



**BRIDGE PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS:
SUMMARIES, OUTCOMES,
AND CROSS-SITE FINDINGS**

A Report from
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE RESEARCH AND LEADERSHIP
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

August 2010



The Office of Community College Research and Leadership (OCCRL) was established in 1989 at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Our primary mission is to provide research, leadership, and service to community college leaders and assist in improving the quality of education in the Illinois community college system. Projects of this office are supported by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE), along with other state, federal, and private and not-for-profit organizations. The contents of our reports, briefs and bi-annual UPDATE newsletters do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of our sponsors or the University of Illinois. Comments or inquiries about our publications are welcome and should be directed to OCCRL@illinois.edu. This document can be found on the web at: <http://occrll.illinois.edu>.

This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant from the Illinois Community College Board and printed by the Authority of the State of Illinois, August 2010 (ICCB Grant Agreement Number SG 2.01).

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge Catherine Kirby and Susan Krusemark for editing the original evaluation report to achieve this summary intended for practitioners and policy-makers alike. Our intent is to provide helpful but succinct information to the increasing audience of persons interested in providing quality bridge instruction in Illinois and elsewhere. We remain grateful to the Joyce Foundation, the Illinois Community College Board and to the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity for their strong support of bridge programming and for entrusting us with this work. Finally, we thank Linda Iliff for her skill in formatting this document.

Suggested citation:

Bragg, D., Harmon, T., Kirby, C., & Kim, S. (2010, August). *Bridge programs in Illinois: Summaries, outcomes, and cross-site findings*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois.



INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of jobs in today's workforce require postsecondary education, yet large numbers of workers lack the essential skills and credentials (i.e., high school diploma or GED) to fill these jobs. The result is that many workers remain underemployed, reaching a ceiling early in their working careers. In 2007, the Joyce Foundation launched the Shifting Gears initiative to assist six Midwestern states—Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin—in linking education, workforce development, and economic development at the local and regional levels. These states are working to equip low-skilled workers with the necessary credentials to expand their job opportunities and strengthen economic growth in the Midwest by “reengineering adult education, workforce development, and postsecondary education policies,” according to the Joyce Foundation Web site (see <http://www.shifting-gears.org>). The first phase of the Shifting Gears initiative in Illinois was aimed at two efforts: implementing demonstration projects to identify and resolve local policy and program issues that influence bridge program instruction and developing a policy agenda to support bridge program instruction at the state and local levels. The second phase of Shifting Gears continues to focus on policy development, with special emphasis on student support services, the use of data, communicating to broader audiences, sustainable bridge program models, and promising practices that can inform expansion of bridge programs.

BACKGROUND

Since its inception, the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative has emphasized state-level policy change as a means to address the postsecondary education and employment needs of low-skilled adults. In Illinois, the Shifting Gears initiative has sought to address state policy and local program disconnects that limit low-skilled adults' attainment of postsecondary credentials and employment in high-demand occupations. The first phase of the Illinois Shifting Gears initiative was tied strategically to the state's Critical Skills Shortage Initiative, targeting three industry sectors: healthcare; manufacturing; and transportation, distribution, and logistics. The Illinois Community College Board provided leadership for the grant, with support and matching funds from the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Adopting a pipeline metaphor, Illinois proposed two models for addressing “leakage points” in the pipeline that extends from K-12 through adult and postsecondary education to employment. The first of these occurs when students attempt to transition from developmental education to college-level course work, and the second occurs when students face challenges transitioning from adult education, including English literacy programs, into postsecondary education.

In Phase One of Shifting Gears, 10 community college sites were competitively selected to develop and implement bridge program instruction in their developmental education or adult

education division. The Office of Community College Research and Leadership was selected to evaluate these programs and state policy development. Quantitative data were provided on student participation and outcomes associated with bridge programs offered during the 2008 calendar year, with most data collection occurring during the 2008 calendar year. Results of the qualitative portion of the evaluation were used to inform the Illinois Community College Board, the Joyce Foundation, and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity which of the demonstration programs had been implemented as articulated in the proposals submitted by the colleges.

THE EVALUATION

The complete evaluation report (see http://occrll.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Report/SG_Eval_Report%20PRINT.pdf) provided initial results on the 10 Shifting Gears demonstration bridge programs that operated in Illinois between July 1, 2007, and June 30, 2009. The aim of the program evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Shifting Gears initiative in achieving the following four goals:

1. Identifying opportunities to support bridge programming, and identifying and removing impediments in current policies, structures, and practices;
2. Implementing policies to support demonstrated best-practice instructional and delivery methods;
3. Developing and pilot testing a statewide data infrastructure that can support the planning, management, and evaluation of regional career pathway systems; and
4. Optimizing current funding and identifying the need for new funding for bridge programs.

Methods

Qualitative

The qualitative component of the evaluation was focused on the implementation of the demonstration programs and assessed barriers to program development and student success. The following questions were asked:

1. What are the components of each bridge program (curriculum, instructional strategies, support services, etc.)?
2. How is each program structured to achieve the desired outcomes? What policies support and impede each program's success?
3. What core components are common and perceived to be effective and essential for program success and replication?
4. What is the relationship between implementation strategies and program and student outcomes? What barriers affected schools' implementation and outcomes?

Multiple methods were used for qualitative data collection, including field visits, face-to-face and telephone interviews,

document reviews, and logic modeling. One or more site visits were made to each of the demonstration sites. Data were collected through one-on-one and group interviews conducted with college administrators, faculty, support staff, institutional researchers, and students; Shifting Gears demonstration program directors, faculty, and transition coordinators; community-based organizations or employer partners; and other stakeholders.

In addition, the evaluators collected evidence of implementation by reviewing documents produced by the demonstration sites, including monthly and quarterly reports, curricula, meeting notes, recruitment tools, and other project materials. The Shifting Gears Project Manager prepared summary reports based on multiple visits that provided additional insights. Data were also collected by the evaluators through periodic phone calls and their role as participant-observers at each of the Joyce Workgroup and learning community meetings mentioned above, where program implementation, promising practices, barriers and challenges, and policy change were discussed.

Quantitative

The purpose of the quantitative evaluation was to assess the outcomes of the demonstration programs, especially their performance in improving student transition outcomes and in relating these results to differences among projects associated with each model (Developmental Education or Adult Education). In particular, the quantitative evaluation attempted to measure the extent to which the demonstration programs yielded results superior to traditional models for developmental and adult education. A table that includes student enrollments, characteristics, and a selection of student outcomes appears on page 19. The quantitative evaluation questions were as follows:

1. What percentage of students meet the academic skill standards needed to enter the occupational (or career-technical education [CTE]) program, compared with a baseline for students with similar remediation requirements?
2. What percentage of students enter a postsecondary occupational (or CTE) program in the selected program area?
3. What percentage of students complete the occupational (or CTE) program compared with a baseline for students with similar remediation requirements?
4. What percentage of students earn the applicable certification or license for the occupational (or CTE) program compared with a baseline for students with similar remediation requirements?
5. What is the average time required for students to complete remedial or developmental course work, compared with a baseline for students with similar remediation requirements?
6. What percentage of students obtain employment in the occupation compared with a baseline for students with similar remediation requirements?

The remainder of this report summarizes the evaluation of bridge demonstration programs conducted during Phase One of Shifting Gears in Illinois. It includes selected program and student outcomes data and provides the reader with some detail about college context, program goals, students served, promising practices, barriers, and policy change. The six sites selected for this report demonstrated student outcomes or developed implementation models that showed promise for replication and lessons that could be of value for colleges or other institutions interested in creating adult bridge programs for similar populations. Both qualitative and quantitative results from the six sites are included. Page 19 displays a table of student enrollments, characteristics, and sample outcomes. A discussion of the cross-site findings is included.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS AND OUTCOMES

Developmental Education Demonstration Sites

College of DuPage

College Context

The College of DuPage (COD) is located on a 273-acre campus in suburban Glen Ellyn, Illinois. The College employs approximately 338 full-time and 1,250 part-time faculty and serves approximately 31,000 students who reside in the district. Over the past 5 years, COD had observed a decline in individuals with adequate technical skills to obtain employment in the manufacturing industry, which has precipitated a decline in enrollments in COD's Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree programs in manufacturing.

Bridge Program Description and Goals

The College of DuPage created a developmental education bridge program targeted at the manufacturing career cluster. Their focus was to explore innovative instructional approaches that would improve student transition outcomes, and e-learning and blended online learning that would improve the transition of working parents, incumbent workers, and others into postsecondary education in a cost-effective manner.

To address the College's concern regarding the decline in skilled persons in manufacturing, and consequent decline in enrollments in COD's AAS degree programs in manufacturing, COD proposed to build a bridge program called Right Start for academically underprepared adults seeking to enter a career in manufacturing. The College's proposal articulated its primary goal as preparing adult students who tested into remedial education in reading, writing, or math for transition to the AAS degree program in Manufacturing Technology as well as entry-

level employment. Right Start was initially planned as a 20-week, 10-semester credit hour course and was approved by two curriculum committees prior to the start of the program in spring 2008. However, before the first course began, the program was modified to run for 15 weeks only, with a start date of March 13 and end date of July 21, 2008. This change was made to better align the program with the existing college calendar and faculty schedules and to enhance student recruitment, which proved to be more challenging than COD personnel had anticipated.

Students Served

The Right Start program was targeted at students who did not pass the college's placement test in reading, writing, and math, and who wanted to enter an occupation in the manufacturing sector. This initially included students testing at the 9th grade level and above. However, COD had difficulties recruiting students who met the target developmental education levels (as measured by COMPASS scores), with one COD administrator observing that it was "hard to get students who qualify in all areas, as we defined them." COD was granted flexibility by the ICCB to modify the student eligibility criteria from its original proposal to allow admittance to students who tested at the developmental level (6th grade and above level) on one or more of three developmental tests (math, reading, or writing). Referencing the varied level of student competencies that COD administrators were seeing in applicants, one administrator observed that including students with a wider range of abilities "has helped students be more like peer tutors.... [They] pair up with someone with complementary skills." Ultimately, 12 students began the demonstration bridge program.

Promising Practices

Contextualized Curriculum. The bridge program curriculum incorporated three developmental areas (reading, writing, and math) that were integrated with the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council (MSSC) curriculum, which certifies students for entry-level positions in the manufacturing sector. Math was linked to concepts the students were learning in the MSSC program, and similar integration took place in reading and writing. Full-time faculty associated with the program worked together to develop the curriculum, and they often team-taught to further contextualize academics within the MSSC curriculum. For example, the reading and math instructors collaborated to help students navigate math word problems. The MSSC text was supplemented with academic content so that students could practice reading, writing, and reflecting techniques. A number of COD administrators praised the Right Start faculty for their effective teaching techniques saying, "[The] faculty were able to see the whole picture. It wasn't, 'I'm the math guy, and I'm going to work at the math.'" This collaborative instructional approach enhanced the curriculum, making it relevant to the students' interests. When students were asked what they considered the most important part of the program, a few cited

the inclusion of online MSSC modules. In addition to providing a contextual component to the curriculum, the MSSC modules provided several students with an opportunity to enhance their basic computer skills. One faculty member referenced the wide age range of students in the bridge program, acknowledging the older students' lack of computer skills.

Career Development. A number of career development components were integrated into the bridge program to prepare students for employment and increase their awareness of career possibilities. For example, in anticipation of a job fair at Bison Gear and Engineering, a major partner to COD's Right Start program, a representative from the COD Career Services Center attended a class to assist students in developing a résumé and cover letter and to tutor students in successful interviewing techniques. The faculty altered the course schedule a few weeks prior to the job fair to prepare students to attend. A Right Start instructor emphasized the integration of career development throughout the curriculum, saying, "[We] have had students work through the MSSC modules and résumés during the science times." The job fair and Career Services Center presentation, along with an exercise allowing students to research manufacturing companies, were built into the regular bridge course schedule rather than requiring students take their personal time outside of class.

Transition Coordinator and Support Services. Most support services were provided by existing COD structures and were arranged primarily by a transition coordinator or faculty member involved in the Right Start program. Described as playing a critical "mothering" role, the Right Start transition coordinator was the initial contact and referral point for students for the duration of the bridge program. The transition coordinator was recognized by COD administrators and Right Start students as a vital part of the program. She monitored student attendance and contacted students if they were absent, and she assisted those who had problems of any kind, including personal challenges. Additionally, the transition coordinator collaborated with the five Right Start faculty to track student progress and implement strategies to support student success. Examples of these strategies include conducting one-on-one appointments with students, rescheduling exams and labs, and arranging meetings with students' caseworkers. A COD administrator with primary responsibility for the Right Start program praised the transition coordinator, saying, "Our [transition coordinator] was wonderful.... She kind of dedicated herself to the lives of these students [so] that those who wanted to be successful could be successful. Personnel are key here. They really are."

Barriers and Policy Change

Recruiting students who met the admission criteria was challenging for COD administrators because substantial numbers of applicants fell below or above the 9th grade level, but few fell within the relatively narrow target population window. For

example, only 75 of 12,207 incoming COD students whose first term occurred in fiscal year 2006 fell within the COMPASS score parameters outlined in the proposal. Consequently, the Right Start program relaxed its program entrance criteria to allow admission of students who fell below the initial criteria, with approval from the Illinois Community College Board.

A common reason for students being unable to participate was the positioning of the course during the regular academic year (beginning in March) and during the day (1 to 4 pm). To address this issue, COD changed the course start and end dates to allow more high school students to participate, and they observed that changing the hours of instruction allowed incumbent workers who might want to take classes in the evening to maintain a full-time day job.

At the time of the evaluators' initial site visit in April 2008, the demonstration bridge program was not identified at either the developmental or college level, but administrators planned to apply to have the bridge course accepted as a regular course in the COD curriculum after it was offered on an experimental basis. The fact that that the 10-hour class was offered a number of times provided a compelling argument for approval by the College. (A course approval application could be finalized after offering a course three times.) By connecting the 10-credit hour college-level course to an occupational (or CTE) program, the College could provide a regular funding stream to sustain the program, foreseeing the Illinois Community College Board's new policy of blending developmental education and CTE to support bridge programs for low-skilled adults.

The 10-credit-hour (14-contact-hour) class was split among three faculty for compensation purposes. Because every faculty member received two or three load-hours for teaching the bridge classes, the remuneration was commensurate to time on task. A class with a small number of contact hours would not have afforded this option, and the College would have had to pay the faculty a total number of hours in excess of their contract hours. As implemented, the COD demonstration project seemed to have created a sustainable model for adult bridge programs.

Student Outcomes

Of the 12 students who participated in the cohort offered by COD in spring 2008 (data for spring 2009 were not available), the vast majority of students were male (83%) and minority (67%). Half of the students were more than 25 years of age, and 100% had a family income of more than \$21,000, and 45% had earned postsecondary credits prior to enrolling in the bridge programs. Only one student had a high school diploma or GED, and two students (17%) were nonnative speakers of English. Two-thirds (67%) of the students completed the 15-week bridge program, and two students (17%) continued into some form of postsecondary credit instruction as a result of the program. Fifty percent of the bridge students were placed in employment as a result of the program or continued their employment.

College of Lake County

College Context

The College of Lake County (CLC) is located in Grayslake, Illinois, in the far northeastern suburbs of Chicago. It serves a district with 713,000 residents living in more than 50 demographically distinct communities, the third largest population in the Illinois community college system. The College employs 221 full-time and 740 part-time faculty and serves a diverse student body with more than 18,000 students enrolled in transfer programs, career programs, GED and adult basic education classes, noncredit and career development courses, and business training.

Bridge Program Description and Goals

The demonstration model developed at CLC was a developmental education bridge program with manufacturing as the occupational focus. The CLC bridge program developed contextualized teaching and learning strategies, including innovative instructional approaches in basic skills instruction and career-pathways programming, they believed would benefit the target population. Specifically, this demonstration program examined whether instructional strategies improved the ability of the target population to enter and succeed in postsecondary education leading to career-path employment and increased wages, with the ultimate goal of economic self-sufficiency. This bridge program also investigated whether the removal of identified barriers, such as students' unfamiliarity with the college environment and its processes, would produce correspondingly large improvements in student transition.

Students Served

The College of Lake County established an initial goal of recruiting 22 students who were 18 years of age and older, with reading levels at 9th grade or above; with limited English proficiency; who were attending GED classes; and who were recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or other government assistance (current or past). Various recruiting methods were used, such as distributing a color flyer; sending e-mails to all adult basic education, GED, and English as a second language (ESL) course instructors in the CLC district; and meeting with the counseling staff to inform them about the Shifting Gears project. The College also held information sessions about Shifting Gears. Many students indicated they became interested in the program through a one-page advertisement placed in a free local newspaper delivered to area residents. Several students who were retained to completion said they learned about the bridge program through communication with the program coordinator. Of 28 applicants, 12 met the criteria and were invited to participate. Two cohorts were formed, one in summer-fall 2008 and the other in spring-summer 2009.

Promising Practices

Contextualized Curriculum. CLC offered a 24-week bridge curriculum that addressed manufacturing industry standards by creating a prevocational program including academic remediation, foundational occupational (or CTE) content, and interpersonal skills required to enter the manufacturing field as a Computerized Numerical Control (CNC) technician. The curriculum addressed the National Institute for Metalworking Skills (NIMS) project to enable students to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for NIMS credentialing. The full-time faculty who were affiliated with the program integrated adult education, math, and science into the manufacturing context. Math and English were integrated into the manufacturing curriculum using contextualized approaches, “MyMathLab” (<http://www.mymathlab.com/>), and supplementary math assignments. Adjustments were made to the MyMathLab modules to ensure they were supporting and reinforcing the manufacturing portion of the curriculum. In addition to math support, a reading specialist was recruited to aid in contextualizing competencies for language proficiency.

Students who were unfamiliar with the manufacturing industry spoke of the importance of hands-on learning. One student observed, “I have no knowledge about manufacturing, so it sounds like a foreign language to me. I can understand what he [the instructor] is talking about [in the lab].” One of the most powerful benefits of the small size of the class was the time students spent in the lab working with the CNC machines under the tutelage of their instructor. The students interacted with their manufacturing instructor in the CNC 115 (Programming) class. Whenever they had difficulties, they asked questions of the instructor, and the instructor gave hints or asked further questions to encourage the students to think deeply about the problem. The instructor observed that he tried “to make a safe atmosphere to let them [the students] speak up” and that he tried “to challenge them and keep them thinking.” Most students mentioned that the instructor’s challenges were very helpful to their learning, with one student offering, “[The instructor] challenges a lot. He keeps us thinking. I like that very much.”

The CNC faculty member used Web-enhanced courses and integrated Web-based simulations of the machines. In particular, the use of “clicker” technology through a Classroom Performance System was beneficial to the students’ learning processes. The students reported getting immediate feedback, which facilitated their learning. Career development was another formal aspect of the curriculum.

Career Development. The curriculum included a Cooperative Work Experience course that required students to attend seminars related to job search skills; students in this course earned one hour of college credit. Course content also included interviewing skills, résumé writing, and Internet job searching. Because the CLC faculty were concerned about students’

current and future employment, the students also learned how to negotiate salary with employers. Every student was required to attend this seminar to fulfill the bridge program requirement, and the faculty worked closely with them. The program coordinator observed that transition to college and employment is a long-term goal for many students, and CLC sees its role as allowing students to expand their horizons by continuing their education. He added, “We’re trying to motivate [the students], trying to open their eyes, and [trying to] show them what possibilities are there.”

Barriers and Policy Change

Difficulty finding local business support for internships or apprenticeships for the adult students was identified as a barrier by the bridge program coordinator and CLC administrators, and this concern was exacerbated in 2009 when the economy slid into a recession. The program coordinator hoped to use advisory committee members as mentors to give students advice and help them progress in the program and in future employment, but this aspect of the program had not solidified at the time the program was evaluated.

The barrier in recruiting students was attributed to poor perceptions of the manufacturing industry, requiring that the bridge program coordinator strategize about how to market the program more effectively, including offering meetings to inform prospective students about the program. Difficulty finding qualified faculty was another type of recruitment challenge. Few faculty possessed the professional credentials to teach the NIMS curriculum, and, even when faculty had these credentials, many lacked experience teaching low-skilled adults. CLC administrators planned to address the instructional challenges of the faculty by requiring all instructors to be NIMS credentialed prior to teaching classes in the bridge program.

Further, CLC personnel found the ACCUPLACER placement exam did not diagnose students’ academic weaknesses carefully enough, making development of the contextualized math and English curriculum difficult. Because ACCUPLACER was designed as a placement test rather than a diagnostic test, CLC personnel had to seek additional information about development education placement testing and hoped to make adjustments to the assessment of adult learners’ competencies. These changes had not been implemented at the time of the site visit, however.

Finally, the College was challenged with providing adequate student services (especially counseling and advising) for the target population. In addition to instructional advising and career placement services, students received assistance to enhance their attendance, such as transportation. Shifting Gears grant funds were used to pay students’ tuition, fees, and books, which helped to resolve financial challenges. Student needs were identified by surveying the students using a locally developed Barriers Survey that was administered during orientation sessions. The survey

results showed that financial issues were the most serious barrier, with transportation and library access on weekends and after 10 pm being another concern of some students. Although the faculty did their best to support the students, the issues the students brought to the program were very complex and often beyond the professional training of the bridge instructor. To address this concern, the college hired a professional transition coordinator to work with students who enrolled in the spring 2009 semester.

A local policy issue that arose at CLC was the college's policy regarding course withdrawal. Because of the adult students' numerous and complex personal issues, attendance was sometimes a problem. According to CLC policy, students who were absent over consecutive days were automatically withdrawn from the program. Thus, although some students wanted to return to the program, they could not. To address this concern, a more flexible attendance policy was needed.

Student Outcomes

Twelve students participated in one cohort that extended from July through December 2008 (because data collection occurred in 2008, only outcomes from the first cohort are included in Table 1 on page 19). The vast majority of students was male (92%), and one-half were minority. Half of the students were more than 25 years of age, and one student (8%) was not proficient in English. None of the students had earned postsecondary credits prior to enrolling in the bridge program, and, in fact, 40% of the students had no high school diploma or GED. One-third (33%) of the students completed the 24-week bridge program, and one student (8%) continued into some form of postsecondary credit instruction as a result of the program. None of the students was placed in employment because of the program, but 58% continued in their previous employment.

Oakton Community College

College Context

Oakton Community College (OCC) is located in northeast Cook County. Oakton's main campus in Des Plaines is located on a 147-acre forest preserve and the Ray Hartstein Campus is in Skokie, which serves residents on the eastern side of the district. Oakton employs 700 full- and part-time faculty members to teach 46,000 credit and noncredit students representing all ages and 55 nations. More than half the students come from a minority background.

Bridge Program Description and Goals

Oakton Community College partnered with Presbyterian Homes, a large provider of long-term care, to create a developmental education bridge program to prepare a cadre of incumbent workers (CNAs) to enter an LPN program at the College. The

CNA Bridge to Success program involved a strong partnership, equitable distribution of resources, innovative instructional strategies, and a comprehensive student support network to improve student success.

Students Served

Oakton Community College's program was unique among the Shifting Gears demonstration programs in that the target population was restricted to employees of Presbyterian Homes. It was also unique in that the partnership was initiated by the employer partner. Interested Presbyterian Homes employees were required to be full-time employees, and their experience on the job ranged from new employees to 10 years of experience. Presbyterian Homes did not want to recruit employees selectively based on academic standards, so interested employees were not tested as part of the selection process. In spite of considerable advertisement about the program within the Presbyterian Homes community, OCC's program coordinators reported that the first information sessions were poorly attended, and many employees who had indicated they were interested did not follow through. Program coordinators indicated they had to consistently inform, remind, and encourage many of the employee-students about deadlines and other issues dealing with navigating the college system throughout the recruitment and enrollment process and then again as the students transitioned to the LPN prerequisite courses. Despite OCC's intention to provide instruction at the 9th grade level and above, the program coordinators estimated the range of academic readiness of the group was "very large," extending from a 6th grade to a college level. A few students had taken at least one LPN prerequisite science course but had not passed it. Most students were single mothers of dependent children, and the program coordinators believed most students were first-generation college-goers with little to no familiarity with college. Both Presbyterian Homes and OCC officials described the students as compassionate people with "a calling to care for others" and "people they would want to have taking care of their own parents."

Promising Practices

Community/Employer Partnership. The bridge course was a second attempt by OCC and Presbyterian Homes to prepare employees of Presbyterian Homes (CNAs) for the LPN program. The first attempt was modeled after the college's High Risk Nursing Student Program, involving an 8-week intensive review of verbal, math, science, and medical terminology content for 20 applicants who desired to enter OCC's associate degree nursing program but whose scores fell below the cutoff. The College did not have an active LPN program at the time it was approached by Presbyterian Homes, but it did have Illinois Community College Board approval to reinstate a prior program, so the effort to develop the bridge program required minimal time. The College's willingness to divert resources and services to address Presbyterian Homes' workforce needs was indicative of OCC's sincere effort to partner.

Contextualized Curriculum. The bridge curriculum was co-designed by OCC’s nursing program coordinator and a carefully selected bridge instructor of developmental English who was certified in teaching ESL. She described the learning process as a “character process,” saying her “deepest love is to inspire people who don’t know their capacity to grow.” The instructor used a variety of resources to contextualize medical vocabulary and health-related concepts that the students would be exposed to in their first prerequisite courses, including content from the National League for Nursing exam, which all students had to take for entrance into the LPN program. Further, the instructor chose specific readings and assignments related to healthcare or issues that pertained to diverse student populations, mostly women. Students worked in groups and were required to present reflective summaries of their reading and experiences in healthcare. The students had several opportunities to engage in public speaking, which they described as “not easy”; however, with persistent instructor encouragement, they grew more confident in their ability. The students were provided access to computers in a cottage-turned-classroom at the job site and in the classroom at the nearby satellite campus, and they were given introductory lessons in computer literacy because most did not have basic knowledge of or access to computers in their homes. In fact, the plan to offer some instruction via computer-based modules was abandoned when the instructor learned that the students lacked computer literacy. The curriculum was described as a “work in progress—a continuous discovery of what works and what does not.”

Barriers and Policy Change

At first, Presbyterian Homes did not understand the extent of its employees’ academic needs, believing OCC’s nursing faculty could remediate employee skills in an 8-week term. Attributed with not understanding the rigor of the program, some Presbyterian Homes administrators did not understand why their employees struggled with the curriculum. Administrators of Presbyterian Homes believed part of the problem was that employee performance in CNA jobs did not reveal academic competencies and that the entry-level competence of the students was therefore not understood. Another lesson learned was the importance of Presbyterian Homes and OCC leaders giving the same information and advice to students. To accomplish this, the partners increased communication between themselves and with students to answer questions related to students’ education and employment.

The college administrators and instructors observed that OCC’s cohort consisted of students whose academic preparation and competence ranged widely (although no college placement test was given to confirm this observation). Because of the wide variation in ability, the program slowed the pace to allow students with more limited academic skills to keep up. One consequence of this decision was that the pace of instruction did not accommodate students who believed they could progress

at a faster rate. A few students described the pace of instruction as “frustrating”; however, the program coordinators stated that most students who complained did not demonstrate classroom performance that matched their claims. That is, the vast majority of students were thought to need the slower pace to reach an acceptable level of academic competency.

From the students’ perspective, balancing work and school was challenging. The students did not receive paid time off to attend the bridge class, and although some students used vacation time, others worked weekends to make up for lost hours and pay. Overtime work added to students’ stress and complicated time management, but most students seemed to be able to juggle the additional responsibilities.

College capacity was a barrier to offering future CNA- to-LPN Bridge the Success programs. In fact, during the period when the demonstration program was implemented, one other local provider of long-term care expressed interest in replicating the bridge program; however, the nursing program could not accommodate expansion. This decision was determined partially by the requisite need to hire additional qualified nursing instructors, a profession in short supply nationwide, and the potential difficulty in finding additional clinical sites for instruction.

An OCC administrator indicated that the Illinois Community College Board’s developmental education reimbursement structure did not take into account the actual costs of offering bridge programs. This administrator endorsed the state’s adoption of new policy for developmental bridge programs to make them more economically feasible and serve as an incentive to offer more bridge courses.

College administrators cited several local policy changes that were made to accommodate this bridge program. First, the College allowed bridge students to enroll and commence with the bridge course before receiving tuition payment from the employer-partner. The College also charged Presbyterian Homes in-district tuition for all students, regardless of their residency, because the main campus of the employer was in Evanston, within the OCC district boundaries. Third, the College allowed two transition coordinators to focus solely on this small group of students, meaning the advisor–student ratio was far lower than the typical advisor load. Fourth, the College allowed the course length of the High Risk Nursing Student Program to be doubled to accommodate the needed content and the students’ full-time work schedule. Fifth, the College allowed courses to be scheduled off the main campus at or near the workplace. Finally, the college allowed the admissions criteria to be waived for the bridge class.

Student Outcomes

Nineteen students participated in the single cohort offered by OCC. A majority of these students were female, more than

25 years of age, had a family income of more than \$21,000, and had earned postsecondary credits prior to enrolling in the bridge program. A slight majority were White. All students possessed either a high school diploma or GED, and all 19 (100%) completed the bridge program. Slightly over half of the bridge students continued into postsecondary credit (transfer) instruction at OCC, with almost one-third of the continuing students participating in additional remedial education. Because this demonstration program was restricted to incumbent workers at Presbyterian Homes, it is logical that most, if not all, would continue employment. This finding was evident in the data, showing that 89% of the employee-students continued their employment at Presbyterian Homes. One student transferred to an associate degree nursing program at his local community college.

Adult Education Demonstration Sites

Black Hawk College

College Context

Black Hawk College (BHC) has campuses located in Moline and Kewanee, Illinois. The College covers 2,200 square miles and serves a population of approximately 224,510 residents in a mostly rural area of northwestern Illinois. The College employs more than 400 full-time and 350 part-time employees at both campuses and enrolls 11,938 college credit students and 5,956 continuing education or vocational training students. It offers more than 118 career programs and more than 40 transfer programs.

Bridge Program Description and Goals

The demonstration model developed at BHC was an adult bridge program with transportation, distribution, and logistics (TDL) as the occupational focus because the College's geographic location is a hub of transportation on the Mississippi River and on a major east–west interstate. The BHC proposal specified two goals. The first was that contextualized adult GED and ESL course content would prepare adult education students academically to transition to the College's Warehouse and Distribution Specialist (WDS) certificate program. The second was that comprehensive supports—including tutoring, learning communities, targeted use of instructional software, career counseling, and a designated transition advisor—would enhance students' success.

Students Served

Target students were those age 18 and over who tested at the 9th grade level and above. The initiative targeted individuals who were unemployed or underemployed and who were interested

in occupations within the TDL career cluster. The College's recruitment strategies included a brochure distributed widely in the community, personal visits to students enrolled in GED and ESL classes, and personal outreach to community-based organizations, churches, service clubs, and other groups. Student selection was determined from interested GED students whose academic skill levels corresponded to the 9th grade level and above on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and to ESL students at Level 5 (high intermediate or advanced) on the Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA). In spring 2008, BHC created two concurrent bridge cohorts to prepare students to enter the WDS certificate program, one for ESL and the other for GED. Total program enrollment during the 2008 calendar year was 25 students.

Promising Practices

Contextualized Curriculum. Beginning with an outline of core concepts and vocabulary developed by an external consultant from Women Employed, two experienced ESL and GED instructors, who each taught their respective bridge students, further developed the ESL and GED bridge courses. The ESL instructor developed a broad spectrum of learning activities and a contextualized ESL reading, writing, and math curriculum that was applicable not only to the WDS program, but also to the larger TDL industry cluster curriculum. To prepare her ESL bridge curriculum, she read WDS course texts to determine the academic level required and the common vocabulary used. She accelerated the delivery of the normal 16-week, Level 5 ESL course to include additional parts of speech and verb tenses students would need to know to understand WDS texts. She emphasized that she “recycles and repeats” the material to aid retention because “My students don't go home and study; they go home to sleep so they can get up and go to work and then straight back here for class.” She also added contextualized math vocabulary and practice problems because “Many ESL students understand mathematics principles, but they don't understand the words in the math problem.” A holistic approach to learning was used to help the adult learners succeed.

Curriculum and Career Pathway Alignment. Part of the impetus of the College to apply as a Shifting Gears demonstration site stemmed from BHC's strategic plan to expand the student base to include a relatively large population of adult education students. The associate dean explained that during the 16-week bridge course and the certificate program to which the students transitioned, “BHC had to shift gears many times to adjust policies and practices to support the students enrolled.” Examples include creating a 6-week ESL course to help students retain their new knowledge during the summer break between the end of the spring bridge course and the beginning of the fall WDS certificate courses. Further, BHC offered an additional, unplanned section of the WDS certificate program to accommodate some bridge students' work schedules, accelerating a change in the WDS curriculum to two different

formats and including the measurement of student outcomes to help determine the most optimal time frame.

From the beginning of the Shifting Gears initiative, BHC adult education administrators designed their approach to the bridge program within a larger career pathway and understood its utility for transitioning students from one credential to another as their needs and aspirations evolved. In determining the industry sector within which to develop the bridge program, the Associate Dean of Adult Education examined the academic level of potential bridge students, the academic requirements of the potential BHC certificate and associate degree programs, and the workforce needs of the region. The WDS certificate program was chosen because “Our primary concern was creating an opportunity where, in the semester-long time frame of the bridge course, students could learn the amount of academic and technical content necessary to ‘bridge the learning gap’ and be prepared to enter the chosen program.” Responding to student demand, the College offered two cohorts of the WDS certificate program in two formats. One met 4 days per week over 13 weeks, and the other met 2 days per week over 25 weeks. The program length for both cohorts was accelerated from the standard 36-week WDS program.

At the same time BHC applied for the Shifting Gears grant, the College had applied to the Illinois Community College Board to offer an Inventory Specialist Certificate and an Associate in Science degree in Supply Chain Management, with which the WDS certificate was aligned. The College has since received approval for both programs. Further, the associate degree in Supply Chain Management is articulated with a baccalaureate degree program in Supply Chain Management at Western Illinois University.

Transition Coordinator and Support Services. Support services were provided by a part-time transition coordinator specifically recruited for the Shifting Gears initiative, whose diverse 20-year work experience and dedication to similar populations of students demonstrated the expertise needed to serve the bridge students’ diverse needs. In addition to recruiting students for the bridge courses, she supported them throughout their bridge and certificate program by coaching and encouraging, providing academic and financial aid advisement, and assisting in finding resources for childcare and transportation assistance. Before the WDS courses began, she developed and provided an orientation session for the WDS program instructors, providing them with a class list including brief biographical sketches of each student, an important service because she “recognized that the WDS program’s instructors had not taught a class with this level of diversity.” In addition, she offered four Orientation/Transition workshops for the WDS students designed to bond the previously separate cohorts (GED and ESL), complete course registration materials, secure parking tags, and introduce students to the College campus, resources, services, and policies. As students neared the end of the WDS

program, she coached them with interview practice and résumé preparation and assumed an additional role of employer outreach to help students make contacts. The College retitled her role from case manager to Shifting Gears advisor, believing that potential employers would better respond to the fact that the students were “advised” rather than “case managed,” which often carries a negative connotation. Her role was cited as “the most critical element to the program’s success” by a BHC program administrator.

Barriers and Policy Change

As the bridge students approached the beginning of the planned WDS certificate courses, several reported they had work schedule conflicts that prevented them from attending evening classes. The evening schedule had been determined based on the availability of course instructors who worked during the day. Persistent lobbying by the ESL students resulted in the addition of a daytime section of the WDS program. BHC staff, with the assistance of the College’s Dean of Instruction and Student Learning, found the resources, faculty, and facilities to accommodate the additional section, which allowed more students (not Shifting Gears students) to enter the WDS program. Creation of the daytime courses created another challenge, however. The evening students and faculty did not have access to the same quantity and quality of support services available to participants in the daytime program. To accommodate this need, the transition coordinator extended her role to bring services to the evening students, such as picking up books while the bookstore was open and delivering them to the students, and providing assistance with registration and billing issues.

Hiring the transition coordinator presented a challenge for BHC because the person best qualified to serve in that capacity already worked for BHC as an adjunct faculty member. There was concern that the cumulative appointment would require her to work 40 hours per week, which was considered full time. This issue was resolved after some adjustment of her hours and duties.

Finally, BHC administrators stated that the low computer literacy skills of Shifting Gears bridge students created difficulty with online registration. However, the transition coordinator was able to intervene and help students register for the bridge program.

With respect to policies, BHC administrators strictly adhered to the population targeted for the GED class cohort, students with a 9th grade reading level and above. The College chose this level because it predicted the students could be prepared to pass the GED exam and transfer to the WDS program without also needing to enroll in remedial courses. Students whose scores fell below this level were denied participation in the bridge program. Admission of ESL students followed a slightly different course, which raised an issue about differential admission policies for different student populations. BHC administrators allowed students in the ESL group to enter the program at a lower

competency level than the GED group, observing that the ESL students were highly motivated and sought extra help. This decision was affirmed when ESL students whose TABE scores were below the 9th grade level showed large strides toward the cutoff goal. Whether GED students who were denied admission would have shown similar gains is unknown because those students were unable to participate.

BHC administrators cited Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) rules that needed to be altered to support more bridge programs. Work requirements made it very difficult for prospective students to attend school when the lack of transportation and affordable childcare were considered. In addition to these needs were issues related to student support services, such as financial aid for students enrolled in short-term training programs. The administrators indicated their intent to investigate the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) 40% funding rule and initiate discussions with the federal Perkins (CTE) administrator at the College to pursue additional resources to support bridge programs in other industry sectors.

Several local policy issues arose that were related to curriculum alignment between adult education and ESL courses and vocational training and college credit programs. The Adult Education Department did not align the bridge curriculum with the Developmental Education Division of BHC, but it did work on aligning the program with the vocational credit WDS certificate program. BHC administrators explained that, typically, the main GED program goal was to help students pass the GED test, leaving students unprepared for transition to postsecondary courses. BHC worked with the academic ESL faculty to prepare Level 5 ESL students to transition to academic ESL; however, many of the students' goals were to transition to noncredit or credit CTE classes without having to take academic ESL classes.

BHC recognizes the need to serve low-skilled learners, and the Shifting Gears initiative prompted discussion about using institutional funds to create a transition coordinator position for adult education students. This institutional decision increased awareness within the BHC community of the need to transition more adult education students into vocational and college-credit programs. Based on what was learned in the Shifting Gears project, the College has created a healthcare bridge.

Student Outcomes

Twenty-five students participated in the spring 2008 cohort. (A second cohort was offered in spring 2009, but data were not collected on this group.) In spring 2008, the majority of students were male, minority, nonnative English-speaking, more than 25 years of age, without a high school diploma or GED, and without any postsecondary credits. Slightly over half the students were reported to have an annual family income of \$21,000 or higher. Of the 25 students enrolled, 84% completed the bridge program

and 100% entered some form of postsecondary instruction, with 28% of the students enrolling in remedial education. None of the students was placed in employment (attributed to a downturn in the economy), but 80% continued their prior employment.

Lewis and Clark Community College

College Context

Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC) is located in Godfrey, Illinois, a town in Madison County, approximately 30 miles north of St. Louis. The College has an annual enrollment of more than 13,000 credit students, and employs 96 full-time faculty and 226 part-time faculty. Lewis and Clark Community College also offers instruction at a campus in Edwardsville, at two Community Education Centers, and in all public high schools in the seven-county district.

Bridge Program Description and Goals

The demonstration model developed at LLCC was an adult education bridge program with manufacturing as the occupational focus. The program's goal was to develop innovative instructional approaches that would improve student transition outcomes. As stated in the proposal submitted by LLCC, "the general purpose of the Bridge to Manufacturing course is to prepare adult students who are at the developmental level to enroll in an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree program in one of two manufacturing programs: Process Operations Technology or Water Treatment Technologies." One strategy was for bridge students to enroll in a career development course that would "identify their career interests, aptitude, and abilities, and provide them with transition planning."

Students Served

The target students were individuals age 18 and above who were unemployed or underemployed and were seeking degrees in manufacturing-related areas of study. To participate, students needed to score at the 9th grade level or above on the ACCUPLACER math and reading comprehension placement tests; however, administrators were initially flexible with this requirement, especially in math. Some participating students had obtained their GEDs, whereas others had not; thus, the local project director described LCCC's bridge program as "actually a hybrid of . . . adult education and developmental education." The selection process was closer to the proposed target group of 9th grade and above for students recruited for the cohort in fall 2008.

Units especially involved in recruitment were the adult education program, various regional social service agencies, and the Madison County Employment and Training Office, which traditionally works with underemployed and unemployed

residents seeking advanced job skill training. Several recruitment methods were used, drawing on input from LCCC's Student Support Services Subcommittee. In spring 2008, the adult education staff visited classes and sent fliers via e-mail to GED students, and in fall 2008, the Student Support Services Subcommittee sent flyers to all GED students served during the previous fiscal year, reaching approximately 300 students. By fall 2008, word-of-mouth had become a viable recruitment strategy, with teachers, caseworkers, and others knowledgeable about the bridge program actively recruiting students.

Promising Practices

Contextualized Curriculum. The College offered a 16-week adult education bridge program that included three complimentary GED courses. The students enrolled in a specially developed course, TECH 111 (Bridge to Manufacturing), that combined basic math skills with manufacturing-specific content. Students learned critical thinking skills that were contextualized with hands-on learning, standard quizzes and tests, regular homework problems, and a math anxiety survey. A math lab was correlated with the content taught in the math class. A unique academic support for students in the LCCC program involved this math resource lab and student tutors provided free of charge to bridge students. During the site visit, the researchers spoke to two advanced LCCC students serving as math tutors in the math resource lab. Both of these student mentors spoke about the reward they felt in fulfilling a tutoring and mentoring role for the bridge students.

In ENGL 125 (Basic Writing), students gained the foundational concepts required to transition to college-level reading and writing. (It is noteworthy that LCCC's bridge program changed the English course because students in the first cohort found the contextualized communication component too easy.) ENGL 125 designed to give students the level of communication skills they need to transition to the Technical Writing course needed to enroll in the Process Operations Technology program. ENGL 125 consisted of essay writing; the course led students through the process of formulating thesis statements and also assessed their interests, aptitudes, and abilities to further their educational training in manufacturing or processing. The third course was PSYCH 130, which focused on career development (discussed below).

Curriculum delivery included workshops and module formats to meet the critical time constraints of under-employed workers attending programs on a part-time basis. The demonstration project used a student-centered approach, with a team of teachers working cooperatively to develop and teach the curriculum adapting their teaching styles to meet the needs and learning styles of the students. When asked about the curriculum and instruction being used by LCCC, one of the older students commented that the bridge program was very different from classes he was enrolled in when he was last in school. He

commented that the LCCC instructors were "genuinely interested in you succeeding and making you want to learn."

Career Development. This bridge program was unique in that it incorporated a college-level career development course into the course sequence. Career assessment and career planning were addressed in PSYC 130, which integrated career awareness and decision-making with life choices. Faculty associated with the program described PSYC 130 as a critical part of the curriculum. There, students participated in a variety of assessments to determine career interests, aptitudes, and abilities, resulting in a transition plan that guided them through successive course work as part of a career path.

Transition Team. A leadership team, referred to as the Transition Team, played an important role in the demonstration program development and implementation process, and involved faculty from math, physics, manufacturing, and water treatment; upper level administrators; adult education personnel; and personnel representing the LCCC admissions and counseling, and employment and training functions. The Transition Team was divided into the following subcommittee structures: assessment, student support, curriculum, sustainability, and action research. Further, LCCC was involved in significant and sustained partnerships with local industries and institutions in various career fields.

Action Research Team. LCCC employed an Action Research Team made up of experts from SIU-Edwardsville to facilitate and formalize the action research process. The SIU-Edwardsville staff helped ensure that members of the Transition Team were included in program design and were operating from the same framework. The Action Research Team designed and implemented an action research process that guided the formative assessment of the bridge program. The Action Research consultants guided the Transition Team, via its subcommittees, to consider questions and reflect on the types of data necessary to answer those questions. The Action Research Team included a project administrator and coordinator who met regularly to reflect on lessons learned and, based on those lessons, to determine future steps.

Barriers and Policy Change

Recruiting substantial numbers of students into the bridge program was difficult, with the total number of students falling short of the estimates LCCC included in its grant application. In the 2008 calendar year, after offering two cohort programs, LCCC administrators proposed to recruit students directly from the PSYC 130 course, meaning their target group would expand beyond the 9th to 12th grade level. One recruitment issue raised by local administrators was the limited scope of the program that focused on Process Operations Technology or Water Treatment Technologies in manufacturing. One LCCC administrator stated that the skills learned in the curriculum of either of

these programs (e.g., learning from plans and blueprints) were applicable to many trades and fields but that students might not understand the potential to transfer their knowledge and skills.

Several policy issues were identified and addressed by local personnel. One policy issue looked at where the course resided within the College (i.e., who “owned” the course). The LCCC team approached this issue by recognizing that the contextualized math course (MATH 120) was a part of the math department and led to manufacturing or several other technical fields for which other technical math was required. A second policy issue involved enhancing coordination between adult education and community college programs. This policy addressed the sharing of teaching and coordination responsibilities, despite difficulties sharing payroll, because adult education and regular community college faculty were paid from different funding sources. Part of the issue involved federal and state policy and the restrictions on commingling multiple types of funding.

A third policy issue involved identifying appropriate personnel to ensure successful student transitions, as well as needed student support systems. Identifying which student supports would be helpful was a challenge. Although most students seemed capable of benefiting from taking the courses, many had difficulty persisting. To provide an incentive to complete the courses, LCCC began working with a local manufacturing firm to assist students in entering directly into employment after completing the bridge program. The fourth related policy issue involved adequate student supports. Trying to identify which student supports would be helpful and how to fund them was a challenge that the local Transition Team attempted to resolve.

The final policy issue involved the sustainability of funding. Program administrators determined that a potential source is Perkins (CTE) funds, which could be used to sustain aspects of the bridge program through modularized instruction and modified developmental and CTE course work. In this way, the Shifting Gears initiative created an opportune test bed for experimentation that continues on.

Student Outcomes

Twelve students participated in the two LCCC pilot bridge cohorts; this number included a few students who began in the spring 2008 cohort, left the program, and then returned to participate in the second cohort offered in fall 2008. The majority of students were male, White, younger than 25 years of age, and without a high school diploma or GED, and therefore without any postsecondary credits. Half of the students completed the bridge program, and 42% of these students entered some form of postsecondary credit instruction as a result of the bridge program. Two-thirds of the students who continued at LCCC participated in remedial education.

McHenry County College

College Context

McHenry County College (MCC) serves residents of McHenry County, the fifth most rapidly growing county in Illinois, as well as portions of the surrounding counties. The College is located on the northwest side of Crystal Lake, Illinois, and also operates a facility in McHenry, Illinois. The College enrolls 2,000 full-time students and 5,800 part-time students and employs 92 full-time faculty and 185 part-time faculty.

Bridge Program Description and Goals

The demonstration model developed at MCC was an adult bridge program with manufacturing as the target industry sector. The program focused on developing innovative instructional approaches that would improve student transition outcomes. The region surrounding MCC is experiencing a large influx of immigrants and ESL residents, and to address this need, MCC offers free adult education, including ESL and GED classes. The College implemented an adult bridge model as a strategy to meet the needs of these students.

Students Served

Methods used to recruit students included advertisements in a local Latino/a newspaper, mailers, visits to a homeless shelter, presentations to adult education classes, visits to all MCC ESL classes, and word of mouth. Initially, 50 students were enrolled in two cohorts of the bridge program in spring 2008. One cohort of targeted students were taking adult education/ESL classes and who tested at the high intermediate level (9th grade level or higher) in math and at an advanced level in English (6th grade level or higher). For the second cohort, the faculty recruited students whose academic skills were at the 6th through 8.9th grade levels or at a low intermediate ESL level.

Promising Practices

Contextualized Curriculum. The curriculum consisted of three modules. The Module I curriculum consisted of 48 hours of instruction emphasizing technical math in manufacturing. It also included workplace communication skills and preparation for college placement tests, with the goal of minimizing students’ need for developmental course work. Module II consisted of 48 hours of instruction in welding and other technical skills, such as blueprint reading and industrial safety. The curriculum was aligned with key elements of MET 100 (Blueprint Reading) and IMT 116 (Industrial Safety Management) and was tied to proficiency exams, including practice exams. Module III focused on employability skills that emphasized workplace behaviors and job search skills. The three modules were offered as noncredit courses because the Shifting Gears program was under

the auspices of continuing education, a noncredit division of MCC. This was done to avoid the lengthy curriculum approval process necessary for credit courses and to provide quick responses to the changing nature of the manufacturing industry. As the Shifting Gears program director explained, “In order to offer the classes through adult education, we have to go through Illinois Community College Board approval, and the process is lengthy.” Instrumental to making this curriculum work was the employment of two retired manufacturing experts in the region. Working collaboratively to bring the students the most up-to-date information about manufacturing knowledge and skills, these individuals encouraged a high level of student engagement. They developed a rapport with the students that was highly conducive to their learning and to feeling part of a learning community, and this element of the bridge program was seen as critically important to student learning and retention.

Employer/Community Partnership. A leadership team provided guidance on the development and implementation of the manufacturing bridge program, helping to develop productive relationships within the College as well as with employers and manufacturing-related professional and community groups. The College assembled administrators having a range of leadership responsibilities, including adult education, CTE, and other college credit programs. These leaders were especially important because MCC was reorganized during the time the bridge program was being implemented. The leadership group paid attention to internal resource issues, including personnel turnover due largely to retirement, and it helped to forge relationships with units in the College such as the Academy for High Performance, which provides a fast-track curriculum so that students could complete an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in 2 years or less. AAS degree programs were envisioned as an option for students who completed the bridge program and desired further postsecondary education.

To improve students’ transition to employment, the leadership team strived to obtain input from local manufacturers, including soliciting input through MCC’s industrial advisory meetings, locally organized activities with manufacturing employers and groups (Lean Manufacturing Series at the MCC Shah Center, which provided students with technical competencies in Lean Manufacturing; Precision Metalforming Association best practices meeting; and McHenry County Economic Development Corporation manufacturing events), as well as individual manufacturing firms. In addition, plant tours were conducted when Module II was offered to students in June 2008, and these tours were reported to have a tremendous impact on the first cohort’s learning experiences. According to the MCC coordinator, the tour provided an opportunity for students to understand the jobs in detail. Purposely scheduled at different types of manufacturing facilities, the tours opened students’ eyes to the diversity of jobs available in manufacturing, helping them to plan for their studies and future careers. The grant coordinator

initiated contacts with local manufacturing companies for the tours, explaining students’ biases against manufacturing and the necessity of changing their prejudice. She observed, “While I teach ESL students, I recognize that most students misunderstand manufacturing as a dirty job.” At these plant visits, the company shared details about employee benefits and employment requirements. After touring the plants, new content was added to the employability curriculum.

Transition Coordinator and Support Services. The transition coordinator and support services were identified by students as critical to their success. McHenry County College’s transition coordinator arranged instructional advising and facilitated the awarding of grant funds so that students received free tuition, fees, books, childcare, and transportation. She played an important role, describing herself as an “advisor, counselor, emotional supporter, and staff.” From the beginning of the program, the transition coordinator encouraged students, recognizing the struggles they faced. She told us one of her favorite pieces of advice was, “If it is hard, you need to see me.” A former student expressed his sincere appreciation for the coordinator’s assistance, saying, “She was always by my side in every step.” She conveyed to the students as often as possible that she was very willing to help them, and even spent time beyond her regular work hours assisting students. For example, she connected Spanish-speaking students with a Spanish-speaking tutor, helped arrange childcare and transportation, helped one student’s son complete a community college application, and helped a former student transfer to another college and secure financial aid.

Barriers and Policy Change

McHenry County College administrators identified several barriers to students’ success. The first was the adult education students’ lack of computer access and computer literacy. A majority did not have access to computers, and students’ lack of computer literacy was identified as a critical barrier to their employability. Consequently, computer literacy was integrated into the curriculum to help them complete résumés and search Web sites.

The second barrier involved students’ math skills, one that was addressed by devoting more time to the math curriculum and instruction and offering a math enhancement class. Even with these changes, students still needed more math. A third barrier involved challenges to providing students with the equipment they needed for hands-on training. The students had difficulty visualizing the real parts of machines used in the workplace. As one instructor noted, “To understand what they’re learning, they need to have something solid in their hands.”

The fourth barrier involved a lack of partnerships with companies for internships and apprenticeships. Despite efforts by the faculty, the College was unable to provide students

with internships or apprenticeships. Employers were resistant to offering internships because of liability issues. One MCC administrator observed that this barrier could be overcome by working either with employment agencies, which might be eligible to offer internships, or with the Workforce Network Center, which might be able to offer on-the-job training.

A final barrier involved the ability to identify students with high school diplomas who were employed by local manufacturers and who might be interested in and able to benefit from the program. More flexibility in the targeted group was recommended to maximize the benefit of the bridge program for the low-skilled population with a strong interest in manufacturing.

A local policy issue that arose had to do with the lengthy process of receiving board approval for the program director and coordinator positions; this first involved classification of the position and then lengthy recruitment and hiring processes. A second policy issue involved the College's difficulty seeking tuition assistance for the students who wanted to continue their postsecondary education in the area of manufacturing but who faced difficulties with employment and immigration. The faculty explained that it was virtually impossible for low-income students who were supporting families to pursue further education. College administrators advised these students to first find employment and later pursue postsecondary education with the support of their employers.

Student Outcomes

Of the 50 enrollees in the two cohorts, 90% were nonnative speakers of English and minorities. Nearly half were female and the majority were 25 years of age or older. Almost none of the students had a high school diploma, GED, or any postsecondary credits at the time they enrolled, and most reported a family income of \$21,000 or higher. Although 54% successfully completed the bridge program, none of these students enrolled in postsecondary credit instruction at MCC as a result of the program, despite their desire to do so. Employment among the group was strong. Most students (70%) continued the employment they had prior to the program or indicated that they had been placed in employment as a result of the program.

CROSS-SITE FINDINGS

Student Enrollments, Characteristics, Industry Sectors, and Outcomes

Table 1 on page 19 includes cross-site results of student enrollments, characteristics, industry sectors, and outcomes. The bridge projects were required to focus on one of three industry sectors: healthcare, manufacturing, or TDL. Of the 130 students enrolled in the developmental and adult education models at

the six colleges, 86 students in four colleges were enrolled in manufacturing. Regarding the demographic and educational variables collected for students in these six schools, 100% of students at COD, 83% of students at OCC and MCC, and 52% of students at BHC had family incomes of \$21,000 or higher. The majority at BHC, LCCC, and MCC had not graduated from high school or obtained a GED. In addition, the vast majority of enrollees at BHC and MCC were nonnative speakers of English.

The percentage of students completing the program ranged from 33 (CLC) to 100% (OCC) across the six schools, and 100% (BHC), 53% (OCC), and 42% (LCCC) went on into some form of postsecondary credit-level instruction. Although direct placement of students into employment at the conclusion of the bridge programs was not high at all sites, one unanticipated result was the high percentage (89% at OCC, 80% at BHC, 58% at CLC, and 48% at MCC) of student groups who were placed in employment or continued employment. The large percentage of students who were working and attending bridge classes is relevant for understanding student outcomes and the types of services the students needed.

Barriers

Three types of barriers emerged across the community colleges engaged in implementing demonstration programs, regardless of whether the sites were implementing a bridge program associated with adult education or developmental education:

- *Individual (student) barriers*—Students lacked academic (college) preparation, including foundational academic skills and computer skills. They also had multiple personal, family, and employment challenges that impeded their attending and succeeding in school. Further, recruitment was a problem in terms of attracting and identifying students who fit the identified student profile (target audience A: 6th to 8.9th grade; target audience B: 9th to 12th grade) and meeting their needs.
- *Organizational barriers*—The community college presented multiple barriers, including the use of college placement exams that did not adequately pinpoint students' competency gaps; limited student support services to address the multifaceted barriers of low-skilled adults (see previous barrier); and limited administrative, curricular, and instructional structures to accommodate bridge program implementation.
- *Policy barriers*—The misalignment of systems, funding streams, and policy and program requirements associated with adult education, WIA, Perkins IV CTE, and developmental education presented a barrier to bridge program implementation. Included in this group of barriers was a concern about low-skilled adults' eligibility for WIA funding and issues with commingling monies across federal funding streams associated with adult education, CTE, and WIA.

Bridge Program Components Related to Student Outcomes

An important feature of many of the demonstration programs was the provision of support services to the bridge students. Having access to such a person is generally seen as a key element of potential success for student retention, persistence, and program completion. Among the six demonstration programs selected for this report, the majority of students were assigned a specific staff person who was dedicated to coordinating and/or directly providing assistance. Adult education students at LCCC had access to services not from an assigned transition coordinator, but from a Transition Team formed to assist them at the college. The level of contact with a transition coordinator or team may be associated with better retention and completion, because the students would be able to address whatever problems were present, which might otherwise have resulted in noncompletion.

An important objective of the quantitative evaluation was to identify any relationships that might exist between the results of the demonstration programs and core program components related to student success. Of the relationships examined, five *components of the demonstration programs* were moderately to highly correlated with program completion: 1) the percentage of students receiving career orientation more than once; 2) the percentage of students receiving admissions and financial aid assistance at least once; 3) the percentage of students receiving advising at least once; 4) the percentage of students receiving transportation assistance at least once; and 5) the frequency of student meetings with an assigned transition coordinator. In addition, two *student characteristics* were moderately to highly correlated with program completion: 1) the percentage of students with no high school diploma or GED, and 2) the percentage of students younger than 25 years old.

Among these pilots, three of the program components were more highly correlated ($P < 0.05$) with program completion than the student characteristics of educational level and age: 1) admissions and financial aid at least once; 2) advising at least once; and 3) transportation assistance at least once. In addition, two of the program components were as highly correlated or nearly as highly correlated ($P < 0.05$) with student completion as student educational level and age: 1) career orientation more than once; and 2) frequency of student meetings with an assigned transition coordinator. This indicates that these program components had at least a similar, if not greater, relationship with program completion than with the educational levels of students or their ages.

CONCLUSION

Phase One of the Illinois Shifting Gears initiative (completed June 30, 2009) resulted in an evaluation of 10 bridge programs

implemented in Illinois that were aimed at helping adult learners transition into postsecondary education and providing them with training and credentials to enter the workforce in high-demand middle-skill jobs. Six of those programs are summarized in this report.

One of the policy initiatives that resulted from the Illinois Shifting Gears work in Phase One was the development and implementation of a definition of bridge programs. This definition includes three elements that Illinois bridge programs are required to address:

- *Contextualized instruction* that integrates basic reading, math, and language skills and industry or occupation knowledge;
- *Career development* that includes career exploration, career planning within a career area, and understanding the world of work; and
- *Transition services* that provide students with the information and assistance they need to successfully navigate the process of moving from adult education or remedial course work to credit or occupational programs.

The qualitative results shed light on all three of these program elements, showing that all demonstration sites used innovative instructional approaches, with most using some form of contextualized instruction. The approaches were highly varied, with numerous reasons given to explain local variation, including the need to address local community college policies and practices, the need to serve different student populations, and the need to meet different industry sector and occupational requirements. Within the adult education model, different approaches were used to serve diverse student populations, including finely tuned practices to serve subpopulations. This was readily apparent at BHC and MCC, the two adult bridge programs that enrolled a high percentage of ESL learners. Both programs integrated instructional strategies that were highly sensitive to the language and cultural needs of these learners. We observed that over time, the adult bridge program at LCCC moved toward a blended adult education and developmental education model, both to attract more students and to develop a sustainable model. In another example, in the employer-supported health care program offered by OCC, incumbent employees participated in a CNA-to-LPN Bridge to Success program that allowed them to draw on resources associated with their employee benefits.

Two sites (CLC and LCCC) required students to participate in a college-credit-bearing course in career development. In both cases, the students and instructors commented on the importance of a strong career awareness and preparation component in the bridge curriculum.

In addition, transition services and the transition coordinator emerged as a core component at five of the six sites. Qualitative

results suggest that persons hired in this position should possess extensive knowledge of diverse adult student populations and of the services offered by the college and community-based organizations and community agencies. Transition coordinators played an important role in orienting, guiding, and advocating for the students, and they were critically important to coordinating support services that were sometimes disconnected within the community college and difficult for students to navigate.

The quantitative results provided additional support for the requirement to include career development and transition services in the bridge definition. The demonstration projects that provided most students with career orientation, admissions assistance, and advising had better outcomes than those that did not. Moreover, the demonstration projects in which students had frequent interactions with an assigned transition coordinator, and that provided more students with transportation assistance, had better outcomes than those that did not.

Despite the many barriers encountered, these community college sites changed policies and practices to support the bridge programs offered to low-skilled adult cohorts, including enhanced student support services; better alignment of adult education, developmental education, and CTE; improved course approval procedures to facilitate fast-paced program development and delivery; and enhanced communication and coordination between departments internal to community colleges and between local colleges and the state.

Alignment of funding was an especially important issue for the demonstration sites implementing adult bridge programs because of concerns about commingling adult education and other federal funds. This issue continues to demand further policy investigation and resolution if more students are to enter and succeed in adult education bridge programs.

Phase Two of Shifting Gears involves efforts designed to advance and expand both policy and practice and is supported by the Illinois Community College Board and the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Phase Two emphasizes 1) engaging state decision makers in developing and implementing bridge-related policies; 2) developing and institutionalizing bridge program models and practices; 3) strengthening data systems and expanding performance measures and tracking; and 4) communicating practices and policies to decision makers and the public. All efforts at the state and local levels will be monitored and assessed to continue to inform and document bridge program instruction in Illinois.

REFERENCE

- Bragg, D., Harmon, T., Kirby, C., & Kim, S. (2009). *Initial results of Illinois' Shifting Gears pilot demonstration evaluation*. Champaign, IL: Office of Community College Research and Leadership, University of Illinois. Retrieved June 25, 2010, from the Office of Community College Research and Leadership Web site: http://occrll.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Report/SG_Eval_Report%20PRINT.pdf

Table 1. Student Enrollments, Characteristics, and Sample Outcomes¹

Item	DuPage	Lake County	Oakton	Black Hawk	Lewis and Clark	McHenry County
Total program enrollments	12	12	19	25	12	50
Industry Sector	Manu- facturing	Manu- facturing	Health- care	TDL	Manu- facturing	Manu- facturing
Student characteristics						
Percent female	17	8	95	24	25	48
Percent minority	67	50	47	96	25	90
Percent younger than 25 years of age	50	50	11	14	58	17
Percent with no high school diploma or GED	9	40	0	60	67	84
Percent with any postsecondary credits	45	0	63	28	33	0
Percent with family income less than \$3,000	0	NA	0	4	NA	4
Percent with family income \$21,000 or higher	100	NA	83	52	NA	83
Percent nonnative speakers of English	17	8	5	80	0	90
Student outcomes						
Percent of students who successfully completed the bridge program	67	33	100	84	50	54
Percent of students who entered *postsecondary credit instruction as a result of the bridge program	17	8	53	100	42	2
Percent of students who took one or more postsecondary remedial courses	0	0	16	28	67	0
Percent of students who were placed in employment or continued in employment	50	58	89	80	NA	70

¹Source: Illinois Community College Board, based on student-level data submitted by the Shifting Gears demonstration colleges on enrollments defined as unique student identifiers reported in one or more term submissions for January 1 to December 31, 2008 (see http://occr.l.illinois.edu/files/Projects/shifting_gears/Report/SG_Eval_Report%20PRINT.pdf).

These data reflect corrected summary values from a review of the initial data by Shifting Gears demonstration site officials.

NA = not applicable.

**Postsecondary credit instruction* includes transfer and CTE credit.

