FOSTERING ENGAGEMENT AND SUCCESS FOR ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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KEY TAKEAWAYS & CONSIDERATIONS

- *For adult learners in higher education, the financial barrier is the most prominent obstacle to attaining a postsecondary degree or credential.*
  - According to ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) data, about 39 percent of the Indiana population falls under the ALICE designation. These students are often "one emergency away" from falling into poverty. For them, attaining a degree is an extension of their cost of living.
  - For adult learners with financial constraints, wraparound services, like childcare, are crucial to eliminating this barrier.
- *Institutions of higher education engaging with employers can aid in fostering success for adult learners.*
  - Employers with "grow your own" initiatives are paving the way for more employers to adopt similar frameworks to support the education of their employees.
  - Ivy Tech Community College employs a 16-week predictive scheduling model that maps out a student's coursework for the next two years. This model allows students to work with their employers to find a schedule and a workflow that supports their education and employment.
- *Collaboration among local organizations is crucial to providing support and engaging adult learners in postsecondary programs.*
  - The Cradle to Career approach from Muncie serves as a collaborative action network (CAN), spanning from early childhood to postsecondary education and workforce. This model leverages community connections to mobilize and build upon the strengths of other organizations.
  - Nonprofits that provide services to those in poverty or with an ALICE designation can also assist in referring adult learners to community college programs or workforce development programs.

RESOURCES

- Achieve Your Degree Program (Ivy Tech Community College) | This initiative is a partnership between Ivy Tech Community College and 300 local employers. If a student's employer is part of the program, they can earn an associate degree or certificate in a field of study approved by their employer at little to no up-front cost.
- Skills First Apprenticeship (Lilly) | The Skills First program provides a combination of formal training, work-based learning, and mentorship to put participants on a pathway to a full-time career.
- Harlem Children's Zone| This nonprofit aims to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty with programming that uplifts opportunities for children and families to set them on a pathway to a career and uproot poverty on every front.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR ADULT LEARNERS

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KEY TAKEAWAYS & CONSIDERATIONS
- *Institutions of higher education (IHEs) must be equipped to provide support to adult learners when applying to postsecondary institutions.*
  - Affordability is one of the largest barriers to postsecondary education for adult learners. For students over the age of 24, cost of tuition, books, and other expenses is the most challenging aspect of pursuing education or training.
  - Expanding non-FAFSA scholarship opportunities within IHEs can help drive systemic change that removes the financial barrier for adult learners. Improving affordability can also be accomplished by expanding Pell Grant funds and promoting the reinstatement of the Pell Grant for incarcerated students.
- *Helping adult learners improve intrinsic motivation and increase confidence can encourage them to pursue postsecondary education.*
  - For many adult learners, the first challenge in pursuing education is completing the application. A study conducted by CAEL found that 82 percent of adults surveyed responded that they had considered applying but did not submit an application. Additionally, 65 percent of adults that applied and were accepted enrolled, but did not begin their first course.
  - About 460,000 adults in Indiana do not have a high school diploma or high school equivalency. This is also a barrier for them pursuing postsecondary education.
    - The Excel Center, operated by Goodwill of Central and Southern Indiana, is a free high school for adults that provides on-site wraparound services like childcare and transportation.
- *Ensuring that postsecondary pathways for adult learners align with career goals and workforce needs is essential in increasing engagement.*
  - This study by CAEL indicated that the third concern of adult learners was whether or not pursuing education would actually align with their career goals.
  - Employers have equally important roles to IHEs in encouraging their employees to pursue higher education. This can come in the form of tuition assistance for pursuing relevant credentials or maintaining flexibility with their employees' scheduling.
  - Encouraging employers to hire based on skills and credentials, and not requiring a bachelor's degree for every position is another step in removing this barrier.

RESOURCES
- Adult Learner Leaders for Institutional Effectiveness (ALLIES) Framework (CAEL) | This resource from CAEL provides stakeholders with guidance and best practices to support the needs of adult learners.
- Where It Starts (Truist Foundation) | This initiative partners with local organizations in underserved communities to engage business leaders, workforce development, and IHEs to create opportunities for employment and credentialing for primarily women and BIPOC adult learners.

- <u>Simon Youth Foundation</u> | This nonprofit located in Indianapolis works to help students fund a postsecondary education through scholarships, primarily targeting first generation college students and those with demonstrated need. The Simon Youth Foundation also works with students at risk of dropping out of high school.