NCSALL Seminar Guide:

Going Beyond the GED

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NCSALL

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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Going Beyond the GED

This seminar guide was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) to introduce adult education practitioners to the research that has determined that GED students experience educational and financial gains when engaged in GED preparation courses that focus on cognitive development in addition to exam preparation. Recommendations from the study suggest that programs support students who want to transition to postsecondary education and training. Programs or professional developers may want to use this seminar in place of a regularly scheduled meeting, such as a statewide training or a local program staff meeting.

Objectives:

By the end of the seminar, participants will be able to:

- Explain why the adult education system should focus on: (1) enabling students to develop the academic skills necessary to complete the GED and to enter postsecondary education and training, and (2) supporting students in this transition
- List strategies for supporting adult education-to-postsecondary transitions for adult education students

Participants: 8 to 12 practitioners who work in adult education—teachers, tutors, counselors, program administrators, policymakers, and others

Time: 3 hours

Agenda:

10 minutes	1. Welcome and Introductions
5 minutes	2. Objectives and Agenda
50 minutes	3. Discussion of the Readings
15 minutes	***Break***
50 minutes	4. Model Transition Programs
20 minutes	5. Adult Education-to-Postsecondary Transition

20 minutes 6. Planning Next Steps

10 minutes 7 Evaluation of the Seminar

Session Preparation:

This guide includes the information and materials needed to conduct the seminar: step-by-step instructions for the activities, approximate time for each activity, and notes and other ideas for conducting the activities. The readings and handouts, ready for photocopying, are at the end of the guide.

Participants should receive the following readings at least 10 days before the seminar. Ask participants to read the articles, take notes, and write down their questions for sharing at the seminar.

- **Is it Time for the Adult Education System to Change Its Goal from High School Equivalency to College Readiness?** (*Focus on Policy*, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2003)
- **A Conversation with FOB…Why Go Beyond the GED?** by John H. Tyler (*Focus on Basics*, Volume 6, Issue D, February 2004)
- **Is the GED Valuable to Those Who Pass It?** by Alice Johnson Cain (*Focus on Policy*, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2003)

The facilitator should read the articles, study the seminar steps, and prepare the materials on the following list.

Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time.)

___ Objectives and Agenda (p. 7)

___ Discussion Questions (p. 9)

___ Reflection Questions (p. 10)

___ Benefits of Transition Programs (p. 11)

___ Next Steps (p. 12)

___ Useful/How to Improve (p. 13)

Handouts (Make copies for each participant.)

___ *A Model for Adult Education-to-Postsecondary Transition Programs*

___ *Action Plan*

Readings (Have two or three extra copies available for participants who forget to bring them.)

___ **Is it Time for the Adult Education System to Change Its Goals from High School Equivalency to College Readiness?**

___ **A Conversation with FOB…Why Go Beyond the GED?**

___ **Is the GED Valuable to Those Who Pass It?**

Materials

___ Newsprint easel and blank sheets of newsprint

___ Markers, pens, tape

___ Sticky dots

Steps:

1. Welcome and Introductions (10 minutes)

- **Welcome participants** to the seminar. **Introduce yourself** and state your role as facilitator. Explain how you came to facilitate this seminar and who is sponsoring it.
- **Ask participants to introduce themselves** (name, program, and role).
- **Make sure that participants know** where bathrooms are located, when the session will end, when the break will be, and any other housekeeping information.

Note to Facilitator

Since time is very tight, it's important to move participants along gently but firmly if they are exceeding their time limit for introductions.

2. Objectives and Agenda (5 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Objectives and Agenda</u>** and review the objectives and steps with the participants.

Objectives

By the end of the seminar, you will be able to:

- Explain why the adult education system should focus on: (1) enabling students to develop the academic skills necessary to complete the GED and to enter postsecondary education and training, and (2) supporting students in transition
- List strategies for supporting adult education-to-postsecondary transitions for adult education students

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions (Done!)
2. Objectives and Agenda (Doing)
3. Discussion of the Readings
4. Model Transition Programs
5. Adult Education-to-Postsecondary Transitions
6. Planning Next Steps
7. Evaluation of the Seminar

3. Discussion of the Readings (50 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that in this activity they will be using the articles** that they were asked to read in advance of this session.

  [Note to facilitator: According to a comprehensive research review by Portland State University's Steve Reder, the adult education system should change its goal to successful transition to postsecondary education. **Is it Time for the Adult Education System to Change Its Goals from High School Equivalency to College Readiness?** summarizes the main points of that research and lists policy implications from that review.

  In **A Conversation with FOB…Why Go Beyond the GED?** Tyler asserts that, based on his research, GED credentials can raise economic earning power but not enough for an individual to move out of poverty. He observes that higher-skilled dropouts, with or without GED certificates, receive better pay than lower-skilled dropouts with GED credentials. Tyler questions how well GED credentials prepare students for college entry and work requirements and argues that programs should concentrate efforts on students with fewer skills because these learners will benefit most from gaining GED credentials. He also proposes that GED programs focus on transitioning students into post-secondary education because that is where students benefit economically from education.

  Is the GED Valuable to Those Who Pass It? provides an overview of three specific research findings from Tyler's work and reports that the GED provides different economic benefits to high school dropouts depending on their academic proficiency when leaving school. Those with low skills who obtain GED credentials can expect substantial economic benefits while those with higher skills may not. The economic benefits associated with the GED are not experienced immediately. Based on Tyler's work, Cain outlines policy implications.]

- **Post the newsprint <u>Discussion Questions.</u>** Ask participants to share their comments and questions from the readings, and then lead a general discussion of the articles using the following discussion questions as a guide.

Note to Facilitator

If participants would like to read Reder's research, refer them to the following article: Reder, S. (2000). "Adult Literacy and Postsecondary Education Students: Overlapping Populations and Learning Trajectories" in *The Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Vol. 1.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Discussion Questions

- What were the key points of these articles?
- What evidence did they give to back up the findings?
- What were the strengths and weaknesses of this evidence?
- Which of the findings or practices did you find surprising or intriguing? Why?
- How might the findings or practices in these articles be applicable to your context?
- Students question you as to why they should continue in school after receiving their GED credentials. How would you answer? How might you get students to understand how important continuing on is?

- **Explain to participants** that NCSALL developed some classroom materials that would help teachers explain the importance of continuing in school after receiving their GED credentials. *Beyond the GED* can be downloaded free at: www.ncsall.net/?id=35#ged.

  [Note to facilitator: ***Beyond the GED: Making Conscious Choices About the GED and Your Future: Lesson Plans and Materials for the GED Classroom*** is designed for General Educational Development (GED) teachers. These classroom materials provide learners with practice in graph and chart reading, calculation, analyzing information, and writing while examining the labor market, the role of higher education, and the economic impact of the GED credential. The materials are based on NCSALL's GED Impact research and assist students in making decisions about their work lives while preparing for the GED. Teachers gain useful information for advising students on career and educational decisions.

Break (15 minutes)

4. Model Transition Programs (50 minutes)

- **Explain to participants** that in this activity they will discuss some ways for implementing an adult education-to-postsecondary transition program.

- **Distribute the handout *A Model for Adult Education-to-Postsecondary Transition Programs* and ask participants to take 10 minutes to silently read** the article.

  [Note to facilitator: In this article the author describes the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project, sponsored by the New England Literacy Resource Center, as an example of a program designed to help students transition from GED to postsecondary courses, a need identified through Reder's research. This transition project serves 700 students in six states through free, pre-college reading, writing, and math courses and education and career counseling. Students in these programs, which collaborate with postsecondary educational institutions, are also supported by peer mentors and participation in college survival and study skills courses.]

- **Post the newsprint <u>Reflection Questions.</u>** Ask the participants to **form small groups.** Give the small groups 15 minutes **to discuss the following posted questions.**

Reflection Questions

- What do you see as key components of an adult education-to-postsecondary transition program?
- What skills, knowledge, and/or attitudes would students need to have for entering postsecondary education or training programs?
- What strategies have you or your program used to coordinate communication with postsecondary education and training programs?

- **Reconvene the whole group.** Ask the small groups to take turns sharing the key components of a transition program until all the ideas have been shared. The facilitator should write the ideas on newsprint and post the newsprint for the next activity.

5. Adult Education-to-Postsecondary Transitions (20 minutes)

- **Explain to participants** that in this activity they will continue to **discuss adult education-to-postsecondary transitions.**

- **Post the newsprint <u>Benefits of Transition Programs.</u>** Ask participants to brainstorm the benefits of adult education-to-postsecondary transition programs. Encourage participants to not only consider benefits to students, but also to programs and communities.

Benefits of Transition Programs

- Then lead a brief discussion on the potential negative consequences of this focus on post-secondary transitions and the challenges that adult basic education students face in pursuing further education and training.

6. Planning Next Steps (20 minutes)

- **Distribute the handout *Action Plan.* Ask participants to take 10 minutes to review the ideas** for developing an adult education-to postsecondary transition program generated during the session. Then ask the participants to choose one to try in their programs or classrooms and briefly write down a plan for how they will implement the idea and what evidence or data they will collect to determine if the idea works.

- Explain that now that the individual participants have plans to try out in their programs and/or classrooms, the group should make a plan about the group's next steps**.**

Next Steps

- How might you share with each other how your plans worked, or how might you ask each other questions?

- **Write up potential next steps,** such as scheduling a follow-up meeting or organizing an e-mail list, on the newsprint as the participants mention them. After five minutes of brainstorming, ask participants to silently look at the options and individually decide on two ways for the group to continue the discussions.

- **Hand a sticky dot to each participant** and ask the group to put their dots next to the idea that they would most like the group to do. If they don't want to do any of the activities, they should not put their dots on the newsprint.

- **Lead the group in organizing its choice. For example:**

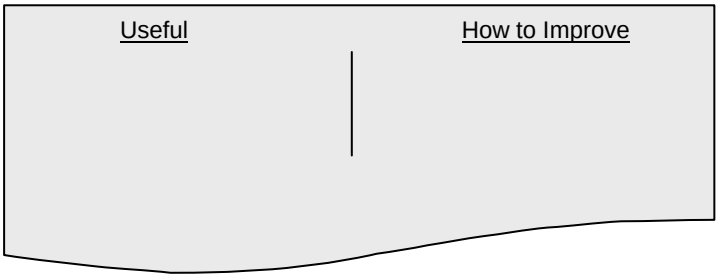
  - If they choose to schedule a follow-up meeting, set the date, time, and place for the meeting, and brainstorm an agenda for the meeting. Determine who will definitely be coming and who will take the responsibility to cancel the meeting in case of bad weather.

  - If they choose to organize an e-mail list, pass around a sheet for everyone to list their e-mail addresses. Decide who is going to start the first posting, and discuss what types of discussion or postings people would like to see (e.g., asking questions about adopting the policy, describing what happened after they implemented it, sharing other resources, etc.).

7. Evaluation of the Seminar (10 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in the time left, you would like to get feedback from them about this seminar.** You will use this feedback in shaping future seminars.

- ☐ **Post the newsprint <u>Useful/How to Improve.</u>**



Ask participants first to tell you what was useful or helpful to them about the design and content of this seminar. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "Useful."

- **Then ask participants for suggestions on how to improve this design and content**. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "How to Improve." If anyone makes a negative comment that's not in the form of a suggestion, ask the person to rephrase it as a suggestion for improvement, and then write the suggestion on the newsprint.

- **Do not make any response to participants' comments during this evaluation.** It is very important for you not to defend or justify anything you have done in the seminar or anything about the design or content, as this will discourage further suggestions. If anyone makes a suggestion you don't agree with, just nod your head. If you feel some response is needed, rephrase their concern: "So you feel that what we should do instead of the small-group discussion is . . . ? Is that right?"

- **Refer participants to the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy Web site (www.ncsall.net) for further information**. Point out that most NCSALL publications may be downloaded for free from the Web site. Print versions can by ordered by contacting NCSALL at World Education: ncsall@worlded.org.

- **Thank everyone** for coming and participating in the seminar.

Reading

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Is it Time for the Adult Education System to Change Its Goals from High School Equivalency to College Readiness?

By Alice Johnson Cain
Focus on Policy, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2003, pp. 5–7

According to a comprehensive research review by Portland State University's Steve Reder, the adult education system should change its goal to successful transition to postsecondary education. Reder concludes that ***a high school diploma or GED is no longer sufficient for success in the workforce.*** The following is a summary of the main points and policy implications from that review.

While a high school diploma or equivalent did at one time provide reasonable access to well-paying jobs and other opportunities, changes in technology, labor markets, and global competition have increased demand for the skills and knowledge traditionally learned in postsecondary education and training. Reder's paper finds that the earnings gap between the education "haves" and "have-nots" is widening, reflecting the increasing economic returns of higher education.

Reder found significant overlap between students in adult literacy programs and those in remedial education classes at postsecondary institutions. Using data from the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS, see *About the Research*, below), which places adults into one of five levels of literacy skill, Reder conducted an analysis of postsecondary student literacy proficiencies. He found that 15 to 17 percent of postsecondary students have proficiencies below NALS Level 3. The average NALS score for GED graduates is at the transition point between NALS Levels 2 and 3. In other words, 2.9 million postsecondary students have literacy skills below that of the average GED graduate.[1] Of this group, 30 percent are enrolled in two-year degree programs, 53 percent in four-year degree programs, and 17 percent in advanced degree programs.

The literacy skill level, as measured by NALS, of high school graduates and GED graduates is comparable, but their postsecondary completion rates are not. Sixty-three percent of all beginning postsecondary students either attain a degree or are still enrolled and pursuing one five years after entry. Of those, the overall rate is much higher for students entering with high school diplomas (65 percent) than with a GED (40 percent).

About the Research

Adult Literacy and Postsecondary Education Students: Overlapping Populations and Learning Trajectories, by Stephen Reder, NCSALL, 1999

In this article, Reder used data from the National Adult Literacy Survey of 19921, the Beginning Postsecondary Student Survey (BPS), and other national studies to review the proficiencies, needs, and completion rates of GED recipients who enter postsecondary education. NALS randomly selected and tested 26,000 Americans who were 16 years of age and older. Each participant was tested for reading and math skills using materials that simulated the literacy demands of everyday life and interviewed about demographic, employment, education and other characteristics. Available at http://www.ncsall.net/?id=513.

1 Kirsch, I.S., Jungeblut, A., Jenkins, L., & Kolstad, A. (1993). Adult Literacy in America: A first look at the results of the National Adult Literacy Survey. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

The grades of GED recipients who do enter postsecondary education are roughly comparable to those of students entering with high school diplomas. While GED recipients' grades are initially lower during the first year of postsecondary education, over time they rise to levels statistically comparable to high school graduates. Reasons that GED holders have dramatically lower rates of persistence and completion in postsecondary programs may be a result of their being older, less likely to be full-time students, and more likely to be full-time workers and single parents.

Reder makes four policy recommendations for ways that the adult education and the postsecondary education systems could increase the number of GED holders who both enter and are successful in further education and training:

- **Advance the goal of adult education from high school equivalency to college readiness.** According to Reder, the mean annual earnings of U.S. adults age 18 and older rise dramatically with education. Individuals without a high school diploma or GED earn $16,124, as compared to $22,895 for those with a high school diploma or GED, $29,877 for those with a two-year degree, $40,478 for those with a four-year degree, and $64,229 for those with an advanced degree.[2] If adult education programs adopt the goal of helping more GED graduates enroll and succeed in college, it could have a tremendous impact on students' earnings over their lifetime.

- **Policy makers should add support for GED- to- postsecondary transition to WIA legislation.** Too many students who obtain a GED are not sufficiently prepared to succeed in college. These students need "bridge" programs that assist in the transition from GED programs to postsecondary education. However, Reder concludes in his review that "Despite the increasing overlap between the populations of adult education and remedial postsecondary students, surprisingly little attention has been given to developing programmatic and policy bridges between the two systems. Five-year state plans developed thus far for implementing WIA have either totally overlooked coordination between adult education and remedial postsecondary education or paid scant lip service to it. (p. 143)"

  Since WIA regulations recognize transition into postsecondary education as a positive outcome of adult education programs, new legislation could support coordination between adult education and postsecondary education programs. The goal of this collaboration would be the creation of a seamless path from a GED into postsecondary education and training. Several practical issues need consideration before moving ahead to build such transition programs. These include the roles and responsibilities of each system, sources of funding, approaches to accountability, and appropriate curriculum and instruction.

Teaching Materials: Helping Students Consider the Implications of Education... Beyond the GED

Receiving a GED credential is a valued step in an adult's life for many intangible reasons. At the same time, GED students deserve an opportunity to understand just what the GED may or may not do for them in tangible, economic terms. NCSALL was eager to see research findings on the economic impact of the GED made accessible to adult students and their teachers. *Beyond the GED: Making Conscious Choices about the GED and Your Future* is a set of materials designed to be used in GED classrooms. The materials provide GED students with practice in graph and chart reading, math, analysis of data, and writing, while they examine the labor market, the role of higher education, and the economic impact of the GED. After using these materials, GED students are better prepared to make decisions about their work lives as well as being better prepared to pass the GED. Adult education teachers can use these materials as the basis for professional development for themselves, so that they are better equipped to advise their students on career and educational decisions. *Beyond the GED: Making Conscious Choices about the GED and Your Future* is available at http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/beyond_ged.pdf.

- **Adult education and postsecondary education teachers and administrators should become more familiar with each other's programs.** In most cases, the adult education and remedial postsecondary education[3] systems operate independently of each other, even on campuses where both programs are offered. Reder argues that building connections between the educators in these two systems is crucial because they must work in collaboration to help the same pool of students. Practitioners currently working in the two systems generally belong to different professional organizations, have different professional identities, attend separate conferences, and read different journals. Adult education and postsecondary organizations should sponsor joint professional development activities and publications. Such joint activities could forge closer links between these two largely separate worlds of practice that find themselves serving similar populations.

- **Adult educators and postsecondary educators should work together to build the literacy skills of their students.** Adult educators try to base instruction on the daily lives and needs of adult students. They know how to design lessons that integrate basic skills with the work and family responsibilities adults face each day. On the other hand, remedial postsecondary educators generally offer lessons that integrate basic reading and writing skills with the content of academic courses, such as science or history. GED students who may go on to college need to practice the literacy skills they need in daily life, but they also need to improve the reading and writing skills they need to pass college courses. Educators from both adult education and postsecondary education should work together to design transition programs that build skills useful for both academic study and the demands of work, family, and citizenship.

References

1 Fifteen percent of this group have limited English proficiency.

2 Mean earnings for adults age eighteen and over with education, taken from U.S. Census Bureau, *Current Population Survey, Educational Attainment in the United States*, March 1998 (Update), Table 9, p. 51.

3 Also called "developmental education".

Reading

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

A Conversation with FOB…Why Go Beyond the GED?

Focus on Basics, Volume 6, Issue D, February 2004, pp. 17–18

Why dedicate an entire issue of Focus on Basics *to transitioning to postsecondary education? Isn't the GED good enough? The psychic benefits are well documented: GED holders feel a sense of satisfaction and completion. What about the economic benefits? Does the GED provide the economic security a high school diploma once did? NCSALL researcher John Tyler studies the labor market benefits that accrue to those high school drop outs who pass the tests of General Educational Development. His research reveals that certain groups of GED holders benefit economically in comparison to similar drop outs who do not complete the GED. Even with these economic benefits, however, GED holders who fail to continue on to postsecondary education are left with very low earnings.* Focus on Basics *spoke with Dr. Tyler to learn more about what his research can teach us about the need for successful transitions to higher education.*

FOB: Your research shows that while the GED helps many GED holders to raise their economic earning power, it doesn't raise it enough to bring people out of poverty. What level of education do people need for that?

JOHN: I think you'd find that the average high school graduate without college earns above the poverty level, but you can't make an across-the-board statement since the poverty level is a function of family size. In 2002, for example, the poverty threshold for a two-parent, four-child family was $24,000.

Through the late 1980s and 1990s, the world got much worse for anyone with less than some years of college. Even those with a high school diploma became much worse off over this period relative to those with at least some college. Simply put, the economic returns to higher education (relative to having just a high school diploma) grew dramatically, although the growth of the economic gap between those with and without some college education has slowed in recent years.

FOB: Your research shows that economic benefits associated with the GED seem to accrue only to low-skilled high school drop outs. What about higher-skilled dropouts? How do they perform economically without the GED, and

with the GED?

JOHN: Higher-skilled drop outs, with or without a GED, tend to do better on average than low-skilled drop outs with a GED. Skills really matter.

FOB: As you know, few GED holders go on to postsecondary education. Any indication of why that is?

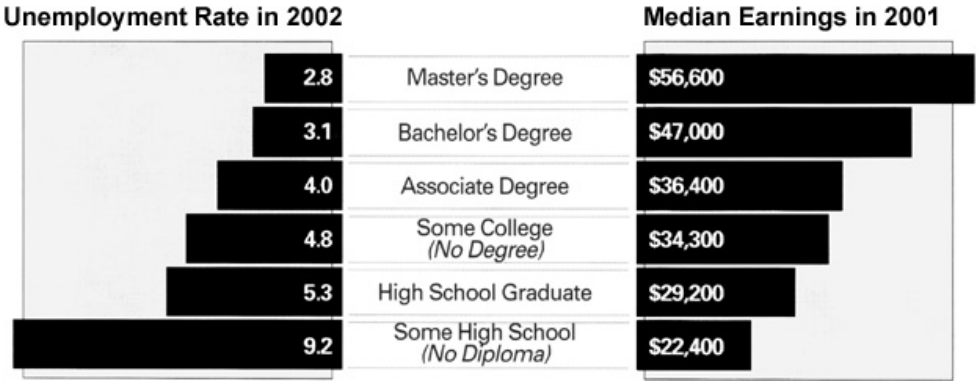
JOHN: There's no research on that. Another interesting point is that we don't know how well the GED enables them [GED holders] to get into degree-granting programs. Oftentimes you need the GED to get into degree-granting postsecondary education programs. However, we don't really know how effective studying for the GED is in preparing one to do college-level work.

FOB: What advice would you give to GED preparation program staff - program designers and teachers - based on the results of your research?

JOHN: The advice is going to sound self-evident, but based on my research, there are two messages. First, concentrate resources on those with the least skills, because they'll get the most out of obtaining the credential. Second, do whatever you can to help make the GED a bridge to postsecondary education [rather than an endpoint], because postsecondary education is where the real economic payoffs are.

Also, research shows, not surprisingly, that the two tests that tend to be the biggest hurdles are the writing test and the math test: the writing for males, the math for females. Those trends have been known for some time among the general student population, and work we have done has shown them to be true in the GED population as well. So put an emphasis on these areas.

Education and Training Pays



NOTE: Unemployment and earnings for workers 25 and older, by educational attainment
Sources: Unemployment rate, Bureau of Statistics; earnings, Bureau of Census

Resources

To help make the GED a bridge to postsecondary education, students must be convinced that continuing beyond the GED is worthwhile. For teaching materials that tell that story as they help students prepare for the GED, download Beyond the GED: Making Conscious Choices about the GED and Your Future from the NCSALL web site at http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/beyond_ged.pdf. These materials provide GED students with practice in graph and chart reading, math, analysis of data, and writing, while they examine the labor market, the role of higher education, and the economic impact of the GED.

For more information on the economic benefits (and limitations therein) of the GED, download *Focus on Policy* Volume 1, Issue 1. John Tyler's research reports, as well as summaries of the research, are available at http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/beyond_ged.pdf, under NCSALL Reports and NCSALL Research Briefs. And, for articles covering similar information in other issues of *Focus on Basics*, click http://www.ncsall.net/?id=61.

Reading

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Is the GED Valuable to Those Who Pass It?

By Alice Johnson Cain
Focus on Policy, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2003, pp. 1, 3–4

Research consistently shows that high school graduates do better in the labor market than do holders of the General Educational Development (GED) credential.[1] But do high school dropouts who get the GED fare better economically than dropouts who don't get their GED? According to NCSALL research conducted by Brown University's John Tyler (see *About the Research*, p. 21), acquisition of a GED can have a substantial impact on earnings for some school dropouts. Tyler presents three specific research findings:

Finding #1: ***Economic benefits associated with the GED seem to accrue only to low-skilled high school dropouts, defined by Tyler as those who left school with low skills or who passed the GED but with very low scores.***

The GED provides different economic payoffs to high school dropouts depending on their level of academic skills at the time they left school. For low-skilled dropouts, Tyler's research shows substantial economic gains associated with the GED. These GED holders earn anywhere from 5 to 25 percent more than similar dropouts without a GED. However, the research found no economic benefits for GED holders who left school with higher-level academic skills.

Tyler's report suggests that the GED leads to better labor market outcomes through three mechanisms:

- Studying to pass the GED results in gains in "human capital" that might be rewarded in the job market.
- Using the GED to gain access to post-secondary education and training leads to better paying jobs.
- Signaling to employers that a GED holder may have higher academic skills, positive attitudes, motivation, and commitment to work than other school dropouts leads to employment.

Finding #2: ***Economic benefits associated with a GED appear over time rather than immediately upon receipt of the credential.***

Research by Tyler and others has found that the financial benefits associated with the GED appear over time. Three recent studies[2] concluded that there is no statistically significant difference in earnings between low-skilled GED holders and uncredentialed dropouts after one year. After five years, however, the earnings difference became statistically significant. One study[3] found that, for women, the predicted annual earnings gain associated with the GED in the first year after obtaining the credential was about $300, but seven years after obtaining a GED, the earnings gain was about $1,300. Tyler's own study[4] found little difference in income after one year but found that about five years after acquiring the GED, recipients earned $1,200 more per year. Tyler found that, in general, GED holders earn about 15 percent more than non-GED school dropouts five years after obtaining a GED.

Finding #3: ***Since few GED holders go on to postsecondary education, few benefit from the advantages associated with further education and training, but the gains resulting from postsecondary education and training are as great for GED holders as they are for high school graduates.***

The acquisition of a GED leads to a greater probability of obtaining postsecondary education or training, and wages increase for GED holders who pursue further education.[5] However, only 12 percent of male GED holders complete at least one year of college, only three percent obtain an Associate's Degree, and only 18 percent obtain any on-the-job training.[6]

Policy Implications

These findings on the GED have the potential for contributing to educational policy. For example, the following are implications that could be drawn from the research articles cited above:[7]

- **Policymakers should work to increase funding for efforts that discourage high school students from dropping out in order to get their GED.** The best choice for most high school students is to stay in school. The national high school dropout rate is currently 10.9 percent, and over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 students left school each year. In the 1999/2000 academic year, 488,000 students dropped out of high school. The dropout rate was 6.9 percent for whites, 13.1 percent for blacks, and 27.8 percent for Hispanics.[8]

  The response of the federal government to this problem is the School Dropout Prevention Program, authorized by Title I, Part H of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as reauthorized by the *No*

Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This program provides grants to state and local educational agencies to support school dropout prevention and reentry activities. According to the U.S. Department of Education, these activities must employ strategies that are evidence-based, widely replicable, and sustainable. Approximately $10 million was awarded in grants in FY 2002. Considering the scope of the problem and the size of the federal education budget (over $30 billion annually), a much more substantial investment in this area should be carefully considered.

About the Research

What Do We Know About the Economic Benefits of the GED: A Synthesis of the Evidence from Recent Research, by John Tyler, Brown University and National Bureau of Economic Research, August 2001

In this article, Tyler reviews all of the recent research on the relationship between earnings and the GED, including three of his own studies. One of his studies used a "natural experiment" design, based on the differing GED pass criteria between different states. Tyler's studies used either unemployment insurance information, Social Security earnings, or self-reported income as the dependent variable. Across the studies, multiple statistical analyses were utilized to determine the factors that influence benefits of the GED. The full text of Tyler's article is available at http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Education/resources/what_do_we_know.pdf.

- **Adult education programs should focus more resources on low-skilled GED students.** Policymakers could make additional funding available for GED programs to focus on low-skilled students, who need more resources to pass the GED tests than do high-skilled students. Since many welfare recipients have low academic skills,[10] new welfare legislation might include incentives for participation in intensive GED preparation programs, so that welfare recipients do not cycle in and out of low-skilled, low-paying jobs.

- **Policy makers should support a change in Workforce Investment Act (WIA)[11] legislation that identifies GED programs for low-skilled adults as a priority.** WIA legislation recognizes receipt of either a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent as one of three core indicators of performance[12] that state education agencies must use in their accountability systems. Programs, therefore, have an incentive to serve students who are most likely to pass the GED test, those with high skills. Programs could be allowed to count low-skilled GED graduates as worth more in terms of accountability.

- **Policy makers could add a component to WIA that supports GED to postsecondary transition.** Over 65 percent of the GED examinees in 1999 indicated that they were obtaining the credential in order to pursue further education.[13] Yet only 30 to 35 percent of GED holders obtain any postsecondary education, and only 5 to 10 percent obtain at least a year of postsecondary education. Many more GED holders accumulate hours in proprietary school training where, according to Tyler,[14] the evidence of financial benefits is not encouraging. GED holders may face barriers to success in education beyond the GED that could be addressed by services that might be situated in adult education programs or postsecondary institutions.

- **Policy makers should fund research that identifies ways to prevent dropout, improve the skill-building component of GED programs, and increase the number of GED holders who successfully pursue postsecondary education and training.** Such research should evaluate model education programs and identify policies or interventions that remove barriers that make it harder for GED holders to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education.

The GED Reduces Recidivism, Saves Money, and Reduces Crime

By Steve Steurer, Correctional Education Association

Multiple studies in the last 10 years have shown that educating prisoners reduces the likelihood of return to prison. Data from these studies consistently show that educated former inmates commit fewer crimes after release.

- A Federal Bureau of Prisons study[1] concluded that "recidivism rates were inversely related to educational program participation while in prison." The more education completed, the lower the recidivism, even after controlling for age and prior criminal history.
- A recent study[2] of over 3,000 ex-offenders for three years after release found the overall drop in recidivism for educational participants was about 29 percent. According to the Correctional Education Association, a 29 percent drop in re-incarceration saves $2.00 in correction costs for every $1.00 spent on prison education. Additional savings are made in reduced police and court costs.

1 Harer, M. (1995). Recidivism among federal prisoners released in 1987. Journal of Correctional Education. 46(3), 98-128, cited from LoBuglio, Stefan (2001). Time to Reframe Politics and Practices in Correctional Education, from Comings, J., Garner, B., and Smith, C (eds.), Annual Review of Adult Learning and Literacy, Vol. 2, pp. 111-150. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

2 Steurer, S., Smith, L., and Tracy, A. (2001). Three State Recidivism Study. Lanham, MD: Correctional Education Association, 63 pps.

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1 Cameron, S.V. & Heckman, J.J. (1993) The Nonequivalence of High School Equivalents, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 11(1), 1-47.

2 Boesel, D., Alsalam, N., and Smith, T., (1998). *Educational and Labor Market Performance of GED Recipients.* Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Department of Education. National Library of Education Research Synthesis.

Murnane, R.J., Willett, J.B., and Boudett, K.P., (1999). Do male dropouts benefit from obtaining a GED, postsecondary education, and training? *Evaluation Review* 22, no. 5: 475-502.

Tyler, J.H. (2001). So you want a GED? Estimating the impact of the GED on the earnings of dropouts. Cambridge, MA: NCSALL.

3 Boudett, K.P. (2000). "Second chance" strategies for women who drop out of school. *Monthly Labor Review*, December: 19-31.

4 Tyler, 2001, ibid.

5 Murnane, et al., 1999, ibid.

6 Murnane, et al., 1999, ibid.

7 The following policy implications are the thoughts of the author of this article and do not necessarily represent the views of the researcher (John Tyler).

8 In October 2000, there were 3.8 million 16- through 24-year-olds who were not enrolled in a high school program and had not completed high school (status dropouts), accounting for about 10.9 percent of the 34.6 million people in this age group, according to the National Center for Education Statistics report *"Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000"*.

9 NCES, 2000, ibid.

10 Levenson, A.R., Reardon, E., and Schmidt, S.R. (1999). Welfare, jobs and basic skills: The employment prospects of welfare recipients in the most populous U.S. counties. *The Impact of Welfare Reform on Adult Literacy Education*. Boston, MA. Available at http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/welfare.pdf.

11 The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 is the legislation under which federal adult education and family literacy services are currently funded. Reauthorization of WIA is scheduled for 2003.

12 The other two "core indicators of performance" under WIA are: (1) Demonstrated improvements in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, and speaking the English language, numeracy, problem solving, English language acquisition, and other literacy skills, and (2) Placement in, retention in, or completion of, postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment or career advancement.

13 *Who Took the GED?* GED 1999 Statistical Report. (2000) Washington, D.C.: American Council of Education, Center for Adult Learning Publications.

14 Tyler, 2001, ibid.

Handout

A Model for Adult Education-to-Postsecondary Transition Programs

By Alice Johnson Cain
Focus on Policy, Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2003, p. 8

"It's like stretching before running a marathon. You would never go for a strenuous run without stretching, so why go to college without attending the ABE-to-College transition program?"
- Ron, X-Cel program
Roxbury, MA

Reder's research strongly advocates helping adult education students and GED graduates prepare to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. Here is a description of a program designed to provide just such a transition for non-traditional adult learners who want to further their education.

Since January 2000, the New England Literacy Resource Center (NELRC), with funding from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, has assisted adult education program graduates to prepare for, enter, and succeed in postsecondary education. The NELRC project consists of 25 transition programs in the six New England states, currently serving more than 700 students. These programs are housed in community-based organizations, public schools, community colleges, and prisons. The project is aimed at GED graduates and high school graduates who have been out of school for several years. The program is free and consists of instruction in pre-college reading, writing, and math skills as well as computer and Internet skills. Students also receive educational and career counseling, and learn college survival and study skills. Many students, for example, do not know what is meant by the terms *syllabus*, *prerequisite* or *bursar*. Each program collaborates with one or more local postsecondary institutions to provide mentoring and other assistance that helps non-traditional adult learners succeed.

The transition program begins with an intake and orientation component. The intake process includes an interview that allows staff to assess students' academic skills (using the collaborating college's placement instrument) and other factors that could affect a student's ability to succeed in postsecondary education, such as employment status, child care needs, motivation, goals, career interests, academic experiences, learning styles, and previous academic assessments. This helps program staff determine whether students are ready for the transition course or they need more remediation than the program can provide.

Orientation activities include an introduction to the collaborating postsecondary institution and an overview of the content of the program and criteria for completing it, student responsibilities, the attendance policy, and counseling opportunities. During the orientation, college students who are former adult education students give advice to new students.

Transition program classes are held at times and in places that support regular attendance. For example, one transition program takes place at a Head Start site that is easily accessible by public transportation. This program has recruited several parents of Head Start students.

Postsecondary institutions are asked to support the transition program by:

- Facilitating the admissions process for transition students;
- Facilitating and supporting the financial aid process for transition students;
- Conducting tours of the college for transition students;
- Making all student support services, including academic advising, available to transition students;
- Having representatives of the college meet with the instructor and counselor of the transition program on an ongoing basis to discuss the needs of transition students.

One way in which the program aids student persistence is by matching each student with a peer mentor once they enter college. Mentors serve as role models who attend classes on a regular basis, earn good grades, and work well with both instructors and other students. The mentors also involve new students in college life and talk to them about student activities.

In these ways, the New England ABE-to-College Transition Project aims to both improve access to postsecondary education for more students and ensure their persistence through achieving their goals. For more information about the ABE-to-College Transition program, see their website at www.collegetransition.org. This overview of the NELRC project was taken from their report *Exemplary Practices for College Transition Programs Facilitated by Adult Basic Education Providers* (available at www.nelrc.org/abe.htm).

Handout

Action Plan

Idea for Developing a Transition Program:

Name:

Date:

Action Steps	By Whom	By When	Resources Needed
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Information About NCSALL

NCSALL's Mission

NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort among the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement).

NCSALL's Research Projects

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) student motivation, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

Dissemination Initiative

NCSALL's dissemination initiative focuses on ensuring that practitioners, administrators, policymakers, and scholars of adult education can access, understand, judge, and use research findings. NCSALL publishes *Focus on Basics*, a quarterly magazine for practitioners; *Focus on Policy*, a twice-yearly magazine for policymakers; *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, an annual scholarly review of major issues, current research, and best practices; and *NCSALL Reports* and *Occasional Papers*, periodic publications of research reports and articles. In addition, NCSALL sponsors the Connecting Practice, Policy, and Research Initiative, designed to help practitioners and policymakers apply findings from research in their instructional settings and programs.

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