the transition program curriculum with that of the college courses into which many of the program's students enroll. She has extensive knowledge of academic benchmarks of developmental college courses and 101 level college courses.

Sally Daniels, the program counselor, is particularly responsible for Sumner's emphasis on thorough recruitment, academic guidance and financial aid. She understands the challenges of nontraditional students, many of whom are the first generation college students in their families. She recruited students to the program through the Maine Educational Opportunity Council, where she is employed part-time. Sally combines a deep knowledge of financial aid with practical assessments of student abilities and is able to recognize those who will excel.

Students and staff identified the key ingredients of the success of Sumner's program. Staff and students alike identified the following skills and knowledge—all of which are integrated into the core program curriculum—as central to their success:

- How to balance and prioritize demands
- How to organize one's work
- Incremental studying (e.g. 15 minutes/break/15 minutes)
- Note-taking
- How to tape classes and put the tapes to good use
- Rigorous math, writing and reading courses

Sumner's assessment process utilizes a thorough screening checklist to assess student readiness for the program. The assessment process involves a number of steps, including: interactive counseling assessment; Accuplacer testing and follow-up review with the college counselor, instructor and student about how the placements relate to the transition course; and an interview. Ongoing assessment of learning gains, including self-assessment, rubrics, checklists, quizzes, in-class writing and portfolio

reviews are implemented during the courses. Self-assessment takes place during mid-cycle evaluation of the courses. Exit assessments in reading, writing, math and study skills take place during the final sessions of the courses. The initial instructional assessment, including the initial interview, takes approximately three hours and may be conducted over two sessions, if necessary.

Student Success Factors

Sumner staff articulated their thoughts on the key characteristics of successful students (those who complete the program and enroll in postsecondary education) and the key obstacles their students encounter. Successful students:

- usually displayed a willingness to embrace change;
- sought out new perspectives and were quick to challenge their entrenched, initial beliefs (i.e. they exhibited an openness to new skills and perspectives);
- were prepared for the significant challenge of overcoming financial aid barriers (e.g. persevering through roadblocks, returning to school after extended absences or semesters of more limited activity, etc.) despite being first generation college students; and
- were self-starters but were also willing and able to take advantage of program resources, accept feedback and capitalize on skills and resources to which the program (and the college) exposed them.

In summary, the key findings from the site visit to Sumner included the program staff's knowledge and experience working with and teaching adult learners, the practical mix of academic and college readiness curricula, and the longstanding relationship between the ABE-to-College program and its higher education partner.

C. Cape Cod Community College's SUCCESS Program

Program Description

The Students Utilizing Cape Cod Educational Support Services (SUCCESS) Program GED-to-College Transition Program was established in November, 2001, at Cape Cod Community College. Classes held at the Hyannis Center are convenient for adult learners who reside in southeastern Massachusetts, Cape Cod and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket.

SUCCESS is an 18-week program that offers three hours each of math and writing/study skills weekly. Stress and time management workshops are included as well as assistance with college admissions and financial aid information. Students produce as a final product a research paper and an oral presentation about the college major the student plans to pursue. Also, the program provides a three-credit college computer course. The program serves approximately 30 students annually. Classes are held two evenings per week during the fall cycle, and two mornings per week during the spring cycle. Orientation and the computer course are held on the weekends during both cycles. From spring, 2002, through summer, 2004, the program served 94 students of whom 83 percent (78 students) completed the program; 78 percent (61 students) completed one or more college semesters. One student completed an LPN degree and is enrolled in an RN degree granting program. Four students are transferring to four-year colleges.

Program Startup and Evolution

In 1990, Cape Cod Community College administrators saw the need to bring together a wide range of functions related to adult education. With funding from the Massachusetts Department of Education, Cape Cod Community College's administrators established the Adult Collaborative of Cape Cod for Education and Support Services (ACCCESS) in Hyannis. In addition, the Cape already had a Massachusetts Department of Education-funded transition program for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students.

Therefore, when Nellie Mae Education Foundation funding became available, there was an established cadre of administrators and program staff on Cape Cod who recognized the need for academic and support services and could build on an existing base of experience. In 2001, the Students Utilizing Cape Cod Educational Support Services program (SUCCESS) was established with an NMEF grant. As with Sumner in Maine, there was a pre-existing, working relationship with a higher education partner (Cape Cod Community College) prior to NMEF funding, but the grant enabled the program to solidify and strengthen the relationship.

Program-College Relationship Success Factors

Several characteristics are central to this successful relationship. Cape Cod Community College and the SUCCESS program have clearly defined roles and responsibilities that help in managing student transitions. In addition, there is enormous collaboration between the two. SUCCESS students are concurrently enrolled at Cape Cod Community College from the beginning of their participation in the program and enjoy access to a range of services provided by the college. While enrolled in SUCCESS, students receive college credit from Cape Cod Community College for the computer classes offered through the program.

SUCCESS is clearly and completely a part of Cape Cod Community College. This, in large part, reflects the personal commitment of the President of Cape Cod Community College, Dr. Kathleen Schatzberg. President Schatzberg is known to tout the college's motto: "Opportunity, access and equity." College administrators interviewed for this study repeatedly made comments that reflected an understanding of, and commitment to these core principles. SUCCESS' staff are Cape Cod Community College employees. They attend departmental meetings at the college and are well known across campus. Like other administrators at the community college, the ACCCESS program director reports to the vice president who reports directly to the president. The program enjoys a good relationship with college administrators, characterized by cooperation, problem solving, and give and take.

SUCCESS staff is equally committed to the goals espoused by President Schatzberg. SUCCESS staff work closely together to prepare students for the transition to college. For example, assessment testing is carefully organized and coordinated; groups of SUCCESS students travel to Cape Cod Community College together for testing each semester. Not only does this help smooth students' way for test-taking, but it also helps students to overcome the intimidation associated with their first visit to "college".

We heard repeatedly from Cape Cod Community College and SUCCESS staff that the quality of the relationship between college and program staff is based on mutual respect, trust and flexibility. They listen to each other and together make decisions to try new approaches. If the approach doesn't work, they learn, move on and try something else, hand-in-hand.

While proud of program performance and retention, program staff and the college administration agreed that measures of retention, which are defined by the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project as stipulated from the project funder, should be broadened and improved. One-year retention in post college enrollment was thought to be too narrow a definition. They agreed that the focus should be on longer-term retention. They noted that some students need four to five years, or more, to reach their goals. It is not uncommon for students to take breaks from coursework because of family, health or financial pressures. Program staff felt that, as long as students are making steady progress, they should be considered "successfully retained." President Schatzberg said that a measure for retention should be the number of courses a student takes for *all* semesters, over a four-year period. She added that looking at data over a broader timeframe would generate a better understanding of interventions needed to increase retention rates.

Program Success Factors

Students and staff at Cape Cod Community College remarked upon the intense personal contribution, investment and power of Joan Kieran, the SUCCESS program director. Joan feels a personal commitment to preparing every entering student for college and makes sure they become connected to the other student support services programs at the

college. Students and college staff gave glowing endorsements of Joan's approach and leadership. She, and by extension, her staff, display a blend of commitment, toughness and attention to the individual needs of the students, combining academic support and skill building with personal support and life skill building.

An example of Joan's leadership and commitment is the program's unique orientation model. The SUCCESS orientation was created in response to an identified need to develop a sense of community and trust in the classroom in a short time period. In addition, the program sought to address the emotional and psychological barriers that can undermine student success in the transition class and in college. The program orientation gives students a strong sense of belonging to a group, provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the academic and social goals of the program and increases motivation for success in the program and in college.

The orientation is a two-day, ten-hour commitment. The agenda includes an ice breaker, community building activities, introductions from students and all program staff, and a group activity in which students articulate what they will need to feel comfortable and to thrive in the classroom. Additional activities include learning to manage time, learning to use a college planner, and reviewing the program's syllabus and the materials needed for the program.

The building of self-esteem, confidence and commitment is a key part of SUCCESS students' preparation. The integrated approach to this preparation was apparent in the visits to Cape Cod Community College, the conscious connection of students to Cape Cod Community College resources, and the recognition of the underlying psychosocial challenges of "*the first generation of college students from working class families,*" as articulated by President Schatzberg. She also spoke eloquently of the "*unique psychology*" of the first generation of college pioneers, and emphasized the importance of familiarizing these pioneers with the supports and resources available at the college.

One strategy for accomplishing this, traveling together to Cape Cod Community College for testing, provided other benefits for students. By using Cape Cod Community College's assessment services and office, the SUCCESS students received a full orientation to the test, extra support, and began using the college's support services. They took the Accuplacer test while enrolled at SUCCESS, yet the administration of the test took place at the college's own testing site.

An emphasis on other practical skills, beyond testing and accessing campus resources, also builds SUCCESS students' confidence and skills. Computer skills were listed by students as some of the most valuable skills they obtained while at the program. Students learned to overcome fear, build competence and grow confident in computer use. Many of these students had been away from school, working in jobs that did not require computer use: they were nervous and full of self-doubt about their ability to succeed in college. However, after hands-on practice and program support at SUCCESS, students entered Cape Cod Community College feeling quite confident, and they used computers as an integral part of their school work. One student commented, "*I was always good at math. Though I started off knowing little about computers, the spreadsheet stuff came pretty easily to me.*" Other key life and study skills the students said were important to their success at college included the use of libraries (for research and study support), time management strategies and study groups.

Student Success Factors

Staff at SUCCESS identified several characteristics of students most likely to complete the program:

- clear career goals;
- focus and good attendance;
- good self-esteem;
- an ability to connect with others and build a learning community.

In the focus group, students were visibly comfortable. They were clearly happy to see one another and had many connections across SUCCESS classes. They also described SUCCESS graduates as an informal network of "familiar" and "supportive" students with shared experiences and the ability to support one another on the Cape Cod Community College campus, where class schedules and commutes from all over the Cape make socializing difficult.

In summary, key findings from the SUCCESS site visit included: the importance of individual staff's creativity and knowledge associated with meeting the academic and college readiness needs of adult learners; the full integration of the program into the college partner's administrative infrastructure and the mutual respect between the ABE-to-College Transition Program staff and the higher education administrative staff.

LITERATURE REVIEW

BACKGROUND

The literature review was conducted in order to compare the data gathered through this evaluation with other similar or related qualitative and quantitative research that has been conducted on nontraditional adult learners and their experiences transitioning and attending postsecondary education. We were not able to locate any studies on other college transition programs and their outcomes to compare with the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

METHODOLOGY

Articles and reports were identified that examined GED students' postsecondary education enrollment and persistence data, challenges faced by postsecondary education bound students with risk factors that might prevent either their successful enrollment or completion of postsecondary education, or both, and research that focused specifically on Massachusetts and its adult education and community college system. This review offers a starting perspective for understanding how the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project compares with what is known about the field of nontraditional learners' pre-postsecondary education and postsecondary education experience. More research is needed to fully comprehend the scope of this field, as it evolves and grows.

FINDINGS FROM STUDIES

A. *Getting Through College: Voices of Low Income and Minority Students in New England.* Institute for Higher Education Policy, Washington, D.C., 2001.

The New England Student Success Study includes the results of a telephone survey, interviews with low-income and minority students enrolled in four-year institutions in the region, and analysis of national data collected by the U.S. Department of Education. The telephone survey included low-income students, two-thirds of whom were 18 to 23 years old, 82 percent were single, and 84 percent did not have children. Nearly half lived on campus during the most recent semester. The analysis revealed four issues affecting New England low-income and minority students' ability to succeed in college: pre-college preparation, financial aid, feeling connected to institutions, and attendance patterns.

The key findings of the New England Student Success Study include:

- Pre-college programs (such as the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project) had an impact on those who participated in them: two-thirds of the participants felt the programs were very helpful. However, only one-quarter of low-income students in New England had participated in such programs.
- Of the students in the study, 90 percent received assistance in paying for college.
- Minority students were less likely than non-minority students to have taken time off from their studies, attended part time, or transferred. Other positive behavior was seen among Pell Grant recipients, first-generation students, and pre-college program participants in general.
- Students' involvement and attachment to college were critical factors for success.

Of the researchers' recommendations, these are the most relevant to this evaluation:

- Increased awareness of pre-college programs and greater support through additional funding.
- Greater efforts to link the experiences and successes of pre-college, transition, and in-college programs to provide continuous support for students.

This study's findings are consistent with the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project model and provide additional support for the provision of these kinds of pre-college programs.

B. *College Persistence on the Rise? Changes in the 5-Year Degree Completion and Postsecondary Persistence Rates Between 1994–2000: Postsecondary Education Descriptive Analysis Report.* National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C., 2004.

This study contextualizes the at-risk issues many New England ABE-to-College Transition Project students face. Students are considered at risk if they enter postsecondary education with one or more characteristics that place them at risk of not completing their postsecondary studies. The risk factors include those who delay their postsecondary enrollment by a year or more, are financially independent from their parents, first enroll part-time, work full-time while enrolled, have children or dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, or do not graduate from high school (drop out or earn a GED). Using data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), this study found that the Bachelor's and/or Associates degree completion rates of students with one or more of these risk characteristics was 17 percent in 2000. Their likelihood of remaining enrolled in a four-year or two-year institution after five years was 16.7 percent and 47 percent had no degree and were no longer enrolled. These data highlight the obstacles that transition programs students face in successfully completing a Bachelor's or Associates degree.

C. *Profiles of Undergraduates in US Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999–2000, Statistical Analysis Report.* Horn, Peter, & Rooney, Kathryn, MPR Associates Inc. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2002.

This report looked at 1999–2000 undergraduates with respect to seven risk factors found to be negatively associated with persistence and degree attainment (listed in the previous paragraph). In 1999–2000, three-quarters of all undergraduate students reported at least one risk factor. Overall, the average number of risk factors reported by all undergraduates was 2.2. More risk factors were reported by African-American students (2.7), American Indian/Alaska Native students (2.8), and Hispanic students (2.4). Parents were at greater risk than other undergraduates (since they are financially independent, have children, and may be single parents). Undergraduates with children or other dependents averaged 4.3 risk factors and single parents averaged 4.7 risk factors. Female

undergraduates were more likely than male undergraduates to be parents, therefore they averaged more risk factors (2.3 versus 2.1). However, men were more likely to work full time, so no statistical difference was found between men and women in their likelihood of having at least one risk factor (75 percent).

The implications of these findings are important in understanding the challenges faced by students in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project. Previous research on college persistence found that 64 percent of beginning students with one risk factor persisted in their postsecondary program or completed a degree or vocational certificate within five years, compared with 43 percent of those with three or more risk factors (Berkner et al., 1996). Looking at the data on 1999–2000 undergraduate students with three or more risk factors, at least half might be expected to leave postsecondary education without completing a degree or certificate. The majority of students in the transition program fall into the group with three or more risk factors, as all are delayed enrollees and a large percentage work full-time, have children or dependents, are single parents, dropped out of high school or have a GED. Therefore, it can be expected that without specialized support services and transition programs, less than half of these students will successfully complete their college programs in five years.

D. *Nontraditional Undergraduates.* Choy, Susan, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., 2002.

The first part of this research on nontraditional students uses the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS: 2000) to examine demographic characteristics, enrollment patterns and school and work balancing. The second part explores the relationship between nontraditional status (having a risk factor) and college persistence using the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Studies (BPS), which followed cohorts of students enrolling in postsecondary education for the first time in 1989–90 and in 1995–96.

This study found that the "traditional" student is not typical since close to 75 percent of all postsecondary students in 1999–2000 had at least one nontraditional characteristic (risk factor). More than 60 percent of highly nontraditional students identify themselves as an employee, which presents the impression that college is not their priority when it comes to their time and energy.

Among beginning postsecondary college students, nontraditional students were much more likely than traditional students to leave college prior to earning a degree and they were likely to drop out in their first year. Compared with traditional students, nontraditional beginning students who left their first college were more likely to leave postsecondary education altogether and less likely to transfer elsewhere.

Using longitudinal data, this study examined the relationship between nontraditional characteristics and persistence and attainment after three years for students who enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time in 1995–96.

This research supports the point of view we have heard previously from President Schatzberg at Cape Cod Community College, that persistence is best studied in relation to students' goals. Some students enroll for a limited number of courses without intending to earn a degree or certificate. Without knowing the students' specific goals, it cannot be known whether they were achieved, so only students with a degree or transfer goal were included in this analysis of persistence: 88 percent of the 1995–96 beginning postsecondary students.

With the exception of single parenthood, each of the nontraditional characteristics has a direct or indirect association with persistence and attainment. This study found that, controlling for the covariation of the other factors, the following nontraditional characteristics were negatively associated with persistence: delaying enrollment, enrolling part time,

being financially independent, and having a GED or other certificate of completion. Interestingly, the remaining three nontraditional characteristics—working full time in the first year of enrollment, having dependents and being a single parent—did not have an independent association.

Again, this study highlights the challenges associated with persistence in college when faced with the nontraditional characteristics of the students in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

E. *Adult Education and Literacy in Community Colleges in Massachusetts.* Liebowitz, Martin, Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, New York, NY, 2004.

Community colleges are among a wide range of organization types, including public schools, nonprofit organizations and other types of provider organizations, which provide adult education services in Massachusetts. This study found that community colleges serve a slightly different population of adult learners, and they place greater priority on obtaining a GED and transitioning to college, which is of relevance to this evaluation.

This study reported that college transition programs, such as the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, are achieving success in enabling a sizeable proportion of students to transition to college. The study found that these types of programs offer a useful structure for communication between the community colleges and adult education providers, consistent with our case study findings. Other findings were also consistent with our case study analysis, in that the researcher found building these types of partnerships was critical but required considerable effort to develop and maintain.

The study also found that there has been progress made in increased integration between adult education services into community colleges and in the provision of college-based support services that are critical to many students making the successful transition to college. These findings

highlight the importance and potential impact that transition programs can have, in working closely with community colleges to develop and expand these critical services.

The Massachusetts community college system is a critical partner for programs such as the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, as was noted by the findings of this study, as well as by the case study results reported earlier.

F. "Adult Literacy and Postsecondary Education Students: Overlapping Populations and Learning Trajectories." Reder, Stephen in *Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Vol. 1.* Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2001.

This study examined the experience of adult learners as they become participants in the postsecondary education system. Of particular interest is the discussion and analysis of data pertaining to nontraditional students, similar to those who participate in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project.

As was noted earlier, research on postsecondary persistence and attainment finds being a GED graduate or receiving a certificate of high school completion to be one of seven risk factors for dropping out of postsecondary education without attaining a degree. Other studies (Boesel et al., 1998) reviewed follow-up of GED recipients, which report that 50 percent to 63 percent of GED recipients get additional postsecondary education or training (most of which occurs in two-year and vocational-technical colleges and most of which is focused on acquiring occupational skills).

In this study, Reder analyzed data provided by the Beginning Postsecondary Student (BPS) survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. The BPS survey reports on the type of high school credentials beginning postsecondary students obtained: high school diploma, GED, or other certificate of high school completion. Although almost 20 percent of students entering certificate programs have a GED

or equivalent considerably smaller percentages of students beginning postsecondary education in two- or four-year institutions have a GED or equivalency certificate. Only 2 percent of students entering four-year and 7 percent entering two-year institutions had a GED. Since 15 percent to 20 percent of all high school credentials awarded were GEDs, this indicates that relatively few GED recipients go on to postsecondary academic education. This finding is consistent with research that contrasts the relatively large numbers of adult education students who report planning to pursue college degrees with the small numbers who actually enter or complete postsecondary academic programs.

Looking at the BPS data on the persistence rates for beginning postsecondary students who enter two-year colleges with a high school diploma or a GED, Reder found 54 percent of students entering with high school diplomas had either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry, while only 28 percent of students with GEDs entering postsecondary education had either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry. The highest persistence rates occured among students entering four-year institutions and the lowest rates for students entering two-year institutions.

The policy implications of these findings are significant. The fact that relatively few adult literacy students who obtain GEDs eventually enroll in postsecondary education (given the large number who express an interest in doing so) is an important finding that requires further attention. Also of concern is the finding that the GED holders who do enroll have significantly lower rates of persistence at college. Reder argues that these findings reflect a disconnect between basic skills instruction in the adult education and the postsecondary education system, as well as between counseling, financial assistance, and other student services provided in the two systems. These types of problems disrupt the longer-term learning goals that adult learners need to achieve in order to gain literacy skills and desired postsecondary education.

G. "Who Benefits from a GED? Evidence for Females from High School and Beyond." Tyler, John H.; Murnane, Richard J.; and Willet, John B in *Economies of Education Review*, 22 (2003) 237–247.

This study explored the value of the GED credential for women in the labor market, using the data set *High School and Beyond*. The primary finding of the paper was that among women who left high school with poor math skills, the group who went on to get a GED had more experience in the labor market and had higher earnings, when compared with women who did not go on to get a GED.

Of particular relevance to this evaluation, the study reviewed data on GED holders and their acquiring of postsecondary education credits. The study found that 34 percent of GED holders acquired at least one postsecondary credit and only 11 percent of the GED holders completed at least two years of college credits. This rather low rate of enrollment compares markedly with the 69 percent of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project graduates who enroll in postsecondary education. While 51 percent of New England ABE-to-College Project graduates had a high school diploma, they had been out of school an average of 15 years and are considered non-traditional college attenders, so comparing the project outcomes with the Tyler study is valid.

H. *A Promise of Empowerment: Results of the GED 1992 Follow-up Survey.* Kroll, Bonnie, American Council on Education, Center for Adult Learning and Education Credentials, Washington, D.C., 1995.

This study examined information on the education, employment and other related experiences of GED students for three years following their taking the GED test. The GED Testing Service of the American Council on Education conducted a national survey of students who took the test between October 1, 1989, and November 15, 1989. Nine hundred and sixty-five (965) participants took part in a follow-up survey in 1992. This population was similar demographically to the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project students. The average age of survey respondents was 31.6 years old, 70 percent were women and 47 percent

were married. Incomes of 54 percent were less than $10,000. Of particular relevance, only 27 percent of the GED graduates were working towards a postsecondary degree at the time of the survey, 9 percent were working on their Bachelor's degrees, 10 percent were working on their Associates degrees and 8 percent on technical or trade certificates. This is significantly less than the 69 percent of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project graduates who were enrolled or were expected to enroll in postsecondary education by the fall of 2004. Again, while 51 percent of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project graduates had a high school diploma, they had been out of school an average of 15 years and are considered non-traditional college attenders, so comparing the project outcomes with this study is valid.

This research helps to demonstrate the impressive results the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project has accomplished regarding postsecondary education enrollment for program graduates.

The evaluation of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project sought to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the program participants?
2. Do program participants enter college at higher rates than comparison students?
3. What can be learned from the most successful programs about their relationship with their college partners?
4. What was the experience of dropouts?

WHO ARE THE PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS?

While the typical student in the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project was a 32-year-old, white, English-speaking woman, 39 percent were students of color and 20 percent were non-native English speakers. Nearly one half (49 percent) of the students were never married, 57 percent had children and 15 percent were single parents. The majority of all students were employed and 47 percent worked more than 35 hours per week. Remarkably, 79 percent of all students had incomes of $25,000 or less, and 28 percent of all students reported incomes of less than $5,000. Of the students, 38 percent received some type of support such as Medicaid or Social Security. GED certificates were held by 43 percent of the students; 50 percent had high school diplomas. Past college experience was reported by 25 percent.

The students in this project fell into the highly nontraditional or high-risk category, when considering the seven characteristics that define this risk level. These risk factors are: delaying postsecondary enrollment by a year or more, financial independence from parents, initially enrolled part-time, working full-time while enrolled, having children or dependents other than a spouse, single parent status, and not graduating from high school (dropping out or earning a GED). Therefore, these students were at risk for not succeeding in postsecondary education, substantiating the need for college transition services to give them the support needed to persist in postsecondary education.

DO PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS ENTER COLLEGE AT HIGHER RATES THAN COMPARISON STUDENTS?

The spring, 2004, data revealed the following information:

- 241 students enrolled in the program
- 168 students completed the program (70 percent)
- 49 students dropped out (20 percent)
- 24 students (10 percent) were unaccounted for, since neither graduate survey forms nor dropout forms were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in the data collected in future semesters.

Of the 168 students who completed the program, 69 percent (116) were enrolled in or expected to attend college in the fall, 2004. This figure is considerably higher than the percentage reported in research by Kroll (1995) that found only 27 percent of GED recipients were enrolled in postsecondary education programs three years after completing the GED test. Of the students who reported they were enrolling in postsecondary education, 53 percent had high school diplomas and 47 percent had a GED or External Diploma.

Much of the data and research that was reviewed focuses on college retention. Reder's study demonstrated that 54 percent of students entering with high school diplomas either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry, while only 28 percent of students with GEDs entering postsecondary education had either attained a degree or were still enrolled and pursuing a degree five years after entry. While some programs report on college retention past the first semester, this data is not gathered and tabulated by the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project due to the complexities of tracking students in more than 40 postsecondary institutions across six states.

In addition to the exemplary college enrollment, the project has had a positive impact on participating students by improving their readiness for postsecondary education. At program completion, students felt better prepared for postsecondary education in six areas: overall academic

readiness, math, reading, writing skills, computer skills and knowledge about what college is like.

These positive changes represent an important finding: students perceive the valuable impact the program has on their readiness for postsecondary education. The students feel they are better prepared to successfully enroll and participate in postsecondary education as a result of the concrete skills they gained through the program. In addition, students feel they will encounter fewer barriers related to financing their postsecondary education as a result of knowledge gained through the program.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS ABOUT THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR COLLEGE PARTNERS?

From the qualitative data analysis several key features of successful programs were identified:

- Successful programs have knowledgeable, experienced, resourceful, and committed program staff and leadership. The staff demonstrate their skills through the development and implementation of effective program elements such as thorough student assessments, creative orientation models and rigorous academic courses.
- Successful programs have strong college partnerships, formed over significant time, characterized by collaboration and coordination of students' experiences in preparing for college, leading to mutual respect. Elements of these partnerships include:
  - Outstanding commitment, understanding and flexibility on the part of college partners to serve effectively those students who completed the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project;
  - Carefully integrated information about college expectations, systems, standards and support services, which is introduced to students prior to their completion of the transition program.
- Successful programs have staff who understand the distinct mix of challenges and needs of a unique target population: adult learners returning to school after a long absence, or pioneering the way to college as the first of their family to enter higher education.

- Staff care about the adult students and are interested in seeing the potential of adult, nontraditional students fulfilled.
- Staff know that much of what students are encountering is completely new to them, and involves issues of socioeconomic class and substantive personal and financial challenges.

WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE OF DROPOUTS?

The 49 students who dropped out of the program prior to completion appeared to have additional obstacles to overcome, compared with the obstacles encountered by most New England ABE-to-College Transition Project students. In addition to the barriers that all students enrolled in the transition programs faced, such as returning to school after a long absence, low-income, having a GED, these students had other concerns and personal motivation challenges.

Interestingly, the information gathered from these students at intake on their perceptions of their academic and college readiness raised additional questions, as the mean scores in specific areas (reading, writing, computer skills and knowledge about college) were higher than the same scores for the overall student population. This data is self-reported and only comprised of the 49 students for whom dropout data was collected. Therefore, these findings raise more questions which are best answered through additional research and analysis on who the dropout students were and what were their individual as well as collective experiences in the ABE-to-College Transition Project.

We do know that the student population who dropped out had a higher proportion of females and Latinos, with a larger proportion of non-native English speakers than the students who completed the program did. The dropout group also had higher percentages of single parents and higher percentages of recipients of public assistance. This knowledge should inform future efforts.

Section 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

- To gain increased knowledge of GED recipients' persistence in postsecondary education, implement a longitudinal study using five to eight programs from the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project and focus on students attending postsecondary education. Focus data collection on assessment testing, college level course enrollment and college persistence for five years post enrollment in a postsecondary institution.
- Implement further evaluation of the postsecondary education transition needs of non-native English speaking adult learners. Student intake data showed that students who dropped out of the project were more likely to be non-native English speakers than those who successfully completed the project. Additional efforts should be made to study and understand the needs of this specific population.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Maximize replication of successful practices by pairing effective programs (demonstrated by transition program completion rates, entries into postsecondary education, and academic learning gains while in the transition program) with less experienced programs. Through these pairings, encourage the sharing of promising practices and opportunities for ongoing learning. Continue to identify and document promising practices as is currently being carried out by New England Literacy Resource Center. Areas of promising practices could include student recruitment techniques, creative program design approaches, lessons learned through college partner management, professional development and human resources expertise.
- Expand college partnerships, focusing on maximizing the shared responsibility for providing educational opportunities to nontraditional adult learners. While college partnerships are an important facet of the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, the primary onus of responsibility still rests on the project itself. Efforts should be made to encourage college partners to increase their role in serving these students. Specifically, consider further integration of the New England ABE-to-College Transition programs

into the college infrastructures through the co-location of programs on college campuses and the development of structured memoranda of agreements between colleges and programs. In addition, build relationships on multiple levels of both the program and college entities and pursue joint professional development initiatives.

- Revise Intake and Graduate Survey Tools: The current intake and graduate survey tools were created to capture a wide range of data to be used for this evaluation. Two specific issues have arisen, that require revision.
  - The tools are too long and cumbersome to be used by program staff every semester, unless the data are being used in an evaluation. Therefore, it is recommended that shorter versions of the forms be created to capture the essential information that program and New England ABE-to-College Transition Project management staff need for program improvement and monitoring purposes.
  - Several sections of the forms remain of interest to management staff but continue to be difficult for program staff to complete: Accuplacer test scores, college level course enrollment, college enrollment data. These sections of the forms need to be carefully assessed to determine if there are better methods for capturing these types of data.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

- Share evaluation findings to inform policy and funding priorities. The findings from this evaluation support the value of college transition programs. Nontraditional adult learners have become an increasingly larger percentage of students attending postsecondary education in the United States. Projects like the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project represent a model more states should consider in providing essential college preparation programs that maximize nontraditional students' likelihood of persisting in college.

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Appendix A DEMOGRAPHIC TABLES

Note regarding totals: Whenever totals do not equal the total number of intakes within groups, this discrepancy is due to missing data from intake forms.

Table 1A: Gender, Race, Age and Language Intake Data

Question	Data from All Intakes (N=241)	Data from Graduates (N=168)	Data from Dropouts (N=49)
Gender	Males 94 (41%) Females 138 (59%)	Males 68 (42%) Females 94 (58%)	Males 18 (38%) Females 28 (62%)
Race	White 148 (61%) Hispanic 33 (14%) African American 38 (19%) Middle Eastern 1 (.4%) Native American 7 (3%) Asian 5 (2%) Other 4 (2%)	White 105 (63%) Hispanic 20 (12%) African American 26 (16%) Middle Eastern 1 (.6%) Native American 5 (3%) Asian 3 (2%) Other 10 (6%)	White 28 (57%) Hispanic 10 (20%) African American 8 (16%) Middle Eastern 0 Native American 1 (2%) Asian 1 (2%) Other 3 (6%)
Age	Range: 16–58 years old Mean age: 32.5 years old	Range: 17–56 years old Mean age: 31.8 years old	Range: 18–53 years old Mean age: 32.4 years old
Language	Primary English 171 (80%) Primary Spanish 23 (11%) All Others 19 (9%)	Primary English 121 (83%) Primary Spanish 14 (10%) All Others 11 (7%)	Primary English 34 (69%) Primary Spanish 7 (14%) All Others 8 (16%)

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 2A: Marital and Family Status Intake Data Ê

Question	Data from All Intakes (N=241)	Data from Graduates (N=168)	Data from Dropouts (N=49)
Marital Status	Never Married 100 (41%) Married 65 (28%) Lives with Partner 14 (6%) Separated 7 (3%) Divorced 41 (18%) Widowed 2 (1%)	Never Married 72 (45%) Married 43 (27%) Lives with Partner 11 (7%) Separated 4 (3%) Divorced 30 (19%) Widowed (1%)	Never Married 23 (49%) Married 11 (23%) Lives with Partner 2 (4%) Separated 3 (6%) Divorced 7 (15%) Widowed 1 (2%)
Has Children?	Yes 37 (57%)	Yes 92 (55%)	Yes 29 (59%)
Number of Children	1 child 51 (36%) 2 children 53 (37%) 3 children 24 (18%) 4 children 8 (6%) 5 children 5 (3%) 6 children 1 (1%) 9 children 1 (1%)	1 child 40 (42%) 2 children 30 (31%) 3 children 18 (19%) 4 children 4 (4%) 5 children 2 (2%) 6 children 1 (1%) 9 children 1 (1%)	1 child 8 (26%) 2 children 13 (42%) 3 children 5 (16%) 4 children 3 (10%) 5 children 2 (6%)
Single Parent?	Yes 37 (15%)	Yes 23 (14%)	Yes 11 (22%)

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 3A: Employment Intake Data Ê

Question	Data from All Intakes (N=241)	Data from Graduates (N=168)	Data from Dropouts (N=49)
Work Status	Employed 104 (68%) Unemployed, seeking work 9 (6%) Homemaker 2 (1%) Unemployed, not seeking work 17 (11%) Retired 21 (14%)	Employed 65 (65%) Unemployed, seeking work 9 (9%) Homemaker 1 (1%) Unemployed, not seeking work 9 (9%) Retired 16 (16%)	Employed 25 (71%) Unemployed, seeking work 0 Homemaker 0 Unemployed, not seeking work 7 (20%) Retired 3 (9%)
Hours per Week	1–14 hours 13 (13%) 15–21 hours 18 (18%) 21–35 hours 23 (23%) 35+ hours 48 (47%)	1–14 hours 7 (11%) 15–21 hours 10 (16%) 21–35 hours 15 (23%) 35+ hours 32 (50%)	1–14 hours 3 (12%) 15–21 hours 7 (28%) 21–35 hours 5 (20%) 35+ hours 10 (40%)
Family Income	$0–$5,000 43 (28%) $5,001–$15,000 36 (23%) $15,001–$25,000 43 (28%) $25,001–$35,000 15 (10%) $35,001–$45,000 9 (6%) $45,001+ 8 (5%)	$0–$5,000 30 (29%) $5,001–$15,000 27 (26%) $15,001–$25,000 29 (28%) $25,001–$35,000 7 (7%) $35,001–$45,000 4 (4%) $45,001+ 7 (7%)	$0–$5,000 9 (26%) $5,001–$15,000 9 (26%) $15,001–$25,000 9 (26%) $25,001–$35,000 5 (15%) $35,001–$45,000 2 (6%) $45,001+ 0
Public Assistance	None 24 (62%) TANF 13 (7%) Unemployment 15 (8%) Food Stamps 10 (5%) Social Security 17 (8%) Medicaid 17 (8%) Other 6 (3%)	None 86 (62%) TANF 9 (7%) Unemployment 10 (7%) Food Stamps 6 (4%) Social Security 12 (9%) Medicaid 13 (9%) Other 2 (1%)	None 23 (55%) TANF 4 (10%) Unemployment 4 (10%) Food Stamps 2 (5%) Social Security 5 (12%) Medicaid 3 (7%) Other 1 (2%)

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 4A: Education Experience Intake Data Ê

Question	Data from All Intakes (N=241)	Data from Graduates (N=168)	Data from Dropouts (N=49)*
Last Grade Completed	7th Grade 2 (0.1%) 8th 9 (4%) 9th 28 (13%) 10th 30 (14%) 11th 26 (12%) 12th 107 (51%) Other 7 (3%)	7th Grade 1 (0.6%) 8th 7 (5%) 9th 20 (14%) 10th 21 (14%) 11th 16 (11%) 12th 78 (53%) Other 4 (3%)	7th Grade 1 (2%) 8th 1 (2%) 9th 4 (9%) 10th 7 (16%) 11th 8 (19%) 12th 20 (47%) Other 2 (5%)
Age at Last Grade Completed	12 years old 1 (0.6%) 14 years 8 (5%) 15 years 13 (8%) 16 years 25 (15%) 17 years 32 (19%) 18 years 48 (29%) 19 years 14 (8%) 20 years 4 (2%) 21 years 2 (1%) 22+ 9 (5%)	12 years old 1 (0.8%) 14 years 7 (6%) 15 years 10 (9%) 16 years 16 (14%) 17 years 25 (22%) 18 years 32 (29%) 19 years 12 (11%) 20 years 2 (2%) 21 years 1 (0.8%) 22+ 6 (0.5%)	12 years old 0 14 years 0 15 years 2 (5%) 16 years 6 (14%) 17 years 4 (9%) 18 years 12 (28%) 19 years 2 (5%) 20 years 0 21 years 1 (2%) 22+ 3 (7%)
Any Past College?	Yes 61(25%)	Yes 42 (25%)	Yes 13 (27%)
Type of Diploma	GED 98 (43%) External Diploma 15 (7%) High School 113 (50%)	GED 66 (42%) External Diploma 12 (8%) High School 80 (51%)	GED 22 (47%) External Diploma 0 High School 25 (53%)

Table 4A: Education Experience Intake Data *(continued)*

Question	Data from All Intakes (N=241)	Data from Graduates (N=168)	Data from Dropouts (N=49)*
Age When Received Diploma	16–18 years old 109 (51%) 19–21 years old 52 (25%) 22+ years old 51 (24%)	16–18 years old 72 (50%) 19–21 years old 32 (22%) 22+ years old 40 (28%)	16–18 years old 27 (59%) 19–21 years old 12 (26%) 22+ years old 7 (15%)
Parent with Highest Degree	Mother 113 (58%) Father 81 (42%)	Mother 81 (60%) Father 53 (40%)	Mother 27 (60%) Father 18 (40%)
Highest Degree Completed by Parent	None–8th grade 32 (15%) 9th–12th (no diploma) 24 (11%) High School graduate 88 (41%) Some College–Associates Degree 40 (19%) Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate Degrees 32 (15%)	None–8th grade 22 (15%) 9th–12th (no diploma) 15 (10%) High School graduate 66 (44%) Some College–Associates Degree 24 (16%) Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate Degrees 24 (16%)	None–8th grade 8 (18%) 9th–12th (no diploma) 7 (16%) High School graduate 13 (29%) Some College–Associates Degree 13 (29%) Bachelors, Master, Doctorate Degrees 4 (9%)

**An additional 24 students (10 percent) are unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form or a dropout form were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in future semesters.*

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 5A: College Preparedness Data upon Intake Ê

For the following areas, please rate your preparedness for college (1–4 scale: poor/fair/good/excellent)			
Question	**All Data from Intakes (N=241)**	**Data from Graduates (N=168)***	**Data from Dropouts Upon Intake (N=49)***
Overall Academic Readiness	Mean Score = 2.37	Mean Score = 2.41	Mean Score = 2.32
Math	Mean Score = 2.03	Mean Score = 2.09	Mean Score = 1.87
Reading	Mean Score = 2.79	Mean Score = 2.73	Mean Score = 2.96
Writing	Mean Score = 2.38	Mean Score = 2.37	Mean Score = 2.52
Computer Skills	Mean Score = 2.38	Mean Score = 2.38	Mean Score = 2.43
Knowledge About College	Mean Score = 2.38	Mean Score = 2.33	Mean Score = 2.45
What do you plan to study?	Accounting 9 (3%) Business 38 (13%) Computer Science 12 (4%) Culinary Art 11 (4%) Education 24 (8%) HealthCare 52 (18%) Social Work 41 (14%) Other 105 (36%)	Accounting 7 (3%) Business 31 (15%) Computer Science 10 (5%) Culinary Art 7 (3%) Education 16 (8%) HealthCare 37 (18%) Social Work 25 (12%) Other 69 (34%)	Accounting 2 (3%) Business 4 (6%) Computer Science 2 (3%) Culinary Art 4 (6%) Education 5 (8%) HealthCare 11 (17%) Social Work 11 (17%) Other 25 (39%)

**An additional 24 students (10 percent) are unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form or a dropout form were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in future semesters.*

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 6A: Challenges to Success at College at Intake Ê

To what extent do you think the following are likely to challenge your ability to successfully attend college? (1–4 scale: not at all/ not very likely/likely/highly likely)			
Question	**All Data from Intakes (N=241)**	**Data from Graduates (N=168)***	**Data from Dropouts Upon Intake (N=49)***
Needing Childcare	Mean Score = 2.28	Mean Score = 2.30	Mean Score = 2.23
Needing Transportation	Mean Score = 2.39	Mean Score = 2.38	Mean Score = 2.37
Lacking FA	Mean Score = 2.50	Mean Score = 2.46	Mean Score = 2.56
Cost of Tuition	Mean Score = 2.48	Mean Score = 2.41	Mean Score = 2.62
Needing to Work	Mean Score = 2.43	Mean Score = 2.38	Mean Score = 2.49

**An additional 24 students (10 percent) are unaccounted for, since neither a graduate survey form or a dropout form were completed for them. A number of these students are repeating the program and will likely appear as program graduates in future semesters.*

Discrepancy between N and data in cell is because data was missing from intake forms.

Table 7A: Graduates' Career Goals Comparing Intake and Graduate Survey Data Ê

Question	Data from Intake (N=168)		Data from Graduate Survey (N=168)	
What do you plan to study?	Accounting	7 (3%)	Accounting	3 (3%)
	Business	31 (15%)	Business	31 (6%)
	Computer Science	10 (5%)	Computer Science	9 (3%)
	Culinary Art	7 (3%)	Culinary Art	6 (6%)
	Education	16 (8%)	Education	19 (8%)
	HealthCare	37 (18%)	HealthCare	36 (17%)
	Social Work	25 (12%)	Social Work	25 (17%)
	Other	69 (34%)	Other	58 (39%)

Discrepancy between N and data in the cells is because more than one answer could be selected.

Appendix B STUDENT FOCUS GROUP EXCERPTS

NASHUA ADULT EDUCATION CENTER

Nashua's focus group was small; all four participants were white women in their late twenties or early thirties who had gone back to school to improve their career and work options. Before learning of the program, none had thought themselves capable of going to college. They had all been out of school for some time; one person had been out of school for 22 years. At the time of the focus group, two were attending NHCTC and one was at the University of New Hampshire.

The following quotes and observations, taken directly from the Nashua student focus group notes, are intended to substantiate this report's conclusions and provide readers with a greater feel for the tone and type of feedback we encountered:

- *They gave me the confidence to return to college and get through it.*
- *The staff was wonderful…I still keep in touch with them…they are always there to help.*
- *The study skills I learned here, and the financial aid information I got, were key.*
- *On the tour, we met Mary Gillette and learned of the support services available there.*
- *I wouldn't have made it in college without ALC program, which gave me the confidence. I was nervous to be sitting next to so many younger students.*
- *I think we were all surprised at college, the fast pace of the courses by teachers, the challenge of dealing with computers.*
- *By talking to other students from the program, I learned about which teachers to avoid!*

Overall, the students' felt that the program led to an improvement in the quality of their lives. They have greater expectations for themselves and their children as a result of participating in the transition program. One student said that her life has changed a lot.

- *I am a totally different person than when I started the program. My kids are proud of me and they are very encouraging of me, which makes me feel good. They saw me do it, and work for it, and it has an effect on them and the way they think of themselves, of their future.*

SUMNER ADULT EDUCATION

Evaluators were struck by the diversity in the focus group participants' stages of life and educational needs. The group was comprised of one male and six females. Two were in their mid to late thirties; five were in their mid to late twenties. Two had children. Their stories had many common themes but also reflected many different perspectives, experiences and needs.

The following quotes and observations, taken directly from the Sumner student focus group notes, are intended to substantiate this report's conclusions and provide readers with a greater feel for the tone and type of feedback we encountered:

Students began the program thinking it would be easy. However, largely because they were anywhere from a few years to a few decades removed from their last school experiences, students had to learn anew how to retain, organize and put to use lectures and study resources. Many reflected that Sumner

- *Helped me 100 percent. Without it, I couldn't have made it.*

Students recognized the role of program staff in setting the performance bar high while instilling confidence in them that they could achieve their goals.

- *Each of them individually, as humans, instilled in you that you are not stupid, there are no stupid questions and anything you want to do, if you are willing to work at it, you can do.*

A number of quotes or themes also reflect students' perspectives on their college experience to date:

- *Staff at UM campus are incredible.*

Many students pointed to particular advisors or individual professors, who had been particularly helpful. Their relationships with Marty and Sally gave students the confidence to establish mentors as they began to travel to the college campus and encountered a diversity of teaching skills and personalities.

- *They really prepared us to get to know each professor; they each can be different.*
- *Marty was actually harder than any of the college stuff I've come across!*

Many comments highlighted the critical role that personal connection, and feelings of inclusiveness or exclusiveness played. For example:

- *No, I don't feel part of the campus experience, because I am a distance student.*
- *I found the transition from the program to college challenging emotionally.*

But many reflected the strength they derived from a feeling of belonging or community:

- *I feel very connected though I haven't really met [other students] or spent time with them.*
- *I feel very connected to my ITV nursing training group (there are seven of us doing ITV through UM!).*
- *I actually feel connected here at Ellsworth because I continue to be an ITV student primarily!*

SUCCESS PROGRAM

The students who participated in the SUCCESS focus group were, on the whole, young and mobile: they were recent residents of Cape Cod and had lived in many different locations. The group was comprised of three males and five females. Two were in their mid to late thirties, the rest in their late teens to early twenties. Two had children. The group was not as diverse in terms of their ages as those we saw in New Hampshire or Maine, which is also not reflective of the overall transition project student population. Most were, however, first generation college students who heard about the GED program at ACCCESS or came directly into SUCCESS after hearing about it through friends or family members.

Key skills and competencies attributed to participation in SUCCESS:

- *I got my identity here…it gets tough with work, school, etc. it's frightening…but it's the foundation that we got here and Joan follows up with you and is a resource/support.*
- *Now I feel prepared to deal with the diversity of styles of teaching and teachers.*
- *Joan helps us pick and choose courses/professors.*
- *I learned at SUCCESS that I had to do the work on my own, and work hard.*

Comments included those about the importance of having built a supportive network of peers:

- *We had a great group, really bonded.*
- *AT CCCC, people weren't super friendly, etc.…here, we knew one another so well, socialized, etc.*
- *Here, we're all equal, "misfits"; we all needed this and made a mistake somewhere previously (or didn't have an opportunity).*
- *Joan calls and checks in, keeps up relationships…people call Joan when there is a problem/issue/challenge…she advocates…Joan has set up people at the college who know the program and are there to support you.*

Organizational Development for Adult Literacy Programs

- Strategic planning
- Program improvement
- Board development
- Equipped For the Future (EFF) standards-based instruction and assessment
- Using the EFF standards for program improvement
- Implementing curriculum frameworks

Computer-mediated Instruction

- Using the Web in instruction
- Using computers to teach reading
- Using computers as a tool for project-based learning

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