

This *Update* examines how some community colleges and sector initiatives are innovating and collaborating to benefit businesses seeking skilled workers, and low-income adults seeking education that leads to higher-wage employment.

## Sector Initiatives and Community Colleges: Working Together to Provide Education for Low-Wage Working Adults

- Bureau of Labor Statistics projections indicate that only about 35 percent of the labor force available to U.S. businesses in 2020 will come from today's high school system. Instead, current workers will be the primary source of employees for the next 20 to 30 years – 65 percent of the 2020 workforce and 43 percent of the 2030 workforce.<sup>1</sup>
- While the number of job openings that do not require post-secondary education is expected to remain high, the fastest growing occupations generally require more education. For example, of the 30 occupations projected to grow fastest between 2004 and 2014, 24 require education beyond high school.<sup>2</sup>
- The National Association of Manufacturers' *2005 Skills Gap Report* noted that 90 percent of the manufacturers who responded to its survey reported a shortage of skilled production workers in a range of occupations. Three-quarters of these manufacturers reported that a skilled workforce is vital to their ability to compete.<sup>3</sup>
- In contrast with the increasing demand for workers educated beyond high school, 43 percent of adults between the ages of 25 and 64 in the U.S. have completed no education beyond high school.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2005, the median hourly wage of all workers in the U.S. was \$14.15. An individual working full time at this wage earned approximately 150 percent of the 2005 federal poverty level for a family of four. Half of all workers earned less.

Projections of the abilities of U.S. workers, relative to the jobs they need to perform, point out challenges to our national economic competitiveness and quality of life. While the likelihood of future skills shortages, and what this will mean at the national level, is a hotly debated topic in federal policy circles, at local and regional levels it is clearer that a skilled workforce is critical to maintaining and improving quality of life. A skilled labor force is considered a primary factor in the location decisions of firms in a wide variety of industries, as well as a challenge faced by industries that are by necessity rooted in place (e.g., health care, public safety services). Without a high quality local workforce, businesses have three options. They can outsource jobs requiring skills or recruit workers from other locations. They can move to locations with an appropriately skilled workforce. Or they can organize their work and workplaces so that they need fewer skilled workers and rely instead on low-cost labor. None of these choices is good for the overall economic health and quality of life in individual communities.

Business and industry need appropriately skilled workers in order to compete and prosper, and individuals need higher levels of occupation-specific skills in order to earn family-supporting incomes. Yet lack of financial resources, inadequate academic preparation, the need to work, and other barriers limit many existing low-wage workers' ability to succeed in traditional post-secondary education venues.

A variety of innovations in the K-12 and post-secondary education systems are being implemented to rationalize and better align these systems, and to improve the preparation of future workers. But most of these solutions are not designed to address the special needs of adults, particularly those with poor academic skills, who are already in the workforce. The public workforce development system, which broadly speaking includes post-secondary education institutions as well as

training initiatives delivered by a range of public and non-profit organizations, while clearly attempting to promote change in programming to better support the labor force needs of industry, is under-funded and operates under inconsistent mandates. Given this context, it is clear that new strategies must be designed that: can serve large numbers of workers who are currently employed in low-wage, low-skill occupations; are sensitive to those workers' special needs; and can build on innovative use of existing resources.

We see evidence in the field that meaningful collaboration between community colleges and sectoral initiatives<sup>5</sup> may have the potential to both help fulfill more of businesses' and industries' demand for skilled workers, and advance the education and economic position of a larger pool of low-income workers than are currently being served through the existing workforce development infrastructure. This potential is exemplified by a number of sector initiatives that, while operated by community-based organizations (CBOs), work closely with a community college to provide a range of critical capacities that include: learning about specific labor force needs and opportunities for employment in local businesses, designing and delivering relevant education and training programming, and supporting low-income workers so they can persevere and succeed in training and transition to more rewarding employment. While other organizations can certainly be effective in collaborating with community colleges, to date we have primarily seen community-based organizations involved in collaborations that are designed with low-income working adults as a priority. These collaborations appear to hold promise for improving the effectiveness and scale of workforce development efforts for this population by taking explicit advantage of the range of complementary resources, relationships and activities already existing in CBOs and community colleges.

## Publication Overview

This issue of WSI's *Update* discusses what we see as an important and timely opportunity for strategic collaboration to expand upon and further develop the work of community-based sectoral employment and community college-based initiatives. We begin this *Update* by briefly describing what we mean by sectoral employment initiatives and go on to describe the resources and strengths that community colleges have that could complement and augment the work of these initiatives. We highlight examples of how community colleges are innovating to better serve low-income adults by addressing a number of the barriers this population commonly faces to participating in college-level education. The purpose of this overview of issues and use of selected examples of innovation is to describe to community-based workforce practitioners, who may have limited understanding of the community college

context, some of the ways in which colleges are working with the tools they have to better serve disadvantaged adult learners. We also hope to portray that during our research for this publication we found strong interest among colleges in providing more effective services to this population. Following this discussion, we will describe in greater detail the work of one sectoral organization in Austin, Texas. Capital IDEA, a community-based organization, operates a number of sector initiatives and collaborates with Austin Community College to accomplish its work. Capital IDEA's experiences with the community college illustrate how different institutional strengths, community positioning and resource bases can be combined to maximize benefits for a low-wage adult student population in terms of education programming and higher-wage employment opportunity.

## Sectoral Employment Development Initiatives

Since 1993 the Aspen Institute's Workforce Strategies Initiative (AspenWSI) has been researching, evaluating and publishing findings documenting *sectoral approaches* to improving educational and employment opportunity for disadvantaged adults – approaches that also meet identified workforce needs of business and industry.<sup>6</sup> Sector employment initiatives are housed in a wide range of organizations, with the majority that target low-income and disadvantaged workers led by community-based organizations. Sector initiatives pursue a range of strategies that seek in some cases to improve the quality of job opportunity and in others to equip workers with skills that make them more competitive for existing good quality jobs. Some of their major activities include: operating education and training programs; running for-profit businesses; forging institutional links with educational institutions, employers, unions and industry associations; advocating for policy changes; and providing

consulting or other services to firms within an industry. Successful sector initiatives possess or coordinate a range of competencies that often are not found within one organization – thus many sector initiatives are made up of partnerships of organizations. These competencies include:

- Strong relationships with a community of businesses that help the initiative develop workforce training and services, and identify employment opportunities in specific sectors;
- High-quality education and training programs that meet identified learning needs and goals of both workers and business;
- Support services that meet the special needs of low-income and disadvantaged adults to be successful in learning and to progress to an economically rewarding job;
- Ability to communicate vision about and need for new ways of operating to a wide range of actors whose support is needed to make that vision a reality.

## What is the experience of the working poor, particularly single parents, balancing family, work and school?

Hearing directly from low-income adults can help us understand their struggle to balance the basic needs of their families against the need for higher skills and credentials. The following are comments from low-income adults who participated in sectoral training programs.<sup>7</sup>

**Monique's** hours at work were noon to 9 p.m., and she could not imagine attending training during her few remaining daytime hours: "If I take any more time away from my baby, he won't even know who I am." **Tyra** was caring for her two small children: "There was really no way I could go to college if I couldn't afford to put them in day care." **Rosa** talked about her struggle to succeed in class despite enormous financial and scheduling obstacles. The sectoral program gave an allowance for gas money, worked with the food bank and other agencies for household and educational supplies, and contacted the electric company to keep the lights on. **Paula** said: "Sometimes it was very hard getting through school. I'd be catching six to eight buses a day. I was getting home in the dark. The kids had chicken pox. And then the homework ..."

Despite their strengths, many of the initiatives that have risen to prominence in the sector field are limited in their ability to grow and serve large numbers of participant or business clients. A subset of sectoral initiatives that work to connect their constituency with post-secondary education provided by other education partners – most notably local community colleges – explicitly recognize that they greatly increase their capacity with this strategy. With training provided by a college, these programs focus on: providing the support services needed by students balancing school, work and family responsibilities; assisting students with adult basic and developmental

work; helping students navigate college bureaucracy to enroll and stay on track; helping them prepare financial aid applications; and providing financial support, among other services. The best of these sector initiatives are also actively engaged with local businesses – focusing on identifying employers that provide viable job and career opportunities for low-income adults, understanding industry dynamics and how employer needs might be shifting, learning what skills their students need and the courses they should take to get them, and identifying outcomes of their work and how these contribute to employer success.

## Community College Assets

Community colleges are charged with a number of educational missions, and their student populations are as diverse as these missions. Community colleges provide the first two years of coursework to students who plan to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. They offer career and technical education degrees and certificates. They provide customized training to local businesses' incumbent workers. They offer

adult basic and developmental education, and many also operate GED preparation and English as a Second Language programs. They provide special education and training programs for public assistance recipients. Their students include new high school graduates, adults returning to school, part-time students, full-time students, working students, non-English speaking students, and students who have serious academic

deficiencies. Working in all of these areas, community colleges have a wide range of resources and experiences. Some of these include:

- Existing institutional capacity to educate students on an on-going basis;
- Faculty and adjunct professors who teach in a wide range of disciplines;
- Infrastructure of classrooms, labs and other physical capital;
- On-going funding that keeps the college, if not all of its offerings, operating from year to year;
- Experience working with student populations that are older, need to work, and carry less than full-time course loads;
- Divisions within the college (in some but not all community colleges) dedicated to working with public human resource and workforce development agencies;
- Ability to award industry-recognized credentials and certificates, making skills more marketable among employers;
- Ability to award course credits that build toward degrees and are often transferable to other colleges and universities.

Despite this obvious range of assets, college representatives interviewed nonetheless acknowledged that their resources and institutional knowledge about serving non-traditional student populations are generally contained within separate “silos” of the college – with neither learning nor individuals served

within one silo transferring as a matter-of-course to another. For example, adults in GED preparation classes generally don’t receive information or counseling on next steps to matriculate into a college’s mainstream academic tracks.

In recent years, however, a growing number of community colleges have been developing a range of pedagogical, curricular and administrative approaches to improve their ability to meet the education needs of harder-to-serve student populations. Examples of these efforts include but are not limited to: dual enrollment in for-credit courses and adult basic education and/or college developmental education, modularized career and technical offerings, intensive case management to special populations of at-risk students, and changes in class schedules and locations. Taking a hard look at their own ways of operating, these colleges have looked internally for new ways of using available resources and operating procedures to try to implement more effective practices and achieve better outcomes for disadvantaged learners. Most colleges probably don’t have the entire set of tools needed to meet the needs of large numbers of low-wage working adult students. Students in this population usually need strong connections to social services, help with income support, assistance with finding and paying for appropriate child care, counseling, and other supports, in addition to academic remediation services.

## Low-Income Working Adult Students

This publication’s focus is on the needs of low-income, working adult students. We believe it is important to distinguish working, independent, low-income adult students, from younger, family-supported low-income students. A variety of factors, such as work schedules, family responsibilities (including supporting and caring for children and others), limited cash-in-hand, financial aid eligibility, and length of time since being in a classroom, have a much greater effect on the ability of independent, low-income and working poor adults to succeed in the community college environment. In turn, these needs define the services that will support their success in studies and on the job.

# Community Colleges Are Innovating to Better Serve Low-Income Working Adults

This section will explore in some detail a number of challenges that colleges are working on to better serve low-income, working students. The discussion is based on interviews conducted during 2006 with individuals representing a range of departments and divisions within 10 community college institutions. Our goal in this research was not to try to compile an exhaustive universe of actors, issues and innovations. Nor was it an attempt to describe “best practices” – which would be premature. Rather we sought to find

examples of work that represent thoughtful approaches to very complicated challenges. The issues and community college innovations we will discuss include:

- Addressing admissions and enrollment barriers;
- Combining adult basic and developmental education with academic and technical training;
- Meeting non-academic needs; and
- Financing students’ direct and indirect educational costs.

Many community colleges are involved in demonstrations that are sponsored by a number of national and regional philanthropic foundations and are designed to learn more about how to better serve disadvantaged learner populations, including economically disadvantaged adults. Some of these include:

***Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count*** is a multiyear initiative involving 14 national partner organizations and 58 colleges in nine states. The initiative focuses colleges and others on understanding and making better use of data from a variety of sources to inform institutional change and public policy innovation that will ultimately improve student outcomes. ([www.achievingthedream.org](http://www.achievingthedream.org))

***Dreamkeepers Emergency Financial Aid*** is an emergency scholarship program for community college students at risk of dropping out due to a financial emergency. The three-year pilot project, which is a component of Achieving the Dream, is designed to learn more about supporting and administering short-term scholarships for needy students and the role of emergency aid in increasing student persistence. Dreamkeepers is operating at 31 community and tribal colleges. ([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org))

***Bridges to Opportunity*** is an initiative established to promote state policies that strengthen the capability of community colleges to work with other partners to improve education and economic opportunities for low-income adults. Grants support policy innovations and

strategies that emphasize: building support from external constituencies; securing buy-in from institutions and state officials; enabling policy implementation through technical assistance and capacity-building activities; and evaluating policy effectiveness in improving economic and academic outcomes for disadvantaged students. ([www.communitycollegcentral.org](http://www.communitycollegcentral.org))

**The Data Project** is a partnership between the Achieving the Dream and Bridges to Opportunities initiatives that is working to help states use data to learn about and improve outcomes for community college students, particularly low-income adults. ([www.communitycollegcentral.org](http://www.communitycollegcentral.org))

**Breaking Through** is a multiyear demonstration involving seven Leadership Colleges and 19 Learning Colleges that are working to strengthen post-secondary outcomes for low-income adults by focusing on strategies that create more effective pathways through pre-college and degree-level programs. The demonstration is exploring strategies that include re-organizing college programs; accelerating learning; assuring a labor market payoff to coursework; and providing comprehensive supports to students. (<http://www.jff.org>)

**Shifting Gears** works in Midwestern states to strengthen state-level policies to enable workers to advance in education training systems, acquire post-secondary credentials, and move up in the labor market. States commit to policy reform efforts to: improve adult student transitions within and between different educational systems, training programs, and the labor market; strengthen connections between supply-side and demand-side systems to promote economic growth and the advancement of workers; and develop cross-cutting agendas to guide the work of individual agencies. ([www.joycefdn.org](http://www.joycefdn.org))

**Opening Doors** is learning about strategies that address high rates of attrition among low-income students and gathering evidence about which strategies are effective in improving student retention and academic and labor market success. Six colleges in four states are testing strategies that include: curricular and instructional innovations; supplementary financial aid; and enhanced student services. (<http://www.mdrc.org>)

**Learning Communities Demonstration**, a project associated with **Opening Doors**, will explore how colleges operate learning communities to improve student retention by encouraging peer relationships, personal connections to faculty, and fostering a deeper understanding of coursework. The project will evaluate the effectiveness of learning communities as a strategy to improve educational outcomes such as completion of developmental education requirements and persistence in school. ([www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org))



## Addressing Admissions and Enrollment Barriers

College-level training may not be accessible to many adults because of barriers from admissions, testing, and placement policies and practices. Community colleges have an “open door” admissions policy, which means that the community college will admit students regardless of previous educational performance. For this reason, community colleges are an entry point to higher education for adults with a wide range of academic experiences and prior performance. However, open enrollment policies do not mean that working poor adults can simply enroll in credit-bearing courses.

By and large, first-time students minimally must have a high school diploma or equivalent (GED) to enroll in the technical/academic courses that teach occupation-specific skills. This requirement results historically from the need for colleges to gauge the initial readiness of students for college-level work. Completion of a high school diploma or GED was once the standard for indicating that students possessed the basic math and English skills needed to study technical material (e.g., nursing, biotech laboratory skills, advanced manufacturing). While this achievement may have been relevant in years past, it is increasingly the case today that possessing a high school diploma or GED is not necessarily a good indicator of a student’s preparation for college-level academic or technical material.

Because of this, most college programs require minimum cut-off scores on mandatory placement tests such as the ACT, Accuplacer or COMPASS, prior to registering for classes. These placement tests are used to determine students’ skill levels in English and mathematics before admission to most courses that are required for degree programs. If students do not score high enough, they will not be eligible to enroll in the prerequisite and core courses of their program of study that use these skills. They will instead have to take developmental English, mathematics or ESL to raise their proficiency.

The result is that a large number of community college students cannot enroll in occupational coursework immediately upon admission, regardless of whether they have a high school diploma or GED. The recently released Spellings Commission report from the U.S. Department of Education reported that, “Fewer than 22 percent of the 1.2 million students who took the ACT college-entrance examinations in 2004 were ready for college-level work in the core subjects of mathematics, English and science.” And “some 40 percent of all college students end up taking at least one remedial course.”<sup>8</sup> Low-income and working poor students, who need to fortify their skills and qualifications to advance or improve their job and earning

**The Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS)** allows students to co-enroll in credit-based academic-technical courses simultaneously with free developmental reading, math and English courses that award institutional credit, for six to 12 months while studying toward a GED or a passable entrance score (on the COMPASS or ACT). Students are assessed upon admission and must demonstrate that they are within six months of completing a GED and/or the passable placement score. During this time students are considered post-secondary students, and are eligible for federal financial aid, based on their level of for-credit enrollment. Students who are recipients of Kentucky’s Transitional Assistance Program (K-TAP) or welfare also may be eligible to receive full K-TAP benefits, Work Study income, and other educational support benefits under KCTCS’ Ready to Work and Work and Learn programs.



potential, literally cannot afford the time and expense associated with the delays they typically experience before qualifying to enter occupational training.

In the course of our interviews, we found community colleges examining how policies and practices related to requirements for a high school diploma, GED or basic skills proficiency restrict enrollment in courses for technical certificates and degrees. The following are ways in which colleges are working with students to help them qualify for enrollment more quickly.

- South Texas College in McAllen, Texas considers conditional enrollment for students who do not have a high school diploma or GED, if the student can provide qualifying test results from other college-recognized placement tests. Even while allowing for this type of conditional enrollment, the college reports that most students nonetheless do not qualify for conditional enrollment, because literacy and basic skills levels are determined to be too low for college-level work.

- Some regulatory enrollment barriers that affect students with lower levels of academic preparation may in some cases be circumnavigated. For example, at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C., English language learners who are taking courses toward occupational certifications, but are not enrolled as degree-seeking, are not required to take a college placement test. Instead, they take an alternative placement test, which measures reading proficiency. Students who might otherwise be ineligible based on their placement scores, are not restricted from enrolling in technical training. Depending on performance and completion of initial college-level coursework, these students may be waived from the college's placement test on the basis of previous completion of college-level material, if they subsequently seek a degree.
- Portland Community College in Oregon has a tuition waiver policy that offers an immediate financial incentive for persevering in adult basic education. If students get their GED at the college, they can enroll in courses awarding up to 12 credits tuition-free.

## Combining Adult Basic and Developmental Education with Technical Training

Colleges are finding a number of ways to decrease the time students spend in adult basic and developmental courses, and to increase the pace at which they advance into academic-technical coursework that provides potential for wage progression. One common practice among effective sector initiatives focused on training students for targeted occupations – combining basic or developmental education material with job-specific technical skills – also is being employed by innovative community colleges. This approach to teaching academic fundamentals has been shown to be especially effective with adults who are highly motivated to learn skills that

relate directly to the workplace and job opportunities.

We learned that a number of colleges have redesigned curricula so that students with basic skills deficiencies can earn credits in technical coursework while simultaneously working toward completing a GED, attending English as a Second Language instruction, or working on developmental education that prepares them for more rigorous college-level material. It is important to recognize that community colleges face financial and regulatory barriers to implementing these types of approaches. The formulas used to determine community colleges' funding are typically based on the

number of students a college enrolls, with the assumption that one full-time equivalent (FTE) instructor will be funded to teach a set number of students. Resources generally are not available to support additional instructors that lower the student-instructor ratio. Colleges also work within an academic regulatory environment that requires students to achieve minimum placement scores and/or complete prerequisite courses to be eligible to enroll in other credit-based courses. Regulations stem from federal financial aid requirements and college accreditation requirements. In order for a community college to change them and/or obtain additional resources, they generally must enlist the support of the policy- and regulation-setting agencies that govern them.

A number of college representatives pointed out a financial motivation to designing more effective ways of serving the disadvantaged learner population. When given the right supports and instructional approaches, they report seeing that students with low skills and/or limited English can persist and succeed at least as well as the average mainstream community college students they serve. For colleges struggling to qualify for additional FTE-based funding, higher student persistence translates directly to higher amounts of funding. In this way these educators' experiences begin to dispel the notion that working with disadvantaged learners "costs too much."

Although providing effective services does take additional resources, these innovators report a return on this investment.

South Seattle Community College's (SSCC) Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) adjunct model, funded by Washington state's I-BEST Initiative (see box) uses two instructors, one for content and one for language, who work side-by-side in the classroom. The VESL instructor observes and learns the technical content, and provides supplementary language instruction that reinforces technical vocabulary and concepts while building broader English and academic proficiency.

SSCC also has taken a new approach to helping lower-literacy students by combining contextualized English with changes in enrollment policies. Nursing students were found to have difficulty meeting entrance requirements for first-level/prerequisite courses due to English language deficiencies. The college designed a contextualized English literacy course that bolsters literacy in the context of learning relevant health care nomenclature, among both native and non-native speakers. The success of this approach led SSCC to lower the allowable test score for entry to first-level courses, with the understanding that students will achieve the regulated passing scores by the *end* of the course.

In McAllen, Texas, South Texas College employs a "supplemental instruction" model that was originally funded by a Title V

### Washington State: I-BEST

Washington state's non-English speaking population has more than doubled since 1990. In response, the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges piloted a demonstration in 2004 to test a new model for delivering English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and adult basic education. The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Initiative (I-BEST) funds colleges to pair an ESOL or Adult Basic Education (ABE) instructor with a technical instructor. The paired instructors provide simultaneous skills training and literacy instruction. Ten I-BEST pilot sites showed impressive outcomes. Participating students "earned five times as many college credits, and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training, than traditional ESOL students." The model is now offered at 23 Washington community and technical colleges, with funding provided for additional instructors to deliver ESOL/ABE education linked with a wide range of occupational skills training.

Hispanic Serving Institution grant and is now being institutionalized on a department-by-department basis within the college. In courses designed for lower-level and developmental education students, a supplemental instructor is assigned to a group of faculty. This supplemental instructor learns the content of skills courses and provides English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction designed to complement skills material while students are learning. This type of supplemental instruction has been linked to improved graduation rates at the college.

Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, N.C. used Adult Education ESL funding and funding from a local utility company to develop an Applied Electrical ESL Pathway. They have developed other pathway programs for entry-level occupations in health care and construction and other occupations for which they have identified local employment opportunity. The program uses what they call an “adjunct contextual ESL course” approach that is similar to those described above.

Contextualized adult basic and developmental education go hand-in-hand with modularization in “career pathway” programs that seek to increase the pace at which students learn occupation-specific skills. Modularization provides greater opportunities for (low-wage, lower-skilled) non-traditional students to move through a certificate or degree program at their own pace. Longer programs of study are broken down into relatively small chunks, or modules, which take less time to complete than is typical of courses structured in a traditional associate-degree model. Industry-recognized credentials are awarded at the completion of each module. In this way, longer-term programs that typically have very limited points of entry can be adapted to provide a wider range of skill-specific offerings, with multiple entry points.

In Oregon, Mount Hood Community College (MHCC) and Portland Community

College (PCC) are innovating with Career Pathways – course clusters designed to reduce time to employment in high-skill, high-wage jobs. Developmental-level courses, often content-specific, are bundled together with academic courses, so that students do not have to complete developmental classes *before* entering employment-related training. MHCC developed a Vocational ESL Welding Program that combines occupation-specific ESL with welding instruction. At PCC, more than 200 students have participated in Professional/Technical Pathways and ESL Vocational Pathways for a number of different occupations. The Career Pathways trainings, offered jointly by PCC and MHCC, have been funded for six years by Worksystems, Inc., the local Workforce Investment Board. Based on the success of these efforts and similar efforts at Southwestern Oregon Community College, the governor’s office and the State of Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development launched a statewide Pathways Initiative in 2004.

Colleges are innovating with “gateway” programs that quickly train students for entry-level positions while also exposing them to practical information about a wider variety of higher-level employment opportunity in the same field but requiring more extensive training. This is helpful for workers who may lack practical information about how to take first steps in pursuing education that leads to better employment with a clearer career path. Elizabethtown Community and Technical College in Kentucky offers gateway programs (that offer a first step toward the college’s health care training programs) directly to entry-level and non-clinical hospital workers at their workplace. The college provides career counseling and courses in Security Officer Training and Command Spanish for Allied Health Workers. Courses are inexpensive and convenient and allow students to experience immediate success, see how learning relates to their jobs, and that they have the potential for continued learning.

## Meeting Non-Academic Needs

In the course of our research evaluating sector initiatives, many of their participants described why they had to drop out of school. They were exhausted by the pace of catching five or six buses per day; they had to care for a sick child, fell behind and didn't know how to get help; or after paying for tuition, they could not afford surprisingly expensive books, and fell behind because they had to borrow required texts. The challenges any working adult, particularly one who has children to care for, must overcome to persist in school are enormous. When a working adult student is also poor and struggling academically, his or her challenges may seem insurmountable.

The schedules that are typical of the types of jobs low-wage workers hold can affect their ability to enroll and succeed. Jobs often require inflexible shifts that can vary from week-to-week and encompass much of the day and evening. Low-wage shift jobs typically do not have flex-time options, and unscheduled overtime is common. Such work schedules, compounded by parental duties such as transporting children to and from school and child care providers, conflict with the typical course schedule that accommodates traditional college students during peak daytime and even evening hours. Testing, admissions, financial aid, student services, libraries, computer labs and child care facilities also are not open frequently enough at times that accommodate working adults' schedules.

Transportation issues compound schedule conflicts, as low-income families frequently deal with unreliable, inconvenient and inefficient transportation options. Many lack the resources to purchase and maintain a reliable car, and rely on public transportation, which in many communities does not run with sufficient frequency or on routes that facilitate time-efficient daily travel between work, children's schools, college, shopping and other necessary trips. Buses and trains frequently run on reduced schedules or not at all during traditional non-rush hour periods, and routes often require multiple connections and long

waits between transfers. Public transportation may not be available at all for some needs, such as for traveling from the central city to outer suburbs, between suburbs, or in rural and semi-rural areas. Even when a low-income individual owns a car, it is likely to be used and unreliable.

Colleges have begun responding to these realities, and are offering more variety and accessibility in their class times and locations. For example:

- **Teacher Pipeline**, a collaborative project involving the Austin Independent School District, Austin Community College, St. Edwards and Huston-Tillotson universities, Austin Interfaith, Education Austin and Capital IDEA in Austin, Texas supports paraprofessionals employed by the school district in their efforts to become teachers. The community college has made course schedule changes, and the school district provides paid release time from work to better accommodate workers' schedules.
- **At Mount Hood and Portland Community Colleges in Oregon**, a number of innovations have been implemented to improve accessibility of classes for low-income working adults. The college has changed occupational course times so they do not conflict with ESL classes. The college delivers paraprofessional health care courses at a major hospital, improving access for incumbent entry-level workers. And the college has placed college enrollment advisors on-site at the Oregon Hispanic Development Corporation, a local nonprofit human services agency.
- **In Washington**, the Community Colleges of Spokane's Institute for Extended Learning offers classes in more than 100 off-campus sites, including community centers and churches, and may begin co-locating courses at workforce one-stop locations.

More and more students are balancing work, school and family care responsibilities, and college representatives we spoke with

acknowledge an increasing need for student services that were not considered the norm in the past. They reported a variety of ways in which they are providing a range of non-academic services to some students, and testifying as to the importance of these services for retention and completion. Many colleges have opened child care centers on campus. And although these alone admittedly do not meet the wide variety of students' needs for child care, they are a start.

Some colleges focus on providing social services to students from within the college and employ a case manager in the college to coordinate services for eligible individuals. This is particularly the case for colleges innovating with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding. For example, a Kentucky state policy authorizes TANF recipients' educational work to count toward their work requirements. In some cases this has allowed TANF beneficiaries to study while they receive benefits for 12-24 months through the statewide Ready To Work program. TANF funding pays for a college-based case manager to coordinate benefits for eligible students and to monitor student academic progress in close communication with college faculty and staff. Oregon has a similar option for WIA-eligible students as part of its Career Pathways offerings. Other colleges, such as Central Piedmont and South Seattle community colleges, have pledged or already committed internal college resources to new positions, such as retention specialists.

In McAllen, Texas, South Texas College (STC) serves a largely working-poor, Latino student population with issues of generational poverty and educational under-preparedness. The

college, an Achieving the Dream demonstration participant, recently took on a college-wide needs assessment and strategic planning effort to design a new model for improving student retention and success.<sup>9</sup> In campus-wide open forums and focus groups, planners heard from students that policies and procedures frustrate their success. As a result, the college is working to change its complex advising process, which is believed to be a factor in low student retention rates, financial budgeting problems, default on financial aid and emergency loan payments, and lack of understanding about how to enter, navigate and succeed in college. In reorganizing the advising process, the college is implementing what is described as a comprehensive student support model. Key components include:

- *Increasing the number of qualified student advisors.* More than 80 faculty members have been trained. VIDA (Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement), a long-term community-based partner, is training college staff in how to use its model for providing comprehensive supports to working poor students. (VIDA uses a model to support disadvantaged students similar to Capital IDEA's, which is described later in this publication.)
- *Implementing an intrusive advising and alert system (for at-risk students).* Students identified for this program must have at least three contacts with a counselor per term, and counselors track students' course withdrawals and re-attempts. According to STC, initial results for students served by intrusive advising show that these students have higher rates of retention and course completion and higher grade-point averages than other students.

### Learning Cohorts:

The Community College of Denver's Certified Nurse Assistant to Licensed Practical Nurse program uses a **learning cohort approach** in which a group of supported learners is enrolled in a course together. An instructor and a case manager work together to address the academic and non-academic needs of the students in the cohort. College representatives think that in addition to better serving the social needs of students by building communities of learners, this approach increases sustainability of programming. By bundling WIA, TANF and other funds, the college reports it can serve a larger number of students more efficiently than it could serve one-by-one.



## Financing Students' Educational Costs

The structure of the student financial aid system, designed for traditional full-time college students, does not work well for low-income, working adults. “Nationwide, unmet financial need among the lowest-income families (those with family incomes below \$34,000 annually) grew by 80 percent from 1990 to 2004 at four-year institutions, compared with seven percent for the highest-income families.”<sup>10</sup> In the community college context, where many students attend school part time, qualifying for financial assistance is especially problematic.

Many working adults don't carry enough credit hours to qualify for subsidized student loans. Even when they do, the lead time required to apply for grants and loans is very long, and assistance is not available year-round. Financial aid funds are also typically disbursed to students after a term begins. This means the money is not available when it is needed to purchase required books and supplies. Not having a high school diploma, GED or passing score on such tests as the ACT or COMPASS can make a student ineligible for aid that might otherwise pay for a credit-based occupational certificate.<sup>11</sup> Education tax credits, intended to reduce the real cost of post-secondary education, are generally not relevant for low-income workers, who typically do not earn enough or have enough eligible expenses to itemize deductions on their tax returns. Low-income workers also may have no mainstream or a negative credit history, making them ineligible for some types of student loans. Working adults are also very likely to experience gaps in their enrollment – which they re-evaluate semester-by-semester based on family circumstances. This makes student loans that require repayment to begin during enrollment gaps a poor option for them. And low-income adults may be understandably wary of incurring large amounts of debt based on only the hope of a better job and higher income.

Leaders of local college programs may not be in a position to change the federal financial aid system, but they are trying a number of ways to help low-income students qualify for existing sources of aid, and to leverage outside resources to help them pay for college. Some approaches include:

- *Designing shorter programs that both meet the learning needs of working adults and enable them to carry enough credits to be eligible for federal financial aid.* For example, Oregon's Career Pathways program leaders spoke about this being important not only in terms of leveraging financing for tuition, but also because financial aid that exceeds the cost of tuition may be used by students for both direct educational expenses and to subsidize indirect costs of education, such as additional costs for child care and reductions in work income.
- *Coordinating the work of financial aid and other internal college units to leverage aid on behalf of low-income and working poor students.* For example, the Kentucky Ready to Work programs coordinate with their financial aid office to optimize the amount of federal work-study financing to supplement TANF funds dedicated for paid work experience. And, at Mount Hood Community College in Oregon, Career Pathways staff assist students in completing their financial aid applications to increase students' chances of continuing their education when WIA workforce training funding ends, typically after six months of instruction.
- *Providing contextualized adult basic, developmental and technical education programs.* Training provided on-the-job may not benefit adults with limited English literacy or English comprehension, because they might not understand verbal instruction, or be able to study textbooks or written material, which is most likely provided in English. These limitations mean that low-wage incumbent workers may not benefit



from worksite-based technical skills training programs, such as those paid for with WIA incumbent worker training grants. Vocational ESL, one type of contextualized training,

combines English language assistance with technical skills curriculum, in order to develop workers' on-the-job and academic literacy while teaching hands-on skills.

### Special Effort to Help Low-income Adults Finance College Education

Central Piedmont Community College, in Charlotte, N.C., provides need-based assistance through JumpStart Scholarships, and through grants from churches and the United Way. The college also works with employers to secure tuition reimbursement for incumbent workers.

## Summary

As we researched this *Update*, we learned of a number of important new instructional and procedural approaches to making college-level education more accessible, efficient and effective for low-income adult students. We also learned how a number of community colleges are working to better coordinate with local agencies, primarily public agencies such as WIA one-stop workforce and welfare agencies, but also community-based agencies, to better serve qualifying students with financial and other services. A few colleges also are working with local industry representatives to learn about employment opportunities and design curricula that address their needs for skilled workers. To recap, community colleges are working to improve their services and outcomes for low-income adult students in a number of ways, including:

- Focusing on occupations that offer opportunities requiring short-term training and designing curricula specific to employment opportunities;
- Reducing negative impacts of technical admissions, enrollment and placement test requirements;
- Shortening the time it takes a student to complete programs – including innovations to decrease time in adult basic and developmental education;
- Modularizing curricula so students have multiple entry points and are awarded interim certificates of completion;
- Providing non-academic supportive services;

- Offering on-the-job experience through internships and paid work experience while studying; and
- Organizing curricula so that more students qualify for public student financial aid and reaching out to other public and private agencies for needs-based scholarships and other financial resources for low-income adult students.

There is enormous need for the types of promising approaches highlighted in this publication – both among the many low-income, working adult students who need these services to succeed, and businesses that urgently need qualified workers. However, these innovations are not yet widespread, in large part because community colleges, like all organizations, work with limited scope, resources and flexibility. These factors restrict colleges' ability to meet all the academic and non-academic (social) needs of students who are becoming harder and harder to serve. The next section of this *Update* highlights the collaborative work of Capital IDEA, a community-based organization operating a number of sectoral initiatives in the Austin, Texas area, and Austin Community College, its primary education partner. We provide this profile as a model of how a community-based organization can help low-income and working poor adults not only to persist and succeed in long-term education programs offered through the community college, but also to obtain family-sustaining employment.

# Capital IDEA, Austin, Texas

Capital IDEA (Investing in Development and Employment of Adults), Inc., is a nonprofit, community-based organization founded in 1998 as a joint project of Austin Interfaith, a broad-based organization of congregations, schools and other community institutions of the Industrial Areas Foundation, and members of the Central Texas business community. Capital IDEA describes its work as lifting working families out of poverty by sponsoring educational services that lead to life-long financial independence. Capital IDEA acts as a bridge, connecting underemployed adults to employers in need of highly skilled workers. Capital IDEA also works with workforce partners to identify new areas of training needed to educate workers and the unemployed. They currently support students to train for occupations in health care, electric utility, high-tech production and service, broadband cable and wireless technology, and education (teacher preparation).

## Summary of Services Offered to Participants

Capital IDEA refers to its program as *career-driven education and training*. It collaborates closely with employers and education providers to ensure that education and training completed by participants will lead to a career – defined for their community as a position paying at least \$12 per hour and providing benefits and opportunity for further career advancement. Participants work with career counselors to create customized education strategies based on assessment of their aptitudes and interests, training availability and employment opportunity. An individual's education program begins wherever he or she is in the process: GED preparation, English as a Second Language, college entrance exam preparation, or enrollment in college. Almost half of participants begin their studies in the GED, ESL or College Prep Academy programs. This feature distinguishes Capital IDEA in the larger field of adult workforce development. Most programs designed with

the goal of matriculating participants into for-credit college programs require them to have achieved a high school diploma or GED prior to acceptance.

## Capital IDEA Participants – 2005<sup>12</sup>

- 527 enrolled
- No minimum academic or English language proficiency requirements
- 50% age 21-30; 29% age 31-40; 14% age 41-60
- 49% Hispanic; 23% African-American; 18% Non-Hispanic White
- 79% Female
- Over 300 participants are parents to 760 minor children
- Eligible to work in U.S.
- Income below 200% of federal poverty guidelines
- 68% of College Prep Academy enrollees passed the THEA exam within 1 semester; 22% within 1 year
- 97% of graduates were employed 1 year after graduation
- Average monthly income of graduates increased on average 259%, to \$2,479 compared to monthly average of \$958 at enrollment

Capital IDEA programs are long-term, with the majority of individuals expected to complete in three years, but with some taking as long as four or five years, depending on where they start. The program does not provide education directly, but instead works closely with a range of education providers, especially Austin Community College, shepherding students through their education process in close-knit cohorts, providing intensive case management and personal support services, and monitoring participants' progress through regular meetings with counselors and peers, and institutionalized communications with education providers. Capital IDEA arranges for the payment of all costs of their participants' education, including tuition, fees and books. The majority of participants receive financial assistance to pay

for child care and transportation. Many also receive interim employment assistance, emergency financial assistance, health care services, and a range of counseling services.

### Entry Level of 2005 Participants

- 54% college-level
- 30% College Prep Academy
- 6% GED preparation
- 10% ESL

Capital IDEA's case management and counseling starts with in-depth assessment of each individual's personal circumstances to identify possible barriers and determine ways to overcome these barriers, prior to beginning the education process. Once enrolled, students meet weekly with an assigned Career Counselor and with other Capital IDEA participants enrolled in their occupational track for one-hour "Vision, Initiative, Perseverance" (VIP) peer support sessions, guided by Capital IDEA staff counselors. These meetings are held at locations and at times that are convenient to students – usually where they attend classes. Counselors also work individually with students as needed to help them find interim employment that will help them gain experience, earn income, and get internships with employers to be better positioned to get a job upon graduation. For example, a student in a health care career education program who has only retail employment experience would be encouraged to work instead as a Certified Nursing Assistant while in school.

### Critical Partners

Capital IDEA has a wide range of partners representing business, education providers, the workforce development system, city and county governments, faith-based and other community-based organizations, among others. Within specific industries the organization has a number of very strong relationships with individual businesses, which help with strategic planning, fund-raising, program design,

partnerships to obtain services, making financial gifts, and by providing other resources. Only a few of their partnerships are described here. We highlight the CBO's partnership with Austin Interfaith and Austin Community College, two partner organizations that we believe are critical to understanding the core framework for Capital IDEA's operations and program success, and its work with Austin Energy, describing the way in which Capital IDEA and Austin Community College collaborated to develop a training curriculum designed to meet not only the employment needs of Capital IDEA participants but also some of Austin Energy's own critical labor force challenges.

### *Austin Interfaith: Recruitment, Screening, Local Political Advocacy, Fund-raising*

To understand Capital IDEA's success, it is important to understand its relationship with Austin Interfaith, its founder. Austin Interfaith, an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), is a political advocacy organization that works through hundreds of house meetings designed as continuous conversations to determine community needs and opportunities for community action to meet those needs. Austin Interfaith, with thousands of leaders in the region, has a loud voice in local political arenas. It originally lobbied for workforce development funds from the City of Austin and Travis County to establish core operating support for Capital IDEA. Austin Interfaith developed the model for Capital IDEA based on the experiences of Project QUEST, another IAF-founded program located in San Antonio, Texas. Notably, Austin Interfaith insisted that funds to support Capital IDEA not come largely from human services coffers, but mainly from business tax and general revenue sources. Austin Interfaith lobbies yearly for this funding to be renewed – enabling Capital IDEA to maintain a stable funding base.

Austin Interfaith also uses its political clout to advocate for issues that affect other Capital IDEA partners. For example, when Austin Community College recently proposed

a public bond initiative, an increase in its tax rate, and expansion of its taxing district to finance expansion into an underserved community with a large low-income population, Austin Interfaith members were central to local campaigns for their success – enabling the community college system to build new facilities, serve more residents, and expand its tax base.

### ***Austin Community College: Adult Basic Education, ESL, College-Entrance Exam Preparation***

Capital IDEA is described as one of the largest customers of Austin Community College. College representatives note that Capital IDEA is well positioned to research the experiences of the students it supports, evaluate problems and inform the college about specific issues affecting the ability of low-income students to navigate the college system and complete education programs. Austin Community College has shown itself to be in meaningful partnership with Capital IDEA in a number of ways. This is critical because like most community college systems, Austin Community College has acknowledged challenges to its ability to serve the large numbers of low-income adults who need adult basic education, ESL and academic preparation to pass the state-mandated college-entrance exam – just so they can enroll in for-credit and occupational certificate programs. Perhaps even more important than the direct support the college provides to Capital IDEA, the two organizations appear to be learning together how they can change their own operations to better serve the college's general student population. The college describes its interaction with Capital IDEA as a "relationship, not a project." College representatives cite a range of activities, including joint proposals for funding, sharing information about opportunities for external funding, and Capital IDEA's involvement with the community college's master planning process, as examples.

In partnership with Capital IDEA, the college developed a new College Prep Academy that enables Capital IDEA students needing

instruction to pass the THEA (state-mandated college entrance exam) to bypass regular adult basic education and developmental coursework. The academy is based on a cohort-model, with students meeting together daily and receiving accelerated instruction (compared to the college's traditional model). The college contributes financially to the academy by providing classroom space, salaries for some instructors, and paying for administration. As of summer 2005, the college had held 20 cycles of the academy for Capital IDEA. The academy has been lauded in the local press as a model education service for this population – expensive, but effective, based on extremely good outcomes in terms of GED and THEA pass rates. Ted Rachofsky, an Austin Community College instructor who teaches developmental math for both academy and general population students, reported to an *Austin Chronicle* reporter, "I'm the same teacher I am at ACC and at Capital IDEA, but the fact that these people are in the math class together 12 hours a week makes them a supportive community ... It just works better."<sup>13</sup> Capital IDEA reports that "the most recent available data, from Fiscal Year 2003, found that 7.4 percent of community college students enrolling in regular developmental education courses in Fall 2001 had passed the TASP (precursor to the THEA) by Summer 2003. In comparison, 67 percent of Capital IDEA participants passed all three sections of the THEA after completing the College Prep Academy at ACC in Fall 2004."<sup>14</sup>

Austin Community College Vice President for Academic Programs Donetta Goodall reported that working with Capital IDEA has expanded the college's horizons in terms of the potential of working with a nonprofit organization, noting that the college is changing its adult basic education curriculum over time. She describes the college as concluding, we need a "Capital IDEA component" to this more and more as they evaluate and develop programs and support services for adult basic education students. As a result the college: offers babysitting services during ESL classes; has moved Adult Basic Education to the Technical Education

department (enabling students to be eligible for Pell grants); provides one-on-one assistance to students applying to the college; and attempts to provide more student support through personalized discussions about curriculum paths. The college is experimenting with ways to replicate some of the components of the College Prep Academy in general population programming, for example, using cohort-based courses, tutorial labs, pairing basic education coursework with college-level coursework, and organizing study sessions. The college enrolls approximately 3,000 adults in basic education coursework at any one time, so this is not a small undertaking. But it appears that the college is working to improve low-income student retention and outcomes – and learning from the organized and very specific feedback received about the experiences of large numbers of students it serves through Capital IDEA.

### **Relationship with Business: Austin Energy**

Capital IDEA collaborates with local business in a number of ways. Business representatives serve on its board, advise on labor market trends, work on education programs, provide internship experiences, provide program financial support, and hire participants. The program has staff dedicated to conducting business outreach, information-gathering about labor force needs and trends, and establishing and maintaining working relationships with businesses. These same staff members remain the point-of-contact for business – following up on referrals or making cold calls, interviewing them about their labor force issues and opportunities, developing internship programs, and collaborating on curriculum development and job placement. To provide a sense of how business engages with Capital IDEA, the following describes its work with Austin Energy.

Austin Energy, and the electric utility industry in general, face a looming workforce crisis. A large portion of Austin Energy's operations workforce will be eligible to retire in the coming decade. The industry has traditionally conducted most job training in-

house, and there is extremely limited infrastructure for electric utility operations training nationwide – and none in Austin. Traditional worker recruitment for this industry was largely by word-of-mouth, with existing workers recruiting friends and family members. Austin Energy wanted to tap new pools of potential workers who would also represent the changing demographics of the Austin metropolitan-area population.

When Capital IDEA staff contacted Austin Energy in the hopes of beginning a discussion about its workforce needs, the timing was right. The utility provider had recently completed a workforce planning study for its 1,400-employee organization. It determined that the company would very soon experience significant worker shortages in operations – employees who work in power plants and in power distribution facilities. Not only would it need new entry-level workers, but it also must train and get these new workers the experiences they need to move up into positions requiring higher levels of skills – and fast. Capital IDEA had recently completed a strategic planning activity itself – concluding that it needed to identify occupations with good career potential and that require shorter training periods.

The Director of Workforce Development at Austin Energy was assigned by his General Manager to work with Capital IDEA to develop a training curriculum that would meet the needs of not only Austin Energy, but also the local electric utility industry in general. Capital IDEA connected Austin Energy with Austin Community College's Customized Training division to begin discussions about designing a workforce program for the electric utility industry. Joining their collaboration were several subject-matter experts as well as representatives of other local electric utility providers who were invited by Austin Energy to participate.

Within a year, the team developed a new curriculum for an Energy Technician Certificate program at Austin Community College. The curriculum is very streamlined in terms of the time it takes (three semesters), and is reported to focus on the basic knowledge



and skills needed to obtain entry-level employment with a highly articulated career ladder of opportunity in the electric utility industry. The curriculum includes paid internships during the second and third semesters of coursework and qualifies graduates for employment as Electrician I at Austin Energy. A number of other local employers have committed to hire interns as well. Coursework taken for the certificate is transferable to associate degree programs at Austin Community College.

This new certificate program was designed for Capital IDEA students, who can use the extensive range of supports provided by the community-based organization. But significantly, program enrollment is open to the community college's general population of students as well. With Capital IDEA acting as intermediary and relationship-builder, what resulted was a collaboration that yielded a new public good, offered through the community college, with the potential for developing new pools of skilled workers who will be available to work across the industry locally.

### **Financing**

Providing long-term training and extensive participant support services, as well as supporting staff to establish and maintain long-term relationships with business, education and public sector partners is expensive. Capital IDEA estimates that its annual per participant cost is \$6,000. In Fiscal Year 2005 Capital IDEA's expenses were approximately \$2.6 million, of which approximately \$566,000 was spent on college tuition and fees, \$148,000 on students' textbooks, and \$453,000 on payments to child care providers.

Capital IDEA taps a wide range of

resources to support its activities. In Fiscal Year 2005, Travis County and the City of Austin together accounted for more than \$1.1 million in revenues. An additional \$368,000 came from the city, county and WorkSource (the WIB) and was dedicated to pay for child care. Approximately \$124,000 came from the U.S. Department of Labor. Capital IDEA used revenues from a Nursing Workforce Diversity grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services of approximately \$213,000 and Wagner-Peyser funds totaling approximately \$303,000. Capital IDEA earned approximately \$45,000 in "retention fees" for graduates in a small number of very high-demand occupations – primarily Registered Nursing – who went to work for the two major hospital networks. In 2005 Capital IDEA raised a notable \$239,692 in donations from individuals and businesses – its only unrestricted funds.

The program leverages funds in a variety of ways, one of which is through an agreement with the local public workforce agencies – WorkSource and the Rural Capital Area Workforce Development Board. These agencies provide WIA funds to pay for tuition and child care expenses for the final two semesters of WIA-eligible students' coursework. In 2004 and 2005, approximately 45 individuals were co-enrolled and substantially supported by WIA dollars. Capital IDEA staff also works closely with Travis County Human Services staff to ensure that participants receive the means-tested benefits for child care and transportation to which they are entitled. And Peoples Community Clinic, a local public health clinic with representation on Capital IDEA's board of directors, provides participants with a range of health services.



## Conclusion

The achievements of Capital IDEA and Austin Community College highlight the benefits that can accrue to workers and industry when community resources are deployed thoughtfully and collaboratively. We see evidence in this example that a community-based organization, working in partnership with a community college, can help low-income adults prepare for and succeed in college. Austin Community College worked with Capital IDEA to design and deliver innovative adult basic and developmental education services with the goals of reducing the amount of time participants spend at these levels and fostering new supportive learning communities among students in the program. The two organizations' work with Austin Energy to identify and design a relatively short-term Energy Technician curriculum has resulted in a new program that is geared both toward assisting the utility provider with its looming workforce crisis, as well as creating a new path, with an industry-recognized credential, to employment opportunity that appears well-suited to the needs of some of the disadvantaged adult constituency served by both Capital IDEA and Austin Community College.

Most of the efforts we see that result in disadvantaged adults gaining the level of skills and/or credentials that improve their labor market competitiveness use principles of sectoral workforce development. That is, they are designed to prepare individuals for a specific occupation for which there is identified employment opportunity, and they incorporate both skills training and services designed to support them to succeed in that training. Many of the activities discussed in

this *Update* show how colleges are innovating to both enhance learning and expedite students' progress through adult basic and developmental education and into occupational skills coursework by designing new methods and curricula that are more directly linked to the specific skills students will use on the job. We have also seen significant effort dedicated to better understanding and addressing the non-academic supports needed by this population.

From location-to-location there is great diversity in both community college and sector initiative capacity to meet the needs of an area's unemployed and underemployed adult population – who, as we've described in this *Update*, generally need both academic and non-academic supports to make meaningful progress in education that is linked to higher-wage employment. Colleges and sector initiatives also vary in their ability to investigate specific categories of local employment opportunity and to learn from local employers the types of skills they need from workers. The experiences of Capital IDEA and Austin Community College give us but one example of how a sector initiative and a community college might collaborate. We do not propose that there is or should be a uniform approach to designing programs that better meet the tremendous and growing needs of both business and low-income workers. But it is timely to explore the range of ways in which community colleges and sector initiatives might work more collaboratively to design and deliver programs and services that serve larger numbers of adult learners and that are better linked to viable employment opportunities.

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- 4 Derived from 2004 Current Population Survey, U.S. Bureau of the Census.
- 5 Sector initiatives are operated out of a variety of institutions, including community-based organizations (CBOs), Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), and labor-management partnership organizations, among others. However, for the purposes of this publication, we're primarily interested in the work of CBOs and community colleges.
- 6 For additional information on sectoral employment development models, strategies and outcomes visit <http://www.aspenwsi.org>.
- 7 Excerpted from *Skills to Live By*, an AspenWSI publication based on focus groups and in-depth interviews with past participants of six sectoral employment programs. This research was a follow-up to the Sectoral Employment Development Learning Project (SEDLP), a longitudinal evaluation of the six programs. For more information see <http://www.aspenwsi.org>. (Participant names were changed.)
- 8 U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (Washington, D.C., 2006), 9.
- 9 For more information about Achieving the Dream see <http://www.achievingthedream.org>.
- 10 U.S. Department of Education, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (Washington, D.C., 2006), 12.
- 11 Federal regulations require post-secondary institutions to certify whether a student without a high school diploma or its equivalent has the "ability to benefit" (ATB) from the instruction provided, prior to awarding Title IV federal financial aid funds. In practice, this means that the student must take a standardized test, e.g., COMPASS or Accuplacer, and receive a qualifying score; acceptable ATB tests and minimum scores are set by the U. S. Department of Education (see <http://www.ccdanet.org/a2bttestlist.html> for a list, adapted from the Federal Register regulations at <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/other/2004-2/051104b.html>).
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**Courses to Employment: Sectoral Approaches to Community  
College-Nonprofit Partnerships  
A New Demonstration and Learning Project**

In 2008, AspenWSI will launch a three-year learning demonstration that will support partnerships between community colleges and community-based organizations using sectoral employment development principles. A primary goal will be to assist low-income adults to acquire the education and skills they need for employment that pays self-sufficiency wages. Funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the demonstration is designed to illuminate promising collaborative approaches, and document operational features and challenges, as well as costs and outcomes for both workers and businesses. Up to six sites will participate in the demonstration, the results of which will be shared broadly with workforce development, education, funding and policy-setting audiences. AspenWSI will invite partnerships to submit Letters of Interest in June 2007. Full proposals will then be solicited from a select number of those partnerships. For additional information, please see: [www.aspenwsi.org](http://www.aspenwsi.org).



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### **CREDITS:**

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- Austin Community College (Austin, Texas)
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- Central Piedmont Community College (Charlotte, N.C.)
- Community College of Denver (Denver, Colo.)
- Elizabethtown Community and Technical College (Elizabethtown, Ky.)
- Kentucky Community and Technical College System (Versailles, Ky.)
- Mount Hood Community College (Gresham, Ore.)
- Portland Community College (Portland, Ore.)
- VIDA (Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement) (Weslaco, Texas)
- South Seattle Community College (Seattle, Wash.)
- South Texas College (McAllen, Texas)
- Community Colleges of Spokane (Spokane, Wash.)

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