Appendix D

To be handed out at
Session Two of the Study Circle

Session Two Materials

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Key Concepts Related to Learner Persistence

The K-12 Experiences of High School Dropouts
Reder, Stephen, and Clare Strawn. *Focus on Basics*, Vol.4, Issue D, pp.13-15.

Reder and Strawn challenge the prevailing notion (held by Beder, 1991, Quigley, 1990, and others) that students in adult basic education classes have had negative experiences in K-12 schools. Initial findings from their Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) suggest that "It is not true, as many might believe, that most individuals who drop out of high school have had negative school experiences. A larger percentage (40%) report positive (either "somewhat positive" or "very positive") experiences than report negative ones."

Stop Outs, Not Drop Outs
Belzer, Alicia, *"Stopping out, not dropping out" Focus on Basics*, Vol. 2, Issue A, pp.16-17, 1998.

Belzer states:
"We were surprised to find that the students who left the program did not seem to consider themselves 'drop outs'. No one would go so far as to say that she had quit the program. Each of those who left planned to return in the future...Although they did not necessarily know when they would be able to return, they all believed it would be possible and desirable to do so. Of perhaps even greater importance to me was that no one expressed a sense of personal failure because of leaving the program. Rather, each simply felt that it was no longer possible for them to continue at that time. They attributed this to factors beyond their control—a job, health problems, financial problems, legal problems, or other personal and family problems that would have to solve themselves."

"If one agrees with the study, participants' [adult learners'] perceptions that departure from a program should not necessarily be viewed as a failure, but rather as a temporary hiatus, the question then arises: what implications does this have for programs?"

Turbulence and Focus
Sticht, Thomas**,** B. McDonald, P. Erickson, *Passports to Paradise*, *The Struggle to Teach and to Learn on the Margins of Adult Education*, Chapter 4: "Getting to Class and Completing a Semester Is Tough," 1998. El Cajon, CA: The Applied Behavioral & Cognitive Sciences, Inc. (pp.30-40).

Sticht et al. (1998) found that high turbulence (the total number of students coming into and dropping out of a class during the cycle) may make it harder for students to stay in the program. His team also looked at "focus," which is the "extent to which a given class focuses on the same main reason the students have for being in the class" (e.g., a student wants to get a better job, the class focuses on job-related concepts, etc.). They found that persistence rates (completing the class cycle) may increase "in classes where the focus of students and classrooms are more closely aligned."

Handout H

Table 1: Negative Forces
That Hinder Learner Persistence, Identified by Learners

N=150 (There were 150 learners total)

Force	Description of Force	Percentage of Learners Who Named Force as a Top 3 Hindrance to Persistence
Life Demands	Conditions at home Special child care needs Work demands Transportation Own/family's health Lack of time/being fatigued Welfare and other official rules Age Weather Moving Lack of income	48.7% (N=73)
Relationships	Unsupportive family members, friends, or colleagues Unsupportive community or welfare workers Religious beliefs Fears about letting other people down by failing in a program	16.7% (N=25)
Negative Self	Thinking negative thoughts Own laziness Lack of own confidence in their ability to succeed	11.3% (N=17)
Learning Process		8% (N=12)
Instructional Factors		6.7% (N=10)
Teacher		2% (N=3)
Program Factors		1.3% (N=2)

Handout I

Table 2: Positive Forces
That Support Learner Persistence, Identified by Learners

N=150 (There were 150 learners total)

Force	Description of Force	Percentage of Learners Who Named Force as a Top 3 Support for Persistence
Relationships	Friends, families or colleagues God or their church Community groups and community workers Support groups Mentors or bosses Their own children	63.3% (N=95)
Goals	Helping one's children Getting a better job Bettering one's self Moving ahead in life Attending college/some other academic goal Proving someone wrong Obtaining citizenship	57.3% (N=86)
Teacher/Students	Individual teacher (81%) Fellow students (9%) Combination of the two (10%)	50.7% (N=76)
Positive Self	Me My determination	44% (N=66)
Process Orientation	Enjoyment of learning Skill achievement Routine/structure of learning in a program	8.7% (N=12)
Life Supports	Child Care Conditions at home Mandatory participation in a program Work schedules Pleasure in being in the United States Students' own investment in class	7.3% (N=11)
Program Supports	Facilities and structure of program Overall program quality Program counselors	8% (N=12)
Instruction	Curriculum and methods Particular subjects Access to computers	63.3% (N=95)

Readings for Session Three

This is the list of readings for Session Three of the Study Circle. Please bring all the readings to Session Three.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

<u>Session Three of the Study Circle</u>

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

</div>

Please read the following readings before Session Three of our Study Circle. As you read, jot down some of your impressions and questions.

Reading #6: "Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports"

Reading #7: "Sponsors and Sponsorship"

Helping Adults Persist:
Four Supports

NCSALL's Adult Persistence Study suggests that managing positive and negative forces, self-efficacy, setting goals, and making measurable progress help learners stay in programs

by John Comings, Andrea Parrella, & Lisa Soricone

Adults choose to participate in educational programs while children participate because of legal mandates and strong social and cultural forces that identify schooling as the proper "work" of childhood. In fact, most school-aged students probably never seriously consider dropping out. An adult, on the other hand, must make an active decision to participate in each class session and often must overcome significant barriers to attend classes. Most adults come to adult basic education (ABE), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), or adult secondary education (ASE) programs with goals that require hundreds if not thousands of hours of learning to achieve. Every adult education program should help adult students persist in their learning until they reach their educational goals.

The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) is conducting a study on learner persistence. The first phase of NCSALL's study used research as a tool to develop advice for practitioners on how to help adults persist in their studies. In addition, the study developed advice for policymakers on how to structure funding and accountability systems in ways that will support persistence. The next phase of the study will test and refine this advice in programs. In the first phase of this research, the study team read previous studies and related literature, and talked with practitioners about how they have tried to help adult students persist longer in their studies. The team also interviewed 150 pre-general educational development (GED) students in New England to gain their insights into the supports and barriers to persistence. Most of the students were native speakers of English, but a few were immigrants whose English was sufficient or them to be in a pre-GED class.

Defining Persistence

The staff of the Persistence Study spent time working on their definition of persistence so as to be clear about what they were trying to measure. They found persistence to be a complicated concept. Most of the literature on adult education defines persistence as the length of time an adult attends a class or tutoring sessions (Beder, 1991; Comings, 1995; Quigley, 1997; Tracy-Mumford, 1994; Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992; Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1994), but learning may extend beyond attendance in a specific program. The definition of persistence used in this study is: *adults staying in programs for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must drop out of their programs, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow*. The study team interviewed learners near the beginning of their participation in a program and again four months later. A persistent learner was one who, at the second interview, was still in class, was no longer in class but was involved in organized self-study, or who had transferred to another class.

Advice

We classify adult students in many ways: by gender, ethnicity, age, employment status, number and age of children, previous school experience, and educational background of other adults in their lives. The first phase of the Persistence Study revealed that these categories do not tell us much about how to help adults persist in their education. The only significant findings were that immigrants, those over the age of 30, and parents of teenage or grown children were more likely to persist than others in the study. The greater likelihood of persistence by immigrant students in ESOL classes is well documented (Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1994). The findings of this study suggest that this effect continues as immigrants learn English and move on to ABE and GED programs. Grown children might encourage their parents to join and persist in a program. On the other hand, adults who are over 30 are more likely to have teenage or grown children than those under 30. These findings might point to older students persisting longer because they benefit from the maturity that comes with age and they no longer have the responsibilities of caring for small children.

Two aspects of educational experience were also associated with persistence. Adults who had been involved in previous efforts at basic skills education, self-study, or vocational skill training were more likely to persist than those who had not. The strongest relationship was with those who had undertaken self-study. Adults who mentioned a specific goal, such as "help my children" or "get a better job" when asked why they had entered a program, were more likely to persist than those who either mentioned no goal or said they were doing it for themselves. These findings suggest that experience with education may increase an adult's self-confidence about learning. These relationships also suggest that motivation, especially as demonstrated by undertaking self-study or by being clear about the goal for attendance, supports persistence.

The pre-GED students identified a range of supports and barriers to their persistence; clear trends were evident when the study team analyzed their responses. The team recorded these trends, reviewed the research literature and the data from interviews with practitioners, and developed the following advice, which describes four supports to persistence.

The first support is awareness and management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence.

In searching for a framework for analyzing data, the study team sought a theoretical model that would both place the adult learner in a central position and be useful to program managers seeking practical advice on how to increase persistence. The study team chose to employ a force-field analysis as developed by the sociologist Kurt Lewin. Lewin's theory places an individual in a field of forces that support or inhibit action along a particular path (Gilbert, Fisk, & Lindzey, 1998; Lewin, 1999). Understanding the forces, identifying which are strongest, and deciding which are most amenable to manipulation provide an indication of how to help someone move in a desired direction, such as reaching an educational goal.

In the case of adult students, positive forces, such as the desire for a higher income, help support persistence in an adult education program. Negative forces, such as lack of free time to study, push adults to drop out. From the time adults enter programs to the time when they either achieve their goals or drop out, both positive and negative forces are acting upon them. Any intervention by an ABE program meant to increase persistence must help adults to strengthen the positive forces and lessen the negative forces.

The force-field analysis looks at barriers and supports as existing at many levels of importance, from those that have no real effect on persistence to those that have a very strong influence on persistence. The force-field analysis also suggests that strengthening or weakening a force that can be influenced might offset the effects of another force that cannot be influenced. Thus, an adult with a very strong need for education to gain better employment might put aside his or her embarrassment, while very strong embarrassment might keep a less strongly motivated student from coming to class.

Programs must help students to develop an understanding of the negative and positive forces that affect their persistence. Building on that understanding, each student must make plans to manage these forces so that persistence is more likely. The plans that come out of such an exercise should include strategies for persistence when the forces that affect a person's life cause them to drop out, and these plans must be revised as adults persist in their studies and these forces change.

Adult students in this study emphasized positive forces. The strongest positive force mentioned by adult students was the support of people, particularly their families, friends, teacher, and fellow students, followed by self-efficacy and personal goals. Most learners mentioned at least three positive forces, while some mentioned many more. At the same time, many learners mentioned no negative forces or just one. Of the negative forces mentioned, no single force was common.

The force-field theory itself offers a tool for understanding and planning to manage these forces. Students can be encouraged to discuss their persistence in terms of the force-field and to build their plan from that discussion. A classroom force-field activity can begin with students identifying all of the supports and barriers to their persistence. [See page 19 for directions on how to lead this activity in your classroom.] They can then categorize them into those that are most likely to help or hinder their persistence.

Once the crucial forces are identified, students can plan to build their supports and reduce their barriers. As happens in some programs, staff must be open to having the outcome of this activity be early dropout for students who, for any reason, are not ready to persist in their studies. If this is the outcome, adults should be helped to make a plan to prepare to return and be successful later. The management of these forces may be an individual responsibility, one that a group of students takes on together, or one that engages a whole community. For example, students might have transportation needs. A group activity might lead to ride sharing or a request to a public agency for transportation support.

The second support is self-efficacy.

The educational program must help adult students build self-efficacy about reaching their goals. The term *self-confidence* is used more often in adult education literature, but self-efficacy is a more useful term to describe this support. Self-confidence is a global feeling of being able to accomplish most tasks. Self-efficacy is focused on a specific task and represents the feeling of being able to accomplish that task, which in this context is successful learning in ABE, ESOL, or ASE programs. The study drew from the theory of a social scientist, Albert Bandura, for advice on building self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Adult education programs should provide the following experiences to their participants as a means to build self-efficacy.

Mastery experiences allow an adult to be successful in learning and to have authentic evidence of that success. This does not mean that instruction should be designed to produce only easy and constant success. Adults must also experience overcoming failure and eventually achieving success through a sustained effort. Instruction should help them develop this insight. Some programs take care to provide regular recognition of progress and celebrations of achievement. Others make sure that instruction provides opportunities for success early in program participation. These efforts provide learners with opportunities to experience success.

Vicarious experiences are those provided by social models. Adult learners should come in contact with adults who are just like them and have succeeded in an ABE, ESOL, or GED class. These role models, both through the knowledge they share directly and the indirect teaching of their behavior, help adult students to acquire the skills to manage the many demands of learning. Some programs employ successful present or former students as speakers during intake and orientation activities, while others recruit past learners as counselors, teachers, and directors. These past students provide models of success.

Social persuasion is support from teachers, staff, counselors, fellow students, family, and friends that reinforces self-efficacy. These verbal assurances are needed, in part, to overcome the negative self-efficacy about learning built up during previous schooling. Most practitioners provide verbal assurances, but some programs encourage family members to provide this positive reinforcement as well. Some teachers take great care to develop a culture of support among students in their classes. These efforts ensure positive support for students.

Addressing physiological and emotional states is the acknowledgement that negative feelings can result from poor self-efficacy and can also lead to low self-efficacy. Examples of these states are tension and stress, among other negative emotional states. Adult learners must be helped to perceive and interpret these conditions so that they do not affect their self-efficacy. Some practitioners feel uncomfortable addressing the personal problems of their students, and all practitioners must acknowledge that they are not trained mental health professionals. Even so, many teachers use life histories and dialogue journals to help students identify the physical and mental states that can affect their learning. For example, adults with limited English skills may feel anxiety when they have to speak in class. A teacher might ask her class to write about these feelings and practice speaking even with anxiety. Just the acknowledgement that feelings can affect learning can help diminish their negative effect.

Many of the orientation and instructional activities identified by practitioners in this study provide the experiences that Bandura has outlined. Bandura's theory of self-efficacy can act as a powerful framework within which programs can improve on the activities they have already undertaken.

The third support to persistence is the establishment of a goal by the student.

This process begins before an adult enters a program. An adult who could be classified as a potential ABE, ESOL, or ASE student experiences an event in his or her life that causes him or her to enter an educational program. The event might be something dramatic: a person might enter the United States as a refugee and find that she does not have the language skills needed to qualify for a job. The event might be less dramatic: a parent may decide he needs more education when his first child begins school. The event might be subtle: a school dropout might have always felt the desire to study for the GED and when her children are older and need less

attention, she finally has some free time available for education. This event provides potential adult students with goals they hope to accomplish by entering an ABE, ESOL, or ASE program. The staff of the educational program must help the potential adult student define his or her goals and understand the many instructional objectives that must be met on the road to meeting that goal. Teachers must then use these student goals as the context for instruction and intermittently review them, since they may change.

The fourth support is progress toward reaching a goal.

Since goals are important supports to persistence, adult students must make progress toward reaching their goals. They must also be able to measure that progress. Programs must provide services of sufficient quality that students make progress, and programs must have assessment procedures that allow students to measure their own progress. Much of the recent interest in measuring progress has come from the need to build systems of program accountability. Helping students measure their own progress may require tools and methods that are not appropriate for accountability purposes. Accountability systems need measures that are easy to collect and quantify. These may not be useful to students and difficult to integrate into instruction. Portfolio and authentic assessment approaches may have weaknesses in an accountability system but might be very useful for adults who want to measure their own progress. These kinds of assessments can be an integral part of an instructional approach.

Further research into assessment might produce a hybrid system that serves both needs and could lead to certification of progress that occurs more frequently than at present in most programs. At this time, most adults who enter ABE, ESOL, or ASE programs will gain certification only if they pass the GED test or acquire an adult high school diploma. Program-level certification may be helpful to student morale, but state-level or even national certification of achievement might make smaller increments of learner achievement more meaningful and provide a range of goal steps.

In Conclusion

Aspects of these four supports already exist in some programs, but a combination of the four may provide a more supportive environment to persistence. These supports are more likely to be built if the policymakers who provide funding value them. This means that persistence must become a more important measure in program accountability. Funding agencies must provide the technical assistance and training needed for programs to put these supports in place. Policymakers could then hold programs accountable for the quality of their intake, orientation, instruction, and program approaches that support persistence. Using the expanded definition presented here, persistence itself should be an outcome measured as part of an accountability system.

Persistence and Accountability

From the point of view of an accountability system, student persistence ends when an adult drops out of a program. When an adult returns to a program after a lapse in attendance, the program may view that student as a dropout who has returned. From the point of view of the student, persistence may continue after drop out through self-study or distance learning. The adult may view him- or herself as a persistent learner who could not attend for a while. Using only

attendance in class or in tutoring sessions as a measure of persistence undervalues effective learning activities that should be encouraged. A wider definition of persistence would allow practitioners to focus on helping to become persistent learners adults who use episodes of program participation as critical parts of a comprehensive learning strategy that involves other forms of learning.

The definition developed by the study team in the Persistence Study values self-study, transfer, and reentry into a program as part of a pattern of persistence. For this expanded definition of persistence to become part of an accountability system, it must be measurable. This would require procedures for collecting evidence of "time-on-task" that could be credited to a program. Some of this "time-on- "task" might be spent in classes, some in tutoring sessions, and some in self-study through technology, media, or instructional materials. Other "time-on-task" measures might include increased time reading or reading of new, more challenging materials and engagement in community improvement efforts that require the use of English, literacy, and math skills. Methods of measuring and validating these efforts and linking them to a plan of learning developed within a program context would transform some dropouts into persistent learners who are not presently attending formal classes or tutoring sessions.

This expanded definition would require programs to relate to their students differently. Programs would need added resources to stay connected and serve adults who are not attending formal classes or tutoring sessions. With these added resources, programs could treat their students as long-term clients who use a wide range of services, some provided by the program and some by other agencies, to achieve significant improvement in their skills. Since a single adult student might participate in the services of several different programs, a way to document progress would have to be shared among them.

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Sponsors and Sponsorship
Initial Findings from the Second Phase of
the NCSALL Persistence Study

by John Comings & Sondra Cuban

When new students walk into your class, they may appear to be alone, but research now underway at NCSALL indicates that, in most cases, they are not. They arrive in a program with the help and support of a specific person or a few people in their social network. The researchers in the second phase of NCSALL's Persistence Study are calling these people "sponsors" and the help they provide "sponsorship" (Brandt, 2001). Sponsors appear to be an important support to persistence. You may be able to help these sponsors support your students, and your class and program may be able to play the sponsorship role. We hope the research findings presented here help you take advantage of this overlooked resource.

The report of the first phase of NCSALL's Persistence Study (Comings et al., 1999) identified the support of family, friends, teachers, and fellow students as important to students' persistence, but it did not describe the nature of this support. The second phase of the study is providing in-depth, descriptive information about how personal relationships help and hinder student persistence, and is building a more complex picture of these relationships. Most students in the present phase of the study identify a specific person or a few specific people in their social networks who provide support to their persistence. Although we found no evidence that the literacy programs officially recognize these sponsors, we do find that program staff and volunteer tutors sometimes play the sponsorship role.

We did not interview the sponsors in this study; the students indicated their importance as a support to persistence. Sometimes a sponsor steps forward without being asked, or the relationship begins when an adult asks for help with reading or writing. The sponsors in this study usually have more education and familiarity with educational institutions than do the learners they support, and they act as a guide into the world of education, often identifying programs or setting up initial visits. Sponsors are also personal counselors who advise about education, assist with literacy tasks, and encourage students to achieve their goals. Sponsors sometimes provide money, transportation, child care, and housing. Some sponsors are altruistic, but others want something in return for their help. Sponsors can be a help and a hindrance at the same time.

Some sponsors provided a type of symbolic support: a legacy of support. For example, several students mention the memory of a parent, not necessarily well educated, who valued education and who transmitted this value to them, as a support to their persistence. The parent is no longer providing direct support, but the values the parent instilled in the child are still having an effect. One student in the study, who is from Barbados, remembers the importance his mother gave to his education and learning. He says, "Every day she told me you have got to go to school."

Three Types of Sponsor

Students in the study mentioned different types of sponsor, which we have categorized as: 1) personal, 2) official, and 3) intermediate. These categories reflect the relationships between the student and the sponsor, as well as the type of support provided. Personal sponsors are part of a student's everyday life and include relatives, godmothers, children, spouses and partners, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Official sponsors are professionals who are paid to provide specific support to students. They include social workers, parole officers, welfare-to-work counselors, professional literacy staff, librarians, and teachers. The third type is a person who is in an intermediate position between official and personal. They are not part of a student's everyday life or a professional paid to provide this support to them. They include pastors, fellow 12-step recovery program members (especially 12-step sponsors), volunteer tutors, and other students. The sponsorship categories are useful to our thinking about sponsors, but individual sponsors may be described by more than one category. Readers should think of these categories as "roles" that define different ways to support students.

Personal Sponsorship

A personal sponsor, such as a relative who gives emotional, literacy, and informational support, can offer pervasive, comprehensive supports. Susan, a co-worker in Mark's family business, plays the role of a personal sponsor. Mark revealed his problem with reading to Susan, who was the first person to talk with him about it. She offered both to help with literacy tasks and to tutor him, and she found a program for him, calling the local library literacy program and setting up the initial contact for Mark. Susan is part of Mark's life and has shown that she is willing and able to support him in his efforts to persist at learning.

Sometimes, personal sponsors place demands on students that are not supportive to persistence. For example, one student's mother gives her a place to live during periods of homelessness and encourages her to attend class. The mother provides positive reinforcement such as applauding her daughter when she reads. However, this student's mother sometimes calls the program and requests that her daughter come home and help take care of problems related to her mother's illness.

Official Sponsorship

An official sponsor, such as a caseworker who provides a referral to a program and follows up to see how the student's participation works out, gives intermittent, targeted support within a limited time frame. An example of an official sponsor is Sally, a professional General Educational Development (GED) teacher in a drug treatment program. One of her students, Cory, was able to complete some of the math preparation for the GED, but her reading skills were too low to enable her to pass the test. Sally located a basic literacy program and helped Cory to enroll. The GED teacher and the other professional staff in the drug treatment program are supporting Cory's persistence in learning. The GED teacher is in contact with Cory's drug treatment counselor, who keeps track of her participation in the program and can provide referrals to services she might need so that she can persist in her learning.

Official sponsors have limitations. They may not be available to the student on a personal level or outside of normal office hours, and their institutions have official objectives that might interfere with an individual's sponsorship role.

Intermediate Sponsorship

Intermediate sponsors are in the middle of these two ends of a continuum. They are involved with students for a longer period of time than official sponsors but are not integrated into a student's life in the way that personal sponsors are. Bill, Rod's sponsor in a 12-step recovery program, is an intermediate sponsor. Rod started in a literacy program after he began the recovery process, and then dropped out of the literacy program after a relapse into drinking. Bill gave Rod advice on the timing of when he should rejoin the literacy program. Bill felt that Rod should not take on anything stressful until he was back in recovery, and he was worried that participation in the program was stressful and might lead to another relapse. When Rod did re-enter the program, he did so with more confidence.

A student's connection to an intermediate sponsor is usually not encumbered by the kinds of demands that friends and relatives make on each other, nor is it constrained by the rules and objectives of official sponsors. Intermediate sponsors may be particularly beneficial to student persistence and may be a model for how a program can play the sponsorship role for students.

We have observed volunteer tutors and students playing the intermediate sponsorship role. Tutors provide transportation and daycare assistance to their students. Tutors and fellow students provide encouragement, discuss barriers to persistence, and connect students to community services that can provide transportation, daycare, and counseling. The programs in this phase of NCSALL's Persistence Study are connected to libraries, which have a traditional role of support to reading and self-study. Libraries and the volunteers they recruit might be ideal community institutions to play the intermediate sponsorship role. They could play that role for students both in library literacy programs and in the programs of other institutions.

Learning About Sponsors

The programs in this study sometimes learn about sponsors when students casually mention them during intake, in class, or during informal conversations, but we have not observed a systematic intervention that sought to identify or involve sponsors. If programs formally query new students about sponsors in their lives, staff could help students to develop strategies for engaging sponsors to help them persist in the program. Programs could also involve sponsors directly in literacy efforts and provide training and other services to help sponsors to continue and expand their support of students. Professional counselors or support groups among students could discuss the sponsorship role, identify sponsors, and develop strategies to benefit from this type of support.

Identifying sponsorship as critical, defining different types of sponsors, exploring the ways in which sponsors support persistence, and developing approaches to build sponsorship for students could lead to insights into how to increase persistence by better utilizing and expanding a student's network of sponsorship. Since a student may come to a literacy program without sponsors, programs might find ways to connect them to people and institutions that can play this role. Programs can help students to identify sponsors in their personal social networks and in the institutions that provide them with professional help. Sponsors can be found in recovery or substance abuse groups, churches, housing groups, and local neighborhood organizations. A partnership among the sponsor, student, tutor or teacher, and staff might bring the program experience more directly into the student's life, which could help support persistence.

Research into how children learn to read has identified the support of family and community (the social network of the child) as critical to helping children become good readers (Snow et al., 1998). An individual teacher cannot connect to a child's entire social network and, therefore, focuses on the child's primary caregivers, usually the parents. Adult students, too, need a supportive social network that helps them to succeed at learning, whether that learning is focused on reading, writing, math, language, or passing the GED tests. Programs cannot connect to their students' entire social networks, but they can identify a sponsor or a few sponsors in each student's life and connect to them. The co-worker, recovery process advisor, and GED teacher in the examples above could be powerful allies in a program's attempt to help those students persist in their learning. If sponsorship is critical to student persistence, community organizations (such as libraries) might be encouraged to take on this role, even if they are not providing direct instruction. We hope our research will eventually provide programs with tools that will allow them to build a network of sponsors for their students that is consistent and long lasting.

An interim report of this research will be available at http://www.mdrc.org in late 2002 and a final report in mid-2003.

Acknowledgments

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