designed to measure a foundation of knowledge and skills deemed essential to career and college readiness.

² Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy, “Advancing Workforce Readiness: Adult Education and Literacy for 21st Century Virginia,” Strategic Plan for 2012-2017.

http://www.doe.virginia.gov/about/tech_and_career_ed/adulted_strategic_plan_book.pdf

³ Ibid.

work financially and/or balance them with family and other obligations. What approach should Minnesota ABE take to help students answer these questions? No doubt, ABE instructors have long provided invaluable guidance to students on a range of personal, academic, and employment related issues. While these are often informal, one-to-one exchanges between a student and teacher, increasingly, ABE sites are incorporating “transitions” and “navigation” – career and college exploration and counseling – into their programming. West Metro ABE, for example, ran a “transitions and career counseling” pilot project in 2010-11; and ABE programs in Southwest, West, and St. Paul have worked with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) over the past couple of years to develop **MyMnCareers**, an online tool specifically designed to help adult learners with goal-setting and around their work aspirations.

Nonetheless, if and how career and other types of counseling is done differs across (and even within) programs. Further, the degree to which students need these kinds of supports varies greatly. An ongoing study of how Minnesota FastTRAC (a cross-system career pathways education and training model taking place at numerous locations throughout the state) is being implemented found that “participants’ need for navigation help varies; some participants need very little, whereas others would likely drop out of the program without” it.⁴

Also at issue is how to counsel the numerous ABE students who are not planning or able to pursue additional education. Transitions and career pathways programs tend to assume that adult education students will move into postsecondary programs. However, this often not the logical or feasible step for adults with a pressing need to find a job and a pay check, or whose skills fall well below the prerequisites needed to enroll in college level programming. There need to be tools available to ABE staff to counsel these students as well. Given that ABE is a key entry point into a longer trajectory of education and work for many students, it’s worth exploring best practices around delivering these supports and whether they should be offered more systematically.

Finally, we note that legislation passed by the state in 2013 – **Planning for Students’ Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment** (Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.125) – may well push ABE to weave more career and future planning into its programming. Minnesota is the 36th state in the country to pass such legislation, which requires all secondary students to develop a plan that prepares them to successfully transition to college and/or employment. While the legislation does not pertain to ABE students, adult education is part of the K-12 system; as such, it may be reasonable to assume that a similar set of expectations around career and college planning apply to adult learners in the system – whether that planning is eventually mandated or not. As high schools adopt policies and programming to satisfy the new mandate, ABE should consider what components could work well for an adult population. In fact, there are numerous career and college exploration programs at the high school level that are/could be instructive to ABE.

⁴ MN FastTRAC, “Implementation Study of 2011 Career Pathways,” October 2013.

This paper examines various possible answers to the following questions: What is the scope of the support/counseling services ABE should offer (academic, personal, career, etc)? Who should deliver these services (ABE instructors, dedicated counseling staff, partner organizations, etc.), and in what format (integrated into a course, stand alone, orientation and/or exit programming, etc.)? How should counseling be tailored to address the needs of students who may not be transitioning to higher education? How do we support local ABE programs' efforts to deliver support services (training, professional development, curriculum and other resources, etc.)? To answer these questions, we look to successful models of delivering career exploration and other student supports already taking place within ABE programs, both here in Minnesota and elsewhere around the country. We also explore what can be learned from high school career and college guidance models – the one just enacted in Minnesota and others – that can be adapted for adult learners.

WHAT are Support Services?

Just what kinds of supports should be offered to ABE students? And what do we call them? Across education and social assistance programs, there are a range of support services available to students/clients. Depending on the setting, these services – and the people who deliver them – may be called different things. “Counseling” tends to evoke assistance of a personal nature, but it is also part of the education lexicon, referring to guidance with academic choices. “Career counseling” refers more specifically, of course, to helping individuals with their employment choices and job preparation – services you would certainly find at a WorkForce Center. “Case management” is more typically associated with public assistance programs, where participants’ needs and obligations are monitored and attended to. “Support services” are often thought of as aide community based organizations offer clients, and can range from things like food and housing support to financial literacy. “Navigation” is a term being widely used within bridge or “transition” programs (like Minnesota FastTRAC), connoting the range of assistance given to students to help them succeed in a postsecondary setting.

In practice, these terms are relatively interchangeable and refer to services that are often interwoven (e.g.; career choices necessitate education and training decisions that may require financial assistance and help with things like child care). A counselor, navigator, or case manager can, and often does, provide a similar menu of support. Pennsylvania ABE, for example, lays out what it calls “case management” duties in its guidelines to local programs. These duties are wide-ranging and include participating in program orientation; reviewing student goals and analyzing assessments; making referrals to other community resources/agencies; assisting with addressing barriers to attendance, such as childcare and transportation; and providing access to resources that facilitate transitions to workforce or postsecondary education/training.⁵

Like case managers in Pennsylvania, “navigators” under Minnesota FastTRAC assume a wide range of duties. An on-going analysis of how FastTRAC is being implemented locally has

⁵ State of Pennsylvania, Adult Education and Family Literacy Guidelines, Program Year 2013. http://tlcliteracy.org/images/downloads/aefl_adult_education_and_family_literacy_guidelines_py_2013_14.pdf

identified four general areas of responsibility among navigators: recruitment and orientation, college connections (registration, getting college student IDs, etc.), support service referrals, and career exploration and job search. At the same time, FastTRAC navigators report that they are often called on to be “a sounding board for participants to work out personal issues” (around things like housing, family problems, finances, immigration documentation, and self-esteem) in addition to providing referrals for daily needs like transportation and childcare.⁶

Regardless of terms or titles, the challenge for ABE is decide just what to kinds of services to offer, by whom, at the right place and time. Given increasing expectations that ABE act as a launch pad for students’ ongoing education and/or occupational preparation, providing guidance on these topics should certainly be a main ingredient on its “support services” menu.

WHO Delivers Support Services (and When and Where)?

There is no one right person, or even institution, that must be designated with delivering counseling services to ABE students. Within ABE, support services may be delivered by staff dedicated for those purposes or by classroom instructors. Or, ABE may partner with WorkForce Centers, CBOs, and/or community colleges to offer some, most, or all of these services. This section explores some different service delivery models, with a focus on “the who, when, and where.”

Within ABE

A. Dedicated Counseling Staff. In states where the community college system is the institutional home to ABE, there may be opportunity for ABE students, especially those involved in bridge programming, to access campus counseling staff – professionals well-trained in providing academic and career planning guidance to adult students. In states like Minnesota, where ABE is located within the K-12 system, the incidence of “counselor sharing” with high school programs seems less likely.

Regardless of institutional location, some state ABE offices mandate that local programs house trained counseling staff. In Pennsylvania, for example, ABE programs are expected (as laid out by the state’s AEFLA guidelines) to employ dedicated case managers – professionals with a four-year degree who have training in educational counseling and attend periodic case management professional development courses. In cases where it’s not possible to employ a dedicated counselor, Pennsylvania guidelines require that staff assigned to case management duties be given sufficient time devoted to fulfilling them.

Similarly, Massachusetts hires professionals with a bachelor’s degree in counseling or a related field to serve as Educational and Career Advisors who are specifically tasked with helping students identify career goals and develop work readiness skills. The state’s **ABE Education and Career Planning Guide** lays out a goal setting process local programs are to follow, in which advisors work with students to develop Individual Education and Career Plans (IECPs) – part of a system-wide effort to help students “take steps beyond the GED” and make informed

⁶ MN FastTRAC, “Implementation Study of 2011 Career Pathways,” October 2013.

education and career choices.⁷ In addition to monthly meetings with students to review progress towards the goals they've outlined together in IECs, advisors coordinate career exploration activities (emphasizing career pathways in high-growth industry sectors) and help students locate/apply for relevant training programs or jobs.

While many states do not require ABE to employ dedicated counseling staff, some provide funding for these positions – just as many counties/local programs choose to. Connecticut now funds “case manager” positions in several ABE programs, along with professional development opportunities for them. The Helena Public School system in Montana employs a “Lead Career Counselor” as part of its ABE team. In Virginia, where ABE counselors are not mandated but there is a statewide emphasis on career preparation for adult students, Henrico County ABE has employed counselors since 2006, which Program Manager Elaine Callahan calls “one of the most important positions we have in our program” – and one that she credits with a nearly 50% improvement in student retention over the course of a few years.⁸ Counselors hold mandatory orientations and offer students ongoing guidance and joint planning opportunities as they matriculate.

Callahan acknowledges that instructors could likely carry out some of the same duties, but they may not be able to do so with the same intensity or duration as a person whose position is devoted only to counseling students on an individual basis. She notes, “The instructional priorities of the classroom are significant, and the instructor’s focus is different from that of the counselor’s.”⁹ The New England Literacy Resource Center’s Adult Learner Persistence webpage states the following: “In many programs and ABE systems, teachers double as informal counselors. In other systems, the teaching and counseling functions are separated to lessen the burden on teachers and to provide students another option to consult a trusted person.”¹⁰

Minnesota does not require local ABE programs to have dedicated counselors on staff. In fact, Minnesota ranks 3rd from bottom among states in terms of the ratio of counselors to students in its K-12 system (which houses ABE)¹¹. Nonetheless, many ABE sites do employ people in the counselor role (who often perform other duties as well). Minneapolis ABE, for example, has “student support services” staff on hand to assist with course planning and registration; proctor exams and administer assessments; and answer students’ questions on any number of personal or practical topics. Counselors/support staff in local programs may be in charge of orientation sessions for new students, many of which do incorporate career and future planning. In Detroit

⁷ “Education and Career Plans and Family Action Plans Update” available at:

www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.aspx?id=6944

⁸ Elaine Callahan, Henrico County ABE, “Role of GED Counselors in Student Retention,” Winter, 2008.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ New England Literacy Resource Center’s Adult Learner Persistence web page:

<http://www.nelrc.org/persist/policy.html#7counseling>

¹¹ There are 771 students for every professional counselor in Minnesota’s k_12 system. The national K-12 average is 473-to-1 and the American School Counselors Association, an advocate for the profession, recommends a ratio of 250-to-1.

Lakes, a “goal setting and career planning instructor” meets with students following an overview orientation to introduce them to the MN Career information system.

B. Classroom Instructor. Students spend most of their time in the classroom, and it is with their teachers that they tend to develop close and trusting relationships. Naturally, then, teachers are the ones that students often bring their “life” questions to, and therefore can be well suited to impart future planning guidance. In addition, encouraging or mandating students to spend time outside of the classroom for career counseling and future planning exercises may not be realistic, given limits on students’ time and the fact that many are struggling to meet immediate needs and simply don’t have the luxury to plan ahead; as one full-time ABE counselor pointed out, “getting a job right now is what matters” for many students, not plotting out various steps along a lengthy career pathway. Staff from both Robbinsdale and Minneapolis ABE reported that workshops held on these topics outside of class time were sparsely attended.

Indeed, for many students obtaining a GED or improving English language skills is a prerequisite for what’s needed most immediately in their lives – a job. For them, ABE may be most valuable if it prepares them adequately for entry into the workforce. Further, despite the growing popularity of transitions and career pathways programs that emphasize movement along an education and training continuum that starts with basic skills acquisition and progresses to postsecondary degree/certificate completion, continuation beyond ABE is not practical or preferable for all students.

At the 2009 “**Adult Readiness Roundtable**” Project of the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy and the National Center on Education and the Economy, participants voiced concern that adult education programs with a career pathways component do not easily accommodate learners with very low basic skill levels or very limited English proficiency (see box). That worry has been echoed here at home, with educators and policymakers noting that programs like FastTRAC tend to be inaccessible to all but the highest level ABE learners.

Career Pathways Programs Inaccessible for Some

Excerpts from the Roundtable capture participants’ concerns that traditional career pathways and transitions programs are out of reach for many ABE students:

“...virtually all occupational and transition programs require a threshold level of basic skills and/or English language proficiency that would be rated somewhere in the intermediate level by most assessments. Below this level, most adults with limited skills are not trainable workers for high-opportunity occupations by the instructional models now in use, and below the highest levels they are not prepared to make transitions to postsecondary education.” Participants worry that “low- level learners will not persist long enough in traditional adult education courses to reach these levels...The problem is getting them onto career pathways training to begin with.”

Excerpted from CAAL’s “Expanding Horizons: Pacesetters in Adult Education for Work,” available at: <http://www.caalusa.org/Expanding.pdf>

For these reasons, weaving career exploration and job readiness exercises into classroom instruction may be useful for the widest range of students – including those without near-term

plans to continue education and training. Many instructors already contextualize GED or ELL lessons to some extent, making them applicable to the workplace or other “real world” situations. And, increasingly, instructors are incorporating career and future planning exercises into their lesson plans. There are myriad lesson plans, activities, and other resources available to help teachers integrate these ideas into the classroom (a sampling of these resources is listed at the end of this document).

In addition to specific lessons, a review of current literature on this topic suggests that “embedding” workplace expectations into the classroom is beneficial for all students. Preparing students for the world of work can be accomplished, in part, by structuring classroom tasks and obligations to simulate these expectations (e.g., punctuality, appropriate dress, seeking information, taking responsibility, problem-solving, workplace etiquette, use of technology). Similarly, it can be helpful to repeatedly demonstrate to students how mastering elementary basic skills can lead to better employment opportunities. Another important tool is working with students to identify skills they already have (e.g., cooking, using machinery, child care, fixing things, etc.) and determine how those could be used as a basis for building career planning.

C. All/Both! In reality, counseling tends to be fluid within ABE, occurring both in and outside of the classroom. Nicole Wibstad from Rochester ABE reports that Career Navigation is provided one-on-one outside the classroom setting during individual appointments, and also in the classroom in the Career Pathways course that she teaches. Under FastTRAC, some navigators offered specific workshops or sessions outside of regular class time, some offered sessions or were guest speakers during a bridge class, and others met with participants only one-on-one.

The availability of counseling both in and out of the classroom can be important. Some students may be reluctant or unable to seek out navigation services outside of the classroom. Others may be uncomfortable asking questions or revealing personal information in front of classmates, and prefer meeting with a counselor one on one. As Tom Lonetti from American Indian OIC puts it, “We are continuously giving guidance on what students’ plans are. Inside the classroom during instruction, between classes, emails, phone calls, etc...are all employed as means to communicate with students to help them with future plans during and after successfully completing the GED tests.”

Outside of ABE

ABE staff may not have the background or time to fully answer the questions students have, particularly those related to career exploration and preparation in fields they are not familiar with. The **Guide to Adult Education for Work: Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce** states: “In practice, most counseling in Adult Education programs is provided by teachers, who usually do not have enough time or training to carry out this task in addition to their other responsibilities.” At the 2014 Minnesota State Economic Competitiveness Summit, Michelle Ufford, the Executive Director of the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, echoed this sentiment when she said: “Few educators in our region have private sector experience, so they can’t advise their students on what it’s like to work in different industries.”

It is important for ABE programs to recognize that they do not have to spend limited time and resources reinventing the wheel – there are organizations out there employing professionals specifically trained to assist people with career exploration and job preparation.¹²

D. Workforce Development Professional: In terms of helping students with career exploration and preparation, the workforce development system is a logical place to turn. As Michelle Ufford noted at the Economic Competitiveness Summit, “schools don’t typically have connections to business communities, but Workforce Centers do.” In fact, a number of ABE students may be engaged in the workforce system through Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Adult or Dislocated Worker programs, and therefore, already receiving employment preparation and job search and placement services (students enrolled in MFIP may also receive employment services along with work supports like child care and transportation assistance). It is important to note, however, that students do not have to be enrolled in WIA to benefit from the services the workforce system has to offer. Indeed, one pretense behind the 1998 enactment of WIA is better coordination and less duplication of services among ABE, workforce development, and other agencies running federally funded education and training programs. However, the degree to which true coordination of services takes place locally varies greatly.

Many ABE programs engage with their local workforce system, referring students to the WorkForce Center (WFC) for training programs or other employment services, or inviting WFC staff to campus to conduct career assessment and job search workshops (again, these may be better attended if they are offered within regular course time). Minneapolis ABE suggests that bringing these services to ABE sites may be the best model given that students tend to feel a level of comfort in the classroom that may not exist for them in the WorkForce Center (in fact, it was noted that some immigrant students steer clear of WorkForce Centers because they worry about documentation and legal status).

ABE programs could seek to establish semi-regular classroom visits from WFC staff to present students with the latest jobs forecast and offer guided exploration of ISEEK/MyMnCareers. Or, WFC staff could regularly share up-to-date labor market information with to ABE instructors or support staff, who in turn could use the information to inform career planning work with students. Either way, ABE’s Regional Transitions Coordinators (RTCs) could be charged with establishing local relationships between ABE and WFCs (where they don’t already exist) and with ensuring that recurrent meetings or classroom visits take place.

¹² Note, too, that states have actually resituated their ABE programs so that they are officially part of the workforce development system. Pennsylvania ABE is part of the state’s workforce development system, for example, and in 2012, ABE in Indiana shifted from the state’s Department of Education to its Department of Workforce Development, which reoriented the program to focus on occupationally based curriculum and career counseling in addition to traditional GED attainment services. Students who enter ABE are co-enrolled in WIA employment and training activities. View details at: http://www.in.gov/sba/files/BC_Hearing_2012_510_DWD_Agency_Overview.pdf

E. CBO Case Manager: A number of adult learners are connected to neighborhood CBOs where they receive counseling and assistance on issues like housing, food, transportation, financial literacy/family budgeting, as well as employment services. Not only can ABE work to develop strong referral relationships with local CBOs that offer wraparound support services, but RTCs could be tapped here again to establish relationships where they don't yet exist, and to help build consistent pathways from ABE to employment training programs offered at CBOs. In this model, either ABE or the CBOs could provide career exploration services; the idea is that, by working together, the two entities would offer the full range of supports many students need. Some of these partnerships/pathways already exist, and could serve as models for other ABE programs.

F. Cross-System Counseling Team: ABE students who are also participating in WIA, MFIP, or CBO-based programs are likely receiving various guidance and support from each entity. It is less likely, however, that there is a coordinated service delivery plan across these entities unless they are in a partnership where the joint provision of student supports is deliberate. The most recent round of FastTRAC grants, for example, require local programs to designate an individual or a *small team pulled from participating partners* to provide navigation services to students. While most programs had one or two staff members from the same institution serving as navigators, some had individuals from different organizations sharing responsibilities and splitting their duties by location, function, or caseload. The FastTRAC implementation study notes that the navigator role “did not need to be embodied in a single individual. That model worked well, but so did models in which the navigation duties were shared by a small number of people. What seemed crucial was that participants knew of a specific individual(s) who they felt confident would be ready and willing to help them.”¹³

Somewhat similarly, Rhode Island ABE requires local programs to provide “integrated services” so students are connected to training opportunities, structured work experiences, work readiness training and assessment, job development and job placement, and case management/coaching through partnerships.¹⁴

Secondary Career & College Planning Models

As mentioned earlier, Minnesota passed legislation in 2013 designed to ensure that all 9-12th graders have well-thought-out plans to guide their academic careers such that they graduate high school ready and able to move into postsecondary education or the labor market (see box below).

¹³ MN FastTRAC, “Implementation Study of 2011 Career Pathways.” October 2013.

¹⁴ New England Literacy Resource Center’s Adult Learner Persistence web page:
<http://www.nelrc.org/persist/policy.html#7counseling>

With grant dollars from the state, Northeast Minnesota is subsequently running a Higher Education Career Advising Pilot, in which the workforce development and K-12 systems are partnering with the local business community to offer a menu of free career planning services, designed to supplement the work of school guidance counselors.

Called **Northeast Career EdVenture**, area schools select services from the menu, which are delivered by professional Career Counselors from the workforce system, and range from individual student consultations to group/classroom activities to job shadowing and business-led entrepreneurial workshops. From just September to December, 2013, 2,056 students have received a range of career exploration and preparation services (75% participated in group activities, 25% received individual assistance); by comparison, just 1,723 students received similar services between 2007 and the start of the pilot.¹⁵

Planning for Students' Successful Transition to Postsecondary Education and Employment (Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.125)

The legislation states that starting in 9th grade students must have "plans" designed to:

- provide a comprehensive academic plan for completing a college and career-ready curriculum that meets academic standards and developing "21st century skills" like team work, collaboration, and good work habits;
- emphasize academic rigor and high expectations;
- help students identify personal learning styles that may affect their postsecondary education and employment choices;
- help students access postsecondary education and career options;
- integrate strong academic content into career-focused courses and integrate career-focused courses into strong academic content;
- help students/families access counseling and other supports that enable them to complete coursework, prepare for postsecondary education and careers, and obtain information about postsecondary costs and eligibility for financial aid and scholarship;
- help students/families identify partnerships of K-12 schools, postsecondary institutions, economic development agencies, and employers that support transitions to college and employment and provide experiential learning opportunities; and
- be reviewed and revised annually to ensure that students are on track to meet graduation requirements ready to succeed in work or postsecondary education without needing remediation.

Career EdVenture is one among many programs in the state that successfully connect youth to the business community, providing exposure to different industries, giving students a flavor for the world of work, and introducing them to professional networks that may be extremely useful to their eventual entree into jobs. **BestPrep**, for example, is a statewide non-profit organization that works to build students' (grades 4-12) business, career and financial literacy skills by linking classroom curriculum to local employers. BestPrep programs like Classroom Plus bring employers into the classroom and takes students on workplace tours, while eMentors enables professionals to provide on-going guidance to students in a structured online format.

¹⁵ Power Point presentation by Michelle Ufford, Executive Director, Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, for the 2014 Minnesota State Economic Competitiveness Summit.

It's certainly worth considering whether successful high school programs like Career EdVenture and BestPrep be adopted for ABE. While some employers and volunteers may be less likely to want to mentor adults than teenagers, there are no doubt many in the business community who could be called upon to do this important work with ABE students. Indeed, there are a number of businesses that already engage with adult job seekers through CBOs and the WorkForce Centers, providing things like mock interviewing, job shadowing, and career fairs. Local ABE programs could ask area CBOs and WFCs to co-sponsor career orientation/job preparation type events with engaged employers – who may also be willing to speak to classes or small groups of adult learners. Or, thinking more broadly, could the Minnesota Literacy Council, the WorkForce Centers, or some other entity offer a “one-stop shop” of the same kinds of services that BestPrep does, tailored specifically for ABE learners?

Recommendations

To respond to growing expectations from lawmakers, employers, and educational institutions, ABE will need to move more deeply into the work of preparing its students for college and careers. In addition to incorporating more work readiness and industry specific content into its curriculum, ABE will increasingly be called upon to help learners navigate choices around education, training, and careers. How best to provide this function may depend on particular programs, student needs, and local partnerships. There are a handful of strategies that ABE could spearhead, however, to establish a framework through which local programs could access career counseling and future planning resources and opportunities.

- Utilize the RTCs to build/strengthen relationships between ABE, WorkForce Centers, and CBOs to point where consistent referral processes along with classroom visits, teacher training (e.g., WFC staff coming to ABE to do career exploration/preparation workshops with students or delivering local labor market information and employer needs to instructors), and the like become embedded in local programming.
- Identify the key components a “career and future plan” for ABE students should contain (adapting the new state high school model to fit adult learners, or borrowing from numerous planning guides already in use by ABE programs here and nationally), and provide a template planning guide for local programs to use/modify.
- Provide ongoing professional development to educate ABE staff about career and future planning expectations and resources, ranging from counseling techniques to timely labor market information.
- Replicate a secondary career exploration and prep model like Career EdVenture for ABE students. There may be sufficient interest in funding for something like this from both public and private sources given the growing emphasis on career readiness and the pressing need to position our current workforce to fill the skills gap.

More generally, ABE might look to pursue/advocate for:

- Dedicated student counseling functions – located both within and outside of ABE with funding that follows students for counseling, so that it can be appropriately provided by whatever organization is most appropriate (within ABE, CBO, at the college, etc.).

- Improved tracking for impact – acknowledging that there are several partners who may provide an “assist” to the “goal” achieved by ABE or a college in terms of degree completion, certificate attainment, or placement. How can we give ‘credit’ to partners for their “assists”?
- Program development that encourages shared ownership among ABE, postsecondary institutions, CBOs, and workforce partners to ensure that each perceives themselves as supporting a shared program and not “someone else’s.”

Resources

There are a whole host of tools available to ABE instructors/counselors interested in assisting students with career and future planning. In addition to resource links embedded in this report, here is just a small sample of available tools and materials:

In 2009, Massachusetts’ ABE professional development organization, the **System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES)** created **Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE/ESOL Classroom**, a curriculum guide for instructors and counselors working to build employment and education planning into their programs. The ICA curriculum guide includes numerous “classroom ready” lessons and activities, handouts and online resources to prepare instructors and counselors to guide students through career awareness and planning processes. The curriculum guide is available at: <http://sabes.org/workforce/integrating-career-awareness.pdf>

The **National College Transition Network (NCTN)** recognized the value of the SABES guide and worked with them to develop it into an **online course** offered through World Education E-Learning PD at <http://elearningpd.worlded.org/integrating-career-awareness>. NCTN/World Education offer adult education instructors a number of other online professional development opportunities. **Finding True North –The Role of the Navigator** may be of particular value for staff looking to build career counseling into their programs. Note that this course, available at <http://elearningpd.worlded.org/finding-true-north/>, was developed by NCTN in collaboration with a national team that includes Minnesota FastTRAC!

The NCTN website also hosts what it calls an **Aspirations Toolkit**, a compendium of counseling and instructional materials contributed by adult educators around the country. These are lessons and activities that can be implemented with adult learners in various class types (ESL or GED) and at a range of skill levels to encourage goal setting and inspire future planning. The toolkit can be accessed at: <http://collegetransition.org/resources.aspirationstoolkit.html>

In 2011, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) commissioned MPR Associates to produce **ABE Career Connections: A Manual for Integrating Adult Basic Education into Career Pathways**, a toolkit for practitioners looking to improve student transitions from ABE to postsecondary education and employment opportunities. The toolkit includes strategies for incorporating career and education planning and support services into ABE. Available at: <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CareerPathwaysToolkit2011.pdf>

More recently, OVAE commissioned MPR to complete a review of and report on Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – standards for k-12 education adopted by 46 states (including Minnesota) that reflect empirical evidence of what employers and educators demand of prospective employees/students. The MPR report, **College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education**, reviews a subset of CCSS and presents a College and Career Readiness (CCR) standard – a synthesis of content standards based on the CCSS and *tailored for adult students*. View the report at <http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/CCRStandardsAdultEd.pdf>

Minnesota FastTRAC recently launched an **Adult Career Pathways** website to house professional development resources for educators, workforce development professionals, and others engaged in career pathways work. A section of the site is designated for navigators and includes links to webinars and other resources. Available at: <http://mnfasttracpd.ning.com/>

The **New England Literacy Resource Center's Adult Learner Persistence** website has a Counseling and Support page that contains resources on a number of effective approaches to providing support services, including approaches specific to career planning. View them here: http://www.nelrc.org/persist/counseling_evid.html

The **Florida Literacy Coalition** has developed a three module self-paced course on training tutors and teachers to be career advocates. The first module is an overview of the adult learner, the second describes career clusters and how to help students develop an industry-specific career plan, and the third addresses working with students on things like resume writing, interviewing, and keeping a job. Available at: www.floridaliteracy.org/cp_course.html
Florida also has an online portal of career and college planning information and resources targeted to different groups of students, including GED students/Adult Learners: https://secure.flchoices.org/Home/_default.aspx