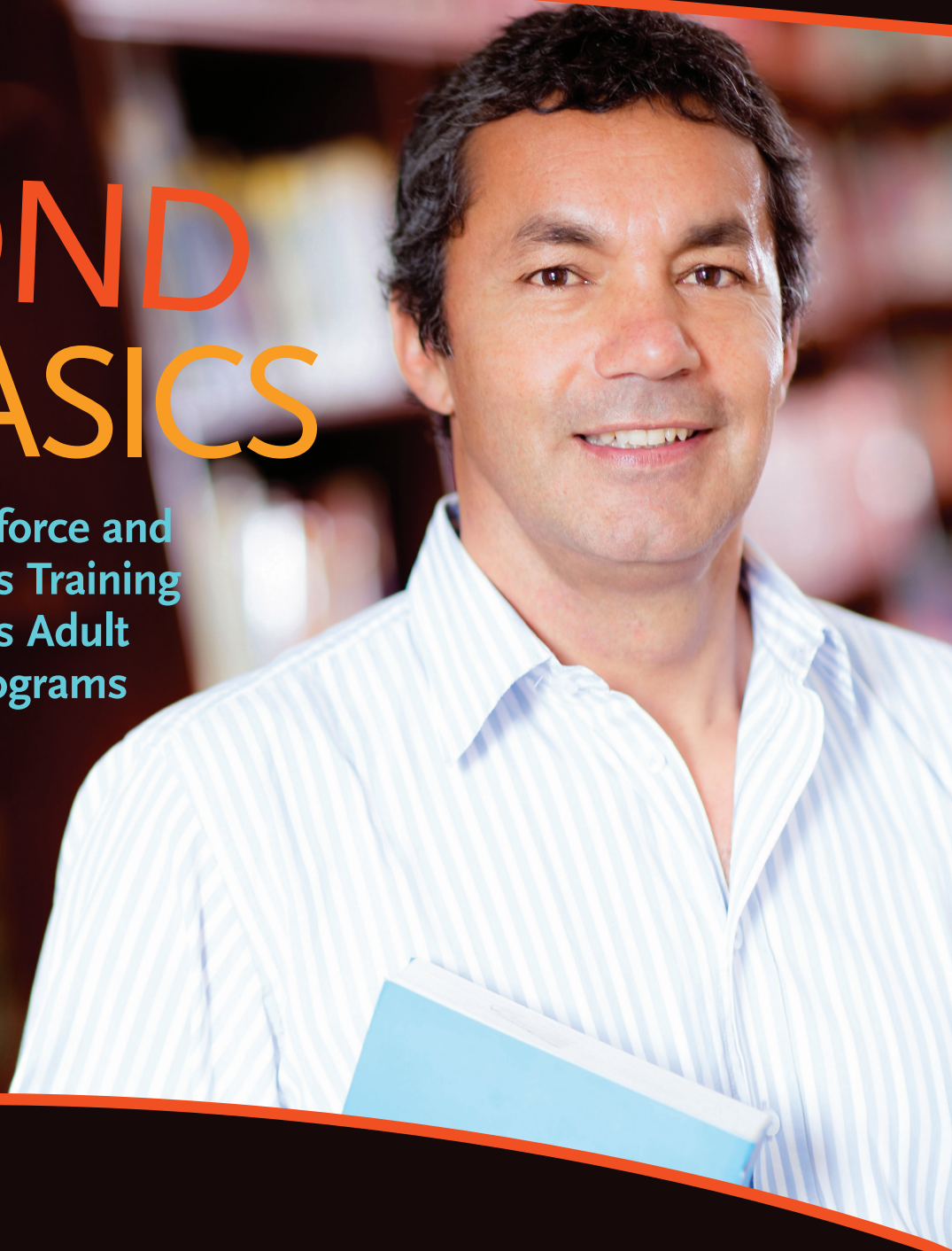


# BEYOND THE BASICS

Integrating Workforce and  
College-Readiness Training  
into California's Adult  
Basic Skills Programs



**mdrc**  
BUILDING KNOWLEDGE  
TO IMPROVE SOCIAL POLICY

Elizabeth Zachry Rutschow  
Katie Beal  
Chase Johnson

JULY 2019



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with

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**JULY 2019**

# FUNDERS

**Funding for this report was provided by The James Irvine Foundation.**

Dissemination of MDRC publications is supported by the following funders that help finance MDRC's public policy outreach and expanding efforts to communicate the results and implications of our work to policymakers, practitioners, and others: The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Arnold Ventures, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, Daniel and Corinne Goldman, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., The JPB Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, The Kresge Foundation, Sandler Foundation, and The Starr Foundation.

In addition, earnings from the MDRC Endowment help sustain our dissemination efforts. Contributors to the MDRC Endowment include Alcoa Foundation, The Ambrose Monell Foundation, Anheuser-Busch Foundation, Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, Ford Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Grable Foundation, The Lizabeth and Frank Newman Charitable Foundation, The New York Times Company Foundation, Jan Nicholson, Paul H. O'Neill Charitable Foundation, John S. Reed, Sandler Foundation, and The Stupski Family Fund, as well as other individual contributors.

The findings and conclusions in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the funders.

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# OVERVIEW

**IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**, approximately one in ten adults — nearly 36 million people — lack basic literacy and numeracy skills, while 27 million adults lack a high school diploma. Federally funded adult basic skills programs, such as Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) courses, have traditionally served the educational needs of low-skilled adults. However, these programs have struggled to help undereducated adults transition into postsecondary education and the workforce. Over the last decade, new models for adult education have emerged that integrate basic skills education with workforce and college-readiness training. These integrated programs show new promise for increasing the academic and labor market successes of low-skilled adults — and they have been catching on across the country.

With one of the nation's largest educational systems, California provides a unique environment for studying these trends. State leaders have been highly active in developing career pathway models that integrate academic and workforce training in their K-12 and workforce sectors; however, less is known about how these programs are being integrated into adult basic skills education. With support from The James Irvine Foundation, MDRC researchers conducted phone interviews and site visits with 39 adult basic skills programs and leaders throughout California to learn more about the state's programming and offerings. This report analyzes the need for adult basic skills programming across the state of California, the status of programs in high-need areas, and promising models that integrate workforce and college-readiness training with adult basic skills education.

This report makes clear that The Irvine Foundation's priority regions, including the San Joaquin Valley and the Salinas Valley as well as Riverside and San Bernardino counties, have some of the highest concentrations of undereducated and impoverished adults in the state, accounting for over one-fourth of the state's low-skilled adult populations. Additionally, adult basic skills programming in these regions is still recovering from severe budget cutbacks in 2008 to 2012, when many programs were forced to close or dramatically reduce their enrollments due to the Great Recession. As a result, many programs focused more on rebuilding their core offerings and less on integrating adult basic skills instruction with workforce and college-readiness services.

MDRC researchers were able to identify 10 programs in the priority regions and across the state that had integrated basic skills education with workforce and college preparation. A relatively limited number of programs existed within the state's traditional ABE and ASE programs, so programs in other sectors such as workforce development are also highlighted. The report reveals that several opportunities exist for strengthening the development of these programs within adult basic skills schools, building on the lessons learned from promising programs in California. It also sets forth key incentives and structured learning opportunities for expanding integrated adult basic skills programs on a larger scale in California — and beyond.



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# PREFACE

**FEDERALLY FUNDED ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMS** such as Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) have long paved the way to high school credentials for low-skilled adults. But until recently, these programs have struggled to help these individuals access higher-level training and postsecondary education. This has begun to change, however, as new studies uncover the promise of adult education programs that integrate basic skills training with workforce and college-readiness instruction.

In 2010, studies traced positive labor market outcomes for low-skilled adults to integrated adult education programs such as Washington State’s Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST). The I-BEST initiative exemplifies an approach to integrated education that has swept the country and inspired some states to promote the scaling up of these programs. Furthermore, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 is a federal policy that provides incentives for the development of Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs throughout the country.

Despite these developments, relatively little is known about the implementation of integrated adult education programs in states with large populations of low-skilled adults. California, as the most populous state in the country and one of the largest economies in the world, provides a promising place to study these programs. With support from The James Irvine Foundation, this report seeks to fill this gap by investigating programs in some of California’s poorest regions and identifying model programs across the state.

Based on interviews with over 30 programs and leaders in the state, this report reveals that even though a number of these programs have been implemented statewide, relatively few are integrated into ABE and ASE programs. Instead, many programs that focus on workforce and college-readiness skills tend to target individuals with higher-level academic skills and qualifications. Nevertheless, this report identifies a number of promising programs across California’s adult education and workforce sectors that offer a template for building and strengthening IET models in ABE and ASE programs.

Gordon L. Berlin  
President, MDRC



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE JAMES IRVINE FOUNDATION**, which provided funding for this report. In addition, we greatly appreciate the time spent by leaders of the California Adult Education Program, the California Community College Chancellor's Office, and others providing valuable insight, guidance, and context on the adult education landscape in the state. We also would like to thank the adult education students, instructors, and administrators across California who facilitated or participated in focus groups and interviews for this report.

We appreciate the many people who read and provided comments on this report. In particular, we are grateful to those who gave us excellent written and oral feedback, including Alexander Mayer, Frieda Molina, Leigh Parise, Rob Ivry, and Rachel Rosen at MDRC; Neil Kelly and Javier Romero at the California Community Colleges' Chancellor's Office; Carolyn Zachry at the California Department of Education; and Judy Mortrude at the Center for Law and Social Policy. Finally, we would like to thank Anaga Dalal, who edited the report, and Carolyn Thomas, who prepared it for publication.

The Authors



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**WITH NEARLY 36 MILLION AMERICAN ADULTS** lacking basic literacy and numeracy skills and 27 million lacking a high school diploma, the need for adult education in the United States is marked.<sup>1</sup> The multiple challenges these adults face — ranging from high rates of poverty to poor health — have pushed many policymakers and practitioners to search for more effective strategies for educating this population and transitioning them into living-wage careers.<sup>2</sup> Federally funded adult basic skills programs have often served as the primary mechanism for educating low-skilled adults, English language learners, and those without a high school diploma.<sup>3</sup> While these programs have traditionally focused on helping adults improve their literacy and numeracy skills, the changing U.S. labor market has increasingly pushed programs to adopt models that also build workforce and college-readiness skills.<sup>4</sup> In turn, programs that integrate basic skills and workforce training have become an increasingly important — and effective — part of the adult education landscape.<sup>5</sup>

California, with its large population of undereducated adults, provides an interesting case study for these national trends. The state has traditionally invested heavily in education for low-skilled adults with budgets that quadruple the level of federal investment in the state.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, California has integrated academic and workforce skills training across its educational systems through initiatives

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- <sup>1</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Education at a Glance 2014* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2014); U.S. Census Bureau, *2013-2017 — American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).
  - <sup>2</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Time for the U.S. to Reskill* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2013); Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, *Integrated Education and Training Policy Toolkit* (Washington, DC: National Skills Coalition, 2016).
  - <sup>3</sup> Claudia Tamassia, Marylou Lennon, Kentaro Yamamoto, and Irwin Kirsch, *Adult Education in America: A First Look at Results from the Adult Education Program and Learner Surveys* (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, 2007).
  - <sup>4</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2016).
  - <sup>5</sup> Deena Schwartz, Julie Strawn, and Maureen Sarna, *Career Pathways Research and Evaluation Synthesis: Career Pathways Design Study* (Bethesda, MD: Abt Associates, 2018); David Fein and Jill Hamadyk, *Bridging the Opportunity Divide for Low-Income Youth: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Year Up Program* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018); Karen Gardiner, Howard Rolston, David Fein, and Sung-Woo Cho, *Pima Community College Pathways to Healthcare Program: Implementation and Early Impact Report*, OPRE Report No. 2017-10 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017); Howard Rolston, Elizabeth Copson, and Karen Gardiner, *Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement: Implementation and Early Impact Report* (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017).
  - <sup>6</sup> California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Adult Education Regional Planning* (Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2015).

such as the California Career Pathways Trust and the Strong Workforce Program.<sup>7</sup> But it is unclear how much of workforce and college-readiness skills training has been integrated into programs for adults with basic skills needs and how they are growing their proficiency in these areas.<sup>8</sup>

This report, which was funded by The James Irvine Foundation, analyzes the need for adult education in underserved regions of California and identifies promising programs for adults that integrate basic skills education with college- and career-readiness training. Based on phone interviews and site visits with 39 programs and adult education leaders, the report reveals that The Irvine Foundation's priority regions, including the San Joaquin Valley and the Salinas Valley as well as Riverside and San Bernardino counties, are home to more than one-fourth of the state's undereducated and impoverished adults.<sup>9</sup> Adult basic skills programming in these regions is still recovering from the Great Recession, with many programs still focused on rebuilding basic academic services rather than launching new models that integrate adult basic skills education with workforce and college preparation. This report, however, highlights 10 programs that integrate adult basic skills education with workforce and college preparation, though they tend not to be centered within the state's traditional adult basic skills programs or target those without a high school diploma. The report also discusses mechanisms for strengthening the development of these programs within adult basic skills schools.

## What Is Adult Basic Skills Education?

Federally funded adult basic skills programs in the United States have traditionally focused on four key goals: improving adult literacy levels, advancing career-readiness skills, promoting active parent participation in children's education, and earning secondary school credentials.<sup>10</sup> The three types of programming for low-skilled adults include English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction for non-native speakers, Adult Basic Education (ABE) for individuals with skills below ninth-grade proficiency levels, and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) for individuals with ninth- to twelfth-grade skills.<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally, adult education has been a precursor to college and occupational training; however, many programs and states across the country have begun offering occupational training and access to postsecondary education concurrently with adult basic skills education. This shift was spurred by promising results from Washington State's Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) program in 2004, which provided basic skills and technical training courses that certified graduates

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<sup>7</sup> Career Ladders Project and Jobs for the Future, *College-to-Career Pathways: Getting from Here to There on the Roadmap for a Stronger California Economy* (Sacramento, CA: California Community Colleges Task Force on Workforce, Job Creation, and a Strong Economy, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> OECD (2013).

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, *AEFLA Resource Guide* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, *Adult Basic Education Grant Program Factsheet* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2017).



for work in high-demand industries such as nursing and childhood education.<sup>12</sup> Over the last decade, many states and funders have promoted the development of these programs on a larger scale and, as of 2014, federal regulations in the Workforce and Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) began encouraging adult education providers to establish programs that are similar to I-BEST through the establishment of the Integrated Education and Training (IET) model.<sup>13</sup>

## A Look at Adult Basic Skills Education in California

Approximately four and a half million California adults lack a high school diploma. This is approximately 17.5 percent of the adult population in the state. Additionally, 12 percent of California adults — three million individuals — are living in poverty.<sup>14</sup> Those without a high school diploma in the state are disproportionately Hispanic, Latino, or foreign-born, while those living in poverty are disproportionately black, Hispanic, or Latino. Further, The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions have a disproportionate share of both undereducated and impoverished adults. The priority regions make up 22 percent of the state’s total population, but account for 29 percent of those in the state who are without a high school diploma and 27 percent of those living in poverty.

California has traditionally provided a rich environment for adult basic skills education, with an annual budget of around \$750 million annually prior to 2008 — larger than the adult education spending totals for all other states *combined*.<sup>15</sup> The state has also been heavily focused on developing career pathways for low-skilled adolescents and adults across its educational systems through a variety of state and national initiatives.<sup>16</sup> However, California’s adult basic skills programs have struggled over the last decade to recover from major funding cuts and the closure or severe reduction of programming in many adult basic skills schools.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, the fragmentation of adult skills programming across K-12 school districts, community colleges, and other nonprofit organizations has made it challenging to track student outcomes and build integrated programs.<sup>18</sup>

In 2015, the state’s Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) legislation reinvigorated adult basic skills education in California by providing \$500 million to 71 local consortia to develop an integrated adult

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**12** John Wachen, Davis Jenkins, and Michelle Van Noy, *How I-BEST Works: Findings from a Field Study* (New York: Community College Research Center, 2010); Davis Jenkins, Matthew Zeidenberg, and Gregory S. Kienzl, “Educational Outcomes of I-BEST, Washington State Community and Technical College System’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program: Findings from a Multivariate Analysis,” CCRC Working Paper No. 16 (New York: Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2009); Matthew Zeidenberg, Sung-Woo Cho, and Davis Jenkins, “Washington State’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST) New Evidence of Effectiveness,” CCRC Working Paper No. 20 (New York: Community College Research Center, 2010).

**13** Bergson-Shilcock (2016).

**14** U.S. Census Bureau (2018). Adults are those 25 years old and older; poverty is defined as the percentage of people whose income has been below the poverty line in the past 12 months.

**15** California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015).

**16** Career Ladders Project and Jobs for the Future (2015).

**17** California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015).

**18** Mac Taylor, *The 2018-19 Budget: Adult Education Analysis* (Sacramento, CA: Legislative Analyst’s Office, California Legislature, 2018); California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015).

education system in their regions; consortia members consist of all the education providers within a region, including community colleges, K-12 schools, and other community-based organizations that provide education and training for low-skilled adults.<sup>19</sup> While this restructuring, now named the California Adult Education Program (CAEP), has encouraged a number of changes in adult basic skills programming, less is known about whether and how these reforms have been implemented and whether programs are building IET-like models that integrate academic skills and career readiness.

## Adult Basic Skills Education in the Priority Regions

Overall, adult basic skills programs that are run by K-12 school districts in the priority regions, and the buildings in which they have been housed, mirror high school settings and have faced many of the same challenges as adult basic skills programs nationally. Programs in these regions typically provide three types of federally funded adult basic skills courses (ABE, ASE, and ESL) along with Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. Classes were similar to high school models, with courses offered a few hours a day on select days of the week and during the evenings. Given funding restrictions, most programs also implemented a number of management practices common in adult education, such as open enrollment and open exit systems, where students are continuously enrolled in programs throughout the year. Many programs also relied on part-time teaching staff and had limited capabilities for tracking student outcomes.

Though they offered some services aimed at transitioning students to college and work, most adult schools offering ABE and ASE courses in The Irvine Foundation's priority regions had not yet integrated college- and career-readiness training into their programming in a significant way. Program leaders and instructors were generally focused on the more traditional goals of increasing student literacy, numeracy, and high school credentialing. Most programs offered services to help students transition to college or careers, with the assistance of dedicated transition specialists, college and career fairs, and transition workshops. However, for most programs, these services were focused on students who had nearly completed a high school credential and were not integrated with classroom instruction. Some adult schools tried or were hoping to integrate workforce training and educational programs, but most identified important barriers to this work, such as limited staff capacity, misalignment between K-12 and postsecondary education policies, and limited exposure to, or cross-agency training with, these models.

## Common Features of Programs in California

Despite the obstacles to integrating workplace instruction in adult education programs in California, the research team identified college- and career-readiness programs that concurrently offered basic skills instruction. Overall, these programs demonstrated the implementation of several IET and

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<sup>19</sup> California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, *Adult Education Block Grant Planning Report* (Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, 2016).

career pathway components, including the integration of technical skills training and basic skills development; supports for job entry such as training in workplace expectations and interviewing; direct connections with employers; and support services such as counseling, emergency funding, and child care to address barriers to program participation.

However, programs were relatively limited in their offering of other types of IET or career pathway components. For instance, only a few programs included paid work experience or an opportunity to earn college credit, perhaps because some state regulations do not allow paid internships as part of non-credit community college programs. Additionally, while these programs served lower-skilled individuals, they tended not to directly target those without a high school diploma and enrolled many students who had already obtained this credential, which suggests that non-high school graduates may be underserved by these programs.

## **Encouraging the Growth of IET Programs for Adult Basic Skills Students**

These findings suggest that California education leaders and policymakers have additional opportunities for growth and advancement in helping low-skilled, undereducated adults gain workforce skills while building their academic skills. Below are potential ideas for this type of programming in ABE and ASE settings.

### **HELP PROGRAMS BUILD STAFF CAPACITY**

One of the most critical challenges that adult school leaders raised to building their program offerings was the lack of a stable teaching force. Nearly all the programs examined in this study relied heavily on part-time staff to teach their ABE and ASE courses. While these individuals were committed to their classes and students, leaders noted that they were often less connected to developing and helping manage an adult school's overall programming compared with full-time faculty. Additionally, most schools only had a handful of full-time teachers and administrators who could assist with this effort. Finally, a number of program leaders discussed their fears about their financing, anticipating that funding could be cut once again and force them to shut down any new initiatives.

Given these challenges, one of the most promising ways that California leaders might help programs build more integrated basic skills and workforce training programs (as well as their general academic courses) is to help schools bring in more full-time staff members. These staff members could dedicate more time to building the infrastructure of their schools and add new features such as college- and career-readiness training for students. Such work could also be facilitated by allocating resources to noninstructional work, such as the development of new education and training programs.

### **BUILD CAPACITY FOR CROSS-AGENCY LEARNING AND COLLABORATION**

Despite rebuilding or severely reducing services following the Great Recession, many adult schools appear to be progressing toward additional college- and career-readiness programming. For instance, most schools had counselors who provided information and advice to students about transitions to

college or workforce training programs, and most programs offered at least some CTE courses at their school. Additionally, many program leaders had attempted or were planning to attempt the development of integrated adult basic skills courses that provided workforce training in growing fields such as allied health.

One of the key challenges that leaders identified in furthering this work was the lack of cross-program or cross-agency coordination that might help build more integrated programs. Even when programs were collocated in the same building, leaders noted that not enough cross-program coordination had occurred — and they hoped to do more of this in the future. Allowing space for these leaders to build their knowledge about other programs and consider how they might better integrate the education and training across them is one basic step in helping build more integrated programs for lower-skilled adults. Additionally, providing models for how these services could be integrated could help further this work.

## **BUILD EXPOSURE TO IET AND CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAMS**

IET and career pathway programming was limited in most ABE and ASE settings. In some cases, program leaders highlighted their staff's lack of familiarity with career pathway models or had somewhat limited knowledge of these program models themselves. Additionally, in interviews, a number of program staff highlighted their focus on the traditional goals of adult basic skills programs and a number were concerned about the resources and capacity required to develop these types of programs.

Given these comments, California education and policy leaders may need to do more to build the knowledge of program leaders and instructors about career pathway models and provide practical examples of how these can be built into ABE and ASE programs. CAEP leaders have already begun spotlighting programs that have integrated workforce training and career pathway models, and have allocated resources for their further development.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, the Center for Law and Social Policy's report on the implementation of the CAEP policies provided a number of important recommendations for how the California adult education consortia should build this work into their planning — and CAEP leaders have added these recommendations into the consortia's planning documents.

## **PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN IET PROGRAMS**

In addition to exposing program staff to the IET model, leaders might also provide local and national technical assistance to help adult schools implement these programs. California adult education leaders have built a strong professional development system for adult education through the Technical Assistance Project, which brings together multiple partner organizations in California to support instructors and staff in the 71 adult education consortia. Together, leaders from these two groups might consider how adult basic skills programs can best integrate career pathway models.

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of these resources include [CAEP student transitions resources](#), [CAEP's resource bank](#), [CAEP's showcase of practices with promise](#). See, for example, <https://caladulthood.org/Administrators/373>, <http://resources.caladulthood.org/>, and [http://aebgpracticeswithpromise.com/showcase\\_successes.asp](http://aebgpracticeswithpromise.com/showcase_successes.asp).

California leaders might also look beyond their state for further guidance on how these programs can be developed. For instance, states such as [Indiana](#), [Virginia](#), [Kentucky](#), [Minnesota](#), and [North Carolina](#) have developed state-level public-private partnerships that involve multiple educational institutions (including adult basic skills programs), workforce development agencies, businesses, and community based organizations, to build career pathway models beginning at the ABE level.<sup>21</sup> These partnerships typically bring together multiple funding streams, including federal funding such as WIOA dollars, financial aid through the Ability to Benefit clause, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program along with state funding streams to build multifaceted educational, training, and support programs for low-skilled adults. Additionally, national organizations such as the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) have developed guidance documents for how differing agencies can collaborate to build stronger career pathway programs that span multiple sectors.<sup>22</sup> These leaders might provide valuable information about how such pathways could be worked into California’s adult basic skills programs.

## **INCENTIVIZE THE DEVELOPMENT OF IET MODELS IN ADULT BASIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

Broadening exposure to career pathway models may expose these programs to administrative staff and teaching instructors, but this does not guarantee that these models will be developed within individual schools. As such, state and philanthropic leaders might consider ways to incentivize the development and growth of these programs, particularly in underserved regions. For instance, funders might consider developing a set of grants earmarked for developing these programs and ask schools to put forth their plans through a competitive bidding process. Additionally, leaders might consider partnering with programs that have built IET models and with those that are interested in implementing these programs.

## **Summing Up and Looking Ahead**

After a number of challenging years of budget cuts and program closures, California’s adult basic skills programs are making strong progress in rebuilding and moving closer to the type of collaborative networks that will help build the workforce and college-readiness training models that low-skilled individuals need. California stands poised to spur this type of growth and development through its many successes in building career pathway programs in other sectors. Learning from these models and building them within adult basic skills programs may help the state further serve and support the millions of California adults struggling to escape poverty and build brighter futures for themselves and their families.

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<sup>21</sup> See, for example, [www.in.gov/dwd/adulted\\_workin.htm](http://www.in.gov/dwd/adulted_workin.htm), [www.pluggedinva.com/our-model](http://www.pluggedinva.com/our-model), [www.elevatevirginia.org](http://www.elevatevirginia.org), [kyskillsu.ky.gov](http://kyskillsu.ky.gov), [careerwise.minnstate.edu/education/fasttrac.html](http://careerwise.minnstate.edu/education/fasttrac.html), and [www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/college-and-career-readiness/basic-skills-plus](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/college-and-career-readiness/basic-skills-plus).

<sup>22</sup> See CLASP’s blog post (“Illinois’ Career Pathways Definition is a Model for States,” by Judy Mortrude, June 29, 2018) and its brief on guided pathways (“Better Together: Career and Guided Pathways,” by Judy Mortrude, September 2018) at [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).



## CHAPTER

# 1

## Introduction

**IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**, approximately one in ten adults — nearly 36 million people — lack basic literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>1</sup> Twenty-seven million adults are without a high school diploma.<sup>2</sup> Many in this population have fallen prey to a cycle of poverty and poor health that is hard to break in a twenty-first century economy that demands high-skilled, high-tech workers.<sup>3</sup> And yet, research shows that the average basic skill level among young adults in the United States remained relatively the same between 1994 and 2012.<sup>4</sup> These trends have prompted a broad array of policymakers and practitioners to strategize on how best to educate low-income adults and transition them into living-wage careers.<sup>5</sup>

Federally funded adult basic skills programs have served as the primary mechanism for educating disadvantaged adults across the United States.<sup>6</sup> In 2016-2017, more than 1.5 million Americans enrolled in basic skills programs, which were originally launched by the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act and most recently reauthorized in Title II of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014.<sup>7</sup> While these programs have traditionally focused on improving adults' literacy and numeracy skills, the changing nature of the U.S. economy has increasingly pushed programs to focus on workforce and college-readiness training — a move that was further promulgated by WIOA's push to have adult basic skills programs incorporate Integrated Education and Training (IET) models as one component of their programming.<sup>8</sup> IET programs — and models similar to them — have become an important part of the adult education landscape — charting a promising path forward to academic and professional success for low-skilled adults.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Adults 25 years old and older; U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2013); OECD (2006); Zimmerman, Woolf, and Haley (2015); McFarland et al. (2019); Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Gulish (2015); Levy and Murnane (2004).

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2016).

<sup>6</sup> Tamassia, Lennon, Yamamoto, and Kirsch (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2016); U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2016).

<sup>9</sup> Glosser, Martinson, Cho, and Gardiner (2018); Martin and Broadus (2013).



California, with the world's fifth-largest economy, offers a particularly instructive case study of these national trends.<sup>10</sup> The state has the second-highest percentage of undereducated adults in the United States and has traditionally invested heavily in programming for them, with budgets that more than quadruple the level of federal funding received by the state.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, like other states, California has focused on integrating academic and workforce skills training across its K-12 and community college systems through initiatives such as the California Career Pathways Trust and the Strong Workforce Program.<sup>12</sup> However, the degree to which these efforts have made a positive impact on the lives of California's six million lowest-skilled adults remains an open question.<sup>13</sup>

To investigate these issues, MDRC, with funding from The James Irvine Foundation, examined adult education programs in California to identify those that integrate workforce and college-readiness training with basic skills instruction. Though English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are also an important part of adult education, this report focuses on the state's need for programs that target adults without a high school diploma or skill levels below the twelfth grade. In terms of federal government parlance, these programs include "Adult Basic Education" (ABE) initiatives for adults with skills below the ninth grade level and "Adult Secondary Education" (ASE) for individuals with high school skills. This report uses the term "adult basic skills programs" to encompass both programs.

Researchers prioritized an investigation of programs housed within the California Adult Education Program (CAEP) — formerly the Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) — as well as programs funded by WIOA Title II and CAEP. However, the report also includes an investigation of programs for adults with lower skills offered in community colleges and workforce development programs. The study began by examining poverty and educational levels in different regions of the state to assess the need for adult basic skills education and whether these regions aligned with those identified by The Irvine Foundation as potential priorities for investment, including the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys as well as Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Researchers next looked for college- and career-readiness adult basic skills programs in these regions and beyond, to provide lessons and serve as potential models throughout the state. Here are key findings from the study:

- **California has a pronounced need for adult education.** The Irvine Foundation's priority regions have some of the state's highest concentrations of underserved adults. The study found a marked need for effective and comprehensive adult education for this population.
- **Adult basic skills programs in Irvine's priority regions were focused on increasing adult numeracy and literacy and less on IET programs.** The adult basic skills programs that researchers observed in The Irvine Foundation's priority regions focused on traditional goals of increasing adults' literacy and numeracy skills and ensuring that they earned a high school credential. While

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<sup>10</sup> Cooper (2018).

<sup>11</sup> This report uses "undereducated" to describe those without a high school credential, those who have been assessed with literacy and numeracy skills below the twelfth-grade level, or both; the percentage of people in the state who are undereducated were calculated using U.S. census data. For more, see California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Career Ladders Project and Jobs for the Future (2015).

<sup>13</sup> OECD (2013).



few programs had begun integrating some workforce and college-readiness training, program leaders cited a number of challenges to further developing these components, including the need to rebuild basic services, difficulties collaborating with and garnering buy-in from institutional partners, and the lack of resources or capacity to implement these programs.

- **Ten promising IET-like programs were identified, but they tended not to serve the lowest-skilled individuals.** Ten programs were identified that implemented many of the recommended components, including contextualized academic instruction, job training, and strong student supports. However, a number of these were not located in adult basic skills programs and were not targeting the lowest-skilled individuals, including those without a high school diploma.
- **Opportunities exist for building IET-like models in adult basic skills programs, but additional incentives and support may be needed.** There is interest in and hope for developing more IET-like models in California’s adult basic skills programs, which are supported by the state’s recent restructuring of adult education. While some financial supports exist for building these programs, additional incentives and structured learning opportunities may be needed in order to facilitate the creation of these programs on a larger scale.<sup>14</sup>

## Background and Context

### WHAT IS ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION?

Federally funded adult education programs, which are authorized under Title II of WIOA, exist in every U.S. state and are primarily responsible for building the skills of low-literate and undereducated adults in this country.<sup>15</sup> WIOA Title II funding is provided to each of the 50 states, which then are required to disburse these funds to a variety of local providers, including school districts, community-based organizations, libraries, and community colleges.<sup>16</sup> Adult basic skills programs have traditionally focused on four key goals: improving adult literacy, advancing self-sufficiency, improving adults’ involvement in the education of their children, and helping adults attain a secondary school credential.<sup>17</sup> Programming is traditionally organized under three broad areas of student need — ABE for adults with skill levels below the ninth grade, ASE for individuals with ninth- to twelfth-grade skill levels, and English literacy (EL) for those who need to improve their English language skills.<sup>18</sup> (See Box 1.1 for more information.) Additionally, states are required to submit student outcome information to a national database called the National Reporting System,

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<sup>14</sup> Basic skills programs can draw on the Ability to Benefit guidelines in the Higher Education Act Title IV, which specify that students without a high school diploma or its equivalent are eligible for federal financial aid benefits, such as Pell grants, to pay for postsecondary education if they meet certain requirements, such as enrollment in a career pathway program.

<sup>15</sup> Tamassia, Lennon, Yamamoto, and Kirsch (2007).

<sup>16</sup> CLASP Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success (2016).

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2017b).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2017a).

## BOX 1.1

### What Is Adult Basic Education?

Since 1964, with the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, America's federally and state-funded adult basic skills programs have been the primary mechanism for educating low-skilled adults in the United States. Federally funded adult basic skills programs have traditionally had four key aims: improving adult literacy, helping adults gain the skills necessary to become self-sufficient and gainfully employed, helping adults serve as active participants in their children's education, and helping adults attain a secondary school credential.\* In service of these goals, programming has generally been split into these three courses of instruction: English literacy (EL), for adults who lack proficiency in English; Adult Basic Education (ABE), for individuals with skills below the ninth grade level; and Adult Secondary Education (ASE), for individuals with ninth- to twelfth-grade skills.

Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), federally funded programs are required to track progress around common performance measures. These measures include the percentage of program participants who have a gain in measurable skills that moves them toward a credential or employment, attainment of a secondary or postsecondary credential, employment in the second and fourth quarters after program exit (two separate indicators), retention of employment, and post-program median earnings.† Student skill development is tracked through a number of approved adult skill assessments such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). Other outcomes, such as postsecondary enrollment and earnings, are monitored through student surveys, analysis of unemployment insurance wage records, or statewide longitudinal education data. Adult education programs are required to submit data to a national database called the National Reporting System, which is managed and monitored by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education.

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\*U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2017b).

†Center for Law and Social Policy (2015). Skill gains can be measured in a variety of ways depending on the type of program individuals are enrolled in. For instance, gains can be defined as movement from one educational functioning level to another, such as moving from a ninth-grade reading level to a tenth-grade reading level, as measured by a pre- and post-test; or a transcript or report card that shows an accumulation of credits toward a diploma or credential.

which tracks the percentage of adults who achieved certain milestones such as obtaining work or achieving a high school credential.

While the federal government provided \$582 million to support adult education in 2017 — and required states to match their federal block grants — this funding is minimal relative to the need for these services across the country.<sup>19</sup> For instance, the average spending on an adult student in 2017

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (2017a). Federal spending on adult education has remained flat for the last 10 years, and state spending on adult education tends to be less than 10 percent of money spent on K-12 schools. See World Education (2018).

was just over \$1,000, or less than one-tenth of that spent on the average K-12 student (approximately \$13,800).<sup>20</sup> As a result, many adult education programs are run on shoe-string budgets and must suffice with management and classroom structures that make it more difficult to provide the types of learning models provided in K-12 schools. For instance, many programs have long wait lists and operate as open entry and exit systems that place new students in classes that are already in progress as spots open up, making it difficult to implement sequential lesson planning.<sup>21</sup> Many adult education programs also tend to employ part-time instructors with limited experience teaching adults and tend to provide relatively few opportunities for further training given budgetary constraints.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to programmatic challenges, the students who attend adult education programs often face hardships that differ from those of K-12 students. For instance, adult basic skills students tend to face a number of life challenges, including heavy work schedules, single parenthood, and poverty; they also tend to drop out of school or stop out (that is, leave and then return to school) on a regular basis.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, most students (79 percent) entering adult basic skills programs have skills below the ninth-grade level, with important deficits in reading, writing, and math as well as other academic areas.<sup>24</sup>

## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF ADULT BASIC SKILLS PROGRAMMING

As economic gains have increasingly benefited higher-skilled workers, many leaders in the field of education, along with policymakers, have begun to look beyond literacy and numeracy to employability and postsecondary success.<sup>25</sup> Although adult basic skills programs have traditionally been seen as an important precursor to college and occupational training, many programs and states across the country are now offering these programs concurrently with adult basic skills education.<sup>26</sup> This shift was spurred by promising results from Washington State's Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) program, which consists of a set of co-taught basic skills and technical training courses that lead to a certificate in a high-demand industry.<sup>27</sup> Quasi-experimental research on the program found that I-BEST students were significantly more likely than other students to advance into credit-bearing courses, advance to graduation, earn occupational certificates, and show progress on basic skills tests.<sup>28</sup>

Over the last decade, many adult education programs and states across the country have been replicating I-BEST models across their school systems, often in conjunction with workforce development

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<sup>20</sup> World Education (2018).

<sup>21</sup> Zachry Rutschow and Crary-Ross (2014).

<sup>22</sup> Smith et al. (2003); Sabatini et al. (2000).

<sup>23</sup> Comings, Parrella, and Soricone (1999); Lasater and Elliot (2005); Reder (2012).

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education (2013).

<sup>25</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2016).

<sup>26</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2016).

<sup>27</sup> Wachen, Jenkins, and Van Noy (2010).

<sup>28</sup> Wachen, Jenkins, and Van Noy (2010); Jenkins, Zeidenberg, and Kienzl (2009); Zeidenberg, Cho, and Jenkins (2010).

organizations and postsecondary institutions.<sup>29</sup> Funders such as the Joyce Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have also incentivized the development of these programs and partnerships through initiatives such as [Shifting Gears](#) and [Accelerating Opportunity](#). As these programs have proliferated, the federal government and philanthropic organizations have funded rigorous evaluations to study their effects on participant outcomes, with many showing similar results to I-BEST.<sup>30</sup> WIOA, which was reauthorized in 2014, requires adult education providers to establish Integrated Education and Training (IET) models like those used in the I-BEST program to offer adult basic skills instruction at the same time as workforce development preparation for specified career pathways.<sup>31</sup> (See Box 1.2.)

## BOX 1.2

### WIOA Definitions

#### ***Integrated Education and Training (IET) Programs***

Codified in the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in 2014, IET programs contain these three concurrent components:<sup>\*</sup>

1. **Adult education and literacy activities**
2. **Workforce preparation activities**
3. **Workforce training**

#### ***Career pathway programs***

Also defined in WIOA, career pathway programs entail a sequence of secondary and postsecondary education, training, and services that allow individuals to earn credentials that meet industry standards and the needs of employers and that are aligned with state or regional economies. Career pathway programs are also expected to include counseling to support individuals' advancement and allow them to obtain a secondary school credential and at least one recognized postsecondary credential.<sup>†</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup>Mortrude (2016).

<sup>†</sup>Bergson-Shilcock (2015).

## ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION IN CALIFORNIA

Although adult education has undergone significant challenges in the state in recent years, California has traditionally had a long history of providing basic skills instruction to adults that is anchored in rich funding to support these programs. For instance, in 2007, the state's annual budget for adult

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<sup>29</sup> Examples include Minnesota's FastTRAC, WorkINdiana, North Carolina Basic Skills Plus, and Arkansas Career Pathway Initiative. See Zachry Rutschow and Crary-Ross (2014).

<sup>30</sup> Schwartz, Strawn, and Sarna. (2018); Fein and Hamadyk (2018); Gardiner, Rolston, Fein, and Cho (2017); Rolston, Copson, and Gardiner (2017).

<sup>31</sup> Mortrude (2016).

education was \$750 million — one of the largest state budgets for adult education in the nation.<sup>32</sup> This funding enabled the state’s K-12 school districts and community colleges to serve some 600,000 adult students annually.<sup>33</sup> This commitment to adult education was further illustrated through the establishment of the California Adult Literacy Professional Development Project, or [CALPRO](#), which provides professional development for adult literacy instructors across the state and seeks to build communities of practice among them.

In line with national trends, California has also focused on building career- and college-readiness pipelines for multiple types of low-skilled adolescents and adults both within and outside of adult basic skills programs.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the state provided funding for K-12 and community college initiatives that sought to increase low-skilled adults’ access to and success in postsecondary education through programs such as the [Basic Skills Initiative](#), which focus on improving underprepared students’ access to and success in college; [Career Advancement Academies](#), which are designed to allow younger, underprepared and underserved adults to gain both foundational and technical skills concurrently; and the [Strong Workforce Program](#), which is an effort to expand and improve career and technical education. The state also created the [California Career Pathways Trust](#), a grant aimed at helping K-12 schools and community colleges expand pathway programs into high-skill, high-wage jobs in emerging industries. Many institutions in the state have also participated in national initiatives aimed at improving low-skilled adult access to college and career training, such as CLASP’s [Alliance for Quality Career Pathways](#) initiative or the [Gateway to College National Network](#), which aims to help disconnected youth achieve a high school diploma and postsecondary credential.

Despite these strengths, most of the funding for career- and college-readiness programming has not been aimed at the adult basic skills programs within the California Adult Education Program. Furthermore, adult basic skills programs have faced significant challenges in recent years. Because programming is provided by both the K-12 school districts and the community colleges, fragmentation has occurred in the management and delivery of these programs due to the differing policies and practices of these organizations. For example, instructor requirements, assessment and placement practices, and accountability measures differ across the two systems, making coordination and tracking of the outcomes across programs challenging.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, given the heavy role that state funding plays in supporting adult basic skills programs, not all students who participate in these programs are tracked within the federal government’s National Reporting Systems measures, making it difficult to compare the system’s enrollments and outcomes with other states. Finally, the state and its adult education services were hard hit during the Great Recession, when budget cuts and state policy resulted in severe reductions in adult education funding and the closure of many programs by 2012.<sup>36</sup>

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**32** California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015).

**33** California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015).

**34** Career Ladders Project and Jobs for the Future (2015).

**35** Taylor (2018); California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015). Specific examples of these issues include adult schools requiring instructors to have an adult education teaching credential, students with similar profiles potentially being placed into courses at different levels, and the use of differing outcome metrics and student identifiers.

**36** California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2015).

Fortunately, adult basic skills education has been reinvigorated in California in recent years through new efforts to align programming across the state. Recognizing the challenges in offering adult education across two different systems, the 2013-2014 California State Legislature pushed the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) to develop a coordinated plan to restructure the state's adult basic skills programming and management.<sup>37</sup> Based on recommendations from CDE and CCCC leaders, the state legislature passed the Adult Education Block Grant (AEBG) in 2015, which created 71 local consortia that were tasked with developing an integrated adult education system in their regions. Consortia members consist of all the adult education providers within a region, including community colleges, K-12 schools, and other community-based organizations, and each consortium received a portion of the state's new \$500 million annual allocation of adult basic skills education.<sup>38</sup> The AEBG (now the California Adult Education Program) also focused on developing the types of IET models that have become popular across the United States. Two of the primary objectives of the CAEP are (1) to integrate existing programs and create seamless transitions into postsecondary education or the workforce and (2) to employ approaches proven to accelerate students' progress toward their academic or career goals.<sup>39</sup> The state has also provided renewed professional development services for adult education consortia through the establishment of the Technical Assistance Program, or TAP, which brought together multiple partner organizations throughout the state.<sup>40</sup>

While the California Adult Education Program has encouraged a number of changes in adult basic skills programming, less is known about whether and how these reforms have been implemented and whether adult basic skills programs are building models that are similar to IET programming, which has shown promise for improving the academic and labor market successes of low-skilled students. According to a 2017 report on AEBG implementation, many consortia had made at least some progress in aligning services and building better pathways to college and work.<sup>41</sup> This report seeks to build on these findings by specifically examining whether and how IET models have been established in Irvine's priority regions and in selected areas of the state.

## Study Methodology and Report Structure

MDRC researchers undertook a three-pronged research strategy in order to learn more about California's adult basic skills needs, resources, and services and to identify adult education programs that integrate college- and career-readiness skills within their classes. First, in order to better understand the state's adult education needs and services, MDRC researchers reviewed reports and background documents on California's adult education systems and analyzed demographic information on the adult education target population within different regions in the state. Second, the team conducted phone interviews with state and national adult education leaders as well as with the state's regional

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<sup>37</sup> California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2015).

<sup>38</sup> California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2016).

<sup>39</sup> California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2017).

<sup>40</sup> California Adult Education Program (2019); these organizations include CASAS, West Ed, CalPro (AIR), Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN), and the Sacramento County Office of Education.

<sup>41</sup> Mortrude and Cielinkski (2017).



consortia leaders to learn about the current context of adult education in California and to identify potential IET-like programs in the state. Third, the research team conducted phone interviews and site visits to investigate programs and practices that are being used to provide students receiving basic skills education with higher-level postsecondary or workforce training opportunities. The key research questions guiding this study are:

1. Where are the high areas of need for adult basic skills education in the state of California? What does the target population for these services look like and what are their basic skills needs?
2. Following the Great Recession, what is the overall context of adult basic skills programs in California? What do programs look like in areas of high need?
3. To what extent have California adult basic skills programs integrated the college- and career-readiness practices advocated in career pathways and IET program models? What are the key supports and challenges to integrating these practices?

To answer the third research question, MDRC sought to find programs that align with or have the characteristics of the federal definitions of career pathways and IET programs, which have shown promise in increasing students' academic, college, and labor market outcomes in many rigorous research studies.<sup>42</sup> (See Box 1.1.) More specifically, MDRC researchers sought programs that provided concurrent adult basic skills instruction, workforce preparation or academic supports for transitioning to college, and support services that helped students persist and support their transition into work or postsecondary education.<sup>43</sup> Generally, student outcome data on the programs identified by MDRC is limited, preventing the research team from commenting on an individual program's effectiveness. Rather, the team identified them based on their overall alignment with models that are like IET programs, which have been shown to be effective nationally.<sup>44</sup>

Over the course of the study, a total of 25 phone interviews were conducted with 21 consortia, program, and organizational leaders. Researchers also conducted site visits to a total of 24 programs from April to September 2018. These site visits typically consisted of interviews with staff (administrators, teachers, or counselors), students, and a classroom observation or tour of the campus or office. The goal for these visits was to understand the instruction, training, and supports offered; the types of students who were targeted; and how college preparation or workforce training was integrated with basic skills education. The research team analyzed notes from the site visits and interviews to develop analyses for the report from summer 2018 through early 2019.

A few limitations of the study should be noted. First, given the short span of time for the study, researchers did not conduct an exhaustive review of all the adult basic skills programs in California.

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<sup>42</sup> Schwartz, Strawn, and Sarna. (2018); Fein and Hamadyk (2018); Gardiner, Rolston, Fein, and Cho (2017); Rolston, Copson, and Gardiner (2017).

<sup>43</sup> Adult basic skills instruction includes both the elementary and middle school programs provided in ABE as well as the secondary school level programs provided in ASE.

<sup>44</sup> Schwartz, Strawn, and Sarna. (2018); Fein and Hamadyk (2018); Gardiner, Rolston, Fein, and Cho (2017); Rolston, Copson, and Gardiner (2017).

Instead, the team relied on recommendations from leaders within the state about which programs had implemented promising college- and career-readiness components. Additionally, student outcomes in adult education programs were difficult to systematically track, so this analysis does not provide information on the impact of these programs on students' academic and labor market outcomes.

The three chapters that follow this introduction address each of the questions that drove the research study. Chapter 2 explores the need for adult education in California and specifically the priority regions identified by The Irvine Foundation. Chapter 3 follows with an examination of the context and state of adult education in California, and Chapter 4 highlights programs in the state that have IET, career pathway components, or both. The report concludes with recommendations for strengthening and supporting the development of models that adopt an IET-like approach in California's adult basic skills programs.



## CHAPTER 2

# Assessing the Need for Adult Basic Skills Instruction in California

**WHILE THE NEED FOR ADULT BASIC SKILLS EDUCATION** in California is clear, it is important to understand where the need is most pronounced in an effort to generate the greatest benefit for the most people. This section provides a detailed analysis of the need for adult basic skills programs in California and The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions by examining the demographics and location of low-skilled and impoverished adults in the state. Additionally, this section examines the extent to which the adult basic skills programs offered in these regions meet the needs of their low-skilled adult populations.

### State-Level Need

Demographic and student enrollment data reveal a marked need for adult basic skills education in California and in The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions, in particular. Approximately four and a half million California adults do not have a high school diploma, which is approximately 17.5 percent of the state’s adult population, leaving Texas as the only other state with a higher percentage of undereducated adults.<sup>1</sup> Latinos and Hispanics make up a disproportionate share of this population in California, where they account for approximately 33 percent of the state’s total adult population but approximately 70 percent of the state’s adult population without a high school diploma. (See Table 2.1.) Additionally, approximately 71 percent of those without a high school diploma were born outside of the United States, though these individuals only account for 37 percent of the state’s total adult population. (See Table 2.1.)

Meanwhile, approximately three million adults in California are living in poverty, 12 percent of the adult population — with Latinos and Hispanic adults again overrepresented in this population, along with African-Americans.<sup>2</sup> Latino and Hispanic adults account for approximately 45 percent

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<sup>1</sup> State demographic statistics throughout this chapter were calculated using the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Adults are defined as those 25 years old and older. Eighteen percent of Texas adults do not have a high school diploma.

<sup>2</sup> Poverty is defined as the percentage of people whose income is below the poverty line in the past 12 months. Excluding Puerto Rico, California has the twenty-first highest adult poverty rate.

**TABLE 2.1** California's Adult Population Without a Secondary Credential

CHARACTERISTIC	NUMBER OF ADULTS <sup>a</sup>	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS	NUMBER OF ADULTS WITHOUT A SECONDARY CREDENTIAL <sup>b</sup>	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITHOUT A SECONDARY CREDENTIAL
<b>Race</b>				
White <sup>c</sup>	11,249,732	43.4%	607,146	13.4%
Hispanic or Latino	8,512,999	32.8%	3,199,640	70.4%
Asian	3,991,789	15.4%	510,632	11.2%
Black or African-American	1,507,055	5.8%	165,957	3.7%
<b>Place of Birth</b>				
Native to the U.S.	16,469,752	63.5%	1,306,983	28.8%
Foreign born	9,481,066	36.5%	3,236,547	71.2%
Total	25,950,818	-	4,543,530	-

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

NOTES: Race percentages do not total to 100 because other race categories are not shown in this table.

<sup>a</sup>“Adult” is defined as those 25 years old or older.

<sup>b</sup>“Secondary credential” is defined as a high school diploma or its equivalent.

<sup>c</sup>Whites not of Hispanic or Latino origin.

of adults in poverty in California while African-Americans account for 9 percent, disproportionate to their representation in the total California adult population. (See Table 2.2.) Comparatively, the percentage of white adults living in poverty in California is significantly lower than their representation among adults statewide.

Squaring these demographic measures with enrollment data suggests that the state’s adult basic skills programs are reaching a slim proportion of those with the greatest need. In 2016-2017, just under 700,000 students enrolled in adult education programs funded by the California Adult Education Program (CAEP) — formerly the Adult Education Block Grant — across the four primary program areas, including English as a Second Language (ESL) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses, which are not a focus of this study. (See Table 2.3.) When looking at the Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs that traditionally serve those without a high school diploma, there were approximately 261,000 adults enrolled in basic skills programs in the state, which represents 39 percent of the total enrollments in the state. This suggests that programs are serving roughly 5 percent of the state’s overall adult population that does not have a high school diploma, indicating that ABE and ASE programming represents a potentially important investment for the state.

**TABLE 2.2** California's Adult Population Below the Poverty Level

CHARACTERISTIC	NUMBER OF ADULTS <sup>a</sup>	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS	NUMBER OF ADULTS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL <sup>b</sup>	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL
<b>Race</b>				
White <sup>c</sup>	11,249,732	43.4%	971,122	31.4%
Hispanic or Latino	8,512,999	32.8%	1,381,200	44.6%
Asian	3,991,789	15.4%	376,552	12.2%
Black or African-American	1,507,055	5.8%	277,990	9.0%
Total	25,950,818	-	3,095,428	-

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

NOTES: Percentages do not total to 100 because other race categories are not shown in this table.

<sup>a</sup>“Adult” is defined as those 25 years old or older.

<sup>b</sup>Number of adults whose income in the past 12 months was below the poverty level.

<sup>c</sup>Whites not of Hispanic or Latino origin.

**TABLE 2.3** California Adult Education Program Enrollment, 2016-2017

PROGRAM AREA	TOTAL ENROLLED	PERCENTAGE OF ENROLLMENT
Adult Basic Education	112,790	16.9%
Adult Secondary Education	148,663	22.3%
English as a Second Language <sup>a</sup>	296,284	44.4%
Career and Technical Education	110,231	16.5%
Total	667,968	-

SOURCE: California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (2018).

NOTES: Figures are unduplicated enrollments in the four primary program areas funded by the California Adult Education Program (formerly the Adult Education Block Grant).

<sup>a</sup>Includes enrollments in English Literacy and Civics Education.

However, the enrollment data suggest that students who are served by CAEP-funded programs largely mirror the population in need. In 2016-2017, approximately 85 percent of the students across the state’s adult education program areas, including ESL and CTE, are nonwhite. In ABE and ASE programs alone, which are the focus of this report, nonwhite students continue to account for 85 percent of the enrolled population.<sup>3</sup>

## The Irvine Foundation’s Priority Regions

As discussed in Chapter 1, The Irvine Foundation is committed to helping low-skilled adults in underserved areas of the state, including Riverside, San Bernardino, and counties in the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys.<sup>4</sup> The Irvine Foundation was interested in learning more about the demographics of these areas to inform their current practices as well as highlight potential areas of high need in the state.

The 11 counties in The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions have some of California’s densest concentrations of individuals without a high school credential. Each of these counties falls within the top 20 of the state’s 58 counties with the largest populations of adults without a high school credential.<sup>5</sup> These counties also have higher concentrations of individuals without a high school credential than the statewide average of 17 percent, with some counties — such as Merced, Monterey, and Kern — at more than 25 percent of adults without a high school credential. (See Figure 2.1.) In total, the populations in The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions make up 28 percent of those in the state without a high school credential, though the counties’ total combined population only accounts for 22 percent of the state’s overall adult population.<sup>6</sup> (See Appendix Table A.1 for more detail on the population of adults without a high school diploma or its equivalent, by county.)

Many of the counties making up Irvine’s priority regions also have high rates of poverty. Six of the 20 counties with the highest levels of poverty are in the priority regions; all the remaining counties, except one, are in northern California. The priority region counties all had higher poverty rates than the statewide rate of 13 percent. Poverty is particularly high in the San Joaquin Valley counties as the average adult poverty rate across them is 16 percent. (See Figure 2.2.) The priority region counties also account for 27 percent of the state’s total population living in poverty, but only 22 percent of the state’s total adult population.<sup>7</sup>

Although the priority regions have a disproportionate number of undereducated adults and adults in poverty, enrollment in adult education programs in these regions is relatively low. For instance, approximately 1.4 million adults in the priority regions do not have a high school diploma, but only

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**3** California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (2018).

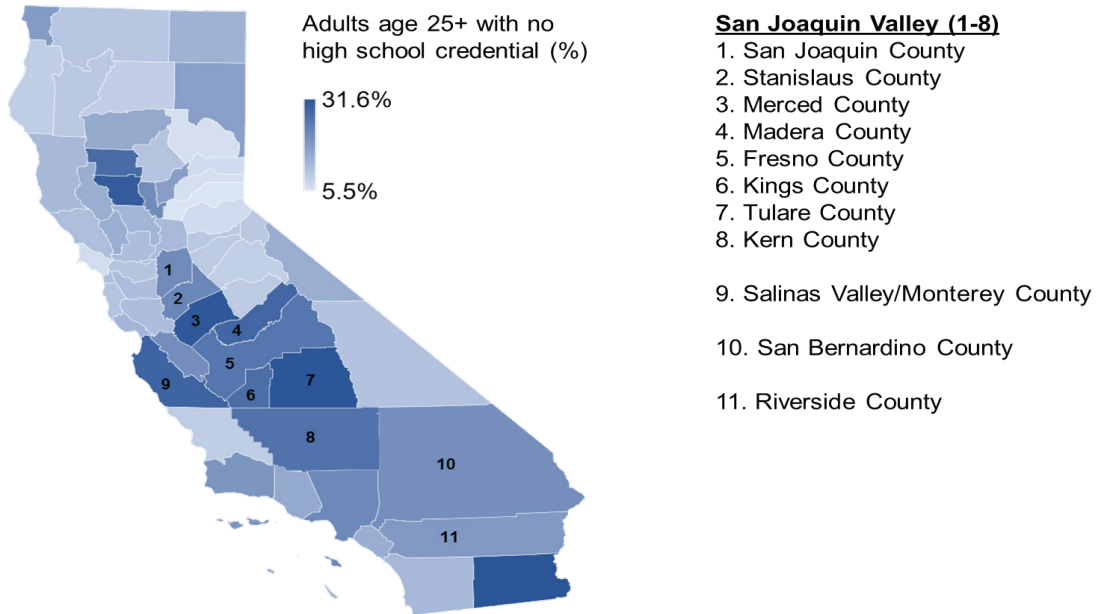
**4** Counties in Irvine’s priority regions include Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Monterey, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tulare, and Riverside.

**5** The other nine counties are located in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

**6** U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

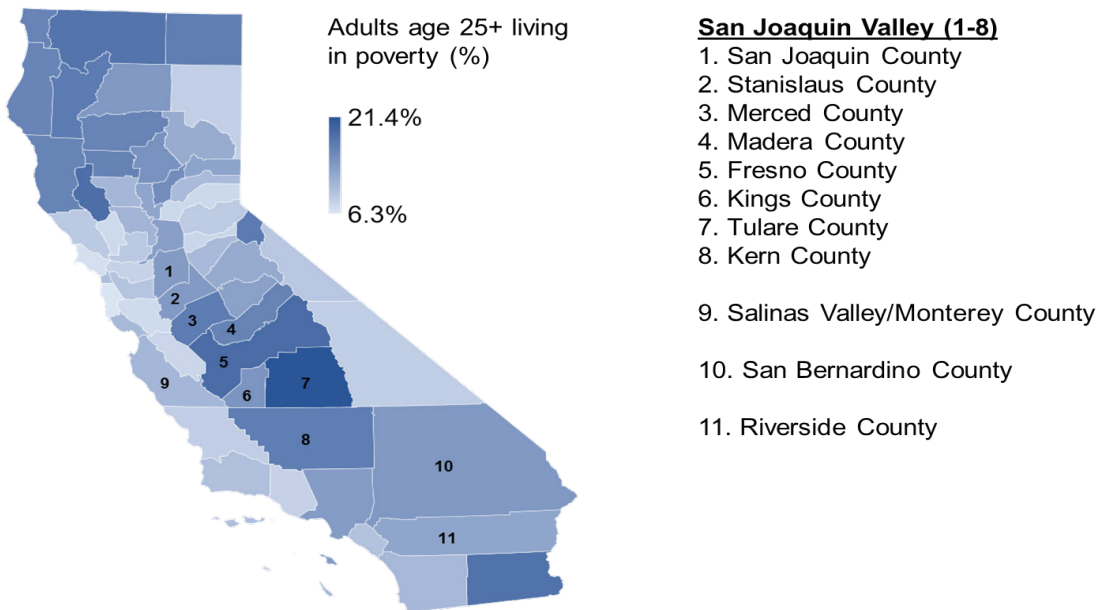
**7** U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

**FIGURE 2.1** Percentage of County Population Without a Secondary Credential



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates data.

**FIGURE 2.2** Percentage of County Population Below the Poverty Level



SOURCE: MDRC calculations from U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates data.

65,500 are enrolled in ABE or ASE programs.<sup>8</sup> This means The Irvine Foundation's priority regions are serving approximately 5 percent of the population that could benefit from adult basic skills education services. By comparison, other more metropolitan areas of the state have been able to meet a higher percentage of the potential need. For instance, there are approximately 82,000 undereducated individuals in Contra Costa County (about 10 percent of the population) and approximately 24,000 students enrolled in ABE or ASE programs, or approximately 17 percent of the population that could benefit from them.<sup>9</sup> (See Appendix Figure A.1.) However, these overall low numbers also demonstrate the high need for basic skills education throughout the state, regardless of region.

Interviews with state adult basic skills education leaders also suggest that adult education programming in these areas may be more expensive to operate than in more metropolitan regions of the state. For instance, one leader noted that it is more difficult to hire and maintain program leaders in these areas of the state and to develop the capacity to work cross-organizationally with other workforce and social service agencies, further underscoring the potential need for additional services or resources for adult basic skills programming in these regions.

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8. U.S. Census Bureau (2018); California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellors Office (2018).

9. U.S. Census Bureau (2018); California Department of Education and California Community Colleges Chancellors Office (2018).

## CHAPTER 3

# Adult Basic Skills Programming in the Priority Regions

**TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE CURRENT CONTEXT** of adult basic skills education in California, MDRC’s research team visited a total of 12 adult schools managed by K-12 school districts, 10 of which were in The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions. Some of these schools were recommended by state and local adult education leaders for their potential to exemplify program components that were similar to the Integrated Education and Training (IET) models highlighted in the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Other schools were recommended because they were highlighted on the California Adult Education Program (CAEP, formerly the Adult Education Block Grant) website as a promising program or practice that provided integrated basic skills, and workforce training or college-readiness training, or both. In some cases, leaders or website descriptions outlined the specific services these adult schools offered, such as counselors who specialized in helping students transition into college or online programming designed to help students explore careers. In other cases, leaders or website descriptions highlighted the implementation of programs that were more structured and similar to the IET model.

The programs that MDRC visited ranged in size from small schools of approximately 400 students to large schools with over 5,000 students. Nearly all of the schools provided instruction in all of the primary adult basic skills program areas funded by CAEP, including Adult Basic Education (ABE), Adult Secondary Education (ASE), English as a Second Language (ESL), and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. The research team’s primary aim was to identify ABE and ASE programs that integrated college- and career-readiness components into basic skills instruction and to find programs resembling the concurrent instruction and training offered by IET models.

### General Education and Program Services

Overall, adult basic skills programs run by the K-12 school districts that MDRC visited, and the buildings in which they were housed, mirrored high school settings. These programs either had their own campuses or shared space at a local high school for classrooms, a study lounge, library, or common area. In most of these schools, ABE and ASE courses are structured like typical high school courses, with separate classes for subjects such as math, science, English, and social studies, and utilized high school textbooks for instruction in some instances. A number of these programs also

provided supplemental support services for their students, such as academic advisors or counselors to help with goal setting, child care, and transportation. However, these services were not always integrated into the program in a structured or consistent way, so instructors in many of these schools were left to counsel and advise students on their own and in an ad hoc manner.

While many adult schools resembled high schools, they also employed management and classroom practices that are typical of adult education settings. For instance, courses were generally offered year-round (though generally organized on a semester or term schedule) with open entry and exit policies. Generally, the teachers at these schools were part time and many had experience as K-12 educators. To accommodate varied schedules, courses were offered at various times and frequencies from full, daily classes to offerings of a few hours on select days or evenings. Several adult schools also offered e-learning platforms and online learning modules to supplement courses or offer students independent study. Entering students were assessed using a common adult basic skills test, the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), and course placements were determined by tests that measure a student's skill level.

The schools varied in how much they tracked student outcomes. Many described using CASAS to assess students' skills and track their performance. Some leaders discussed the federal funding they received and spoke of student outcomes in terms of federal National Reporting System terminology, such as measurable skills gains or high school equivalency certificates, suggesting that they were tracking and submitting outcomes to this federal database on adult education students' outcomes. However, most school leaders said they were unable to track student enrollment or outcomes across educational institutions, so they were unable to determine whether their students might also be enrolled in community college classes, training programs, or at other educational institutions.

## College and Career Transitions

Nearly all of the adult schools in this study offered services that help students transition to college or careers. For instance, several schools utilized CAEP consortium-funded "transition specialists" or "navigators" to help students with both transitions to college and careers, *and* connections to other support services, such as resources for child care or transportation. Generally, these specialized, local counselors aimed, in the words of one counselor, to let students "know that they have options and that the adult school isn't their last stop [and] is only the beginning." These counselors assisted students with a wide range of workforce transition activities, including helping students explore careers, develop resumes, and find and apply for jobs. They also helped students consider different college programs and assisted them with admissions and financial aid applications. Finally, schools regularly hosted career fairs and standalone classes on study skills and time management.

Instructors and administrators emphasized the importance of helping students learn how to succeed in college and careers. For instance, some instructors stressed the importance of teaching what they called "strategies" or "scaffolding," helping them build skills such as effective note taking and determining reliable Internet sources that would serve them well in college. One instructor explained, "Students are not just being exposed to teaching to a test but getting them ready with the strategies that they are going to be able to use beyond the class, in college, [like] annotating and comparing



and contrasting.” In interviews with MDRC researchers, students also emphasized the essential role of college and career guidance. As one student said, “My instructors tell me about job programs, job searching, and career programs within the school and about resources related to getting into college.”

However, while many adult schools offered services to help students transition to work and college, most had not intentionally embedded college and career training within the classroom. Nearly all schools offered at least a few CTE courses, which provided training and credentialing in areas such as Microsoft Office, welding, or the allied health professions. However, these courses were usually siloed from ABE and ASE classes and students, with little intentional coordination or integrated programming between them. This even held true for schools that were collocated with a workforce development agency where counseling and training for local industry jobs was available. Adult basic skills students were only recommended to take CTE courses if they either had, or were about to earn, a high school diploma. In some cases, this was because certain industries only employed high school graduates. In other cases, this was the result of a district’s or school’s advising practices.

Additionally, school leaders reported that they did not generally talk about transitions to college and careers until students had more advanced skills. For instance, transition counselors typically did not meet with ABE and ASE students until they were close to completing their high school equivalency diploma. As counselors for one consortium emphasized, they pursued students from a list of those expected to graduate at the end of the term. While one school claimed to speak individually with students about transitions throughout their academic careers, the transition options available to students were generally dictated by their skill levels. As such, most adult schools encouraged the idea of sequential education, emphasizing that a high school equivalency diploma was required before transitioning to higher-level training and education.

## **Challenges to Implementing Integrated Education and Training Models**

Many adult school leaders cited important challenges to developing programs similar to the IET model in their schools. In several cases, school leaders emphasized challenges with the recent recession when they had very limited funding and were forced to restrict their services or close their schools. These leaders noted that their main emphasis now was on rebuilding their basic academic services and drawing students back to the school. In the words of one consortium director, “When our consortium started, we looked at the data we had on students and tried to figure out how best to serve their needs, and we were not as focused on rebuilding our career and technical offerings.” School leaders at two other schools said they feared that adult basic skills’ funding was unstable, and that they would have to discontinue the programs.

Other leaders mentioned leadership or cross-organizational challenges with building these programs. For instance, a leader at one adult school noted an interest in developing more career pathway models for ABE students, but that the school district leaders did not share this vision, seeing ABE students as “people who didn’t make it.” Others noted challenges collaborating with local postsecondary institutions, either because of differing policies (such as the ability to hire staff or a lack of funding for time spent planning or teaching) or differing visions for the programs or issues over “territory.”

For instance, one school described how they had developed a dual enrollment program with their local college, but then discontinued the program when the college stopped offering college credit for the courses. One consortium director said that the competition between adult schools and community colleges for students further hampered coordination between these programs and any of their related services.

When asked about the supports they would need to develop IET-like programs, school officials called for more collaboration across education and social service providers, and the need to build awareness of career-readiness models across multiple agencies. They also emphasized the need for additional staff members who could help build the academic and personnel infrastructure necessary for developing IET models. Many adult school leaders also reported that they needed permanent, full-time instructors and staff members who could help with program development rather than the part-time staff they currently relied on. In many cases, school leaders said they needed additional funding to supplement their limited resources. For instance, several schools reported a lack of funds for basic services such as take-home textbooks, GED test fees, or access to technology. Finally, several program leaders said they needed better data systems to effectively monitor and track student outcomes.

## **Moving Forward**

Despite these challenges, a few schools had made inroads into integrating their college- and career-readiness training with their academic curricula. For instance, though the programs had been discontinued, three schools had made attempts to build a program that integrated their basic skills instruction with welding, customer service, and health careers in partnership with either their local community college or CTE instructors in their schools. Two other schools were hoping to develop IET models in child development or health care but had yet to implement any programs. Though these programs were not fully realized, they did reveal leaders' interest in developing adult basic skills programming that is integrated with career- and college-readiness training.

MDRC researchers also found a subset of programs that had been able to more fully integrate college- and career-readiness programming in with basic skills education, a few of which were located in ABE and ASE programs. These programs are highlighted in Chapter 4 along with a roadmap that shows how schools, colleges, and nonprofit organizations harnessed the resources to develop them.

## CHAPTER

# 4

## A Look at Adult Basic Skills Education and Training Models Across California

**IN ADDITION TO UNDERSTANDING THE GENERAL PROFILE** of adult basic skills programs in The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions, MDRC researchers also sought to identify programs that had integrated basic skills education and training into their offerings across the state that might serve as potential models for replication or expansion. The team focused on identifying programs that aligned with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines, which included providing concurrent instruction in basic skills and workforce training while also providing supports to help students transition into college and the workforce. Ideally, any programs identified would also be offered as part of a career pathway model that reflected regional labor market needs and provided a stepwise series of educational milestones and credentials that individuals can earn as they advance their skills. (See Box 1.2 in Chapter 1.)

This section provides an overview of 10 California programs that have adopted elements of both the career pathway and Integrated Education and Training (IET) models. MDRC researchers conducted online research on programs and received recommendations from adult basic skills program directors. The research team followed up with site visits to fully grasp how each program was implemented. The programs that the team identified are led by a variety of organizations, ranging from adult schools to workforce development agencies to nonprofit organizations. However, these programs in no way represent an exhaustive inventory of integrated adult education programs in California. Additionally, though many of the programs discussed here serve low-income students, most neither serve nor target individuals without a high school diploma, a limitation that is discussed later in this chapter.

### Common Features of Programs in California

The research team identified 10 programs that offer adult basic skills instruction concurrently with workforce and college-readiness training. Three of the programs were housed at K-12 adult schools, three at community colleges, and the remaining four were offered through nonprofit organizations. Three of the programs were in The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions. (See Table 4.1 for a list of programs.)

**TABLE 4.1** Programs for Low-Skilled Individuals with Integrated Education and Training or Career Pathway Components

PROGRAM NAME	LOCATION	OPERATING ORGANIZATION	DURATION OF PROGRAM	EXPLICITLY TARGETS THOSE WITHOUT A SECONDARY CREDENTIAL?	SKILL LEVEL CUT-OFF
Career Advancement Academy at El Camino College	Torrance	Community college	8 weeks	No	No cutoff
Civicorps	Oakland	Nonprofit	7-8 months <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No cutoff
East LA Skills Center's Photovoltaic Program	Los Angeles	Adult school	5 months	No	No cutoff
Farmworker Education and Advancement at Hartnell College	Salinas	Community college	10 weeks <sup>b</sup>	No	No cutoff
Fresno Bridge Academy	Fresno	Nonprofit	Up to 18 months	Yes	No cutoff
Gonzales Adult School	Gonzales	Adult school	Semester-long	Yes	No cutoff
Jewish Vocational Service	San Francisco	Nonprofit	3-8 months	No	High school diploma
Opportunity Junction	Antioch	Nonprofit	7 months <sup>c</sup>	No	7th grade reading level
Pre-Apprenticeship Training Construction at Washington Adult School	West Sacramento	Adult school	6 months	Yes	No cutoff
Strengthening Working Families Program at LA Valley College	Los Angeles	Community college	6 weeks	No	No cutoff

SOURCE: MDRC review of programs.

NOTES:

<sup>a</sup>Fourteen weeks of instruction plus four months of a paid work experience.

<sup>b</sup>One day a week for eight hours.

<sup>c</sup>Twelve weeks of skills training plus four months of a paid internship.

Overall, these programs demonstrated the implementation of several IET and career pathway components, including the integration of technical skills training and basic skills development; supports for job entry such as resume preparation and mock interviews; direct connections with employers; and wraparound support services to address barriers to program participation, such as assistance with food, transportation, and child care. However, programs were relatively limited in their offering of other types of IET or career pathway components. For instance, only a few programs included paid work experience or an opportunity to earn college credit, perhaps because some states do not allow paid internships as part of noncredit community college programming. Programs were also typically full time with managed enrollment policies that facilitated sequenced instruction, which is difficult to maintain in traditional adult education settings. Key commonalities of the programs are highlighted below, with attention to how their diverse settings and policy contexts affected their implementation.

- **All of the programs provided basic skills and technical instruction, though the level of contextualization varied across programs.**

Contextualized basic skills instruction seeks to teach students basic skills that are relevant to and aligned with the industry in which they are being trained. A benefit of contextualized basic skills instruction is that it allows students to learn more about the industry and see, for instance, how basic math and literacy concepts are important and relevant for their careers. Five of the IET programs provided this type of contextualized instruction for their students.

One way to contextualize basic skills instruction is through the use of a co-teaching model where one teacher provides technical skills instruction and a second teacher contextualizes basic skills instruction using the content and terminology within the technical program.<sup>1</sup> An example of this is the photovoltaic program at the East Los Angeles Skills Center, which is an adult school in the Los Angeles Unified School District. The program consists of three 6-week photovoltaic courses that provide opportunities for students to earn industry-recognized certification. Students concurrently enroll in the photovoltaic course (which is taught by a Continuing Technical Education, or CTE, teacher) to receive technical training along with basic math instruction (which is taught by an Adult Basic Education, or ABE, math teacher) using examples from the photovoltaic industry. Students embraced the contextualized math instruction, saying that it demonstrated the importance of math to their careers and piqued their interest in a subject they might otherwise overlook. “The classes intertwine with each other,” said one student.

The formulas you’re learning in morning math class are later applied in the photovoltaic class. In the math class you ask, ‘Why am I learning this?’ especially when you’re not getting it at first and it’s frustrating. But when you see why it’s helpful and it all comes together.

Programs such as the Career Advancement Academies at El Camino College and Opportunity Junction also offer contextualized basic skills instruction, but with less intensity than the East Los Angeles Skills Center. The Career Advancement Academies at El Camino College offer eight-week

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<sup>1</sup> Wachen, Jenkins, and Van Noy (2010).

training sessions in welding, air conditioning and refrigeration, and automotive technology that lead to certificates. Twice during the program period, a math teacher and industry instructor will co-teach, providing career-specific training along with math skills contextualized within that industry. Voluntary math “boot camps” are also offered outside of class for students twice during the program period, between co-teaching sessions. Similarly, Opportunity Junction, which offers job training programs for those seeking administrative positions, requires students to take Introduction to Business English and Introduction to Business Math. Both courses are taught by neighborhood business volunteers, reducing costs for Opportunity Junction and giving students the chance to network with local employers.

Program leaders made clear that using a co-teaching model for contextualized instruction requires instructors to have a good working relationship and that the basic skills teacher must understand the industry in focus. In addition, teachers required adequate time to develop a curriculum and plan each class to ensure that basic skills instruction is aligned with technical skills training. This can be difficult since teachers are often not paid for time spent planning. To cover program costs, the East Los Angeles Skills Center has blended its California Adult Education Program dollars with other sources, such as monies from the federal Carl D. Perkins program.

In contrast, Gonzales Adult School provides basic skills instruction and technical skills training by encouraging students to co-enroll in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses and Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) courses. Although the basic skills instruction is not contextualized, Gonzales works to ensure that students are aware of the school’s full range of program offerings and courses. Many of the students earn short-term certificates in skills such as forklift operation, typing, ServSafe food handling, Microsoft Office, First Aid and CPR, and paraprofessional testing — which do not have a high school diploma prerequisite — while also enrolled in ABE or ASE courses. Gonzales, which is one of the smaller adult schools, serves about 400 students a year, which may have contributed to this concurrent course enrollment. For instance, program directors and teachers noted that the school’s small size allowed them to provide individualized support to students because they knew every student in the school and were aware of the school’s full suite of classes. This type of model could be used in programs that have challenges doing a co-teaching model due to funding constraints or other challenges. Although this doesn’t include contextualization, it could serve as a lower-cost, less intensive way for schools to provide training alongside basic skills instruction.

- **Programs offered a variety of workforce preparation activities, with more intensive models including a full suite of classes and a paid work opportunity.**

Workforce preparation and training activities are key to facilitating connections between educational experiences and careers. These activities enhance an individual’s employability, critical thinking, digital literacy, and the self-management skills that foster success in the workplace. Workforce training can encompass many different activities, such as on-the-job training, job-readiness preparation such as learning appropriate workplace skills, and incumbent worker training.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Cahill (2016).

Most of the 10 programs that incorporate IET or career pathway components included soft skills instruction and career-readiness training. Topics covered included communication skills, dressing for work, and workplace expectations. The more intensive programs — including the Fresno Bridge Academy and Opportunity Junction — staged mock interviews for participants with local employers. In focus groups, students said the mock interviews were critical to helping them boost their confidence when they went for real job interviews. They also provided students with the opportunity to meet with and learn more about local businesses.

Two of the programs require that participants enroll in a paid work experience, which takes place after students complete several weeks of skills instruction. Program leaders note that the paid work experience is important for students because it allows them to practice the skills they have learned and gain occupational or employability skills in a relatively low-pressure environment and add work experience to their resumes — which is particularly important for individuals who may have been out of work for some time. They are also important for providing a source of income to students while they are participating in the program.

Civicorps, a charter high school diploma program in Oakland, incorporates both workforce preparation and training activities into its program model. Program participants without a high school diploma receive full-time classroom instruction for 14 weeks and then transition into paid job training while finishing high school graduation requirements based on a portfolio model. The paid job training occurs within either one of Civicorps' two social enterprises, environmental management or recycling, or in an internship with Civicorps or another local organization. Through all three job-training opportunities, participants are able to learn both occupational and employability skills while earning money.

These paid work experiences are intended to be the first step to obtaining a job or career that provides a family-sustaining, living wage. For example, those in the environmental management program can earn technical certifications and use the experience to secure a job with training partners such as the local parks or transportation agency. Similarly, the recycling training is a truck-driving pre-apprenticeship program that can lead to attainment of a Class B commercial driver's license with air brakes as well as union apprenticeships with Waste Management.

Another program that incorporates workforce training activities with a paid work experience is Opportunity Junction. The program offers 12 weeks of full-time computer skills training that leads to a Microsoft Office certificate along with workplace etiquette training and then a paid internship for up to four months. During the first 12 weeks of the program, students participate in a life skills course, which usually meets daily for 1.5 hours. A key part of the course is teaching students the time management and communications skills they need to be successful in the workplace. The course also addresses issues of workplace diversity and conflict management. Once participants complete the 12 weeks of training, they are placed in a four-month, paid internship with Opportunity Junction or local employers.

A number of former students discussed the importance of the internship experience. In particular, they discussed how the blend of classroom and life skills instruction followed by an internship experience helped build their confidence about being in the workplace. In the words of one student,



“With the life skills, gaining the confidence is a huge part of it. If I couldn’t present myself as hireable, it’d be all for nothing. The internship is also very helpful because it allows us to have a practical application of our skills instead of just searching for jobs and getting rusty.”

- **All of the programs offered a variety of support services either onsite or through referral to community organizations in an effort to address barriers to program participation.**

All of the programs highlighted in this chapter tend to serve low-income, disadvantaged individuals, many of whom are facing issues such as housing instability, lack of affordable child care, and previous experience with trauma. These life challenges can serve as barriers to program participation and completion for many students. All of the programs provide some level of support to help students address these life issues, with some programs offering more comprehensive and intensive services than others. The programs with more intensive support services provide one-on-one case management services, as well as an array of supports such as free transportation passes, food and groceries, and in some cases, onsite mental health services. Civicorps, Opportunity Junction, and Strengthening Working Families (described in Box 4.1) at Los Angeles Valley College, for instance, all offer onsite mental health counseling, which program leaders describe as an important service given the trauma many of the students have previously experienced.

Another important barrier cited by program administrators and participants was the lack of affordable and reliable child care. Two of the programs — Gonzales Adult School and the Strengthening Working Families program at Los Angeles Valley College — were able to provide some level of child care. Strengthening Working Families offers students who have young children a child-friendly study lounge where their children are supervised by the college’s child development student volun-

#### BOX 4.1

### Spotlight on Strengthening Working Families’ Holistic Support Model

The Strengthening Working Families program at Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC) is a collaboration between the LAVC Workforce Strategy Center, which offers short-term training academies in different industry sectors, and the on-campus Family Resource Center, which provides support services to students. The two centers work together to holistically support the needs of workforce trainees. The Family Resource Center works to identify and service the needs of workforce trainees and connect them with other resources in the community when necessary. For instance, one barrier faced by many participants is transportation, so the Resource Center provides Los Angeles Metro vouchers and tokens to help offset costs. Trainees also receive parenting classes, support with child care, and necessities like food and clothing for their children. Mental health counseling is one of the most popular services. It includes a two-hour presentation about stress management and mental health from a licensed professional with whom participants can later meet for individualized counseling as well as college and community services.



teers. Gonzales is able to provide child care through a partnership with a day care center run by the Gonzales Unified School District.

Program leaders view these supports as critical to keeping students engaged in the program, even though they can be expensive to provide. A director of student supports at one of the programs said, “We try to figure out what’s preventing students from coming to class and then provide the non-academic services that will help them be successful.” Students also talked about the importance of these services. As one student said, “When they [Fresno Bridge Academy] provided me with things like interview clothes for a job interview and glasses that helped me feel good and confident [about being able to get a job], it let me know that somebody cares. They invested their time and resources in me and I felt valued.”

To pay for these services, programs braid, or pull together, a variety of foundation and federal, state, and local government resources, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), WIOA, and Carl D. Perkins dollars. They also rely on services from local community providers. For instance, Opportunity Junction provides meals and groceries to students through local food banks and other community-based food providers.

The programs with more modest support services often refer students to other community providers for assistance. The leaders of these programs noted that for this approach to be effective, it was important to make “strong referrals” that involve program staff working closely with students to walk them through the referral process. This might include, for instance, accompanying a student to the service provider. In turn, these programs have developed a wide network of reliable community relationships. For programs that may not have the resources to provide onsite services, this type of referral system may be useful.

- **Programs accelerated student progress by organizing instruction into intensive multiweek courses that students attended full time.**

WIOA encourages the development of career pathway models that accelerate student progress, so students can finish their programs quickly and advance their careers.<sup>3</sup> Most of the California programs that are similar to the IET model accelerated students’ progress by only allowing them to enter the program at specified times, such as at the beginning of the semester or the beginning of a multiweek program. This strategy, known as managed enrollment, is in contrast to many traditional ABE programs, which have open-entry policies that allow students to enter at any point during the semester.<sup>4</sup> Managed enrollment provides students with a dedicated timeframe for building skills and allows for a sequenced curriculum so that each lesson builds on the previous one.

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<sup>3</sup> Mortrude (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Zachry Rutschow and Crary-Ross (2014).

Another benefit of managed enrollment programs is that they allow cohorts to form.<sup>5</sup> Cohort models allow students to build relationships and support one another as they advance through a program. Some programs specifically encourage the development of cohorts in which students bond and develop peer support networks. Opportunity Junction, for instance, believes that the bonds between students are a critical component of the program and explicitly tries to foster these relationships. One of the key goals of the daily life skills course they attend is to help students develop shared experiences. Each day, the instructor starts the class with a question that everyone must answer, such as, “What’s your greatest fear about entering the workplace?” or “What’s one day in your life that you would like to do over?”

Students at Opportunity Junction commented on how these bonds helped them progress in school. In the words of one of these students,

I feel like I have forged lifelong bonds with all of my classmates. Just the encouragement we’ve gotten from each other through life skills and being able to hear each other’s stories and be inspired by them and learn from them. With my classmates’ support, I was able to get back on track if I ever fell behind.

Other students commented on how these supports built their confidence in the workplace.

[The] life skills [course] gave us confidence in ourselves — bringing out things we never really knew were there. We really needed the confidence to move forward [and believe we were worth getting hired] because we never really thought we could [before].

While most of the programs similar to the IET model in the scan had managed enrollment, three of them were structured as open entry and exit programs. One strategy that programs use to address the challenges of open entry and exit programs is to have student aides or teachers in the class who can provide support to newer students.

Most of the programs were also full time, offering intensive, day-long, multiweek to multimonth instructional sequences. Programs ranged from six weeks to eighteen months, with the longer programs including a work experience component. According to program leaders, part of the rationale behind full-time programs is to accelerate students’ academic and workforce training progress so that they can enter the workplace more quickly.

For students who must work, a full-time commitment to a program can be challenging. As noted above, programs provide a variety of supports, such as food and transportation passes, to help students make ends meet while they are enrolled. During the study, Civicorps also provided a small attendance stipend to students while they were working toward their high school diploma. In addition, programs such as Civicorps and Opportunity Junction, which include a paid experience, allowed students to earn wages while they were in the program. Despite this broad support, program directors report that many students still had to work evenings and nights to sustain themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> Zachry Rutschow and Crary-Ross (2014).

- **Many programs align themselves with the needs of local industry through partnerships with local employers or by examining local labor market trends.**

A key component of career pathway programs is that they are aligned with the needs of local industries.<sup>6</sup> If programs are going to help people enter and advance within a career, it is important that they prepare them for jobs in high-growth industries and that they are able to equip students with the skills that employers value. Programs can do this by having local or regional labor market needs drive their program offerings and by developing strong relationships with employers who can provide input on aligning program curriculum with industry or sector needs and trends.

Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), a career education and job-training nonprofit organization in San Francisco, is an example of a demand-driven organization that uses industry-aligned programming. JVS offers short-term, intensive skills training in three industries: technology, utilities, and health care. These programs are free and open to those who are unemployed or underemployed and meet admission criteria such as having high school credentials and proficiency in English.

In one instance, JVS partnered with John Muir Health to design a medical administrative assistant course to fulfill qualifications for related positions at the company. Program participants completed a ten-week training course followed by a four-month paid internship at John Muir Health.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, JVS built a medical assistant “refresher” course around skills identified by another employer, Sutter Pacific Medical Foundation, as lacking in their hiring pool; the course was open to those who had medical assistant certification but weren’t currently employed in the field.<sup>8</sup>

JVS also received funding to conduct a labor analysis for the Bay Area’s water and wastewater utilities to meet future workforce needs and identify candidates for key positions. This analysis identified the skills and competencies required for certain high-demand jobs, highlighting gaps in the education and career pathways associated with these jobs and providing recommendations for increasing training opportunities to strengthen candidate pipelines.<sup>9</sup>

Another program that has fostered strong relationships with employers is the Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Training (PACT) program at Washington Adult School in West Sacramento. PACT is a six-month-long training program that trains people for jobs in the construction industry and helps them transition into an apprenticeship or find employment in the industry. PACT created an industry advisory council comprising about 35 people, including representatives from local businesses and unions. The PACT program director meets with the advisory council regularly to understand what skills employers are looking for and to secure their input on the curriculum. The employers see this as an opportunity to help ensure a pipeline of skilled workers. In addition, the employers on the council also come to the classroom to talk to students or host students for job shadowing and will often donate equipment or resources to the program.

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<sup>6</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2015).

<sup>7</sup> Jewish Vocational Service (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Jewish Vocational Service (2017).

<sup>9</sup> BAYWORK, Jewish Vocational Service, and The Centers for Excellence (2018).

## Limitations of the Programs

Despite the promise of these 10 programs, they have two limitations that may make them less applicable or more difficult to recreate in adult basic skills programs that serve ABE and ASE students. This section discusses the two challenges below.

- **Although all of the programs served low-skilled adults and sought to improve their basic skills, few of them explicitly targeted those without a high school diploma, and many of the students who enrolled already had a high school diploma.**

Most of the programs highlighted in this section did not have skill-level requirements, meaning they served a range of skill levels, including some people with higher-level skills and those with a high school diploma or equivalent. (See Table 4.1.) Only three of the programs — Civicorps, Gonzalez Adult School, and Fresno Bridge Academy — had the explicit aim of helping individuals earn a high school credential. Outside of these three programs, many program leaders noted that most of the students enrolled in the program already had a high school diploma. Some program leaders referred students with skills below these levels to ABE classes in other schools to build their academic abilities.

So, while the programs did seek to enhance students' basic skills, the primary focus and goal was not necessarily attainment of a high school diploma. This suggests that many programs may be missing lower-skilled students and those without a high school diploma — and that there is a need for additional programming that explicitly targets students who are still working toward their high school credential.

- **Most of the promising programs that were visited tended to be more focused on support for workforce entry than for postsecondary education.**

For most of the programs, and particularly those operated by workforce organizations, the primary goal was to help individuals secure employment, so there was a less explicit focus on college preparation and facilitating connections to postsecondary education for students. Some of this emphasis on workforce entry rather than postsecondary education may have been because they were primarily workforce programs and thus more focused on getting individuals into the labor market more quickly. For instance, Opportunity Junction's primary goal was to help individuals secure entry-level administrative jobs, which often do not require a postsecondary degree.

While short-term training programs can be helpful in getting lower-skilled adults into the workforce more quickly, many of these jobs may be lower-paying and have limited room for growth opportunities. The career pathway model focuses on having multiple levels of career advancement that allow individuals to increase their skills and wages incrementally.<sup>10</sup> Higher-level advancement often requires some postsecondary training, often beginning with a shorter-term credential and advancing into two-year and four-year degrees. Understanding these tiers and the postsecondary education that may be required can be an important part of advancing students into higher-wage careers.

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<sup>10</sup> Bergson-Shilcock (2015).

Some of the programs — especially those located on college campuses and at K-12 adult schools — worked to make sure that program participants were aware of the postsecondary educational opportunities available for them. Programs also organized field trips to local colleges and assisted students with college applications, financial aid forms, and course selection processes. Two of the programs also provided students with opportunities to earn college credits. The Pre-Apprenticeship Construction Training (PACT) program at the Washington Adult School, for instance, is articulated with the construction program at the local community college, so students who complete the PACT program leave with two college credits. The program leader noted that, although many of the students want to enter the workforce immediately and rarely transition over to the community college, it is still useful for students to have those credits should they ever return to school down the line. Los Angeles Valley College’s Strengthening Working Families program also allows students to earn college credit through their participation in the short-term job training academies, as well as a noncredit certificate for parenting classes. According to program directors, this helps promote a concept of a college-going culture to students.

Another organization — Civicorps — provides a further example of how a program designed to help people find employment can also build connections with and awareness of postsecondary education. In recent years, Civicorps has increased its efforts to create a college-going atmosphere among students. All students take a career pathway class at the beginning of the program to help map their career and educational goals and the steps they will need to take (that is, the postsecondary credential needed) to reach those goals. An onsite college counselor also assists students with college applications, managing the AmeriCorps Education Award they receive via the work they do in the community, and financial aid forms. In addition, Civicorps has partnered with the local community college to develop curriculum that prepares graduates for the rigors of college by bridging key concepts and workload. According to the program director, the Civicorps approach gives students a better understanding of college-level academic expectations and helps them avoid the potential stumbling block of remedial courses in college.

Despite this, programs have acknowledged having challenges with students pushing toward higher-level skills or degrees, and that many students are less focused on career advancement. Several program leaders noted that students are primarily interested in entering the workforce as quickly as possible, so they can earn money. Opportunity Junction does provide lifetime services to program alumni to help them advance in their careers; however, according to one program director, take-up for advancement services has traditionally been low:

Program alumni have had such a history of unemployment, being laid off, or terminated, that once they’re in a position [where] they felt stable, they feel like they were ‘good’; they say, ‘I’m not asking my boss for a raise or leaving for a different job, I’m sticking where I am’. So, we actually had to convince folks to negotiate a raise or apply for a promotion — that they’re good enough and smart enough.

In conclusion, programs may need to do more to help students recognize the value of acquiring additional skills and educational qualifications — and provide more supports for them to be able to achieve these goals.



## CHAPTER

# 5

## Conclusion

**HELPING LOW-SKILLED ADULTS FURTHER BUILD** their academic and workforce knowledge is critical for advancing their participation in today’s demanding marketplace. However, developing programs that help adults build both of these skills at the same time can be a challenge. Many low-skilled adults face numerous life challenges that make it difficult to participate in training and education programs — and many of the programs for these individuals are chronically underfunded and underresourced.

Yet many adult basic skills programs have increasingly offered both basic skills instruction and workforce preparedness training. Research studies have shown the promise these types of programs hold for improving student persistence along with academic and labor market outcomes for low-skilled adults. As a result, many states have instituted statewide programs that help bridge the gap between workforce development and adult basic skills education. In 2014, this movement was further advanced through revisions to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) with provisions that now provide funding and incentives for adult education programs to develop these Integrated Education and Training (IET) models.

This study sought to identify programs for low-skilled, undereducated adults in California that offered opportunities similar to the integrated workforce training and basic skills programs proliferating across the country. The research began with a demographic analysis of the key areas of need in the state for adult basic skills education and how this aligned with The Irvine Foundation’s priority regions for investment, including the San Joaquin and Salinas Valleys as well as Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Researchers then sought to identify Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Secondary Education (ASE) models in these regions and throughout the state that incorporated components of federally defined IET programs and career pathway programs, as outlined in WIOA. IET and career pathway programs are expected to provide concurrent instruction in basic skills and workforce training, as well as support students transitioning into college, the workforce, or both. Ideally, they also should be aligned with regional labor market needs and lay a path to achieving educational milestones and credentials that individuals can earn as they advance their skills.

Overall, the study team found that Irvine’s priority regions had some of the highest concentrations of adults in the state who lacked a high school diploma and lived in poverty, accounting for more than one-fourth of the state’s population of low-skilled adults. Additionally, researchers found that most of the adult schools offering ABE and ASE courses in Irvine’s priority regions had not yet integrated college- and career-readiness training into their basic skills programs and were more

focused on the traditional goals of increasing student literacy, numeracy, and high school credentialing. Despite this, the research team identified a number of promising college- and career-readiness models, which offered basic skills instruction concurrently with workforce training, helped students obtain credentials, and provided numerous academic and financial supports to help students succeed. However, many of these programs were operated by nonprofit organizations or workforce development agencies that were outside the auspices of traditional adult basic skills programming. Additionally, these programs tended not to directly target those without a high school diploma and enrolled many students with this credential, suggesting that non-high school graduates may be an underserved population.

## **Recommendations for Advancing Academic and Career-Readiness Instruction**

These findings suggest that there are additional opportunities for California education leaders and policymakers to grow and advance programs that help low-skilled, undereducated adults gain workforce skills while improving their academic capacities. This chapter identifies five recommendations for further investing in and expanding programming that integrates academic and career-readiness instruction.

- **Build staff capacity.**

Adult school leaders identified the lack of a stable teaching force as one of the most critical obstacles to improving programs for low-skilled adults. MDRC interviews with adult education programs detailed a heavy reliance on part-time teachers for ABE and ASE courses. While these individuals were committed to their classes and students, program leaders noted that they were often less invested than full-time faculty in developing and helping to manage the overall programming at the adult school. Additionally, most schools had only a handful of full-time teachers and administrators who could assist with this type of development, making it difficult to focus on programming beyond basic academic offerings. Finally, several program leaders discussed fears about the stability of their financing, anticipating that funding could be cut again and that they would have to cancel new programs.

Given these challenges, one of the most promising ways that California leaders might help programs build more integrated basic skills and workforce training programs (as well as their general academic courses) is to help schools bring in more full-time staff or allocate resources to allow for more noninstructional time. For example, a leader in one adult school suggested that making integrated programming work would require more mentorship and collaboration opportunities between instructors, including activities such as peer-to-peer observation and live instructor coaching. A leader of another program also underscored this point in noting that instructors' ability to collaborate and plan outside of class time was critical to the smooth operation of their co-teaching model.

- **Build cross-agency learning and collaboration.**

Although many adult schools have been rebuilding services that were discontinued following the Great Recession, many have been furthering plans to integrate college- and career-readiness pro-



gramming into their basic skills instruction. For instance, most schools had counselors who provided information and advice to students about transitions to college or workforce training programs, and most programs offered at least some career and technical education courses. Additionally, many program leaders attempted or were planning to attempt the development of integrated adult basic skills courses that provided workforce training in growing fields such as allied health.

One of the key challenges that leaders identified in furthering this work was the lack of cross-program or cross-agency coordination. Even when programs were collocated in the same building, leaders noted that not enough cross-program coordination had occurred and that they hoped to do more of this in the future. One way forward may be to train teachers and staff on all of the programs and services offered by the school, so they can refer students to the appropriate support. East Los Angeles Skills Center and Gonzales Adult School have both done this kind of training.

A central limitation cited by many programs was also the inability to track students across different educational and social service institutions. As the state’s data system continues to evolve, it may well provide the valuable information that schools and programs need to track student enrollment and progress over time and allow for continuous program improvement. This tracking may also help program leaders compare the outcomes of students in IET programs with those in more traditional adult basic skills courses.

- **Highlight promising IET and career pathway programs.**

There was limited IET and career pathway programming in most ABE and ASE settings. In some cases, program leaders highlighted their own or their staff’s lack of familiarity with career pathway models. In interviews, several program staff emphasized their focus on the traditional goals of adult basic skills programs while others raised concerns about the costs of integrated programs.

Given these comments, California education and policy leaders may need to do more to expose program leaders and instructors to career pathway models and practical examples of how these can be built within ABE and ASE programs. California Adult Education Program (CAEP) leaders have already begun this work by spotlighting programs that have integrated workforce training and career pathway models into their basic skills programming and by developing resources to support this integration.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the Center for Law and Social Policy’s report on the implementation of the CAEP policies provided a number of important recommendations for how consortia should build this work into their planning — and CAEP leaders have integrated these recommendations into the consortia’s planning documents. The efforts of some adult schools, such as the East Los Angeles Skill Center, may also serve as useful examples of how to build this type of integrated programming with their course offerings.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples of this include [CAEP student transitions resources](#), [CAEP’s resource bank](#), [CAEP’s showcase of practices with promise](#). See, for example, <https://caladulthood.org/Administrators/373>, <http://resources.caladulthood.org/>, and [http://aebgpracticeswithpromise.com/showcase\\_successes.asp](http://aebgpracticeswithpromise.com/showcase_successes.asp).

- **Provide technical assistance to help programs develop and maintain IET models.**

Technical assistance from within and outside of California may also help advance the work of programs seeking to adopt an IET model. California's K-12 districts and community colleges have built numerous initiatives aimed at helping K-12 schools further advance career pathways and credentialing programs that can lead to higher-wage jobs. Additionally, California adult education leaders have built a strong professional development system through the Technical Assistance Project, which brings together multiple partner organizations in California to support instructors and staff in the 71 adult education districts in the state. Bringing leaders together from these groups may help further spur new innovations for developing career pathway programming in adult basic skills programs.

California leaders might also look beyond the state for insights on developing integrated programming at home. [Indiana](#), [Virginia](#), [Kentucky](#), [Minnesota](#), and [North Carolina](#) have all developed state-level public-private partnerships that involve multiple educational institutions (including adult basic skills programs), workforce development agencies, businesses, and community-based organizations, to build career pathway models beginning at the ABE level.<sup>2</sup> These partnerships typically bring together multiple funding streams, including federal funding such as WIOA dollars, financial aid through the Ability to Benefit clause of the Higher Education Act,<sup>3</sup> Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program along with state funding streams to build multifaceted educational, training, and support programs for low-skilled adults. Additionally, national organizations such as the Center for Law and Social Policy have developed [guidance documents](#) to help diverse agencies collaborate on [building stronger career pathway programs](#) that span multiple sectors.<sup>4</sup> These leaders might provide valuable information that can apply to building career pathways into California's adult basic skills programs.

- **Incentivize the development of IET models in adult basic skills programs.**

In addition to building awareness about career pathway models, state and philanthropic leaders might consider ways to incentivize the development and growth of these programs, particularly in underserved regions. For instance, funders might consider developing a set of grants earmarked for IET program development and invite schools to submit their plans through a competitive bidding process. Additionally, leaders might consider linking programs that have successfully built integrated training and education models with those that are interested in implementing these programs.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, [www.in.gov/dwd/adulted\\_workin.htm](http://www.in.gov/dwd/adulted_workin.htm), [www.pluggedinva.com/our-model](http://www.pluggedinva.com/our-model), [www.elevatevirginia.org](http://www.elevatevirginia.org), [kyskillsu.ky.gov](http://kyskillsu.ky.gov), [careerwise.minnstate.edu/education/fasttrac.html](http://careerwise.minnstate.edu/education/fasttrac.html), and [www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/college-and-career-readiness/basic-skills-plus](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/college-and-career-readiness/basic-skills-plus).

<sup>3</sup> The Ability to Benefit clause of the Higher Education Act allows individuals without a high school diploma to be eligible to receive federal financial aid. For more information, see <https://sites.ed.gov/octae/2015/06/05/new-guidance-on-ability-to-benefit/>.

<sup>4</sup> See CLASP's blog post ("Illinois' Career Pathways Definition is a Model for States," by Judy Mortrude, June 29, 2018) and its brief on guided pathways ("Better Together: Career and Guided Pathways," by Judy Mortrude, September 2018) at [www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org).

## **The Future of Adult Basic Skills Programs**

After many challenging years of budget cuts and program closures, California's adult basic skills programs are making strong progress in rebuilding and forming collaborative networks that will support Integrated Education and Training models that low-skilled individuals need. California stands poised to spur this type of growth and development through its many successes in building career pathway programs in other sectors. Applying these models to adult basic skills education may significantly advance the skills and workforce readiness of the millions of California adults who lack a high school diploma and live in poverty.



APPENDIX

**A**

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## **Supplemental Tables**



## APPENDIX TABLE A.1 California County Undereducated Adult Rates

COUNTY	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITHOUT A SECONDARY CREDENTIAL <sup>a</sup>
Imperial County	31.6%
Tulare County	31.4%
Merced County	31.1%
Colusa County	30.6%
Monterey County	28.8%
Madera County	28.4%
Glenn County	27.5%
Kings County	27.1%
Kern County	26.2%
Fresno County	25.3%
Stanislaus County	22.2%
Los Angeles County	21.8%
San Joaquin County	21.6%
Sutter County	21.3%
San Benito County	20.9%
San Bernardino County	20.8%
Santa Barbara County	19.6%
Riverside County	18.9%
Del Norte County	18.4%
Yuba County	17.9%
Lassen County	17.7%
Ventura County	16.0%
Tehama County	16.0%
Orange County	15.3%
Lake County	15.3%
Mono County	15.3%
Napa County	15.3%
Modoc County	14.5%
Yolo County	13.9%
Santa Cruz County	13.6%
San Diego County	13.3%
Mendocino County	13.1%
Scaramento County	13.0%
Alameda County	12.5%

(continued)

## APPENDIX TABLE A.1 (continued)

COUNTY	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WITHOUT A SECONDARY CREDENTIAL <sup>a</sup>
Santa Clara County	12.4%
Solano County	12.4%
Sonoma County	12.3%
San Francisco County	12.1%
Inyo County	11.4%
Butte County	11.2%
San Mateo County	11.1%
Contra Costa County	10.9%
Siskiyou County	10.7%
Amador County	10.3%
Alpine County	10.2%
Trinity County	10.2%
Calaveras County	10.0%
Mariposa County	9.9%
San Luis Obispo County	9.5%
Humboldt County	9.5%
Shasta County	9.3%
Tuolumne County	9.3%
El Dorado County	7.1%
Sierra County	7.1%
Marin County	6.8%
Neveda County	6.5%
Plumas County	6.4%
Placer County	5.5%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

NOTES: Percentages are listed in descending order.

<sup>a</sup>“Adult” is defined as those 25 years old or older and “secondary credential” is defined as a high school diploma or its equivalent.



## APPENDIX TABLE A.2 California County Adult Poverty Rates

COUNTY	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL <sup>a</sup>
Tulare County	21.4%
Fresno County	19.0%
Lake County	18.7%
Imperial County	18.3%
Siskiyou County	18.1%
Alpine County	17.4%
Trinity County	17.2%
Merced County	17.2%
Modoc County	17.1%
Kern County	17.1%
Glenn County	16.5%
Madera County	16.5%
Tehama County	16.4%
Del Norte County	16.4%
Mendocino County	16.3%
Humboldt County	16.2%
Yuba County	15.3%
Butte County	14.8%
Kings County	14.5%
Shasta County	14.1%
San Barnardino County	14.1%
Stanislaus County	13.9%
San Joaquin County	13.8%
Los Angeles County	13.8%
Sacramento County	13.4%
Mariposa County	13.2%
Sierra County	12.9%
Sutter County	12.7%
Riverside County	12.6%
Tuolumne County	12.2%
Plumas County	12.1%
Yolo County	11.1%
Monterey County	10.9%
Colusa County	10.8%

(continued)

## APPENDIX TABLE A.2 (continued)

COUNTY	PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS BELOW POVERTY LEVEL <sup>a</sup>
San Diego County	10.7%
Santa Cruz County	10.7%
Calaveras County	10.5%
Nevada County	10.5%
San Francisco County	10.2%
Santa Barbara County	9.9%
Orange County	9.7%
Alameda County	9.3%
Mono County	9.2%
Sonoma County	8.9%
Solano County	8.9%
El Dorado County	8.9%
Inyo County	8.5%
San Luis Obispo County	8.5%
Lassen County	8.4%
Ventura County	8.2%
Contra Costa County	8.1%
San Benito County	7.7%
Amador County	7.7%
Placer County	7.5%
Napa County	7.3%
Santa Clara County	7.2%
Marin County	6.8%
San Mateo County	6.3%

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

NOTES: Percentages are listed in descending order.

<sup>a</sup>“Adult” is defined as those 25 years old or older. Percentages represent adults whose income in the past 12 months was below the poverty level.

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# ABOUT MDRC

**MDRC IS A NONPROFIT, NONPARTISAN SOCIAL AND EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO** learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York; Oakland, California; Washington, DC; and Los Angeles, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff members bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-prisoners, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Children's Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.