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Editor's Note: This edition features current research, practice, and policy related to the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative beginning with an interview with Whitney Smith, Manager of the Employment Program at the Joyce Foundation. Julie Strawn, Center for Law and Social Policy, presents a national perspective of basic skills reform efforts similar to Shifting Gears and offers strategies for states to improve the delivery of basic skills services. Finally, OCCRL staff contribute articles based on evaluation results from Shifting Gears Phase One, priorities for Shifting Gears Phase Two, and the role of the Workforce Investment Act in the implementation of bridge programs. We hope that readers enjoy this edition of UPDATE and find the articles useful to advance the successful transition of low-skilled adults to college and careers.

Year Three of the Shifting Gears Initiative: An Interview with Whitney Smith from the Joyce Foundation

by Jason L. Taylor

In 2007, the Joyce Foundation (http://www.joycefdn.org/) launched the Shifting Gears initiative (http://www.shifting-gears.org/) intended to increase the number of low-skilled adults who obtain postsecondary credentials that have value in the labor market and promote economic growth throughout the Midwest. Agencies in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin have been awarded grants totaling six million dollars to implement the Shifting Gears initiative. In October Jason Taylor, OCCRL Research Assistant, interviewed Whitney Smith from the Joyce Foundation to discuss Shifting Gears.

UPDATE: Broadly speaking, what are the goals and objectives of the Shifting Gears initiative?

Ms. Smith: For the last decade, Joyce's Employment Program has focused on improving the labor market outcomes of low-income adults in the Great Lakes Region. Shifting Gears was launched in 2007 with the goal of increasing the number of low-income adults who obtain college-level occupational credentials (meaning certificates or 2-year applied degrees) that have value in the labor market. We saw postsecondary education as a gateway for good jobs and a key to strengthening the region's long-term economic competitiveness.

UPDATE: How did the Joyce Foundation conceive of the Shifting Gears initiative, and what was the rationale for the design of Shifting Gears.

Ms. Smith: We believe state policy has the potential to drive innovation and better outcomes for workers. We see many pockets of innovation in our region, however, they are pretty boutique, small-scale programs. Through Shifting Gears, we're supporting collaboration between state agency leaders and other stakeholders to analyze data, share lessons, and enact policy reforms that are designed to promote statewide adoption of effective practices that lead to more working adults getting the skills they need to advance.

UPDATE: What is your role in Shifting Gears?

Ms. Smith: This initiative represents a new way of doing grant-making for Joyce's Employment Program. We identified the challenges and opportunities, based on input from our grantees and others, and then sought partners who wanted to pursue the state policy reform agenda. Our theory was that the right kind of funding and technical assistance to these partners would accelerate the pace of productive state policy change. We're still in the middle of the initiative and doing an evaluation, but we have seen initial positive outcomes. By providing funding and technical assistance to the states attempting to catalyze reform movements, we hope to further target resources to low-income workers in the region.

This issue features:

For many years we've funded very effective state policy advocacy organizations, and we see ourselves as partners with those organizations. Many of them have worked collaboratively with the government, but this is our first effort at funding reform work within state government at this scale. It is important for us to maintain the funding for advocates because they have expertise in this area. In fact, in most if not all of the state efforts there are policy and research organizations and advocates that are partnering alongside state policymakers to identify goals and strategies.

UPDATE: Your emphasis on partner organizations suggests that a large-scale initiative like Shifting Gears involves multiple organizations working together to achieve its goals. What organizations are involved in the Shifting Gears initiative, and what are the roles of these groups?

Ms. Smith: We're partnering on the day-to-day management of Shifting Gears with the organization, Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP – http://www.clasp.org/). It's an organization based in Washington, D.C. that has done a lot of technical assistance with states across the country on issues related to low-income workers. In addition to managing day-to-day work, CLASP is coordinating all of the technical assistance to the states. We are providing technical assistance in four areas. One is policy identification and development. Each state is identifying what state policies it can use to ultimately increase the number of low-skilled adults who earn credentials. CLASP staff are familiar with the activities of other states because of their work at the national level. They're very good at understanding state political and economical contexts and what will work within a given state. It was important up front not to have a one-size fits all model, so while the overall goal is the same for every state in the region, each state is tackling the goal in different ways. So CLASP is providing technical assistance on policy development by assigning a coach to each state that meets with state teams regularly and provides other resources to state teams.

The second area of technical assistance is related to data. A key component of the Shifting Gears initiative is building the state capacity to track and analyze how many adult workers are receiving education and advancing into the labor market. So we're building the capacity in states to link that data and do special analyses that will inform policy and practice. Technical assistance for data is being delivered by Davis Jenkins, a Senior Researcher at the Community College Research Center (http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/) at Teachers College, Columbia University.

The third area of technical assistance focuses on bringing all the states together twice a year to share what they're doing and dig deep into some of these issues. We are partnering with the Workforce Strategy Center (http://www.workforcestrategy.org/) to coordinate the cross-site learning community meetings as well as occasional webinars. The fourth and most recent area of technical assistance is strategic communications that is being delivered by Doug Gould and Company (http://www.douglasgould.com/). We made a decision to provide this assistance because it was important to elevate two things to a broad set of audiences: 'Why is it important to invest in the education of low-skilled adults for the broader community?' and 'What is the state strategy for getting there?' These are difficult topics to talk about in simple terms, so this communication expertise is really beneficial.

UPDATE: Who are the target audiences for the strategic communication plans?

Ms. Smith: These are customized plans, so the audiences are slightly different depending on the state. Generally, they include state policymakers, but also leaders within the field of adult education, the workforce, community colleges, and local business leaders. At the end of the day, these reforms will probably affect institutions the most, and many of the institutional leaders will be the deliverer of these messages. There needs to be a widespread campaign so everyone is focused on change, and the communication plans are a form of capacity building.

UPDATE: Please summarize some innovative approaches that participating states are using to achieve the goals of Shifting Gears.

Ms. Smith: I will briefly tell you what Illinois and Wisconsin are doing [strategies and progress updates for all states are on the Shifting Gears website – http://www.Shifting-Gears.org]. Illinois saw an opportunity to increase the college going and college success rates of adults who participate in adult education and remedial education programs. Too few adults were gaining the skills they need to advance in education and in the workplace. So, the state identified *bridge programs* as a strategy for better serving these adults and supporting their advancement to college education and into employment. To offer bridge programs statewide, given no new funding, the state is modifying existing workforce, adult education, and developmental education policy to incent this approach.

Wisconsin identified career pathway programs as the intended outcome of the Shifting Gears initiative. The career pathways model was envisioned as a better way of delivering education services for low-skilled adult students because it is believed to facilitate more effective transitions from one level of education and skill development to another and is designed to meet local labor market needs. Wisconsin recognized new approaches to adult basic education and remedial education would be needed, including new connections to credit-based programs in technical and community colleges (i.e., bridge programs), as well as improved connections and transitions within the credit-bearing programs toward the achievement of two-and four-year degrees. So now they have a policy agenda where their workforce department and their technical college system are using existing policies to promote career pathway approaches. Similar to Illinois' bridge program definition, Wisconsin has a career pathway definition. It is driving alignment among the systems

because they're all using funding guidelines and program approval processes to promote programs that meet their standards according to the career pathway definition.

UPDATE: Other states around the nation have championed similar initiatives focused on improving the lives of low-skilled adults and enhancing economic development. What, if any, lessons has Shifting Gears learned from other states' work, and what contribution do you anticipate Shifting Gears will have beyond the Midwest?

Ms. Smith: This is very true. We are constantly tracking and lifting up what other states are doing to improve the lives of low-skilled adults. At our state peer learning meetings for example, we have had representatives from Washington State talk about their use of data to inform policy and their innovative program approaches, and we've had leaders from Oregon talk about their statewide career pathways program and online tools to promote the programs. More recently, we heard from Joe May from Louisiana's community and technical college system speak to the importance of communicating the urgency of these issues and identifying solutions that can make a difference.

So yes, we are not reinventing the wheel. Actually, this is one of the major value-added benefits from working with CLASP because they are a national organization and involved in so many states. They are constantly giving us real-time information. They are at committee meetings and conferences and talking to people across the country about these issues. So I do feel optimistic that there's more of a national conversation occurring among states participating in Shifting Gears. One of our goals or measures of success is to elevate Midwestern states as national leaders on these issues. It is also worth saying that Joyce has talked to several foundations that have led similar initiatives to try to understand their strategies and lessons learned.

UPDATE: When Shifting Gears began in 2007, the economic climate in the Midwest and the entire nation was dramatically different, which has affected employment in many industry sectors. Has there been a corresponding effect on the Shifting Gears initiative, its goals or scope of work or expected outcomes?

Ms. Smith: Well, the recession hasn't worked to anybody's advantage. The states are doing this at a time when there is pretty widespread state budget deficits. So most of the policy agendas being advanced are not new budget allocations, but they use existing resources in a more efficient way to incent better outcomes. The same state leaders that are thinking through a reform agenda in the Shifting Gears initiative are also implementing recovery (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) funds, so they are working day and night. I'm actually more appreciative of the focus on Shifting Gears because I know there are large efforts to try to revive the states' economies and meet the needs of workers who have been affected. But I do think Shifting Gears is really valuable right now, particularly to the states that have been doing this work the longest—Illinois, Wisconsin, and to some degree Minnesota. They have thought through strategies they want to pursue, and the recovery funds provided money targeted for workforce training for low-skilled adults. The states had such a big jumpstart and could use the money to implement strategies they had identified. There is this expectation in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that the money won't just pay for a training spot, but will have some kind of sustainable impact. I think this may hold true in the states that have been pursuing reform strategies longer; but that is a projection or speculation on my part.

We know that people are going back to school in droves, which is typical when there is an economic downturn. If it continues to be a jobless recovery where people are getting trained with no jobs at the end, I think there's a danger because people question whether an education and training system is the right thing to invest in at this time. But, I do think this approach creates more of an incentive to link the education and training efforts to the state's economic development efforts. Actually, all of the Shifting Gears states are tying their investments and new approaches to the industries that they're trying to help grow. So they really are trying to use this initiative as a way of driving supply and demand closer.

UPDATE: Shifting Gears is now in the third year of implementation. What are some of the successes that you see emerging from the participating states?

Ms. Smith: Three years in, we are exactly where we hoped we would be. We expected that after the first two years of receiving funding and technical support, states would have identified their policy reform agendas and plans for implementation. Through the continuation funding, we then expect states to pursue those policies, get them adopted, and begin implementation. Stakeholders, who include state policymakers, people working in the field, advocates, policy experts, and employers have come together around goals and actions steps to take. There's also been more understanding and visibility of what the needs of low-income workers are and how investment in this population will best benefit the states. State policy agendas have been identified and are being pursued. There have also been more targeted data analysis and reporting on the progress workers are making, so we will be able to measure over time whether or not we are increasing the number of adults receiving credentials. I would add that over time we want to measure whether we met our goal of more adults getting credentials, but this is a long-term systems change effort. We have always expected that seeing real changes in numbers would be 5-10 years from the start of the initiative.

UPDATE: How is the Joyce Foundation evaluating the impact of Shifting Gears?

Ms. Smith: An evaluation is being led by Brandon Roberts & Associates and is what I would describe as a formative evaluation. They're providing feedback along the way that's helping us shape and continuously improve the initiative. The evaluation isn't going to just document what the states did, but if the state

approaches lead to the reforms and the outcomes we sought. And we want to know if the Joyce Foundation's approach to the initiative resulted in success. So, we have our own internal question about whether our original theory of supporting state policymakers and partnering with researchers and experts for technical assistance, will result in change. The evaluators will help us answer that question. ◆

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Basic Skills for College and Careers

by Julie Strawn

Editor's Note: OCCRL is pleased to print an article composed by Julie Strawn, Senior Fellow in the Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success at the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP – http://www.clasp.org/). Drawing on recent research and practice, this article recommends states consider reforming basic skills services (i.e., developmental and adult basic education) to improve college and career success, and it highlights various state reform strategies, including Shifting Gears in Illinois. As Ms. Strawn suggests in her article, policy change impacting the delivery of basic skills is a national phenomenon that has the potential to positively affect the lives of many low-skilled adults by improving subsequent college and career outcomes.

Ms. Strawn illustrates that state and regional initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for low-skilled adults are increasingly emerging and developing throughout the country. The inclusion of this article is intended to position Illinois' Shifting Gears work in a broader context and underscore the national momentum of initiatives similar to Shifting Gears.

Improving college graduation rates is a hot topic nationally and in statehouses, with Congress and the President poised to restructure and expand student aid and to invest in community college innovation in order to achieve this goal. Much of the heavy lifting in this effort will fall to states, and they are likely to find that creating more effective basic skills interventions is central to increasing overall student success.

Basic skills services are provided mainly through college developmental education or adult education programs, which primarily serve those without high school diplomas, high school graduates who are not college ready, and/or students with limited English language proficiency. Developmental education includes pre-college reading, writing, math, or English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Adult education includes literacy, adult basic and secondary education (ABE and ASE), GED preparation and ESL. While the majority of states administer and deliver adult education through their K-12 agencies, in about a dozen states community college systems administer it. In several states, adult education is run by the workforce development system. Regardless of the state governance arrangement, a range of organizations deliver services locally; in major urban areas, community-based organizations (CBOs) are especially involved, in addition to local schools and community colleges.

Whatever the setting, the need for basic skills services is widespread in the United States. More than half of community college students – about 60 percent in several recent studies – enroll in developmental education at some point in their college careers (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006). This number does not include the many students served in noncredit ABE and ESL classes that colleges offer. Many others are assessed as needing developmental education but do not enroll (Bailey, Jeong & Cho, 2008). As of 2007, about one in six young adults (6.2 million people between the ages of 16 and 24) are not in school and do not have a high school diploma (Sum, 2009). While some of these dropouts do eventually earn a GED, the number of GEDs awarded annually to young adults (271,055 to 16- to 24-year olds in 2007) is far less than the number of new dropouts annually (407,000 in 2006), so the pool of undereducated young adults grows substantially each year (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2008).

Despite their modest participation relative to growing numbers, there can be considerable overlap of the students served by developmental and adult education, and sometimes even competition by programs for those students. Students who need basic skills, even those at the same skill levels, can experience different content, standards of success and costs depending on which door they enter, developmental or adult education. For example, adult education is free, typically focuses on increasing basic skills or improved English language proficiency and usually has a GED as the end goal. Developmental education courses focus on moving students through courses in a sequence (for example, Math 030, 060 and 090 as is the case in Colorado's community colleges) and typically charge tuition. The goal is usually student completion of the developmental education course sequence and transition to college credit instruction. While student aid typically covers some developmental education, students can use a significant portion of their student aid eligibility while taking these pre-college level courses.

Basic skills services present a paradox. While the research is somewhat mixed, those who *complete* developmental education or ABE education generally go on to be more successful in postsecondary education and training than other, similar, students who do not receive those services (Adelman, 2006). The majority of basic skills students, however, do not complete their studies.

A 2008 study by Bailey, Jeong, and Cho (2008) found that only three to four out of ten students who are referred to developmental education actually complete the entire sequence of recommended courses. Outcomes are the worst for those most in need; just one-fifth of those assessed as needing three or more developmental education courses in an academic area complete them. Some students are less likely to complete than others, including men, African-Americans, older students, part-time students, and students in occupational programs.

Outcomes for adult education students are no better. While adult education tends to focus on GED attainment as the ultimate goal, the majority of adult education students do not earn a GED. Most adult education students stay for 30 to 80 hours of instruction (Tamassia, Lennon, Yamamoto, & Kirsch, 2007). However, research shows that about 100-150 hours are needed for students to advance one grade level (Comings, 2007; McHugh, Gelatt, & Fix, 2007). Equally important is that while earning a GED does increase a student's chances of entering college, few GED graduates complete postsecondary credentials even over the long-term. According to one study, only 12 percent of GED graduates completed more than one year of college in the first decade after earning a GED, and just three percent earned an associate degree (Strawn, 2007).

There are only a few rigorous research studies on what improves postsecondary attainment for those whose basic skills are initially low. Most of this research comes from evaluations of job training and welfare-to-work programs, such as the Center for Employment Training, the California GAIN program and the Portland, Oregon Steps to Success program. This research suggests that programs can improve outcomes by accelerating the pace of basic skills services, using more hours of instruction and raising expectations for attendance and progress. Programs may also be more effective if they closely link the content of basic skills services to postsecondary education and training through contextualization or integration of basic skills content with that of the postsecondary program (see for example, Martinson & Strawn, 2003; Strawn & Martinson, 2001). Student success services can also play a key role, according to recent findings from non-experimental, independent studies of initiatives to increase success for lower-skilled students, such as Breaking Through (Bragg & Barnett, 2009) and Washington State's I-BEST program (Jenkins, Zeidenberg, & Kienzl, 2009).

STATE STRATEGIES

Given how few students complete basic skills education, states should fundamentally rethink the goals, content and delivery of developmental and adult education services to create new pathways that enable students to move faster into postsecondary education and training programs, complete credentials, and transition into careers or to four-year colleges.

Longitudinal, student-level data on how students currently move through these services can help shape change at the state and local level. Wisconsin and Illinois have each produced recent student transition studies [inspired to some extent by Washington's 2005 "tipping point" study (Prince & Jenkins, 2005] aimed at informing statewide conversations about effective policy and practice in adult education and developmental education. About a dozen states are currently working to systematically change policy and practice in developmental education and/or ABE.[1] Some states – including Illinois, Indiana, Minnesota, Kentucky, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin – have created contextualized or integrated "workforce bridge" initiatives to enable lower-skilled students to enter and complete postsecondary education and training programs more quickly.

Washington and Illinois stand out for changing their state policies to support *system-wide* reform of basic skills services in ways that connect them to college occupational programs, to accelerate student completion of marketable credentials. Washington's I-BEST program integrates academic and career and technical education (CTE) content so students can increase their basic skills while earning for-credit occupational credentials in pathways proven to place graduates in family-supporting jobs. Colleges receive 1.75 full-time equivalent (FTE) state reimbursements for each student enrolled in I-BEST and must meet structured guidelines for the content and delivery of the programs (see http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/College/e_studentsuccessprograms.aspx).

Promising systemic state approaches to create more effective basic skills services:

- Provide pathways from ABE, ESL, and GED programs – including dropout recovery programs – to postsecondary credentials. State options include cross-walking assessments, aligning content within college and career pathways, providing advice on college and job training options and student aid, promoting college aspirations, and allowing dual or concurrent enrollments.
- Create "bridge" programs that blur the lines between remedial and program coursework, blending adult education, GED, ESL and developmental education content with college-level academic or technical content so students see clearly how to apply basic skills and learn them in a "just in time" sequence.
- Set new goals and performance measures for developmental education, adult education, GED, and ESL services related to postsecondary and career success.
- Mandate common statewide community college assessments and align or cross-walk them with adult education and workforce development assessments so that students and teachers better understand the skills needed for college and career success. Augment assessment information with personalized academic and career guidance.

According to a recent independent study of I-BEST outcomes, after controlling for student characteristics, program participants were more likely to continue for-credit coursework, earn credits that count toward a college credential, earn occupational certificates, and increase their basic skills (Jenkins, Zeidenberg, & Kienzl, 2009). The study found strikingly large differences when compared to a matched group of students. For example, 55 percent of I-BEST students earned an occupational certificate, compared to only 15 percent of the matched group. Ninety percent of I-BEST students earned at least one college credit, versus 67 percent of the comparison group. More than three-fourths of I-BEST students (78 percent) persisted

[1] These include CA, CO, CT, KY, IL, IN, MA, MD, MI, MN, NJ, OR, and WA.

into a second year of postsecondary education, compared to 61 percent of the matched group (2009). There are impressive outcomes given the difficulties many low-skilled adults face in attending and finishing college courses. Two other state initiatives, Opportunity Grants (see http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/s_opportunitygrants.aspx) and the Student Achievement Initiative (see http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/college/e_studentachievement.aspx), reinforce the direction of I-BEST and help support I-BEST student success.

Illinois, as part of its involvement in the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative, created local pilots to test new bridge models integrating adult basic and developmental education with occupational education (see "Lessons from Illinois' Evaluation of Shifting Gears 1.0," page 9 in this newsletter). These bridge pilots focused on three industry sectors identified earlier by the state as facing critical skill shortages: manufacturing, health care, and transportation, distribution, and logistics. Illinois is now taking what it has learned from those local pilots to identify policy changes necessary for sustaining successful approaches and taking them to scale. This includes creating a standard definition of the components of a bridge program which the state is now formally incorporating into policies across the community college system, the adult education system, Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs, and career and technical education (CTE) programs.

One example is that colleges will have financial incentives to create bridge programs because when developmental education is combined with occupational content in a bridge course that meets the new state definition, that instruction or training will qualify for state funding as a vocational skills course, which carries a higher credit-hour reimbursement rate than the developmental education reimbursement rate. In the WIA system, Illinois is encouraging local workforce boards to invest in bridge programs that meet the state definition by counting such spending toward the state's new requirement that localities spend at least 40% of federal workforce funds on training. The community college is enhancing its data and measurement system, too, so that it can track the education and economic outcomes of bridge students, and ultimately, measure these same outcomes for all adult education and community college students in the state.

Several other states, such as Arkansas, Colorado, Indiana, Kentucky, and Wisconsin, have used state funding to support local innovation to reform adult education and developmental education. Wisconsin, which like Illinois is a Shifting Gears state, is rolling out career pathways statewide and creating basic skills bridge programs patterned after I-BEST to create on-ramps to those pathways for lower skilled or limited English-proficient students. A statewide career pathways initiative was also the impetus for basic skills innovation in Kentucky, which piloted strategies such as contextualization and dual enrollment to improve student outcomes in bridge courses that blended remediation with the content of college "gatekeeper" courses such as anatomy and physiology. An earlier round of pilots in Kentucky funded local partnerships between adult education and community colleges to support transitions and created a crosswalk of adult education and college assessments (TABE and COMPASS) for local programs to use in aligning the content of basic skills services (see http://legacy.kctcs.edu/student/careerpathways/Promising%20Practices.cfm).

Accountability systems are another state policy tool for improving the effectiveness of basic skills services and creating stronger connections between basic skills services and postsecondary education. Kentucky's "Five Questions, One Mission" is an aligned strategic plan and accountability framework for adult and postsecondary education, with school district and campus level action plans. It includes GED to postsecondary education transition goals that are significantly more ambitious than federal ones.[2] Several states, including Louisiana, North Carolina, and Washington, have made basic skills transition and subsequent course success measures part of their accountability frameworks for community colleges.

States can also align college assessment policies and practices and connect them to better college and career advisory services. Minnesota, for example, requires all institutions in the Minnesota State College and University System (MNSCU) to use the same test (ACCUPLACER) to assess reading, writing and math skills of entering students. Florida requires its public colleges and universities to use the Florida College Entry-Level Placement Test (though students can substitute ACT or SAT scores and, in practice, some colleges do further assessment for ESL students) (Russell, 2008). It appears that few states require or fund college programs to connect individualized college and career advising services to basic skills services. A survey of 15 states involved in Achieving the Dream initiated funded by Lumina Foundation (http://www.luminafoundation.org/), for example, found that only Texas did so.[3] The statewide Texas Success Initiative requires community colleges to assess students in reading, writing and math skills prior to their enrollment in college and to provide students who need developmental education with individualized advice based on the assessment results. There are no state resources dedicated to this follow-up counseling, though, and in practice, it appears that few advisory services for basic skills students exist at most colleges.[4]

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[2] For details of this framework, see *Five Questions One Mission: Better Lives for Kentucky's People*. http://cpe.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/BEC64FFE-7730-4CC9-90B5-17B58EAD7FD3/0/FINAL_Public_Agenda_20051004.pdf

[3] *Developmental Education State Policy Scan*, Working Draft from Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count. Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future.

[4] See *Developmental Education in Texas Higher Education*, a 2005 survey of college policy and practice related to the Texas Success initiative. http://www.thecb.state.tx.us/reports/PDF/0832.PDF

SETTING STATE POLICY PRIORITIES FOR BASIC SKILLS FOR COLLEGE AND CAREERS

A starting point for states is to analyze basic skills services, whether provided in adult education or developmental education programs or both. Longitudinal data should follow student progress and outcomes from postsecondary education and training through completion of postsecondary programs, and, ideally, into the labor market. Such data help build consensus around the need for change and create a baseline against which future progress can be measured. States should also seed local innovation, structured by core program elements that prior research suggests are effective, and use the interest and energy generated by pilot programs to leverage more systematic change. From the outset, pilots should be explicitly tied to the development of a state policy agenda for taking innovation to scale and sustaining it. Otherwise, when the local pilot grants end, momentum is lost and change does not occur. States should scan policies on postsecondary education, workforce development, dropout recovery, and adult education to identify levers for aligning funding and accountability and for developing systemic support for refining, scaling up and sustaining new models. ◆

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Lessons from Illinois' Evaluation of Shifting Gears 1.0

by Debra D. Bragg, Timothy Harmon, Catherine Kirby, and Su Jung Kim

Evaluation of what's working and what's not is critical to the success of any new educational initiative, especially one that attempts to make systemic change. Consistent with the vision of the Joyce Foundation, Illinois' Shifting Gears initiative has systemic change as its primary goal. Since the beginning of Shifting Gears, personnel at the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) (Catherine Kirby, Su Jung Kim, Jason Taylor, and myself) has conducted the state's evaluation, in partnership with Timothy Harmon, now employed at OCCRL and formerly Workforce Enterprise Services, Inc. Working collaboratively with state agencies and a workgroup devoted to Shifting Gears, OCCRL has conducted a mixed method, qualitative and quantitative, evaluation to assess bridge programs and policies for low-skilled adults. Ten community colleges located throughout the state participated in phase one of the project, referred to as SG 1.0, including three colleges associated with the City Colleges of Chicago.

In Illinois, the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) is the fiscal agent for federal adult education funding that is associated with Title II of the Workforce Education Act, called the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. Many agencies and organizations in the state secure federal funds to serve adult students, including K-12, community colleges and community-based organizations (CBOs), with community colleges being very important to the state's system. For SG 1.0, community colleges were identified as the lead organizations for pilot projects that implemented bridge courses and programs. The decision to focus the SG 1.0 on community colleges was important because it allowed for assessment of community colleges to serve as a primary delivery system for serving low-skilled adults.

The primary qualitative evaluation questions associated with SG 1.0 were:

- How were bridge courses and programs developed and implemented?
- What were the experiences and perceptions of key stakeholders, including students, of bridge programs and courses?

The primary quantitative evaluation questions were:

- What was the incidence of bridge course and program enrollment and completion?
- What was the impact of bridge courses and programs on students' transition to postsecondary education and employment?

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected throughout the 2008 calendar year, with most community colleges operating pilot programs in spring 2008 and again in fall 2008. Some qualitative data collection continued in the spring of 2009 when a number of pilots repeated their programs for another group of students; however, the quantitative data collection ended at the end of the 2008 calendar year in order to give the evaluation team adequate to collect and analyze data prior to the end of SG 1.0 grant on June 30, 2009.

TESTING TWO MODELS – DEV ED AND ADULT ED

At the start of the project, the ICCB operated a competitive process to identify community colleges who would act as pilot sites for SG 1.0. The Model A, Developmental Education (Dev Ed) Bridge, sought to move students from development education to college-level course work, and Model B-Adult Education (Adult Ed) Bridge, sought to transition students from adult education to postsecondary education, including offering instruction for English Language Learners. Model A—Dev Ed was represented by three of the pilot sites, and five pilot sites (with seven community colleges) operating Model B—Adult Ed.

The occupational focus of the bridge courses and programs varied, with four pilot sites focusing on manufacturing; one on transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL); and three on health care, including three colleges affiliated with City Colleges of Chicago. These three career foci represent three critical skills shortage areas identified by Illinois' Critical Skills Shortage Initiative (CSSI) http://cssi.siwib.org/. Although most pilot sites focused on students who tested on the TABE test at the 9th grade level or above, some sites recruited students at the 6 to 8.9 grade level. A few programs did not seek 6 to 8.9 grade level at the beginning of the project but added these students because of their desire to reach students who needed a chance to participate in postsecondary education and acquire marketable skills. Once engaged, leaders of these pilot sites typically became convinced their bridge programs could and should adults with even lower literacy skills.

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT BRIDGE PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES

The SG 1.0 evaluation produced a host of results useful to implementation of bridge courses and programs. Some of most salient findings include:

Instructional innovation target and engage low-skilled adults. Illinois' bridge courses and programs offer a range of instructional innovations to meet the needs of low-skilled adults. These instructional strategies include team teaching; computerized and online instructional supports; hands-on and laboratory-based instruction, including field trips; learning communities and other cohort strategies; and various forms of active learning.

Contextualization of curriculum emphasizes application. The notion of contextualization, referring to setting academic and occupational content in a real-world context, included the application of occupational content into academic courses and the integration of academic content into occupational courses. Applied instruction was a pervasive approach to contextualized instruction, with applications of basic skills (math, reading and writing) to occupational or career exploration prominent in the Adult Ed pilot sites, and the integration of academic and occupational knowledge and skills using real-world problems and applications prominent in Dev Ed sites.

College leadership matters. In sites where community college leaders (e.g., top- and mid-level administrators) embraced the bridge concept, we observed internal alignment of functional units and resources to support programming for low-skilled adults. Partnerships among unit leaders within community colleges were crucial to development and implementation of bridge courses and programs, particularly to bridges that sought to link adult education with community college developmental education and occupational education or career-technical education (CTE).

Transition services are necessary. All three core elements of Illinois' bridge program definition adopted during the SG 1.0 Initiative (i.e., contextualized instruction, support services including transition coordinators/case managers, and career development) were evident in the pilot sites' bridge courses and programs (bridge definition – http://occrl.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Bridge%20Definition.pdf), especially transition services and the use of a Transition Coordinator or Case Manager. (Illinois has adopted the term Transition Coordinator in association with bridge courses and programs.) Transition Coordinators performed a wide range of duties to support students, including providing academic advising and helping students secure needed resources (transportation, child care).

Transition Coordinators are critical success factor. With respect to Transition Coordinators, the quantitative data show higher rates of student use of Transition Coordinators/Case Managers related to higher rates of student completion when the following occurred:

- Students receive career orientation more than once;
- Students receive admissions and financial aid assistance at least once;

SG 1.0 PILOT BRIDGE SITES[1]

College of DuPage – Dev Ed bridge program in manufacturing for students at 6-8.9 grade level and grade 9 and above. This bridge program was offered for 16 weeks, 4 days per week, 2.5 hours per day.

College of Lake County – Dev Ed bridge program in manufacturing for students at grade 9 and above. This bridge program was offered for 24 weeks, 4 days per week, 4 hours per day.

Oakton Community College – Dev Ed bridge program in healthcare for students at grade 9 and above. This bridge program was offered for 16 weeks, 1 day per week, 3-4 hours per day.

Black Hawk College – Adult Ed bridge program in transportation, distribution and logistics (TDL) for students at grade 9 and above, including English Language Learners. This bridge program was offered in two different formats. One format was 13 weeks, 4 days per week for 2.5-3 hours per day, and the other format was 25 weeks, 2 days per week for 2.5-3 hours per day.

McHenry County College - Adult Ed bridge program in manufacturing for students at grade 9 and above, including English Language Learners. This bridge program was offered for 22 weeks, 2 days per week, 6 hours per day.

Lewis and Clark College - Adult Ed bridge program in manufacturing for students at grade 9 and above. This bridge program was offered 16 weeks, 5 days per week, 1-5 hours per day.

John A Logan College - Adult Ed bridge program in healthcare for students at grade 9 and above. This bridge program was offered 16 weeks, 3 days per week, 3 hours per day.

City Colleges of Chicago –Adult Ed bridge program in health care for students at grades 6 to 8.9 and grade 9 and above. The bridge program duration for these colleges follows:

Malcolm X – 12-16 weeks, 2-4 days per week, 4 hours per day

Olive Harvey – 8 weeks, 2 days per week, 4 hours per day

Wilbur Wright – 16 weeks, 4 days per week, 4 hours per day

[1] At least one bridge cohort followed the format (i.e., weeks, days/week, hours/day) listed here, but the format may have changed as the bridge evolved.

- Students receive advising at least once;
- Students receive transportation assistance at least once; and
- Students meet more frequently with an assigned transition coordinator or case manager.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE ADULT ED AND DEV ED MODELS

The evaluation showed important differences between Model A–Dev Ed and Model B–Adult Ed wherein students who enrolled in Dev Ed bridge courses and programs accessed Transition Coordinators and various student services more frequently than students enrolled in Adult Ed bridge courses and programs. We attribute this difference to the location and historic connections between Dev Ed units and support services units located on community college campuses. Because Dev Ed is a recognized mission of Illinois community colleges, whether integrated into academic units or stand alone, established relationships among the Dev Ed programs and college credit units facilitated the development and delivery of bridge courses and programs. Importantly, faculty members knew one another and their familiarity facilitated productive working relationships needed to integrate Dev Ed and occupational education or CTE, and bring about bridge courses and programs.

For the Adult Ed Model, relationships with college units were not as formal or longstanding as with the Dev Ed Model. In fact, at the start of SG 1.0, connections between Adult Ed and college-credit programs were weaker and sometimes nearly nonexistent as compared to Dev Ed, and these gaps were sometimes difficult to overcome. Adult Ed instructors were often adjunct instructors who had limited familiarity with the college, especially faculty holding full-time positions. Their networks were often limited to Adult Ed personnel and other adjunct instructors. Importantly, however, the evaluation results showed many of the Adult Ed programs made remarkable progress in strengthening connections with college-credit units, including CTE. Given their starting point, some of the Adult Ed programs showed more progress in developing curriculum and implementing bridge courses and programs than the Dev Ed programs. Unfortunately, due to the timeframe for this evaluation during the 2008 calendar year, some positive developments in faculty relationships are not reflected in the quantitative data.

EMERGING BRIDGE MODELS

In addition to Model A–Dev Ed and Model B–Adult Ed, three models emerged during SG 1.0 that showed promise and deserve further study:

- **The English as Second Language (ESL) Model** – Two community colleges customized curriculum and instruction to meet ESL students' needs, including paying special attention to linguistic, cultural, social, and gender issues.
- **The Incumbent Worker Training Model** – One community college drew upon an existing close relationship with a local health care provider to offer contextualized instruction and transition students into a Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program. The company's decision to pay tuition up front, rather than at the close of the course, was a factor in supporting students' decisions to enroll in the bridge program and practical nurse program.
- **The Hybrid Model** – A few community colleges blurred elements of the Adult Ed and Dev Ed models. In particular, Lewis and Clark Community College developed a bridge program that engaged faculty from across all three functional areas (Adult Ed, Dev Ed, and CTE), and the shared experience of these faculty convinced them that a comprehensive model that blends all three functional areas has potential to benefit students and enhance the sustainability of the program. Recognizing that students who need basic skills instruction come from many backgrounds and enter community colleges through many doors, this Hybrid Model helps students identify options and navigate academic pathways.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

We had a limited amount of time to evaluate outcomes achieved by bridge program participants during the calendar year of 2008, but, even so, results show nearly half of all students completed bridge courses and programs, with a higher rate of completion (72%) for students enrolled in a Dev Ed bridge programs than for students in Adult Ed bridge programs (42.1%). Nearly one-third of Dev Ed students continued to enroll in postsecondary education as a result of the program, with about one quarter continuing in remedial instruction. Most Dev Ed students continued employment after completing the bridge program. By contrast, Adult Ed students showed lower rates of completion and postsecondary enrollment, but fairly similar employment results. Figure 1 shows outcomes results comparing students enrolled in the Dev Ed and Adult Ed bridge programs.

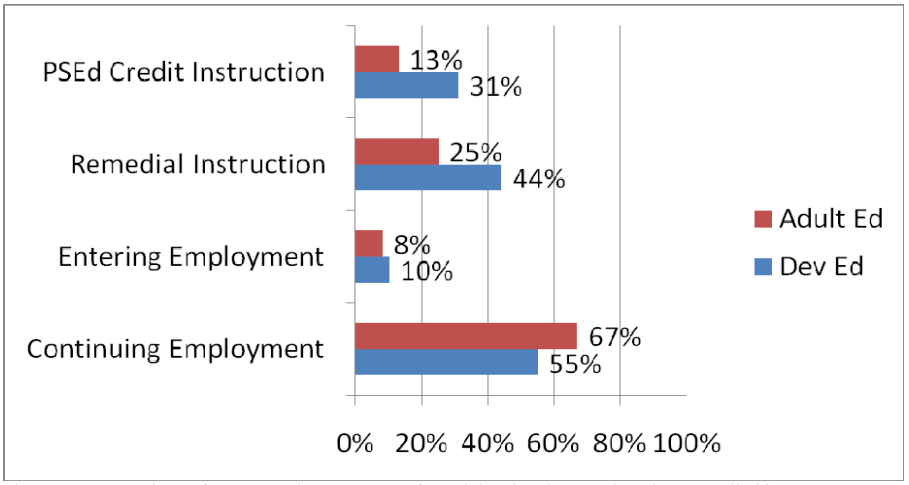

Figure 1. Comparison of postsecondary outcomes for Adult Ed and Dev Ed students enrolled in SG 1.0 bridge courses and programs.

We suggest, however, caution in interpreting these comparative outcomes results because there were fundamental differences in students enrolled in the two models. Dev Ed programs enrolled students having a higher level of academic preparation than the Adult Ed programs. It is also important to note that outcomes varied across the pilot sites implementing the Adult Ed model, with some programs displaying outcomes results similar to Dev Ed programs, and some yielding more modest results. Figure 2 shows student characteristics to assist in understanding who enrolls in each program model

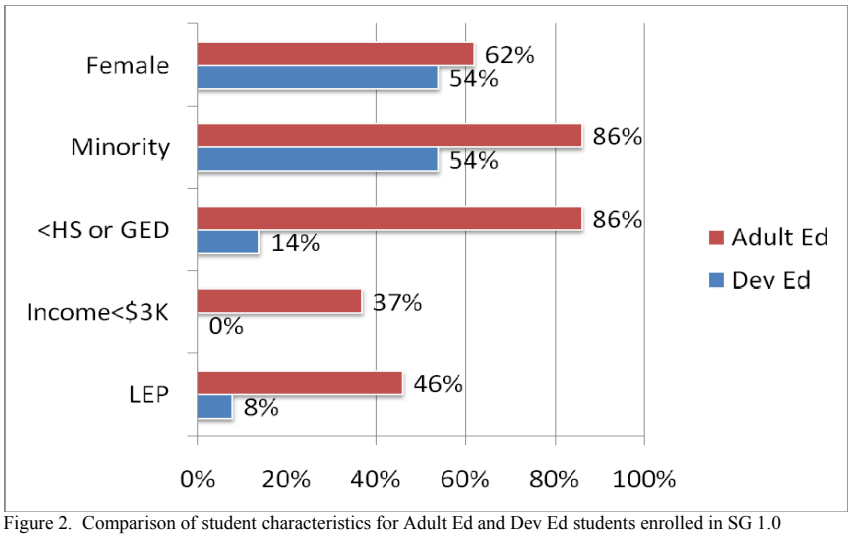

Figure 2. Comparison of student characteristics for Adult Ed and Dev Ed students enrolled in SG 1.0 bridge courses and programs.

BARRIERS

Three types of barriers emerged across the ten community colleges engaged in the pilot sites, and these barriers emerged regardless of whether the sites were implementing a bridge program associated with the Dev Ed or Adult Ed model:

- **Individual (student) barriers** – Many students lacked academic (college) preparation, including foundational academic skills and computer skills. Most also had multiple personal, family, and employment challenges that impacted attendance. Further, recruitment was a problem in terms of attracting and identifying students who fit the identified student profile (Target audience A: 6-8.9 grade, or Target audience B: 9-12 grade) and meeting their needs.

- **Organizational barriers** – The community college environment presented several challenges, including the use of college placement exams that do not pinpoint students' competency gaps, limited student support services to address the personal challenges of low-skilled adults (see previous barrier), and limited administrative, curricular, and instructional structures to accommodate bridge program implementation.

- **Policy barriers** – The misalignment of systems, funding streams, and policy and program requirements associated with WIA Title I and Title II, the Carl D Perkins IV legislation on CTE, and institutional developmental education programs often impede bridge program implementation. Included in this group of barriers is a concern about low-skilled adults' eligibility for WIA Title I funding and issues with co-mingling funds across federal funding streams.

POSITIVE CHANGE

Despite the inevitable barriers associated with implementation of bridge programs, changes in policy and practice were employed by the ten community colleges to support bridge programs. Each of the pilot sites offered one to three low-skilled adult cohorts between January 2008 and June 2009, with most sites offering the bridge program to at least two cohorts. Changes observed in policy and practice include:

- Enhanced support services
- Better alignment of Adult Ed, Dev Ed, and CTE
- Improved course approval procedures to facilitate fast-paced program development and delivery
- Enhanced communication and coordination between departments internal to community colleges and between local colleges and the state

As part of the SG 1.0 pilots, many community colleges adopted new policies and procedures to facilitate bridge programs, making changes to student admissions, tuition and fees, curriculum (course) approval, contextualized and applied instruction, support services, and internal alignment of federal funding streams. Alignment of funding was an especially important issue for pilot sites implementing Adult Ed bridge programs because of concerns about co-mingling Adult Ed and other federal funds.

Results of the evaluation have been reported to the state as well as the local community colleges that engaged in pilot sites. Many practitioners associated with the SG 1.0 initiative are serving as experts for additional bridge program development and implementation during the second phase of Shifting Gears (SG 2.0) to inform the state and local level on program and policy change. ◆

For copy of full report link to: http://www.iccb.state.il.us/pdf/shifting%20gears/SG_Eval_Report_7_261.pdf

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Inside the Black Box: Three Bridge Programs Involved in Illinois Shifting Gears

by Su Jung Kim and Jason L. Taylor

INTRODUCTION

With so much focus on test scores and student performance today, it is easy to forget the importance of knowing how an educational program actually works. Criticized for being "black box" evaluations that focus on inputs and outputs without digging deep into processes and the internal workings of programs, a common and unfortunate mistake that evaluators sometimes make is to neglect the detailed examination of program implementation. Fortunately, the Shifting Gears 1.0 evaluation did not suffer this fate. Considerable time was devoted by the evaluators to researching how bridge programs work, from recruitment to enrollment to retention as well as student outcome data. This article features three bridge programs involved in Shifting Gears 1.0 and reports on the implementation of core practices, including elements of Illinois' newly adopted bridge program definition (i.e., contextualized instruction, career development, and transition services) (bridge definition – http://occrl.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Bridge%20Definition.pdf) The three pilot sites featured in this article were chosen because they reflect the range of pilot implementation approaches and they represent pilots with successful student outcomes.

In this article we first introduce the three pilot bridge programs by their community college, with a brief descriptive overview including student outcomes. We then provide a matrix with specific practices related to the three core elements in the bridge definition, and we conclude with a discussion of select practices and their contributions to the bridge programs and student outcomes[1] .

BLACK HAWK COLLEGE (BHC)

The bridge program at BHC addressed the Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (TDL) cluster and enrolled two cohorts of adult education students in the spring of 2008: English as a Second Language (ESL) students and General Education Diploma (GED) students. The ESL bridge enrolled students at the High Intermediate or Advanced level on the CELSA or BEST Literacy test and the GED bridge enrolled students above the 9th grade level and prepared them to enter the Warehouse Distribution Specialist (WDS) certificate at BHC. The 16-week ESL bridge recruited students mainly through existing ESL classes. Developed by an ESL instructor and external contractor, the ESL bridge program integrated basic skills such as vocabulary, parts of speech, and math with knowledge and skills associated with the WDS program and the TDL cluster. Classroom instructional strategies includes lecture, PLATO learning software, role-play, class discussion, film, and music, and the students were also taken on site visits. The GED bridge had fewer students and was mostly individualized instruction. The GED bridge curriculum was developed by an experienced workplace education coordinator who used self-directed research and experience to contextualize the curriculum. A part-time case manager familiar with the bridge student population provided support services to the students during the duration of the bridge.

Of the 25 students enrolled in the bridge: 84% were retained and successfully completed the bridge program; 100% transitioned to postsecondary credit instruction after the bridge; 28% enrolled in one or more postsecondary remedial course. Although none of the students were placed into new employment, 80% of the students continued their current employment.

MCHENRY COMMUNITY COLLEGE (MCC)

MCC's approach to the bridge pilot targeted adult education and ESL students interested in the manufacturing cluster and enrolled two cohorts of students during the spring of 2008 and spring of 2009: one cohort targeted students at the 9th grade and above level (or high intermediate ESL) and the other cohort targeted students between the 6th and 8.9th grade level (or low intermediate ESL). The non-credit contextualized bridge curriculum was developed by contracted curriculum specialists and designed as three modules, totaling 48 instructional hours offered in 22 weeks.

> Module I: Basic skills module emphasized technical math in manufacturing and workplace communication and helped prepare students for college placement exams.
>
> Module II: A technical module included content on blueprint reading, welding, and industrial safety management and aligned with key courses, preparing students for technical proficiency exams.
>
> Module III: An employability skills module emphasized workplace behaviors and job search.

MCC involved local business by soliciting employability requirements from partner employers and integrating these into the curriculum. MCC and manufacturing partners provided tours to expose students to multiple types of manufacturing facilities and career pathways associated with the manufacturing cluster. A transition coordinator arranged for a number of support services during the bridge program.

[1] This article draws heavily from Bragg, Harmon, Kirby and Kim (2009). http://www.iccb.state.il.us/pdf/shifting%20gears/SG_Eval_Report_7_261.pdf

Of the 50 students enrolled in the bridge: 54% were retained and successfully completed the bridge program; 2% transitioned to postsecondary credit instruction after the bridge; 0% enrolled in one or more postsecondary remedial course. Of all 50, 22% of the students were placed into new employment, and 48% of the students continued their current employment.

OAKTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE (OCC)

The bridge at OCC was designed to prepare incumbent Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA) at Presbyterian Homes to enter the pre-requisite college courses for admission to the practical nurse program at OCC. The bridge recruited from incumbent employees at Presbyterian Homes and primarily targeted students above the 9th grade reading level, although students were not tested prior to enrollment in the bridge. The 16-week bridge program was adapted from an earlier program that provided pre-nursing students with basic skills to prepare them to enter OCC's associate degree nursing program (ADN). The bridge curriculum was developed by OCC's nursing program coordinator and a bridge instructor who is an experienced developmental English faculty member. The content of the program included healthcare related vocabulary and assignments contextualized with remedial reading, speech, writing, and study and time management skills. The lecture and lab components of the bridge program were taught on the OCC campus and other components were delivered on the Presbyterian Homes campus, giving students easy access to computers. Responsibilities for delivering support and transition services to the students were shared among the Nursing Education Director at Presbyterian Homes and a nursing instructor/advisor and admissions counselor at OCC.

Of the 19 students enrolled in the bridge: 100% were retained and successfully completed the bridge program; 53% transitioned to postsecondary credit instruction after the bridge; 16% enrolled in one or more postsecondary remedial courses. All of the students continued employment at Presbyterian Homes.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO BRIDGE PROGRAMS AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES

We use this section to provide a description of the implementation practices in Table 1 below as they relate to the following themes: internal and external collaboration, contextualized curriculum and instruction, students, learning community, and roles of program leaders. We do not elaborate on all of the practices in Table 1, nor is there sufficient space in this article to comprehensively detail each practice. That said, our aim is to succinctly represent what we believe are some of the practices that contribute to the success of bridge programs and their students.

Table 1
Bridge Implementation Practices

Core Element	BHC	MCC	OCC
Contextualized Instruction	• External consultant and two BHC faculty developed contextualized curriculum • Reading, writing, and math ESL curriculum contextualized with TDL knowledge and skills • Curriculum compressed from 36 weeks to 16 weeks	• Curriculum specialists and local employers collaborated to develop curriculum • Three-module curriculum integrates manufacturing knowledge and skills and employability skills • Morning and evening class offered to accommodate students' work schedules	• OCC faculty develop curriculum • Contextualized curriculum includes content from National League for Nursing exam and other health care related content • Basic computer literacy instruction provided at Presbyterian Homes computer labs and OCC campus
Career Development	• Case manager engages with employers to help students make contacts • Interview preparation • Resume preparation	• Plant tours arranged at various manufacturing facilities • Assistance with job searching and employment	• Individualized plan of study developed for each student
Transition Services	• Part-time case manager • Academic and financial aid advisement • Course registration assistance • Volunteer tutoring for ESL students • Orientation/transition workshops for ESL/GED cohorts – introduced to campus resources, services, and policies • Assistance with child care and transportation • Case manager organizes orientation for WDS instructors related to student diversity	• Coordinator provides support services • Coordinator facilitates grand funds to provide students with free tuition, fees, books, childcare, and transportation • Personal counseling is provided to students by coordinator • Tutoring is arranged, and Spanish-speaking tutors are connected to Spanish-speaking students	• Support services offered by two OCC program coordinators and Presbyterian Homes Director of Nursing Education • Presbyterian Homes staff helps resolve conflicts between work and class schedules • Site-based tutoring • Presbyterian Homes pays tuition (not a course reimbursement model) • Presbyterian Homes residents contribute to a scholarship fund to support students

Internal and External Collaboration

Multi-layered collaboration was a prominent factor in the development of contextualized curriculum. We define multi-layered collaboration as internal and external collaborative efforts among units within the community college, local businesses, and industry sector-based professional and community groups. Although each of the three sites approached collaboration in a unique way, collaboration was important to all of the programs.

Internal collaboration was facilitated by strong bridge leadership. For example, the MCC leadership team represented a range of departments, such as adult education, CTE, and other college credit programs. The Dean of Adult Education and the Shifting Gears Coordinator noted that the bridge program initiated communication and collaboration across the departments within the college and engendered conversations related to contextualized curriculum and improving outcomes for ESL students. The Dean of Adult Education explained, "There was more communication. There wasn't [communication previously] between adult education and other departments and other divisions. This was a very interesting phenomenon." He added that discussions began among key administrators and faculty within the campus on how to transition ESL students into college and CTE courses. This communication and collaboration contributed to the development and delivery of contextualized instruction.

Leaders of all three bridge pilot programs worked to establish external collaboration with local businesses. The leadership team and faculty associated with two sites sought input about employability requirements from local manufacturers (MCC), TDL employers (BHC), and health care providers (OCC) and integrated these employability requirements into the curriculum. For example, prior to bridge implementation, the MCC program coordinator visited three local manufacturing facilities to discuss employability requirements for prospective workers. MCC's bridge program leaders also gathered input through MCC industrial advisory committees and local organized events focusing on manufacturing topics.

BHC sought input from existing employer relationships through the Quad-Cities Logistics Roundtable, an employer advisory group of a U.S. Department of Labor grant that provided BHC with coordinated business and industry support for the College's logistics TDL courses and programs. OCC was unique among the pilot sites as the bridge was an expansion of a previous collaborative effort between OCC and Presbyterian Homes. In the new bridge program, more consistent information and advice was transmitted to students because of increased communication between OCC and Presbyterian Homes. Through internal and external collaboration efforts, the three bridge programs built partnerships with local employers and businesses. Feedback from the local employers provided a way to develop relevant and up-to-date curriculum to increase students' knowledge and skills and help them transition to credit course work and to employment that provides a higher wage.

Contextualized Curriculum and Instruction

The meaning of contextualized instruction in the pilot bridge programs is not limited to curriculum content development but also includes teaching the curriculum. In this section we highlight innovative instructional practices that illustrate the use of contextualized curriculum.

The ESL instructor at BHC customized her instruction to address the needs of nontraditional and immigrant students. The instructor added industry-specific vocabulary words, observing that she was "scribbling notes while on the site visit to the warehouse to learn the terminology of the TDL industry". She noted the importance of vocabulary to this student population when saying, "ESL students take words so literally [she] must be sure of her correct word usage so the students' understanding is not compromised by her unfamiliarity with industry terminology." Thus, relevant vocabulary and terminology was infused into various instructional practices that included a combination of lecture, computer-aided instruction, role play, discussion, site visits, and the use of guest speakers. The instructor also used film and music to help ESL students learn the nuances of American accents and jargon.

The MCC bridge program arranged multiple manufacturing plant tours to reinforce learning outside the classroom and provide career exploration opportunities. In her contacts and through visiting different manufacturing plants, the coordinator strived to show the students a cross section of manufacturing plants: plastic, metal, medical, etc. In addition to facility tours, the manufacturing plants shared specific details about employee benefits and requirements. The coordinator noted that the tours provided invaluable exposure for students to a wide variety of manufacturing work environments that they might encounter once employed. Students' perceptions that manufacturing jobs are routine and dirty were dispelled, giving students a more positive image of manufacturing and increasing their interest in manufacturing jobs. In addition to the plant tours at MCC, contextualized instruction included hands-on measuring, drawing, and blue print reading. The instructors made sure the students worked with actual prints and parts that would be encountered at a typical manufacturing facility.

Another innovative instructional practice was volunteer tutoring at BHC. The college recruited volunteers from the local Retired Senior Volunteer Project (RSVP) who were retired warehouse workers. The volunteers provided one-on-one tutoring with bridge students to help them improve English skills, strengthen their understanding of concepts introduced in the classroom, and add real-life work experiences. The ESL instructor said she sometimes "turn[s] the class over to the volunteers and [she] observe[s]." Students reported they learned a lot from the retired volunteers who brought stories of real-world work into the classroom.

Students

Many program leaders hailed the bridge instructors as well-qualified and well-prepared to address the student populations enrolled in the bridge programs. In this section, we use an MCC instructor to illustrate the importance of instructors' understanding of bridge students.

The instructors' understanding of students' characteristics was a crucial factor to student learning. To deliver effective instruction, instructors needed to understand students' lived experiences in specific social and cultural contexts. For example, a MCC instructor noted some ESL students were reluctant to participate in class because of a fear of making mistakes. The instructor recognized that some students may not be familiar with the class culture, including expected student and faculty roles. This instructor made an effort to become familiar with students' cultures and language barriers, and he used open-ended questions to encourage students to participate in class.

The MCC instructor also attempted to change students' perceptions of the relationship between a teacher and students by inviting the students to teach him. At a learning community meeting where all of Illinois' Shifting Gears pilot sites were represented, the instructor commented on his strategy to keep the students motivated:

> *How do I keep these people motivated? It was really interesting. Basically… [It's] not to talk [to] them as an instructor, per se, or as someone with a lot of knowledge . . . But [instead] to come and bring the knowledge together.*

This instructor's efforts to better understand the bridge students and shift from a teacher-centered mode of instruction to one that put the teacher and students on equal footing seemed to change students' perceptions of themselves as active learners and enhance their confidence to participate in the classroom.

Learning Community

Initiated by program leaders and faculty, the MCC and OCC bridge programs established learning communities among the students. Instructors and students both noted the significance of community as it relates to students' sense of belonging to the program and their ultimate success. The intentional structuring of the classroom and activities contributed to the cultivation of community among the learners.

OCC coordinators observed that the bridge students developed a peer support system with the guidance and intervention of the bridge instructor. The instructor deliberately implemented group projects at the beginning of the program and organized student groups to rectify a division formed by some students who segregated themselves in a previous course. The instructor also suggested that cohesion and teamwork are best achieved in the workplace when people have the will and intentionality to work productively with persons different from themselves.

MCC instructors also encouraged collaboration among students by using group learning methods. The instructors divided students into several groups, ensuring each group included one student with strong math skills and another student with bilingual skills to provide support for other students in their group. Classroom observations at MCC revealed an interactive and collaborative learning environment.

Building strong relationships among students can improve their sense of belonging and enhance their ultimate success. The intentional facilitation of collaboration helped nurture community so students could support each other academically and socially.

Roles of Program Leaders

Program leaders at OCC, MCC and BHC played different but important roles, including identifying and providing transition and student services. At OCC and MCC the program leaders were coordinators of the bridge curriculum, and at BHC the program leader was a case manager. Regardless of job title, students relied on these individuals to be the first point of contact for personal and academic concerns. In this section, we provide examples of the various roles of these program leaders

One critical characteristic of the program coordinators and the case manger was dedication to student success. They were passionate about supporting students and willing to go the extra mile to ensure their success. During site visits and cross-site learning community meetings, these individuals articulated their passion for students. This was evident in comments made by the students as well. For example, one male immigrant student at MCC who became employed at a manufacturing company attributed his employment success to the assistance of the program coordinator, saying, "After finishing the program I was scared, but [the program coordinator] helped me... She was always by my side in every step."

Just as it was important for instructors to understand the bridge students, the program coordinators developed a deep understanding of students' characteristics. At OCC, an admissions advisor worked cooperatively with a nursing advisor to offer support services to the bridge students. These individuals relied on their knowledge and the expertise of their partner to provide transition services, and this method appeared to be an effective way to address the diverse needs of the Presbyterian Home employee/student population. Similarly, the BHC case manger relied on previous experience with TANF recipients, as a counselor in the BHC adult education department, and as an adjunct faculty member who taught study skills and an orientation-to-college course. The MCC bridge program coordinator was an experienced ESL instructor, which contributed to her understanding of the bridge students. These previous employment experiences shaped the program leaders' familiarity and understanding of the adult student population.

Finally, the program leaders strived to help students' adjustment to the community college from the beginning of their enrollment in the bridge program. As first-generation college goers, the program leaders recognized the tremendous challenge that students faced in navigating the college system and adjusting to the college environment. They were aware of the challenges that the students faced and intentionally addressed their struggles by providing support services. The MCC program coordinator observed, "The whole college system is so scary to the students. They need literally hand-holding… In particular to immigrant students, it's very scary." To help students adjust to the college system, the OCC and MCC bridge programs conducted campus tours and new student orientations, among other things.

CONCLUSION

Each bridge program implemented diverse practices with the goal of preparing low-skilled adults for college-level course work and family living-wage employment. Cumulatively, the pilot sites at BHC, MCC, and OCC offered core elements that enhanced the quality of the bridge programs and the experiences of the students, faculty, and staff participants engaged in them. ◆

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Shifting Gears Phase Two: Advancing Policy[1]

by Catherine L. Kirby

The outcomes of phase one of Shifting Gears (SG) in Illinois produced an anthology of findings about bridge program implementation strategies and measures of student progress in bridge programs. Another critical outcome of phase one (SG 1.0) was the development of a policy agenda and action plan that set the stage for further expanding educational opportunities for low-wage, low-skilled adults to prepare for high demand occupations. The Joyce Foundation Board of Directors approved the continuation of the Shifting Gears initiative in December 2008, and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) received approval for phase two of Shifting Gears (SG 2.0) in April 2009. With continued support from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and The Joyce Foundation, Illinois SG 2.0 is focusing on implementing and expanding policies that support bridge programs, coordinating bridge programs within the larger career clusters and career pathways framework, braiding existing resources, and building support for sustainability through outreach to a wide range of stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDERS

The Illinois Shifting Gears 2.0 initiative involves multiple stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and agencies, organized into three major groups, each of which play a critical role in the advancement of the Shifting Gears goals and activities. The first is the SG Work Group consisting of ICCB staff, representatives from Policy Planning Partners, DCEO, Women Employed (http://www.womenemployed.org/) and the Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL). The Work Group members are organized into policy subcommittees that research and develop policy areas with which members have expertise and formal roles in their respective organizations. Day-to-day activity is coordinated by the Project Manager with input from the SG Work Group.

The second group is the Stakeholders Advisory Committee which is expected to provide input and recommendations to the Work Group through its diverse members' expertise and build support among the range of constituency groups represented by the Committee. The Stakeholder Committee members also participate in policy development discussions and advise the development of technical assistance documents.

The third and newest group that will join the SG effort is the Leadership Steering Committee, to be comprised of executive members of the ICCB, DCEO, Department of Human Services (IDES), Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC), the Illinois Council of Community College Presidents, and the Governor's office. The Leadership Steering Committee provides the level of engagement and discussion necessary for policy development and adoption, including insuring that resources are adequate to implement complex changes across multiple systems and constituency groups.

TARGET ACTIVITIES

The SG 2.0 activities target four major areas:

- developing and embedding new institutional practices at the local level to assist in the adoption and implementation of policies that support bridge programs;
- advancing policies identified in SG 1.0, including expanding the policy agenda to address current and anticipated challenges and barriers;
- strengthening the data system to allow tracking of student progress and determining performance outcomes; and
- communicating practices and policies to garner support and prompt replication of bridge programs among providers.

Planned activities for each major area are described below.

Developing and Imbedding Practices

Illinois intends to expand bridge programming based on the development of a common definition that was developed during SG 1.0 (bridge definition – http://occrl.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Bridge%20Definition.pdf). With a common definition, Illinois bridge program providers have a framework to use as they develop the instructional components and support services critical for student success. In the summer and fall of 2009, the new bridge definition was distributed to chief academic officers at Illinois' 48 community colleges and to over 100 providers of adult education throughout the state.

In addition, members of the OCCRL staff are preparing to conduct a statewide survey of bridge program providers (community colleges and adult education) to determine the extent to which existing bridge programs align with the bridge definition and estimate student enrollments and institutional investments. Results of the survey will help to identify and distinguish among implementation models, determine essential components of bridge programs, and identify practices that hold promise for replication. The survey results combined with the expansion of and coordination among data systems that track student progress will position the state to evaluate even more systematically

[1] This article draws extensively from the Illinois SG 2.0 proposal written by Judith Kossy and Illinois' Shifting Gears Work Group.

whether bridge programs lead to more adults entering the workforce prepared for the challenges and opportunities that await them.

In addition, the ICCB and OCCRL staff has presented at statewide meetings to multiple audiences, including local Workforce Investment Act (WIA) providers, to expand awareness and knowledge of bridge instruction and programming. To engage new stakeholders and build partnerships to support this type of instruction. In early 2010, members of the Work Group will hold three regional state meetings for teams of providers and partners from various constituency groups. The target audience includes community college personnel, community-based organizations (CBOs), and WIA, Title 1 providers.

A major effort of SG 2.0 is to assemble resources that can aid providers in creating bridge programs. In addition to existing resources, SG 2.0 efforts include creating new resources that focus on bridge programs and the core components of the Illinois bridge definition: contextualized instruction, career development, and transition services. In 2010, SG 2.0 will release a manual based on the healthcare bridge and career pathways program for limited English proficient individuals, Carreras En Salud, (http://www.idpl.org/idpl_carreras_en_salud.html) at Instituto del Progreso Latino in Chicago. In addition, materials will be created for bridges into the manufacturing career cluster area. Through the development of materials, toolkits for program design and delivery, and information that decodes the complex problem of how to leverage multiple funding streams, Illinois intends to advance and expand bridge programming throughout the state.

Advancing Policies

SG 1.0 resulted in a list of six major policy areas that can maximize the state's educational and supportive services to assist adult students to enter or renter the workforce. The policy areas are:

- Embedding the bridge definition into state policy;
- Developing a bridge program classification structure for developmental education and adult education providers;
- Clarifying how existing state and federal adult education funds can be used in the development and delivery of bridge programs;
- Determining the existence of and coordination of resources that provide support services for individuals enrolled in bridge programs;
- Leveraging the WIA Title 1 40% training policy to expand bridge programming; and
- Implementing and expanding measures of student transition for gauging the success of bridge programs.

SG 1.0 activities advanced policies in several areas, specifically, the bridge definition, bridge classification and reimbursement in developmental education and clarification within adult education, and the adoption of the new WIA Title 1 policy (http://www.illinoisworknet.com/NR/rdonlyres/35333577-2136-4F43-AC27-6E85E2DB7837/0/Bridge_Programs_Technical_Assistance_Guide_Final_91709.pdf). The policy agenda in SG 2.0 includes the same six areas as in SG 1.0, but will devote major attention to two policy areas, both of which span multiple, complex systems: student support services and data measurement and tracking.

Improving Student Support Services

The policy action plan for student support services includes four major efforts:

- Educate bridge program providers by customizing information about transition services, including advising, tutoring, study skills, transportation and childcare assistance, etc.;
- Develop a self-assessment inventory to help providers identify ways in which they can more effectively and efficiently provide services;
- Identify promising practices in the provision of creative, low-cost student support services and make that information available to providers; and
- Review existing financial aid programs to determine how they can be used to support bridge students, including identifying the gaps that exist between resources.

Additional efforts to advance the student support services policy area include involving additional agencies and potential bridge populations not included in phase one of the project to increase access and opportunity to students who can benefit from bridge programs.

Strengthening Data Systems

During SG 1.0, Illinois identified the development and implementation of measures of student transition for low-skilled adults. In December 2008, the ICCB released the first "Illinois Community College System Transitions Report" (http://www.iccb.state.il.us/pdf/reports/TransitionsReport08.pdf). In SG 2.0, OCCRL and ICCB staff who comprise the Data subcommittee of the Work Group developed a data performance and management plan, with two specific foci. The first is to continue to develop transition measures, building on the existing measures to explore the potential for additional measures of student progress, some of which have implications for college reporting requirements. Further, data-related work under SG 2.0 will help establish how these transition measures can be infused within the larger P-20 career clusters and career pathways initiative and incorporated into regional sector planning activities that support the implementation of career and technical education (CTE) programs of study.

Second, staff at OCCRL and the ICCB has developed a continuous improvement model called Pathways to Results, in which teams that implement CTE programs of study (http://occrl.illinois.edu/files/profiles/POS%20Profile.pdf) will use

data to improve programs and student outcomes. SG 2.0 efforts will expand to apply the Pathways to Results methodology to nursing programs associated with the health care cluster, including ways in which bridge student transition outcomes can be incorporated into the comprehensive transition measures initiative. The overarching goal of the data effort is to ensure that bridge program providers at all levels are able to access and use data to tell the story about bridge programs and continuously improve these programs.

Communicating Practices and Policies

It is important that the Shifting Gears initiative convey clear and consistent messages about the critical nature of the work as it relates to students, providers, and the necessity of a better prepared workforce to improve the economy of the state. Multiple methods and types of communications strategies are underway. Led by Policy Planning Partners (PPP), a subcommittee of the Work Group is devoted to communication of the SG message and is preparing a communications plan that defines key messages and the audiences that need to be reached. Electronic media plays a large role in communicating the policies and practices developed in Illinois. In addition to the Joyce Foundation's SG Website that contains information about all the Midwest states' efforts (http://www.shifting-gears.org/), OCCRL has a SG Website at http://occrl.illinois.edu/projects/shifting_gears that includes Illinois-specific information such as presentations given at state and national meetings, SG evaluation reports and links to other related resources. The ICCB is preparing its own site devoted to SG activities and products. The culmination of electronic resources will provide a broad array of bridge related resources.

The Joyce Foundation is providing technical assistance to SG states' efforts through Douglas Gould and Company (http://www.douglasgould.com/). PPP is working with Gould staff to create a strategic communications plan that involves "macro" messaging that can be used for multiple audiences. The emphasis on communicating the message is to raise awareness and deepen understanding of the policy and system changes necessary to implement bridge programming at the scale required to impact the economy and the lives of the many adults who can benefit.

CONCLUSION

The work encompassed in SG 2.0 is challenging and complex. It requires the dedicated engagement of professional staff from multiple agencies, solid partnerships with stakeholders and support of leaders within the state and among colleagues in other Midwest states implementing Shifting Gears, and the array of expertise represented in the technical assistance provided by the Joyce Foundation. Shifting Gears 1.0 provided a strong base upon which Illinois will advance policy and practice as the state continues to improve the educational opportunities for low-income adults in Illinois. ◆

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Supporting Bridge Instruction through Title I of the Workforce Investment Act

by Timothy Harmon

AN INCREASED EMPHASIS ON SKILL TRAINING

Title I of the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA – http://www.doleta.gov/USWORKFORCE/WIA/act.cfm) is intended to improve the skills and self-sufficiency of youth, adults and dislocated workers by providing occupational skills training, academic remediation, job development and job seeking services through a network of one-stop career centers and related providers. In Illinois, Title I of WIA is administered by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), which administers an array of federally-funded and state-funded economic and community development programs. DCEO has been an active partner in Illinois' efforts to improve student transitions for lower-skilled adults by supporting the implementation of bridge instruction (described below).

For DCEO, the emphasis on bridge programs is one part of a larger effort to increase investments in training the state's workforce, and to forge more effective linkages between workforce development and economic development in the state. As the state's lead economic development agency, DCEO became increasingly concerned about the long-term decline in training expenditures within many of the state's 26 local WIA Workforce Investment Areas, which are responsible for the day-to-day administration of Title I of WIA. The combined effects of reduced federal WIA funding and increased costs for personnel and facilities, coupled with other structural trends resulted in a steady decline in the provision of training (Harmon & Rodriguez, 2009).

In order to reverse this trend, DCEO developed and implemented a minimum training expenditure policy (Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, 2007). Under this new policy, local workforce investment areas are required to expend at least 40 percent of the adult and dislocated worker program funds on training costs. DCEO's rationale for the policy was three-fold: (1) training is a fundamental purpose of WIA Title I, and a lack of access to training undermines public and Congressional support for the program; (2) training services are needed to significantly improve the employment and earnings potential of WIA Title I participants, especially low-income adults, and (3) WIA Title I must be a source of training investment if it is to play its proper role in support of the state's larger workforce and economic development strategy.

INTEGRATING BRIDGE PROGRAM SUPPORT INTO THE WIA TRAINING POLICY

During the period that this policy was being developed, Illinois received a grant from the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative. The main objective of this initiative is for states to comprehensively examine their policies and make changes to improve the transition of lower-skilled adults into credit post-secondary instruction and employment (see Whitney Smith Interview in this edition). In Illinois, a significant outcome of the first phase of the Shifting Gears initiative was the development of a definition (bridge definition – http://occrl.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Bridge%20Definition.pdf) that has been adopted across career and technical education (CTE) in community colleges, adult education programs, and workforce programs under WIA Title I. Consequently, DCEO incorporated this definition into the WIA Title I training expenditure policy, in that expenditures for bridge instruction are considered training expenditures for purposes of meeting the minimum expenditure requirement of 40 percent.

In addition to requiring a minimum level of training expenditures and incorporating bridge instruction into this policy, DCEO partnered with the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) in an effort to directly support the development and implementation of bridge instruction. A broader and timely objective of this effort is to position Illinois to be ready to implement additional bridge instruction using funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). This effort includes the following elements:

- **ARRA Workforce Investment Act Sector-Based Request For Proposal:** Through the ARRA, the Workforce Investment Act received an additional $3.95 billion nationally, with the State of Illinois receiving over $156 million in additional WIA funding. DCEO issued a request for proposal (RFP) for the statewide set-aside portion of these funds to prevent dislocation, to support recovery in key sectors by accelerating investment in the skills of Illinois' workers, and to build upon regional sector-based initiatives. Eligible entities include community colleges, universities, community-based organizations, for profit and not-for-profit organizations, employers, industry sector associations, and Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIAs). This RFP

includes funding for bridge instruction/program pilot testing or expansion in three career clusters: Healthcare and Healthcare IT; Manufacturing; and Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics. The bridge programs are expected to upgrade low-income, unskilled workers, including incumbent workers, to enter high demand jobs in one of the three career areas and must be designed to ensure that workers can successfully enter and complete these programs and enter employment (or remain employed)[1].

- **Statewide Sector-based Bridge Program Curriculum Materials:** DCEO also intends to assist with the development of statewide model sector-based bridge program curriculum materials for healthcare, manufacturing, transportation and logistics, and information technology for both blended on-line and regular classroom instruction. Curriculum materials will be made widely available to all eligible providers and provide free access to employers and workers through Illinois workNet™ (http://www.illinoisworknet.com). These curriculum materials will build on work already developed under prior skill shortage grants and with ICCB-funded curriculum development efforts.
- **Outreach and Training to LWIAs:** DCEO, in partnership with ICCB, is beginning to provide outreach and training to LWIAs on how to use sector-based bridge programs as access points to occupational skills training programs for adults with low language and literacy skills. One important component of this effort is the development of a technical assistance guide, *Using WIA Title I to Support Bridge Programs* (Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, 2009). The guide is to "assist Local Workforce Investment Areas (LWIAs) in considering options for supporting bridge programs in their communities. It is part of a technical assistance effort by DCEO and its partners to encourage increased investment in these programs" (p. 1). Although directed mostly to the WIA Title I administrators, the guide is also meant to be useful to "community colleges, other Adult Education providers, and other providers or partners" who want to improve student transitions through the bridge mechanism. Among other things, the guide includes: an overview of bridge programs and related policies in Illinois; the impact of ARRA on the use of training contracts to support bridge programs; the advantages and disadvantages of using class-size training contracts vs. Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) for bridge programs ; examples of career pathways that incorporate bridge components and potential funding options for each component; suggestions concerning the procurement of training contracts (specifically through the use of a RFP) and the management of performance of these contracts; and an outline of other exceptions to the use of ITAs under WIA which may be applicable to bridge program implementation.

[1] DCEO ARRA Request for Proposal: To obtain additional information about this RFP, please go to http://www.illinoisworknet.com and click on ARRA Sector-Based Initiatives RFP.

OCCRL SUPPORT FOR BRIDGE INSTRUCTION UNDER SHIFTING GEARS 2.0

The Joyce Foundation has continued its support for Illinois' bridge efforts under a continuation of Shifting Gears grants, known as Shifting Gears 2.0 (http://www.shifting-gears.org/). The Shifting Gears effort in Illinois continues to benefit from significant match support in the form of WIA statewide funding through DCEO and ICCB. Under Shifting Gears 2.0, OCCRL is providing overall project management support, assisting ICCB in the development of improved measures of student transition for adult education and developmental education students, and implementing a survey of bridge instruction provided in these settings.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The DCEO policy on training expenditures has already had a significant affect on training investments among the local workforce investment areas. Since the implementation of the policy in 2007, the number of LWIAs meeting the 40 percent level has increased from less than half of the LWIAs to nearly all LWIAs. In addition, the overall training expenditure rate has increased from about 31 percent in PY 2006 to over 45 percent in PY 2007. The new ARRA funds in particular have been predominantly spent on training services (Harmon & Rodgriguez, 2009).

It is not yet known to what extent these policy initiatives around bridge instruction will lead to increased support for bridge programs from WIA Title I. The City of Chicago has taken the lead by including bridge programs as part of its major solicitation for use of its ARRA funds, and other LWIAs may follow suit. OCCRL will follow these developments and will provide future updates. ◆

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