



FALL 2011

This edition of **Transmissions** provides information on state accomplishments and best practices, up-to-date news, and policy insights for policymakers, researchers, advocates, program administrators, and others outside the Shifting Gears network.

In this issue, you will find:

- Updates from three Shifting Gears states: Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin;
- Updates from the White House, Congress, and the Department of Labor on new legislation that seeks to expand access to training, funding updates, and news about grant opportunities;
- New research that sheds light on the effectiveness of online courses for low-skilled adults;
- New research and reports from experts in adult education, postsecondary education, developmental education and workforce development.

To learn more about specific strategies or find resources that can help your state increase postsecondary and career success for lower-skilled adults, visit the Shifting Gears web site at www.shifting-gears.org. Also, be sure to check out the Shifting Gears presentation, *Shifting Gears: Adult Education State Policy Change for Postsecondary Success* at this year's National College Transition Network Conference on November 14 -15. [Learn more about this presentation.](#)

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Shifting Gears Partner and Technical Assistance Provider

PROGRESS IN MOTION

In this section, we bring you the latest news from the five Shifting Gears states as well as national news related to strengthening state education and training systems to ensure that more low-skilled adults earn postsecondary credentials that help them obtain family-sustaining employment.



In the States

Student Success Stories from Shifting Gears

As the Shifting Gears initiative strives to improve workforce education and skills training in the Midwest, personal success stories serve as a welcome reminder of the value of our work and provide strong motivation for us to continue. CLASP has posted a map with testimonials from students and staff about how programs developed under Shifting Gears have enabled low-skilled adults to access education, upgrade their skills, and get jobs. [View their stories.](#)

Minnesota FastTRAC launched a new cross-agency website www.mnfasttrac.org! The website "markets" FastTRAC to multiple stakeholders and serves as a community space for practitioners in institutions, workforce development, and community based organizations. Additionally, seventeen new bridge and integrated programs were funded through the FastTRAC Adult Career Pathways 2011 grants. In policy work, the FastTRAC Senior Leadership Steering Committee continues to move FastTRAC toward a sustainable, systemic model. Finally, Minnesota FastTRAC staff have been asked to serve as content experts for the Accelerating Opportunity initiative in the areas of braided funding and professional development.

The state has also recently released a video featuring FastTRAC student success stories, entitled ***Minnesota FastTRAC: Opening Career Pathways***. [View the video.](#)



Minnesota FastTRAC: Opening Career Pathways

Ohio has focused its adult learning strategy on two goals: 1) Increasing the number of adults earning credentials with labor-market value within the University System of Ohio (USO); and 2) Increasing the number of adults successfully transitioning through the USO to earn additional credentials and degrees.

To begin measuring where the state stands with the second goal, Ohio has released the University System of Ohio (USO) Transition Metrics scorecard. The statewide scorecard is designed to provide key stakeholders in the USO sectors-Adult Basic Literacy and Education (ABLE), Adult Workforce Education (AWE), community colleges and universities-with a better understanding of students' educational pathways and transition trends. The scorecard draws upon and analyzes data from the ABLE, AWE, and Higher Education Information (HEI) data systems. In addition to the statewide data, scorecards can be produced for specific institutions and regional consortia of education providers.

The initial findings serve as benchmarks for the state's three primary improvement strategies. The state is encouraging education providers to work together to blend services and resources to help students successfully transition to attain

education credentials. In addition, Ohio is promoting effective partnerships to enable students to earn more credit for workforce certificates. Thirdly, the USO is fostering a shared accountability among all providers for student success and performance.

The transition metrics will complement specific policies and practices in bringing about Ohio's vision that all adult Ohioans will have an opportunity to continue their education beyond the secondary level and earn the industry-recognized credential and degrees that give them the knowledge and skills needed to get and advance in good jobs.

Wisconsin is working to better align systems and funding to support the state's career pathways effort, Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE). RISE Partners met with lead state and regional policy representatives from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Adult Education and Family Literacy (AEFL), Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education (CTE) funded agencies and others to discuss ways to align resources and build cohorts of adult learners ready to enroll in Career Pathways. Discussions among these policymakers will continue as they take steps to expand the demand for and the resources available to support RISE career pathways in the state. In addition, Wisconsin's local Workforce Development Boards are completing their two year plans for using WIA formula funds to support expansion of Career Pathways in their local areas.

The state is also working to build local and employer support for RISE. Ten technical colleges and workforce development boards have been selected to recruit and engage local champions for Career Pathways among businesses and other local service providers in their regions. These communications projects will complete their work early in December 2011.

In addition, Wisconsin was selected as one of eleven states to participate in Accelerating Opportunity initiative, a new multi-state initiative that seeks to change the way Adult Basic Education is structured and delivered at the state and institutional levels. As part of this initiative, Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) led a self-assessment process, through an on-line survey and phone interviews, involving all the technical colleges to identify capacity building assets and needs related to taking RISE Career Pathways to scale. RISE and Accelerating Opportunity are co-sponsoring a professional development conference for technical college and workforce development executives, managers and staff in October 2011. The agenda includes workshops on team teaching, successful career pathway bridges and post secondary credentials that are ready for replication, sharpening messaging, and developing next steps for expanding Career Pathways statewide.

On the National Front

President Obama Announces Plan to Create Jobs, Boost Investments in Education

Last month before a joint session of Congress, the President announced his jobs proposal, the American Jobs Act (AJA). The AJA includes provisions that invest in youth and low-income adults; fund summer and year-round jobs for youth; provide subsidized job opportunities for low-income people who are unemployed; support on-the-job training for unemployed people as well as training and skills building for job sectors actively hiring. The jobs package also includes a grants program to support local initiatives that provide training, adult education services and other innovative practices that lead to postsecondary credentials and employment.

Earlier this month, Sen. Harry Reid introduced the entire Act with an additional provision that would institute tax increase for those workers who earn over \$1 million or more. On October 11, the Senate failed to invoke cloture on the bill, yet members may still introduce component parts of the jobs package for vote at a later date. For more information on the provisions of the Act that would support new work and learning opportunities for low-income, unemployed adults and youth, [read CLASP's analysis of the American Jobs Act](#).

Congress Passes Short-Term Funding Bill; FY2012 Appropriations Process Ongoing

In late September, Congress passed a short-term continuing resolution that will keep the government running until November 18, 2011. Meanwhile, both houses of Congress are working to develop FY12 appropriations bills that will serve as the basis for the FY12 budget negotiation process. If the House and Senate cannot come to an agreement by November 18, 2011, they must either pass another continuing resolution or risk a federal government shutdown. The majority of education and training programs are funded through the Labor-HHS appropriations bill, which funds the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education.

- The Senate Appropriations Committee approved a Labor-HHS bill for FY12 that generally maintains current funding for workforce and education programs and the spending caps from the Budget Control Act passed earlier this year. [View more details on the Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations bill](#).

- The House Appropriations Committee has released a draft appropriations bill that proposes drastic cuts to workforce and education programs. It also drastically rolls back several bipartisan expansions to the Pell Grant program that helped working students and introduces new limits in the program, which eliminate or reduce lower-skilled adults' access to student aid. [View more details on the Pell Grant cuts and how they penalize working students and reduce their access to aid.](#) For information on cuts to other programs, [view more details on the draft House appropriations bill.](#)

Department of Labor Awards First Round of TAA Community College and Career Training Grants

The Department of Labor announced the first round of grantees to receive awards under the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training grant program (TAACCCT). Thirty-two grantees from thirty-five states received grants totaling \$500 million that will be used to support partnerships between community colleges, workforce agencies, adult education providers, and employers that provide pathways to good jobs for low-skilled adults eligible to receive services under the Trade Adjustment Act. The innovations supported by these grants include career pathways, integrated education and training, accelerated basic skills courses connected to the attainment of credentials and other models that help students obtain industry-recognized credentials. These awards are the first round of the \$2 billion TAACCCT program, which is required to provide at least \$2.5 million to each state. States that did not apply for grants under this program will be working with the Department to identify uses for these funds that are aligned with the program's goals.

TALKING SHOP

Q: *How can states and local institutions use online delivery options to reach more adult students in need of further education and training? What does the research tell us about the effectiveness of these programs for low-skilled adult students?*



A: As federal, state, and local budgets take bit hits, online course options are becoming more attractive to institutions seeking to meet high student demand for services. And although online options may be a less expensive alternative to traditional classroom instruction, a new report finds that students enrolled in such courses are more likely to not complete the class or drop out in subsequent terms.

These findings emerged from a new study by the Community College Research Center, which followed 51,000 community and technical college students in Washington State to determine the impact of online learning on academic outcomes and enrollment. In addition to higher attrition rates, the study also found that those who took more online courses were significantly less likely to earn a degree or certificate or transfer to a four-year school.

Results were worse for students taking developmental education classes, which prepare learners with low basic skills for college-level academic work. Only 74 percent of developmental education students who learned entirely through online instruction completed their courses, compared to 85 percent of those with exclusively face-to-face instruction. These under-prepared students are the least likely to be able to weather lost tuition costs if they do not complete or need to repeat a course.

The report raises policy concerns as states and institutions struggle to balance budgets amid rising college enrollments and as online courses become more prevalent as a less expensive alternative to face-to-face teaching. In fall 2009, more than 29 percent of higher education students took at least one online course. Despite the cost savings, online courses clearly don't work for all students, particularly those at community colleges.

Options exist for states and institutions to use online learning strategies without sacrificing student success. CCRC researchers recommend that states and institutions help students improve their technological skills and familiarize themselves with the online learning experience prior to enrolling in an online-only course. In addition, the availability of online support services should be expanded to include weekend and evening hours, when many online students do much of their class work.

The report's results suggest great potential for "hybrid" or "blended" courses, which combine the convenience, low cost, and technological advantage of an online environment with some level of face-to-face instruction and class interaction. These programs are on the rise, and for good reason: across the board, the difference in completion rates between face-to-face students and hybrid learners was statistically insignificant.

A successful example of the hybrid approach is LearnerWeb, a web-based instructional tool that can be customized to enhance face-to-face learning for a wide variety of courses. LearnerWeb provides students with an individualized Learning Plan to help them achieve their academic goals and offers face-to-face and online tutoring, self-paced

instruction, and assessments. Originally developed for under-prepared students in adult education, the tool is now also used for students in college-level courses and to help ease the transition of basic skills students into college-level work. Minnesota uses LearnerWeb as part of its FastTRAC program to supplement in-class learning for basic skills students who are also enrolled in face-to-face occupational training courses.

Affordable and effective educational solutions do exist for cash-strapped states and institutions, but maintaining and increasing student success requires more than a transition from the classroom to the computer. If they lack the necessary supports, students in online courses may be at a disadvantage. With appropriate supports and innovative new learning approaches, completion rates can be kept up even as costs are kept down.

This Talking Shop response was provided by Amit Jain and Marcie Foster of CLASP.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The latest research and reports from experts in adult education, postsecondary education, developmental education, and workforce development.



Farther, Faster: Six Promising Programs Show How Career Pathway Bridges Help Basic Skills Students Earn Credentials That Matter. CLASP (August 2011)

Students forced to complete a long sequence of remedial or English language classes before they can begin their postsecondary program rarely earn college certificates or degrees. This brief highlights six promising programs that show how career pathway bridges help lower-skilled students move farther and faster along college and career paths through dual enrollment in linked basic skills and certificate courses. Because creating such bridges requires collaboration across college silos, they can also transform the way colleges operate. [View the report.](#)

Not Just Kid Stuff Anymore: The Economic Imperative for More Adults to Complete College. CLASP and NCHEMS (June 2011)

Just as our economy is demanding that more workers have some postsecondary education or training, the number of recent high school graduates, our traditional source of such workers, is leveling off and even declining in many states. This brief provides relevant data on higher education on a national scale with some broken out by state. [View the report and state by state fact sheets.](#)

Giving Credit Where Credit is Due: Webinar Resources. CLASP (June 2011)

In April 2011, CLASP released a report, "Giving Credit Where Credit is Due," with policy recommendations to create a qualifications system that would enable adults who engage in occupational education and training to receive the credit and labor market credentials they deserve based on their skills and competency. In June 2011, CLASP held a webinar to discuss the report's policy recommendations and highlight innovative attempts at bridging credit and noncredit learning. The report, a recording of the webinar, and the PowerPoint presentation have all been posted online. [View these resources.](#)

Yesterday's Nontraditional Student is Today's Traditional Student. CLASP (June 2011)

Today, the typical college student is no longer a high school graduate who is enrolled full-time. College students in the United States have become older and more diverse, and more students than ever have to balance schooling with family and work obligations. This fact sheet from CLASP provides demographic statistics to illustrate the evolving profile of today's postsecondary learners. [View the fact sheet.](#)

The Undereducated American. Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce (June 2011)

In this report, experts Anthony P. Carnevale and Stephen J. Rose find that demand for college workers has outpaced supply in the United States since the 1980s, meaning that the nation has been underproducing college-educated workers for the past three decades. The authors note that this trend has led to higher wage premiums for college graduates, which in turn has precipitated an increase in income inequality. The report calculates that the nation will need to double its current pace of producing college workers to meet future economic requirements and reduce record-high levels of income inequality. [View the report.](#)

Research Shows the Effectiveness of Workforce Programs. CLASP (May 2011)

Workforce development programs are intended to put low-income adults and youth on the path to finding jobs, boosting their earnings, and improving their communities. In this paper, CLASP re-examines the evidence and finds that federal investments in workforce development are effective in achieving these goals. The brief also finds a growing body of

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research suggesting that today's investments in workforce development are likely to pay off for the next generation. [View the brief.](#)

Transition Services Self-Assessment Toolkit for Adult Education and Developmental Bridge Programs. Women Employed (April 2011)

Transition services are a critical component of bridge programs, providing adult learners with support when moving between different levels of education or into careers. The three general types of transition services are personal support, academic support, and financial assistance. Women Employed has developed a powerful toolkit to help bridge program teams self-assess the usage and utility of their existing transition services before crafting a Service Improvement Plan to build on existing strengths. [View the toolkit.](#)