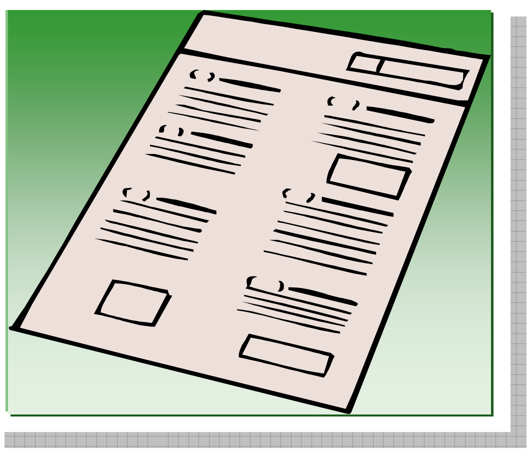
Implementation of Recommendations in

What Works and

Retention through Redirection

Summary of Survey Results



Prepared by: MWB Education Consultants Inc.

Prepared for: College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading

College Sector Committee
for Adult Upgrading

Section 1 A: Implementation of Recommendations in *What Works* – Summary of Survey Results

> **Working relationship with Ontario Works:** What is your working relationship with OW agencies?

The majority of respondents felt they had a positive relationship with their Ontario Works (OW) Agencies. 16 of the 19 said they were working to educate OW personnel. However, the turnover of OW personnel concerned some. Among the responses to the query asking if OW understand the unique role of Colleges:

- Most OW workers work with us directly and they understand what we do.
- Their understanding is improving as we work with them.
- Moderate at best. Still needs work.

When asked if they were working with their OW agencies to improve this relationship almost all responded that they had regular meeting with the agencies and many invited OW people to the college.

> **Retention Strategy: 'Locus of Control'.** Has your program implemented ways to help OW clients strengthen their locus of control?

There certainly is an attempt by most programs to recognize the importance of this 'locus of control'. However, few seem to have been as clear in their approach as Goforth and Jonik suggest. Of the 15 respondents who understood the term, 13 felt that they were working on strengthening learners' locus of control, some through formal approaches, Others less formally, or through their counselling areas. Examples of the way this is carried out are:

- Students are given tools to track their own progress within courses. This way they know what is recommended as satisfactory progress and how well they are doing.
- We allow flexibility in attending the 20 hours per week to satisfy OW.
- We have tried very hard to simplify our bureaucracy, financial assistance and communication with sponsors. By having these things organized the students can focus on being students.
- Learners are encouraged to take control of their learning.

Retention Strategy: 'Encouraging Communication'. Has your program developed means to encourage client interaction and/or increase access to student and faculty advisors?

Colleges have widely varied ways of maintaining communication. Counsellors, faculty and mentors are used. A number refer to organized meetings promoting group identity. This is one of the questions that seem to separate continuous intake from block intake programs.

- We meet the student one-on-one with a counsellor every six weeks or more often if the need is perceived.
- Students are required to attend 'communication and self-management' group sessions.
- An academic advisory structure is an essential component of our program and all students have regular access to it and are part of the ongoing process.
- For LBS 4 & 5 and OBS 4 classes we have been doing group workshops on training plan updates and post-secondary information. Peer help happens all the time in these courses.

The one negative response to this request noted that the program was small, continuous intake in a small community with only one faculty.

Response to Learning Disabilities: Has your program been able to identify and respond effectively to dealing with the problem of learning disabilities?

Generally specialized college units are used to work with students who have learning disabilities. Some programs seem to have the needed expertise in-house. Others talk of wanting to do more but being unable to because of lack of funding. While almost all colleges felt they could identify learning disabilities, only eleven said that they were effectively dealing with these problems. Typical responses:

- Identify 'yes'. Respond effectively, 'no'.
- We have a Centre for Students with Disabilities. We make every effort to accommodate special needs students.
- We have an excellent Centre for Students with Special Needs. Students are encouraged to self-identify to this office and then they have access to a wide range of supports for learning. During orientation the students are informed about this service and if the orientation teacher detects any obvious difficulties she will encourage individual students to self identify.

- Our faculty has a great deal of expertise and experience in recognizing and supporting students with learning disabilities. Often students will self identify on the recommendation of a teacher; then the teacher, student and special needs counsellor will work together developing and using strategies.

Learning Disabilities Quickscreen: Do your programs consistently use the Learning Disabilities Quickscreen with incoming clients?

Nobody seems to use the screen 'as is'. Most use some form of identifying screen; however, many suggest that the time to do this is not at registration time, but rather after the learner feels comfortable with the people and the program.

- We attempted to use the 'Quick Screen' but discovered that some questions were inappropriate and we also administered it too early in the program. We plan to adapt it and use it at a later date when learners are more comfortable.
- Faculty are experienced enough to recognize when a learner may have a learning disability.
- When learners are at this very early stage of returning to school, giving the 'Learning Disability' inventory can further deprecate their already fragile self-esteem. We prefer to wait until learners are comfortable in the LBS program before using it. (Alternatively, perhaps we could change the name of the quick screen tool so that it has a more positive connotation.)
- I am quite confident of the method of assessment I am using, and I do not have the time to be more involved with doing the assessment. Perhaps in future we will look into it.
- We have qualified assessors to make these decisions and students willingly self-identify.

Focus Groups: Have your programs tried the use of focus groups? Were the results encouraging?

While many of the programs have tried different types of focus groups, fewer have found them of real value. Thirteen programs have tried focus groups; eight have found them of value.

- We tried focus groups twice a year and that was effective for communication and change and we found the monthly coffee circles even more effective. We have been able to make changes before concerns become problems.
- Our program uses focuses groups generally once a year to get specific input from the students regarding program issues. These are handled by the support / technology staff.

- We may consider it in the future. We do conduct Course Assessments and Student Satisfaction Surveys according to the KPI method. We have been able to get good feedback about needed change through these evaluation tools. Overall, the results have been very favourable.
- Not time and no one to take the lead in this focus group.

Self-Management/Self-Direction Quick Screen: the most positive of the three retention strategies that Jonik and Goforth identified was the Self-Management/Self-Assessment Quick Screen. Have your programs used this screen? Did you find it is worth continuing with new clients?

Once again, most colleges use some form of self management/self direction tool. However, few have used the one indicated. Most of those that have find it useful. Some do this work up front while Others prefer to wait until the learners have settled in. The reaction to it varied. Some found it of value at the entry point. Others felt it should be used later. Because many had a similar, but more involved tool they use their own rather than the Quick Screen.

- In this somewhat less tangible domain of Self-Dir/Self-Man., it helps new (or established) learners identify strengths as well as areas for improvement.
- We tend to work with clients up front to address issues before they start working toward their goals. We find that several weeks of up front work on ‘barriers’ is effective in retention.
- Incoming clients need to think, assess, value, commit, etc. The screen is a great starting tool. The results provide valuable insight into learners for the learners and for the practitioners.
- We have developed our own version of this and have all learners complete it. We find it very useful in helping learners to identify issues they might have to deal with.
- Comment after viewing this, it will become part of the orientation process.
- During orientation the students complete “The Discovery Wheel” from Master Student which has much the same purpose. The orientation teacher has found that students think it is a worthwhile tool.

Section 1 B: Implementation of Recommendations in *Retention through Redirection* – Summary of Survey Results

Identifying learners at risk: Does your program have a specific tool for identifying learners at risk?

Of the 18 programs responding, 12 said they did have such a tool. The 'tools' varied from elaborate practices involving all staff interacting with LBS learners to the use of attendance and progress records. Some who did not have such a tool felt it was unnecessary because their staff were able to spot at-risk learners in their day-to-day activities.

- Process where all 4 LBS teachers meet to discuss the student's progress and possible need for redirection. With the help of an assessment form each teacher provides input into the student's areas for 'at risk'. Following the completion of the assessments, the teachers meet with the student to discuss concerns.
- Not one tool but a process that involves self-assessment in addition to bi-weekly planning sessions with learners. The issue around a 'tool' might be that learners seldom identify themselves as 'at risk' and it's not until they are allowed information and time to reflect or when issues arise through the program that at risk becomes an issue.
- Our staff meets once every two months in a Student Progress and Achievement Committee meeting to discuss each student in the program – learners at risk are identified here and then counselled by both student services and the program coordinator.
- Most of the clients are students at risk since the nature of their economic status frequently does not provide for a good support network. Careful monitoring from the onset of the program generally serves as an indicator of performance. Life circumstances all too frequently interfere with their desire to attend and progress.
- Satisfactory progress has been defined for each course and the students have a record, which they maintain along with the teacher's record. All courses have a defined evaluation and the students are informed about the evaluation. If a student has unsatisfactory academic progress it is easily identified and teachers follow-up. If the problem persists, the student may be referred to his/her academic advisor for support or redirection.

Setting realistic career and employment goals: Do you feel that your program has an effective process for setting realistic career and employment goals?

This was positively responded to with a wide variety of approaches. While some do the goal setting in group sessions, most use the one-to-one approach. This, too, must be determined by the intake pattern.

Some of these approaches include:

- One teacher has been responsible for the intake of new students. After the student has begun, a regular schedule is kept with the student to meet with this teacher to set, develop or maintain communication about his/her goals.
- Learners receive: two hours of essential skills weekly, two computer programs 'Bridges and Career Cruising' and mentoring. They develop an awareness of goal setting and focus on aptitudes and interests.
- Use of our college's student services counsellors who meet with every student to discuss educational and career goals and administer vocational and aptitude tests.
- A training plan workshop is held at the beginning of the program. Students are encouraged to see this as a work in progress and adjustments can be expected along the way. If someone has an unrealistic goal it is gently redirected during the course of the program.
- To the extent that student is receptive to redirection. We direct students to the counsellor for this type of process. Sometimes students aren't ready for any steps to redirect. In that case they continue until they can see the futility of continuing on their present course. Then we are able to take more positive steps to redirect. Our training plans are set up to keep students working toward a long term goal as well as the short term academic goal of 5-7 weeks. As faculty advisors we constantly monitor students' efforts to find career goals. We work with our counsellor and the student.

Expectations around attendance, progress and conduct: Does your program have written, learner understood, policies that establish expectations for attendance, progress and conduct? If 'yes', what are these expectations?

Clearly, all colleges have policies around this. Some LBS programs have policies that are peculiar to their programs; Others use college policies generally; still others use the LBS guidelines. Attendance demands are as high as 100%. Most identified are in the 80 to 90% area. Some different program approaches:

- All incoming students are required to sign a contract outlining our policies which require:

1) A minimum of 80% attendance overall.
2) Good punctuality.
3) The need to make a consistent, verifiable effort.
4) The need to contribute to a positive, respectful, productive learning environment.

Students are informed that an ongoing space will be reserved for them only if they abide by the terms of this contract. Students are withdrawn if they fail to do so, usually after having been issued a written 'probation notice.

- 90% attendance; progress expectations particular to each specific course.

1) You are expected to attend 100% of your scheduled class hours.

2) If you are not able to attend your class, you must notify clerical staff in the office. You can do this in person, if the absence is related to a future date, or by calling her. If you are calling after hours, you can leave a message on the answering machine. Your attendance information will be recorded in the attendance binder, and will be monitored by a staff member. Upon return, you will be expected to write a memo to staff explaining the absence and how you will make up the hours.

3) If your attendance drops below 100% you may be put on probation by means of an Attendance Contract.

4) If you do not attend 100% of your hours while on the Attendance Contract you may be discontinued from the program without further discussion.

5) Issues affecting your attendance should be discussed with a staff member so that appropriate supports can be put in place.

- We have a policy and procedures manual for the LBS program and Student Rights and Responsibilities document for the College.
- As per the LBS Guidelines, with a learner contract which is signed at intake and is also part of the orientation process.

Reviewing learners' goals, progress, attendance and barriers: Does your program have a systematic process for reviewing learners' goals, progress, attendance and barriers? If 'yes' please give a short description of the process.

Colleges do have systematic processes for reviewing goals, progress, attendance and barriers. Most do this in one-on-one sessions. However, the frequency varies from weekly to once every six week reviews. Some speak of 'case conferences' when needed. Some of the varying approaches:

- Learners review their progress regularly (monthly) through a revisit to their training plans. Teachers monitor attendance. Mentoring appointments are scheduled every six to eight weeks.
- This is done: 1. within our 'communication & self-management session. 2. through regular student demonstrations/assessments in each subject. 3. through regular formal and informal staff meetings.
- Every two weeks learners meet with their teachers to review these issues.
- Not systematic, but an attempt to speak one-on-one with every learner every month or so, and outcomes recorded.
- Rates of Progress meeting every month; checkpoint interviews with learners every 6 to 7 weeks or when necessary.
- Students have individual records of activities and check off the work completed on a daily basis so they know where they are in the program. The teacher has a copy of this record as well. After 8-12 weeks in the program there is a progress report that is developed by the student in consultation with the teacher. Once completed the student processes the report on the computer with assistance as needed. Updates can then be made as required.
- Students carry monthly attendance cards every day to each class. The cards are signed by each professor at the end of the hour block. Even the postsecondary teachers who teach in our program sign the cards.

- Month end reports where the learner and faculty sit together and review the month's goals, attendance and document any problems. Then learning outcomes for the next month are documented and the report is signed by both. Both parties have a copy of this.

Influencing persistence: Feature # 5 of the Protocol looks at strategies that can be developed to help learners recognize and manage forces that influence persistence. Has your program developed such strategies? If 'yes' please list aspects of these strategies.

Most colleges have strategies around 'persistence' in place. Most are rather informal, involving flexibility in scheduling, learning rates etc. Some are quite imaginative. A number involve the group rather than just the individual learner.

- 1. Appropriate screening upon intake; referral to other programs or services if appropriate. 2. Expectations/terms/policies of program are clearly outlined for prospective students.
- Learners are encouraged to examine these forces at the beginning of their program and decide how to deal with them.
- We have flexible timetables, self-paced learning, faculty advisors, recognition of progress via our student celebration days, one-to-one teaching with collaborative approaches to students' comments, questions, problems; all of these are responses to facilitate the students' learning situation. We give stars, monkeys, rabbits – whatever kind of sticker we find in the stores to put on excellent work. It is a bit of a joke, but students often jump into the spirit of the practice and collect these stickers which reflect the students' achievements on a day to day basis. The classrooms are large, brightly lit and as nicely decorated as classrooms can get, including plants, bookcases, posters etc. in an attempt to make the learning environment as pleasant as possible. Students can sit as a group with their friends or they can sit on their own. These are many options to address the needs and inclinations of our students.

- Yes, we go to great lengths to eliminate the negative aspects. The students identify and implement ideas that will make the learning environment less stressful. This year we tried a supplemental instructor for 14 hours in the communications class and four hours in the computer classes. We also hired a tutor to work in the math classroom.
- Done during month end report and documented.

Personal, career and academic counselling: Do your learners have access to personal, career and academic counselling?

All have counselling available. However, this ranges from individuals who have this as their sole function, to faculty who do this as part of their role.

- Personal counselling is available only once a week.
- Their course professors provide career and academic advice. As well the students can go to our Academic Referral Centre where they can get information about the entry requirements of post-secondary program, how to achieve these requirements, and how to apply to post-secondary. They can also access the personal and career counselling available in Student Services. For a fee, they can use the services of our Career Assessment Centre.
- Career and academic – faculty. Personal – refer to community agencies.
- We have a college counsellor assigned to our program who attends all our meetings, coffee circles and meets with the students at least six hours a week. Job Connect comes to the program for four hours every two weeks and helps our learners with employment issues. We have a counselling department that our students access to help make academic decisions (as well as faculty and staff in the program).

Awareness of redirection options: Does your program provide to learners an awareness of the different types of redirection available to learners?

A wide variety of approaches are used in redirection. Most referred to the need for sensitivity in redirection and the importance of the acceptance of the need for redirection by the learner. Some of the responses:

- Much of the time spent on ‘goal setting’ is really on ‘redirecting’ from the original goal.
- It is available when necessary for a particular learner, sometimes in cooperation with a college counsellor. Usually requires sponsor approval which can prove quite difficult to obtain.
- The process is not as overt as this. We are sensitive to students’ aspirations. Referring them to our counsellor and her handling of the situations are done with some subtly and respect. Students may not know they are in a redirection process until their problems become clearer to them. For others, especially if it is a self-initiated process in response to changing circumstances, the options are certainly clarified by our faculty and counsellor. However, at some point the options are clearer.

- Our students are often referred to different educational programs and employability programs. This may happen through the teachers, the Academic Referral Centre or the office staff. The following is a list of frequent referrals: ESL courses, community-based literacy programs, the Adult High School, the EFA Resource Centre, our Job Readiness program, our Focus for Change program, etc.