



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

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New Report Reveals Lessons Learned for Ensuring Success for Underprepared Learners in Illinois Colleges

Team teaching, student supports, and state-level partnership development are critical components according to findings about Accelerating Opportunity initiative.

Chicago, IL (June 8, 2016) -- The Urban Institute, with its partner the Aspen Institute, released its final implementation report on [Accelerating Opportunity](#), the first in a series of final reports on the initiative. Accelerating Opportunity, a Jobs for the Future (JFF) initiative, is designed to transform how states work with their adult education programs and community colleges to provide training for underprepared adult learners.

The AO Final Implementation Report documents how the state of Illinois, along with three other participating states (Kansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana) successfully implemented the program in its first three years. The report highlights cross-cutting lessons on supporting student success, sustainability, and partnership development and provides recommendations to assist other states in creating similar integrated career pathways for adults with low basic skills.

Of the four states in the report, Illinois has the largest community college system (with 48 total colleges in its system, the third largest in the country), and the state engaged about 40 percent of its colleges (19 out of 48). The goals of AO were well aligned with state goals to increase the proportion of adults with high-quality postsecondary credentials to 60 percent by 2025. After three years of implementation, 1,4441 students had enrolled in an AO career pathway in the state of Illinois.

“The findings of this report show great successes with implementing AO in the state of Illinois. We have worked hard to build a strong partnership between our Division of Adult Education and Career and Technical Education Division to ensure that AO students are truly recognized as postsecondary education students,” said Karen Hunter Anderson, Executive Director at Illinois Community College Board. “We are continuing to work to expand the reach of career pathways, and are thrilled to see an overall positive cultural shift towards integrating adult education programs with postsecondary education throughout the country.”

“Almost every college and state is sustaining all or parts of the model, and we are pleased that those participating in AO see the value of continuing it,” stated Maria Flynn, Senior Vice President for Jobs for the Future. “Many AO students have noted that had it not been for the AO initiative, college courses and credentials might have not been a viable option for them.”

Key findings from the Final Implementation Report, based on site visits to colleges in Illinois and each of the other three states, a survey of the participating colleges and other program documentation, include:

The four states successfully scaled AO: The four states utilized a multitude of internal and external resources to expand the AO model to all or a large proportion of colleges within their respective states. Over the first three years of the initiative, 8,287 students enrolled in AO across 54 colleges. These colleges implemented and sustained 154 integrated career pathways. Illinois was particularly successful, and after the three-year implementation period, scaled AO to 6 more colleges for a total of 25. In partnership with the Illinois Center for Specialized Professional Support, which provides services to CTE professionals statewide, the Southern Illinois Professional Development Center staged an annual Transitions Academy, which brought the AO colleges together with a cohort of college administrators and faculty to help them design or improve bridge programs or integrated career pathways. The state plans to continue the Transitions Academy model to support statewide implementation of the AO model.

Partnerships were critical to success: The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) leveraged partnerships between the Division of Adult Education and Career and Technical Education (CTE) Division. In 2013, these two divisions within ICCB worked together to change their policy so that AO students who were enrolled in CTE credit-bearing courses were recognized as postsecondary CTE students. This allowed AO students to access some support from Perkins funds. Similarly, CTE programs in Illinois that worked alongside adult education to implement the AO model were able to draw upon Perkins funding to support the program expenditures. The integration of AO students into Perkins further institutionalized AO within the state’s career pathways strategy.

Internal and external perceptions of low-skilled adult learners changed: The report emphasizes the progress that the colleges and states made in changing the overall culture and attitudes toward adult education students, resulting in increased student engagement. As students experienced academic successes—often for the first time ever—many began to view themselves as fully integrated members of their college community.

Team teaching was popular and perceived as promising for students: Initially, career and technical education (CTE) faculty at the AO colleges expressed concerns about the specific role of an adult education instructor in the CTE classroom, but those who engaged in team teaching became more positive about the approach over time. By the end of the grant period, some CTE faculty even discussed incorporating an adult education instructor in non-AO classes. Students were also enthusiastic about the model and hoped for more exposure to team-taught classes.

The AO navigators were integral to student success: “Navigators” or “success coaches” are important to help connect students to necessary services. AO students received additional support from dedicated staff members, often referred to as navigators, who connected them to needed services inside or outside the college, including tutoring opportunities and individualized case management. Students

reported that college staff supported them on a range of academic, employment, financial, and personal issues. Colleges also noted that navigators are the primary differentiator between AO and the traditional community college experience.

Additional implementation reports will be issued in fall 2016.

About Accelerating Opportunity

[Accelerating Opportunity](#) seeks to change the way Adult Basic Education is delivered by putting students on track to earn a postsecondary credential and providing them with the support needed to succeed. The initiative targets workers who are underprepared for today's demanding job market and builds on the legacy of JFF's innovative adult education initiative, Breaking Through, as well as Washington State's I-BEST program.

The Urban Institute and its partners, the Aspen Institute and George Washington University, are conducting an independent, third-party evaluation of the AO initiative.

About Jobs for the Future

[Jobs for the Future](#) (JFF) is a national nonprofit that builds educational and economic opportunity for underserved populations in the United States. JFF develops innovative career and educational programs and public policies that increase college readiness and career success, and build a more highly skilled workforce. With over 30 years of experience, JFF is the national leader in bridging education and work to increase economic mobility and strengthen our economy.