

State strategies to facilitate adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities



What's Happening

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Prior research has classified strategies to facilitate adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities into five broad categories: advising, General Educational Development-plus (GED-plus), English as a second language, career pathways, and college preparatory (Zafft, Kallenbach, & Spohn, 2006). This two-part study relied on interviews with directors of state- and local-level adult education programs and existing data sources to explore how states facilitate adult learners' transition to postsecondary education. One part of the study used data from interviews conducted in 2014 with adult education directors in six Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest Region states. The study found that states use different combinations of strategies within and across these five categories to facilitate transition. The second part of the study used data from the National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs and found large variation across states in adult learners' postsecondary participation. Part of this variation may reflect inconsistencies in reporting across states. This report suggests areas for future research that can build on the findings described here.

Why this study?

Previous research has demonstrated that some form of education or training after high school is critical to both the upward mobility of individuals and the economic competitiveness of the country (Carnevale,

Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). For example, by 2018 the United States will have an estimated 3 million fewer college graduates than the job market will need (Carnevale et al., 2010). The jobs that are expected to be most in demand will require some postsecondary education. About half of the available jobs are expected to require at least a bachelor's degree, and the other half are expected to require some college or an associate's degree (Carnevale et al., 2010). Policy efforts to address this need often focus on improving the college readiness of students who follow a traditional pathway from high school to college, ignoring postsecondary readiness among low-skilled adult learners (see box 1 for definitions of key terms). This narrow focus on the traditional pathway may limit states' capacity to address the quality and quantity of workforce demand (Jacobson & Mokher, 2009; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2009).

However, recent federal policy has recognized the need to address the postsecondary opportunities of nontraditional students and adult learners. For example, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, which acknowledges the need to align employment, education, training, and support for adult learners and holds programs accountable for reporting on postprogram outcomes related to employment or postsecondary education, wages, credentials or credits, and skill gains (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). As states grapple with these new regulations, it is important to consider the ways in which states have been supporting transitions to postsecondary opportunities for the adult learner population.

Box. 1 Key terms

Adult basic education system. Refers to the combined state-based and federally funded system supported through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The system's focus is not on community college or technical programs in postsecondary education but rather on the strategies—including policies, programs, and program-specific substrategies—for facilitating the transition of adult learners from adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English as a second language programs to postsecondary contexts. A broad range of adult basic education programs are considered, such as the multistate Shifting Gears program, articulation agreements, and the development of industry-specific curricula, as well as adult secondary education and English as a second language programs.

Federal adult education programs. Refers to programs that provide grants to states to fund local adult education and literacy programs, including workplace literacy, family literacy, English literacy, and integrated English literacy–civics education programs. Participation in these programs is limited to adults and out-of-school youth ages 16 and older who are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under state law.

Low-skilled adult learners. Refers to adults in the adult basic education system who lack the qualifications needed for a job that pays a living wage for themselves and those who depend on them.

National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs. Refers to an outcome-based reporting system for state-administered adult basic education programs established under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (since replaced by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2015) that tracks five outcomes for adult learners: educational gain, entry into employment, retaining employment, obtaining a secondary credential, and entry into postsecondary education.

Strategies. Refers to strategies and program- or policy-specific substrategies—that is, strategies within larger strategies—that are defined by the state personnel in response to the following question: “What strategies and program- or policy-specific substrategies do states use to support low-skilled adult learners in transitioning to postsecondary education or training?” Their responses about the strategies form the basis of this report.

Transitions to postsecondary opportunities. Refers to the successful transition of adults from adult basic education to college-level coursework, including postsecondary programs that result in a short- or long-term certification, associate degree, or bachelor's degree.

Adult learners who lack English or workplace literacy have a difficult time transitioning to postsecondary education or gainful employment. In 2011–12 federally funded adult education providers served more than 1.8 million eligible adults who lacked basic literacy or English language skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Among these adults only 47,731 (less than 3 percent) entered postsecondary education during the program year reporting period (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Lack of a college education or postsecondary job skills may prevent adults from obtaining secure employment that pays family-supporting wages and offers career advancement, creating a drag on labor market productivity and adding stress to already overburdened state welfare systems (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Jenkins, Zeidenberg, & Kienzl, 2009).

The primary motivator for this exploratory study is the desire of Midwest College and Career Success Research Alliance members for more information and research about strategies used within member states to support adult learners in the transition to postsecondary education and training opportunities. Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest responded to this interest by interviewing state and local adult education directors in six of the seven REL Midwest Region states—Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio—about the strategies and program- or policy-specific substrategies in their states and by analyzing data from the National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs. The findings of this research were compared with existing research on strategies to address adult basic education transition to postsecondary education and training opportunities.

What the study examined

The aim of the study was to explore how six REL Midwest Region states support students' transitions from adult education into postsecondary programs rather than to provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategies states employ in this endeavor.

Specifically, the study posed the following research questions:

1. What strategies and program- or policy-specific substrategies do states use to support low-skilled adult learners in transitioning to postsecondary education or training?
2. What kind of outcome data on their adult education programs do states collect and report?

The findings of this exploratory study help identify issues that could be examined in future systematic research. For example, qualitative interviews indicated that there is considerable variation in transition programs within and between states. However, much of the information provided in interviews could not be corroborated by other sources, such as data from the National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs (box 2). Consequently, this report gives voice to state and local directors of adult learners' transition programs and indicates the types of strategies that are employed in their state, but it does not evaluate the approaches. The strategies identified during the interviews were organized and compared with approaches to transition programs identified in the literature on the topic (table 1).

What the study found

The study team conducted its analysis on the basis of strategies discussed by respondents during the structured interviews. The findings provide important insights into how states are supporting adult learners' transitions to postsecondary education and training opportunities and into the effectiveness of adult basic education programs.

Box 2. Data and methods

In 2013 the study team conducted structured interviews in six states (Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio)¹ with state adult education directors (or their representatives) and directors of local adult education programs who were knowledgeable about adult transition strategies. Study team members first spoke to one state adult education director in each state and then to one local program director in each state who could provide more descriptive information. Respondents were asked to discuss strategies and program- or policy-specific substrategies in their state that they perceived as supporting adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities. The themes from the interview data were then categorized by state.

The study team also accessed state-provided data from the National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs, an outcome-based reporting system established under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. The National Reporting System collects data on the number of individuals achieving outcomes such as education gains on standardized assessments, entering postsecondary education, earning an industry-recognized credential or certification, achieving employment, or receiving an increase in wages. The system does not track individual learners; instead, it focuses on counts of how many learners achieve each outcome. The study team accessed this database to analyze longitudinal trends within states, covering the 2008/09 and 2010/11 academic years.

Note

1. The six states in the study were members of the College and Career Success Research Alliance. The seventh state in the Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest Region, Wisconsin, was not a member of the alliance and was not included in the study.

Table 1. All six Midwest Region states in the study reported using at least three of the five strategies identified in the literature to support adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities, 2014

Strategy	Illinois	Indiana	Iowa	Michigan	Minnesota	Ohio
1. Advising strategies, which seek to raise adult learners' awareness of postsecondary education options and admissions processes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. General Educational Development-plus (GED-plus) strategies, which seek to accelerate adult learning by providing GED curriculum or instruction that supplies adult learners with the skills necessary for success in college ^a	✓	✓	✓	✓		
3. English as a second language strategies, which provide adult learners with language skills for academic settings, a high number of contact hours, and clear program admission criteria (cutscores on standardized assessments) to reduce the need for further English as a second language services				✓	✓	✓
4. Career pathways strategies, which combine specific job skills training with basic education coursework for adult learners with limited education	✓		✓		✓	✓
5. College preparatory strategies, which include courses that fill gaps in adult learning after the completion of the GED and before college entrance, mimic the college learning environment, or place adult learners in a postsecondary institution, such as a community college	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

a. See Ryder (2011) for examples of GED-plus programs in Iowa.

Source: Author's analysis based on interview data collected January–August 2014, using strategies identified in Zafft et al. (2006).

How do states support adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities?

Zafft et al. (2006) organized adult education transition strategies in the United States into five broad categories. The study team used these categories to organize the strategies discussed by respondents (see table 1). States were considered to have used a strategy if a respondent referred to a policy, program, or strategy that aligned with these definitions. All states reported using advising strategies; states varied in their reported use of GED-plus strategies, English as a second language strategies, and career pathway strategies. All six Midwest Region states in the study reported using at least three of the five strategies; the smallest number of states reported using English as a second language strategies to support their adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities.

Although the strategies cited by respondents generally reflect those identified in the literature, state and local directors reported combining or refining them in ways unique to that state or region. Some strategies discussed by respondents did not fit neatly within the five categories shown in table 1. In these cases the strategies were coded, using emergent coding techniques, into five additional categories: transition programs, alignment with industry expectations, pedagogical strategies to support transitions to postsecondary opportunities, differentiated advising, and support services (table 2). These strategies were then identified as either a hybrid of multiple strategies or as a substrategy of one of the five strategies shown in table 1. For example, some respondents discussed creating differentiated advising models that used personnel from career pathway programs as well as GED preparatory programs. Whereas in the past these approaches might have been perceived by program directors as separate services funded by distinct entities, respondents noted that it is now more common to combine these approaches and then adapt them to the local context. As a program director in Illinois put it:

We certainly borrowed from a number of the approaches and were informed by a number of the approaches. Of course, as happens, we have evolved the [program] to something that we think works well here, and we'll continue to evolve the [program], so I don't think it's necessarily an amalgam of approaches we've seen elsewhere.

An example of a substrategy is a program that links adult learning experiences to postsecondary opportunities (bridge programs) to support students' transitions to postsecondary education and training opportunities. By placing adult learners in a postsecondary institution, bridge programs are a substrategy of college preparatory policies and programs.

Together, the five emergent strategy categories shown in table 2 constitute evidence that states are working to refine traditional strategies into new and sometimes state-specific combinations that support adult learners' transitions to postsecondary education and training opportunities. The categories represent a potential reconceptualization of the strategies identified by Zafft et al. (2006). Respondents reported that these hybrid strategies (addressing more than one of the five strategies in table 1) and substrategies (addressing only one strategy in table 1) are influenced by federal policies as well, though federal policies were not a focus of this study (see box 3).

Several similar hybrid strategies and substrategies were used in the six states. More detailed descriptions of approaches used within emergent strategies are provided below.

A. Transition strategies: Five of the six states have implemented transition strategies that integrate and connect adult learners' skills with postsecondary occupational education in key industry sectors. For example, Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio have funded transition coordinators that connect adult learners with local labor markets through local education and training opportunities

Table 2. All six Midwest Region states in the study reported using hybrid adult education transition strategies and substrategies to support adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities, 2014

Emergent strategy	Zafft et al. (2006) strategies involved ^a	Illinois	Indiana	Iowa	Michigan	Minnesota	Ohio
A. Transition strategies							
Industry-specific bridge curricula	1, 4	✓					
Accelerated-opportunity, industry-specific bridge programs	4	✓		✓		✓	✓
Dual enrollment for adult learners in bridge programs	5	✓				✓	
Funded transition coordinator	1, 4, 5	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
B. Alignment with industry expectations							
Industry-specific curricula	4	✓	✓				
Strong industry-college partnerships/agreements	4, 5		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
C. Pedagogical strategies to support transitions							
Cohort/small-group instruction for individuals with similar postsecondary aspirations	1, 5	✓		✓	✓		
Introduction to industry-related vocabulary and math	4	✓			✓		✓
Instructional aides in the classroom	1		✓				
Peer instruction for postsecondary skills	1, 5		✓				
Basic skills instructor collaborates with technical instructor	4			✓			
Individualized tutoring for postsecondary skills	1, 5		✓	✓	✓		
Contextualized instruction, such as just-in-time literacy instruction	4, 5				✓		
Hands-on lab work	4, 5				✓		
D. Differentiated advising							
Needs assessment survey of postsecondary skills	1, 5		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Career pathway navigators	1, 4	✓		✓	✓	✓	
One-on-one assistance: create adult learner profiles, learning plans, goal development	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Adult education faculty members attend career and technical classes with adult learners to provide in-class support	1, 5	✓					
E. Support services							
Transportation support	1, 4, 5		✓				
Adult learner community building, for example to house single parents or English learner students	3		✓	✓	✓	✓	

a. Numbers refer to strategies as follows: 1 = advising, 2 = General Educational Development-plus (GED-plus), 3 = English as a second language, 4 = career pathways, and 5 = college preparatory. Emergent strategies listed with multiple strategies from the Zafft et al. (2006) classification represent hybrid strategies, whereas a single strategy is considered a substrategy of the Zafft et al. (2006) classification strategy.

Source: Authors' analysis based on interview data collected January–August 2014.

Box 3. Federal policies on adult learning transitions to postsecondary opportunities

Federal funding and reporting guidelines offer a general framework for designing, delivering, and assessing adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities. Interview respondents reported that state policies related to adult learners' transitions were informed by the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998, particularly Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and the provisions of the Workforce Investment Act establishing a National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs.¹ The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act seeks to increase employability among low-skilled adults, help parents support their children's learning, and ensure that adults complete a high school education by providing formula-based grants to states. In turn, states distribute these federal funds through a competitive process to local providers of adult education and literacy services, family literacy programs, and English language services. For many of these local providers—which can include districts, local education agencies, community colleges, libraries, and community-based organizations (for example, United Way of America)—the grants and matching state funding are the primary sources of financial support for adult education, including more specific activities targeted to adult learners' transitions.

The six states studied also received grant funding from other sources, including federal Workforce Innovation Fund grants from the U.S. Department of Labor, to support innovative approaches to the design and delivery of employment and training services (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012). Although not addressing adult learners' transitions directly, these funds have been used by states such as Illinois to support programs that assist adult workers in gaining the necessary education or training for full employment (see http://www.doleta.gov/workforce_innovation/solicitation.cfm).

Note

1. At the time of data collection the Workforce Investment Act was in place. It was reauthorized in July 2014 as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, marking the first federal legislative reform of the public workforce system in 16 years. More information on the law can be found at <http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/>.

that match individuals' skills. These programs combine advising with an emphasis on college preparatory and career pathway programs.

- B. Alignment with industry expectations: All six states align curricula with industry-specific needs through strategic partnerships or agreements with local business or community organizations to support adult learners' transitions, or both.** In Minnesota, for example, a local labor market with high demand for health-care jobs has created a partnership between adult education programs and local businesses through programs offering adult basic education or instruction in English as a second language alongside highly specialized training in high-demand fields. Immediate part-time employment prospects with partnering businesses are available to students after completing their adult basic education training, including opportunities to continue to more advanced training to improve skills and secure full-time employment. In some states this acceleration takes place through agreements between postsecondary institutions and industry.
- C. Pedagogical strategies to support transitions: Five of the six states use pedagogical strategies to support adult education students, most commonly relying on cohort or small-group learning for adult education students, industry-specific vocabulary and math skills lessons, and individualized tutoring to support adult learners' transitions.** In Iowa and Michigan adult basic education students in certain programs are placed in cohorts on the basis of their academic goals and enrolled in similar classes. In Illinois students are encouraged to develop their own learning communities based on shared career interests or academic goals. Students are encouraged to provide one another with a "support structure that they might not have otherwise," as a program director in Iowa explained. "They support each other from a motivational standpoint... It's a beautiful thing." Program directors also reported using cohorts to motivate and support students in their postsecondary aspirations. Illinois, Michigan,

and Ohio report teaching students industry-specific vocabulary and math skills to increase students' abilities to execute tasks in their fields and improve their employability. In Indiana, Iowa, and Michigan, program directors reported using an individualized tutoring strategy.

D. Differentiated advising: Among differentiated advising approaches, all states report using one-on-one assistance to support adult learners' transitions. In programs housed in community colleges students in all six states have access to additional one-on-one assistance from community college faculty. One-on-one assistance supports transition by ensuring that students complete adult basic education or English as a second language program requirements and by exposing students to help they can use throughout their education careers. In Illinois, programs encourage adult basic education students to use advisory services provided by the local community college because, according to the program director, "once they transition to college, they're ... hopefully going to use those same supports when they need them again."

E. Support services: Four states use community-building, particularly for English as a second language learners, as a strategy to support adult learners' transitions. Adult learners can face individual, institutional, and policy-related barriers to successful transitioning to postsecondary education. State directors of adult learner programs have discussed providing additional support services as a way to address these barriers. Respondents in Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, and Minnesota discussed using such community-building approaches. However, only one state, Indiana, reported providing transportation assistance for adult learners who may have trouble attending college and career transition programs.

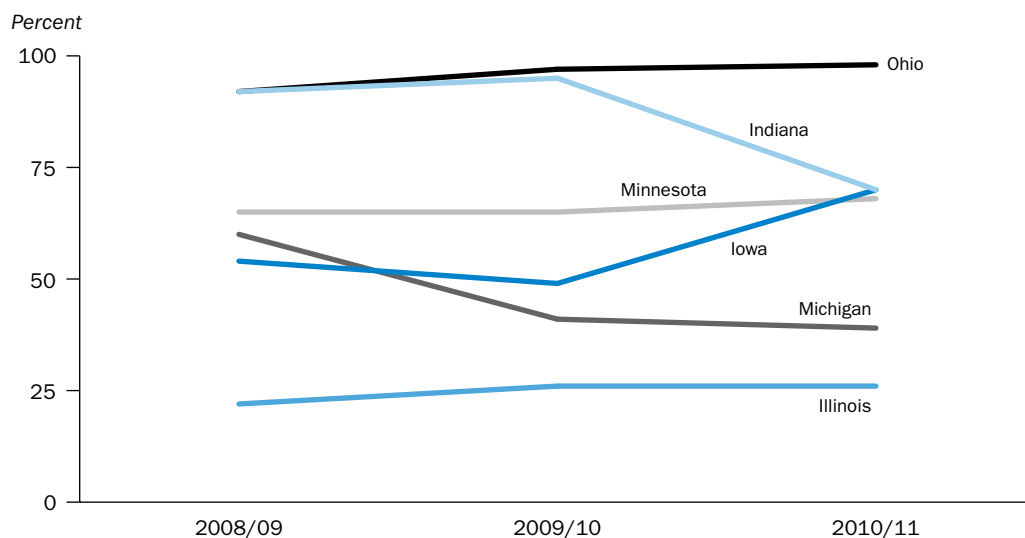
What kind of outcome data on adult education programs do states collect and report?

The National Reporting System for Adult Education Programs is an outcome-based reporting system for state-administered, federally funded adult education programs, such as those receiving Adult Education and Family Literacy Act grant funding (see box 3). Data from the system cannot be used to draw conclusions about the impacts of specific interventions, however, because the system does not track individual students. Rather, it collects aggregate data on outcomes among adult learners in achieving education gains on standardized assessments (such as ACT WorkKeys), getting a job, retaining a job, obtaining a secondary credential, and entering postsecondary education. The National Reporting System requires states to collect program data to report on these outcomes and to use outcome data for program improvement activities, such as staff professional development and technical assistance (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

National Reporting System data can be used as a starting point in understanding trends within states in adult learner transitions to postsecondary opportunities, in particular by providing data on two measures important to adult learners' transitions: the percentage of adult learners with stated postsecondary education or training goals who entered postsecondary education or job training after completing an adult basic education program, and the percentage of adult learners who acquired the basic skills necessary in their adult basic education program to advance at least one educational functioning level, an indication of the extent to which adult learners are successfully transitioning through adult basic education programs (figures 1 and 2).¹

Understanding and using these data to describe trends among outcomes for adult learners requires consistent data on postsecondary enrollment. However, according to state respondents, the collection of data on students' transition into postsecondary education and the reporting on these measures vary and are sometimes incomplete across states, leading to potential inconsistencies for national comparative purposes. More needs to be known about reporting practices and protocols for data collection in order to make

Figure 1. According to National Reporting System data, four of the six Midwest Region states in the study reported increases in the percentage of adult learners with stated postsecondary education goals who entered postsecondary education or training following their adult basic education program, 2008/09–2010/11



Note: The number of adult learners in each state and year with stated postsecondary education goals is not publicly available. However, the approximate 2010/11 enrollment numbers are available by state for adult basic education, adult secondary education, and adult English learners, as well as for adult basic education enrollment: Illinois (96,620 total students; 26,175 adult basic education students); Indiana (28,571 total students; 19,815 adult basic education students); Iowa (11,167 total students; 5,254 adult basic education students); Michigan (25,745 total students; 14,359 adult basic education students); Minnesota (46,009 total students; 17,948 adult basic education students); Ohio (41,692 total students; 30,093 adult basic education students). In interviews state respondents reported that criteria differed across states, suggesting that adult learners' achievement of performance measures should be compared not between states over time, only within states.

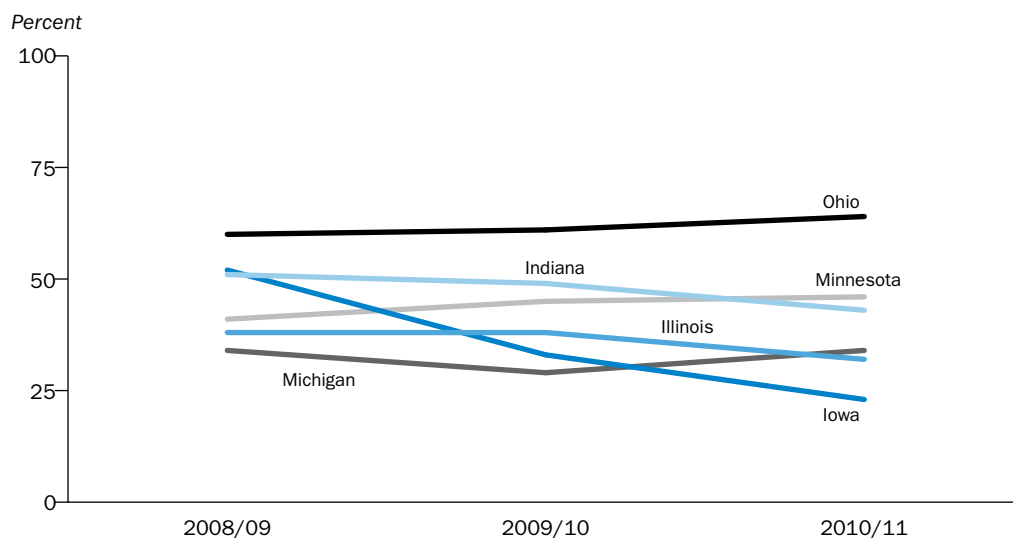
Source: U.S. Department of Education (2013).

accurate comparisons across states. Researchers can, however, look at trends within states because, according to respondents, reporting within states has remained consistent.

National Reporting System data revealed increases in the attainment of some program outcomes within the six Regional Educational Laboratory states. Transition from adult basic education to postsecondary education increased in four of the six states. Between the 2008/09 and 2010/11 program years Ohio, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois reported an increase in this transition outcome, while Indiana and Michigan reported a decline. During that same period half the states—Michigan, Minnesota, and Ohio—reported increases in adult learners enrolled in adult basic literacy programs who acquired the basic skills necessary to advance at least one educational functioning level on a literacy skill assessment. While the disparities between states on these measures appear large, the differences in reporting criteria noted by state respondents may make between-state comparisons unreliable. For example, in Ohio in 2010/11 more than 98 percent of adult learners achieved transition to postsecondary education or training after completing an adult basic education program, compared with 26 percent in Illinois (see figure 1). Further analysis of the reporting practices used by states would shed light on the disparities between states.

National Reporting System data can provide a baseline for how states report on adult learners' progress on tested skills. However, interview respondents suggested that similar challenges may arise in standardizing data collection across states for students' educational functioning levels as for the percentages of adult learners entering postsecondary education or training. National Reporting System data show variation by state in the percentage of adult learners advancing at least one educational functioning level (see figure 2).

Figure 2. According to National Reporting System data, three of the six Midwest Region states in the study reported increases in the percentage of adult learners enrolled in basic literacy programs who acquired the basic skills needed to advance one or more educational functioning levels in literacy skills, 2008/09–2010/11



Note: The number of adult learners in each state and year is not publicly available. However, the approximate 2010/11 enrollment numbers for adult basic education, adult secondary education, and English learners are available by state: Illinois (96,620 total students; 26,175 adult basic education students); Indiana (28,571 total students; 19,815 adult basic education students); Iowa (11,167 total students; 5,254 adult basic education students); Michigan (25,745 total students; 14,359 adult basic education students); Minnesota (46,009 total students; 17,948 adult basic education students); Ohio (41,692 total students; 30,093 adult basic education students). The six educational functioning levels for adult basic education are beginning literacy, beginning basic education, low and high intermediate basic education, and low and high adult secondary education. In interviews state respondents reported that criteria differed across states, suggesting that adult learners' achievement of performance measures should be compared only within states over time and not between states.

Source: U.S. Department of Education (2013).

Data for Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa, for example, show a drop in the percentage of students advancing to higher levels. And Ohio consistently shows a higher percentage of adult learners advancing to higher levels than do the other five states.

Implications of the study findings and suggested research

This report sheds light on six REL Midwest Region states' use of strategies and program- or policy-specific substrategies to support adult learners' transitions to postsecondary education and training opportunities as reported by state and local program directors. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014, the first piece of federal legislation in this area in 16 years, acknowledges the need to align employment, education, training, and support for adult learners and holds programs accountable for reporting on outcomes related to employment or postsecondary education, wages, credentials or credits, and skill gains (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014). The emergence of new and unique combinations of substrategies and hybrid strategies between the passage of WIOA and the Workforce Innovation Act of 1998 suggests the need to collect and analyze more data on how states are effectively supporting the transition of adult learners to postsecondary education.

Program directors in six REL Midwest Region states report using a variety of strategies, including some identified in the literature and others that have been combined into hybrid strategies or refined into substrategies by practitioners. Although this report can increase understanding of the landscape of state

strategies to address adult learners' transitions to postsecondary education and training opportunities in the REL Midwest Region, program directors cite the need for more closely linked data systems to support decisionmaking. For example, future studies may investigate the degree to which National Reporting System data are comparable across states or may assess the efficacy of the strategies described here in achieving the outcomes of interest. In addition, researchers may want to consider whether more systematic data collection would reveal additional strategies or confirm the strategies and substrategies discussed in this report. The additional data that will be collected as a result of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act may inform these questions in coming years. These data could provide policymakers with important, program-specific information on student performance and transition trends, information that could be shared across programs to increase support and improve services for adult learners.

Limitations of the study

This report presents the results of an exploratory study. Because the findings are based on interviews with just one state and one local adult education director in six REL Midwest Region states, the findings may not reflect the perspectives of all program providers and participants. Interview responses were not verified using alternate data sources. Additionally, one of the sources of data for this study, the National Reporting System for Adult Education, relies on data submitted by states, which use different criteria such that only within-state comparisons are possible. Furthermore, the strategies and program- or policy-specific sub-strategies on which the interviews focused may not be representative of the breadth of services offered by a state. Thus the findings of this study are not generalizable.

Note

1. The National Reporting System divides educational functioning into six levels for adult basic education: beginning literacy, beginning basic education, low and high intermediate basic education, and low and high adult secondary education, with each level associated with the expected basic reading, writing, numeracy, and functional and workplace skills for a person functioning at that level. The system also uses six levels to gauge functioning in English as a second language: beginning literacy, low beginning English, high beginning English, low and high intermediate English, and advanced English, with each level associated with the expected speaking and listening skills and basic reading, writing, and workplace skills for a person functioning at that level (see U.S. Department of Education, 2016, for more information).

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Additional free resources from the U.S. Department of Education

These resources are materials that have been developed by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education on adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities. This information is useful for individuals interested in reading further about earlier strategies and supports.

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The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE) conducts unbiased large-scale evaluations of education programs and practices supported by federal funds; provides research-based technical assistance to educators and policymakers; and supports the synthesis and the widespread dissemination of the results of research and evaluation throughout the United States.

January 2017

This report was prepared by Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) under Contract ED-IES-12-C-0004, administered by American Institutes for Research. The content of the publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.

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Hector-Mason, A., Narlock, J., Muhsani, H., & Bhatt, M. P. (2017). *State strategies to facilitate adult learners' transitions to postsecondary opportunities* (REL 2017–223). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Midwest. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

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