

**To:** NJ Institutions of Higher Education  
**From:** NJ Office of the Secretary of Higher Education  
**Date:** March 19, 2025  
**Subject:** New Resources from State's Some College, No Degree Partnership with ReUp

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As the State continues its multifaceted 'Some College, No Degree' initiative, a key goal is to disseminate findings and lessons learned to support the work underway across institutions.

The State's partner, ReUp Education (ReUp), has released a series of resources focused on how to help some college, no degree students persist to complete a degree. These resources are based on ReUp's work nationally, including the partnership with New Jersey, and **can be utilized by all institutions regardless of their participation within the partnership**. The resources provide strategies for intervention, why the strategy matters, examples of the strategies in action, and questions to help engage institutional stakeholders in potential next steps. Several New Jersey institutions are highlighted as exemplars within the resources.

The five documents cover these persistence themes:

- Proactive Interventions
- Institutional Commitment
- Impactful Advising
- Holistic Adult Focused Support
- Success Tracking

We encourage you to share these resources across the divisions at your institution in order to engage in strategic planning and discussion on how to prevent students from stopping out, as well as how to improve supports when these students return.

If you have questions or feedback regarding the 'Some College, No Degree' statewide initiative, please reach out to Stefani Thachik, [Stefani.Thachik@oshe.nj.gov](mailto:Stefani.Thachik@oshe.nj.gov).

*Please see the resource documents attached.*



## CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF PERSISTENCE



## Proactive Interventions

Persistence-focused institutions are committed to intentional, ongoing improvements that address barriers—unmet needs, lack of skills or resources, and life responsibilities—that impact an adult learner’s ability to persist to graduation. In addition, because time poverty and financial concerns are often the biggest barriers adult learners face, they benefit from accelerated programs and streamlined degree plans.

## Strategy 1

# Craft **personalized** outreach

Adult learners have been away from school for a while, sometimes many years. Communication that does not apply to them can be confusing and sends a message that they are outside of the norm for a college community.



## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Normalizes the nonlinear academic experiences of adult learners and shows that they are valued members of the college community.
- Ensures adult learners have the information that is relevant to them at the moment it is needed.
- Increases adult learner confidence, which is crucial for fostering the motivated mindset needed for degree completion.

## IN ACTION



Hudson County Community College redeveloped its communication strategy and **implemented targeted outreach campaigns to re-engage learners who stopped out.** The campaigns include direct communication and personalized support to encourage their return. The school created an email alias dedicated to communication with learners who have questions, ensuring they feel seen and heard.

## IN ACTION (cont'd)

**INDIANA TECH** Indiana Institute of Technology uses a behavioral analytic piece of software that puts learners in **synthetic profiles based on their online behavior.**

*"We pull data from everything online and track how students are acting and behaving. And then (using specific software) we send a series of nudges, both text messages and emails, to students based on their synthetic profile. They are written to resonate with students based on their behavior."*

— Kris Bliss  
Associate Vice President of Student Success

**Kalamazoo VALLEY**™ community college During the summer months, Kalamazoo Valley Community College advisors **call learners who have not registered for the upcoming term** to check in on their plans and offer assistance. The school's coaches conduct one-to-one outreach via text, email, and phone calls at key times, especially around midterms when withdrawals are high.

This personalized approach helps address individual concerns and encourages learners to return.





## IN ACTION *(cont'd)*



The team at Owens Community College focuses on a **communication plan that uses Google Analytics** to send targeted emails and route learners to advisors for course recommendations. The college's advising plan includes check-ins for learners on probation and early alerts for those not attending classes. Owens also focuses on early registration for probation learners who may need extra support, and uses text messaging for communication. Proactive rather than reactive outreach allows learners to receive support when they need it most.



The University of Idaho considers **all learners who registered in the last two years to be active**—even if they stopped out—and regularly sends reminders about registration, FAFSA openings, and other important deadlines. Regular ongoing communication keeps all learners informed and connected to the institution.



REUP  
INSIGHT

ReUp leverages SMS pulse checks during key times of the year to identify and support learners in need, tailoring outreach and resources based on their responses. ReUp recommends implementing proactive, segmented campaigns with personalized messages to effectively engage and assist adult learners throughout their academic journey.





## Strategy 2

# Decrease time to credential completion

Faster credential completion helps adult learners balance work, family, and education more efficiently. It allows learners to secure credentials sooner, enabling quicker access to career opportunities and economic mobility.

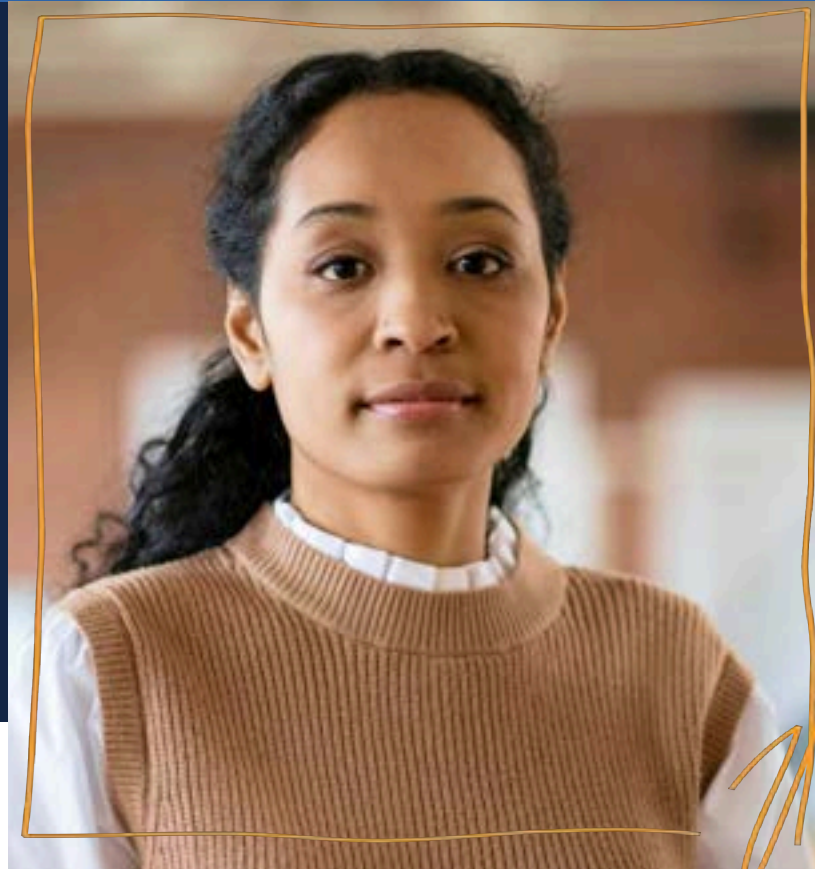
## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Allows busy adults to return to their non-academic commitments faster.
- Reduces the long-term financial burden of tuition payment and loans.
- Helps adult learners stay focused on their goals and stay motivated; this also benefits institutions that are under intense public pressure to deliver positive returns for graduates.

## IN ACTION



University of North Carolina Charlotte conducts regular curriculum reviews to reduce unnecessary barriers, such as complex prerequisites and limited course availability. By analyzing and streamlining programs and policies, they eliminate obstacles that prevent learner progress. This includes helping departments simplify their programs and ensuring faculty understand their role in creating a more accessible academic experience.



## IN ACTION (cont'd)

**Kalamazoo VALLEY™** Kalamazoo Valley Community College sees adult part-time learners as the norm rather than the exception. **Degree plans, course sequencing, and maps are built on timelines that are realistic for this population.**

*"The courses that are offered sequence together really seamlessly, cleanly and make sense instead of just having ad hoc options [...] Students want to know when they're going to graduate, and often what they think and what's reality is very different[...] To have those informed conversations with a student about how long it's actually going to take them if they're only able to take six credits at a time, it's important to have [this conversation] early on in their journey. The more semesters it takes a student to complete, the more likely it is for life to interrupt their journey."*

— Evan Pauken  
Director of Institutional Effectiveness



## IN ACTION *(cont'd)*



Owens Community College finds that **early registration significantly improves learner persistence and completion rates**. School data showed that the earlier learners registered for courses, the higher their completion rates. The school sends course recommendations via email starting as early as the third week in the enrollment cycle to continuing learners, which has made a significant difference in learners accessing the courses they need. When learners register earlier, there is also more time to focus on those who have more needs. To support this, academic advisors follow up with learners, particularly those on probation with a GPA under 2.0, to encourage them to meet with advisors before registration.

The institution also benefits from knowing how enrollment is shaping up for the upcoming term.

*"By the time spring graduation hit, we were at 70% of the enrollment target for continuing students and for us as a community college, that was fantastic. I remember days where we'd be at 55%, so to be at 70% of our enrollment target was a huge win."*

— David Shaffer  
Executive Director, Student Services



REUP  
INSIGHT

A survey of learners who re-paused their education showed that 24% cited clear degree plan direction as a key factor in returning to college, which highlights the motivational impact of a shorter time to completion. ReUp recommends that institutions review and eliminate policies or practices that extend time to degree completion, recognizing that reducing this burden is essential to supporting adult learners' persistence.



## Strategy 3

# Tailor academic progression

Programs with accelerated academic progression align with the schedules and learning styles of busy, working adults, making higher education more accessible and manageable. By tailoring learning experiences to support adult learners' goals—whether advancing careers, developing new skills, or personal fulfillment—institutions foster higher persistence and success.



## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Acknowledges that adult learners come to higher education with a variety of academic backgrounds and knowledge.
- Meets learners where they are and provides the programs and support needed to persist to graduation.
- Supports satisfactory academic progress, which is a requirement for financial aid.

## IN ACTION

**INDIANA TECH** Indiana Institute of Technology offers six-week sessions that work well for adults. Learners can make a plan to front load more credits when they know they have more time, and take planned breaks when needed. The short sessions provide freedom and flexibility for those who are balancing school and life commitments. Advisors work closely with learners to create plans that include transfer credits and to monitor course sequencing so learners can stay on track.

*"There's someone dedicated to looking at the four year plans for the students so they can make informed decisions about what's next and they can see it mapped out in black and white."*

—Kris Bliss  
Associate Vice President of Student Success





## IN ACTION (cont'd)



Kalamazoo Valley Community College hired coaches for math and English as well as industrial technology and pre-health programs to **support learners entering in-demand fields**. The math coach, in particular, supports learners with remediation with the goal of improving their placement score. Learners also have support while they are enrolled in concurrent developmental courses. The school cites math coaching as the best action they have taken to improve persistence because it builds learner confidence, aids progress toward credit-bearing math requirements, and results in better course completion and grades.

*"It's been astounding, with almost every single student, if they meet at least two times, we see some really notable gains in their math scores...if students are fairly engaged with our coach, they're much more likely to be successful in the course that they're enrolled in."*

— Evan Pauken  
Director of Institutional Effectiveness



Owens Community College **modified its English and math course placement processes**, implementing retention initiatives to help learners directly enter college-level courses. This approach, which includes self-placement and multiple measures for placement testing, allows academic advisors to assess readiness based on factors like high school GPA (e.g., 2.75 or higher) and grades in English courses, alongside test scores. Advisors use their professional judgment during conversations with learners, considering both academic history and individual readiness, to place them in appropriate courses like college-level English or math. This method provides a more holistic and accurate evaluation of learner preparedness.

*"Many students struggle to progress out of developmental education, so we are exploring self-placement and using multiple measures instead of traditional placement testing."*

—David Shaffer, Executive Director, Student Services



REUP  
INSIGHT

ReUp Success Coaches note that adult learners often feel overwhelmed and consider pausing when unprepared for certain subjects, which affects their confidence and belonging. ReUp recommends flexible academic pathways tailored to varying preparation levels to support success and credential completion.



## Does your institution:

- ☐ Speak directly to adult learners with targeted and timely communications?
- ☐ Make it clear on its website how adult learners can get information tailored for them?
- ☐ Review administrative practices and processes that create barriers for application, registration, financial support, and student services?
- ☐ Consult with adult learners about their administrative experiences to learn and enact changes?
- ☐ Have flexible options that decrease or eliminate the need for developmental courses that are not credit-bearing?
- ☐ Review curriculum requirements for all programs, especially for those with higher attrition rates? Have you considered options to streamline degree requirements?
- ☐ Audit course availability and timing to ensure degree progress continues at the fastest pace? Do you use summer or short terms to help learners catch up for timely completion?
- ☐ Enhance learner support resources at junctures in the academic journey where learners tend to have more challenges?





## CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF PERSISTENCE



# Institutional Commitment

Institutions that successfully support adult learner persistence demonstrate institution-wide commitment. This includes leadership support, policy revisions, allocation of resources, and facilitating cross-departmental initiatives to ensure learners can successfully complete a degree. These institutions communicate their commitment broadly throughout campus, measure and publicize improvements, and emphasize long-term results.



## Strategy 1

# Develop institution-wide persistence efforts and committees

The educational path of returning and adult learners is often nonlinear and they may encounter multiple barriers along the way. As a result, successfully supporting this population requires an institution-wide effort.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Strategic, cross-functional alignment results in significant changes in adult learner readmission and persistence.
- Holistic persistence initiatives mitigate the financial, academic, motivational, professional, and personal barriers adult learners face.
- When faculty and staff understand their personal impact on persistence, creating an adult learner-friendly environment becomes a universal mission.
- High retention metrics are viewed favorably by donors, state offices of education, legislatures, and external stakeholders.

## IN ACTION



Owens Community College created a completion team that includes faculty, staff, and leadership to plan adult learner persistence and completion efforts. The Ohio Department of Higher Education requires completion planning every two years, and the internal team took ownership of that, focusing on **mitigating enrollment or completion barriers**.



## IN ACTION (cont'd)



Hudson County Community College enjoys **strong support from leadership** and is investing in positions where intentional support is needed for student populations like adult learners.

*"Our president has really set the tone and the culture. I've always believed it starts from the top down. He has done a really good job of making sure everyone at the institution understands what our focus is on."*

—Matthew Fessler, Dean of Enrollment



Westmoreland Community College instituted a collaborative effort across departments that emphasizes everyone's role in the **shared responsibility of student success**. The school brings together its academic, student affairs, and business units to remove barriers.

*"My biggest advice is to make sure that everybody understands that persistence, retention, and completion are everybody's responsibility. It's not just the faculty's responsibility; it's not just student affairs' responsibility, it even comes down to alumni relations and the foundation."*

—Julie Greathouse, Director, Student Success

## IN ACTION (cont'd)

**INDIANA TECH** Indiana Institute of Technology made a commitment to **investing in initiatives, technology, and human resources** to better support adult learners and improve retention across traditional and online student populations. The school worked with a retention consultant to identify gaps in services and conduct a business process analysis. The consultant emphasized the need to give persistence initiatives across campus three to five years to see progress.

*"Give it time, you've got to let it work and let employees learn it. Talk about it and make it part of the culture. It's these small steps, putting one foot in front of the other."*

—Kris Bliss

Associate Vice President of Student Success

**University of Idaho** The University of Idaho focuses on all aspects of the institution—from learner engagement to academic advising models—and **leverages the knowledge of outside experts**, like ReUp Education, to assist with change management on campus and promote new initiatives.

*"We leverage ReUp. If I can have you help with that voice, and say to the leadership team on campus, 'You would really benefit from this initiative'...Having experts from outside of the campus is super helpful."*

—Dean Kahler

Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management



University of North Carolina Charlotte developed the Charlotte Model, a **comprehensive student success strategic plan**, that promotes **high-impact learning practices** and seeks to transform adult learners' lives. The model includes an "ABC" rubric of learner success that includes academics, belonging and competence, and builds persistence initiatives towards that end. Academic program leaders are accountable for meeting persistence goals within their department and are responsible for learners who change departments so they do not get dropped along the way.

*"We had a student success working group, which is about 80 people from different offices across campus, faculty, staff, and administrators...(and) basically figured out what it is that we're talking about when we talk about the 'Charlotte model.'"*

—Dr. Lisa Walker

Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education and Dean of University College

**Kalamazoo VALLEY**™ Kalamazoo Valley Community College has a cross-functional retention committee that includes faculty and administration. The school's Office of Institutional Effectiveness is able to **draw on a breadth of student data** to underpin retention strategies.



REUP  
INSIGHT

All seven high-performing institutions interviewed consistently highlighted an intentional, cross-campus focus on persistence as key to their success. ReUp recommends establishing a cross-departmental persistence committee—comprising faculty, administrators, support staff, and leadership—to ensure all areas contribute to initiatives that enhance persistence.



## Strategy 2

# Leverage **outside** financial resources for persistence initiatives

Third-party partners or funds help alleviate challenges in staff capacity and limitations within financial aid packages.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- It can be difficult for institutions to support persistence endeavors fully.
- It is an opportunity to have outside entities who may share similar goals come together to provide adult learners the support that makes persistence possible.
- Resources provided by community-based, nonprofit, state, or other organizations expand an institution's capacity to provide services and opportunities for faculty, staff, community groups, and businesses, not just learners.



### REUP INSIGHT

A 2024 survey of 3,000 ReUp learners who paused their education a second time revealed that 50% cited additional financial assistance as key to their return. To address this need, institutions can increase flexibility by leveraging grants, partnerships, and donations from mission-driven organizations.



## IN ACTION



Hudson County Community College works with [Jobs for the Future](#) and [Achieving the Dream](#) to target adult

learners. New Jersey State funding also plays a crucial role, providing funds to support learners with some college, no credential so they can complete their education. Grants allow the school to take a more aggressive approach to attracting and serving returning adult learners.



Kalamazoo Valley Community College is proactive in seeking grants and funding from state and community sources to provide a broader range of services for learners. The [Office of Sixty by 30, Global Detroit, and MCAN awarded grants](#) to institutions that were interested in providing wraparound support for learners who are immigrants, including transportation services. The school accessed this funding to support eligible DACA and refugee asylum learners. The outcomes of these programs are regularly assessed to ensure they impact the targeted populations.

*"We have a grant with the Michigan College Access Network (MCAN) for what are called College Completion Corps coaches. Those are AmeriCorps positions that oversee a designated smaller cohort of students, such as students with low-income, first-generation college-going students and students of color."*

—Evan Pauken  
Director of Institutional Effectiveness



Westmoreland County Community College pursues grants and community partnerships to fund adult learner support, including new initiatives that address gaps in existing services that can improve persistence. The RK Mellon Foundation helped start a '[Mental Health Matters](#)' initiative at the school. A board member **expanded donations for an [emergency assistance fund](#)**. The school is recognized as the largest provider of social services in the area, leveraging community partnerships and pursuing additional grants to expand and sustain student support.



## Strategy 3

# Offer specific adult learner financial support

Based on our internal ReUp data, financial constraints are one of the top reasons learners paused their education, and it's often the biggest barrier to returning.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Financial barriers are one of the biggest deterrents to reentering higher education after a stopout and persisting to degree completion.
- Financial barriers take many forms, such as ineligibility for financial aid, loan debt, debt to the institution, or non-academic financial obligations.
- Institutions that understand learners' financial barriers and nonlinear progression can find creative ways to reduce their financial burdens.

## IN ACTION



To remove financial barriers that keep learners from earning a degree, the University of Idaho created several associate degrees and now reaches out to inactive learners who stopped out with a high number of credits with an offer to retroactively award the degree. The school waives all graduation fees. After learners have an associate's degree, the conversation often turns to their interest in furthering their education. This represents a campus-wide shift from thinking about recruitment to retention.

## IN ACTION (cont'd)



Kalamazoo Valley Community College found **debt forgiveness** and an **emergency fund for basic needs** to be low-cost, effective strategies to improve persistence. These initiatives provide critical financial assistance and relief to learners so they can overcome financial barriers and stay on track with their educational goals.

*"We have found that the program is very low cost. A lot of the cost to the institution is that we had written that debt off, regardless of whether we allow those students to enroll... I would recommend that institutions explore a debt forgiveness program. Because we've just found it to be an overall success."*

—Evan Pauken

Director of Institutional Effectiveness



## REUP INSIGHT

A ReUp survey revealed that balancing schedules, financial needs, and personal or family matters are the primary reasons adult learners pause their education a second time. This aligns with data from 42,000 responses showing that life balance (25%) and finances (24%) are top reasons for initial stop-outs. To address these challenges, ReUp recommends institutions explore innovative strategies to reduce student expenses and alleviate financial pressures.



## Strategy 4

# Involve your **faculty**

Faculty play a critical role in creating a positive learning environment for learners and focusing on persistence.

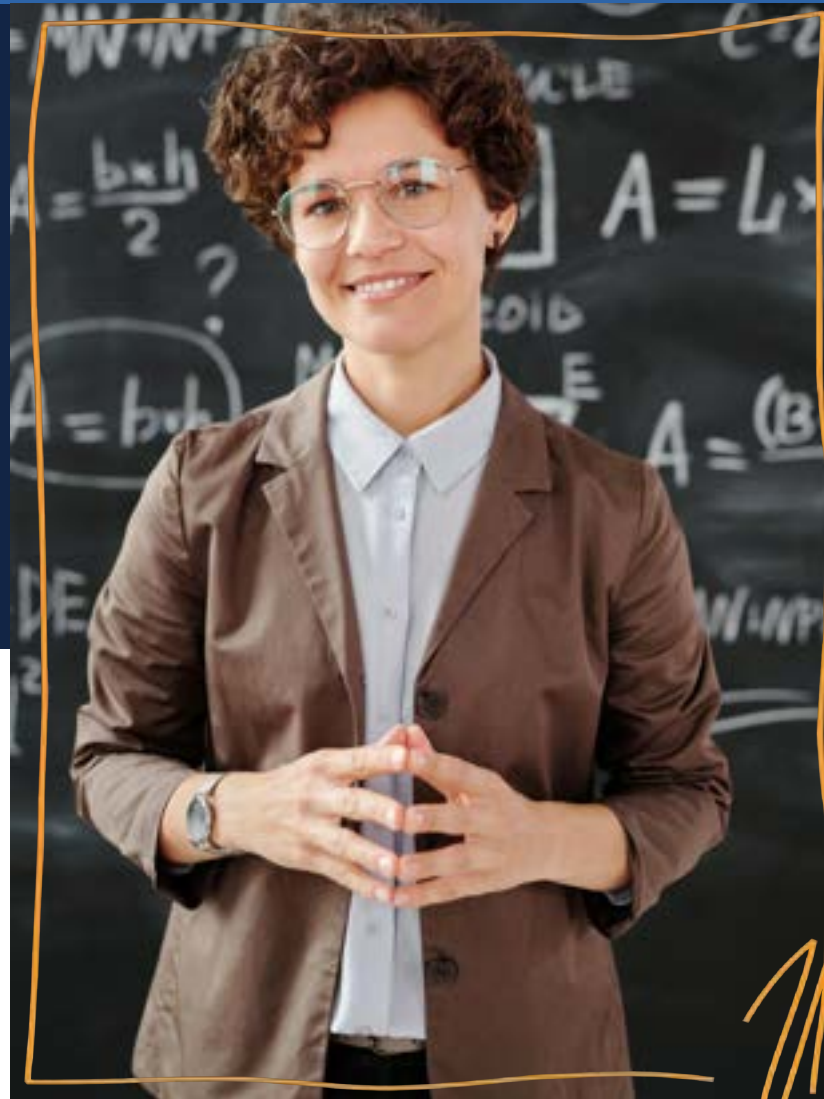
### WHY THIS MATTERS

- Faculty are uniquely positioned to have a positive impact on the adult learner experience and persistence because they interact with them so frequently.
- By fostering meaningful engagement through teaching, advising, and mentorships, faculty play a pivotal role in enhancing student outcomes and persistence.
- Equipped with the right training and holistic view of adult learners, faculty can proactively intervene to support student persistence, thereby enhancing the student experience.

### IN ACTION

**Kalamazoo VALLEY**  
community college

Through Kalamazoo Valley Community College's cross-departmental Retention and Completion Committee, faculty see the impact of their persistence efforts on the lives of adult learners.



*"Having faculty voices influencing the work we're doing, and contributing to that narrative and the initiatives, was really beneficial because they could bring that back to our Academic Leadership Council and take pride in owning some of the things that we were doing to increase persistence and success...Our faculty really want to see our students be successful in our classes. We see the direct impact. We see how many barriers students are facing and how disruptive trying to insert education can be into their lives, and how important it is that they see positive outcomes from this experience."*

—Evan Pauken  
Director of Institutional Effectiveness



## IN ACTION (cont'd)



The University of North Carolina Charlotte emphasizes the importance of faculty in supporting adult learner persistence. Techniques to **build equitable learning environments** from the school's [Student Experience Project](#), a multi-campus funded project, are used in all courses to create a growth mindset and sense of belonging for learners.

*"We're working with the departments and the faculty on thinking through what they're doing to support students. Are they doing the right things? How are they interacting with their students, particularly in the classroom? So we have the Student Experience Project...a big multi-campus funded project...that was looking at STEM gateway courses. But now we use these techniques in all of our classes. And it's really about creating a growth mindset and sense of belonging in our students."*

—Dr. Lisa Walker

Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education  
and Dean of University College



Westmoreland County Community College involves faculty in persistence initiatives because of their frequent interactions with learners. The average faculty course load is five classes per semester, meeting at least once per week. **Intentional collaboration between student affairs and academic leadership** helps shift the faculty mindset toward persistence.

*"Let's say they have 125 students a semester in their classes, that's 125 students that they have access to, that they meet with every week. And it doesn't matter whether it's online, via zoom, or in person...[Faculty] have more of an opportunity to affect change in the student population than student success staff does."*

—Julie Greathouse

Director, Student Success



REUP  
INSIGHT

ReUp Success Coaches frequently hear that positive faculty interactions play a crucial role in helping adult learners feel valued and confident, especially those from structurally marginalized backgrounds. To enhance persistence, ReUp recommends regular faculty development sessions, clear communication channels, and proactive interventions for students in need.







## Does your institution:



- ☐ Promote an institution-wide strategy to improve adult learner persistence?
- ☐ Have a retention working group that includes many functional areas and is guided by a retention framework or strategic plan?
- ☐ Include faculty in persistence efforts and educate them about their role in persistence?
- ☐ Ensure faculty has the capacity to intervene with resources when adult learners indicate need?
- ☐ Look for creative ways to reduce costs and fees for adult and returning learners?
- ☐ Identify new funding models for adult learners, including alumni, external foundations or community stakeholders?



3  
*strategies*  
FOR IMPACTFUL  
ADVISING

## CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF PERSISTENCE

### Impactful Advising

Impactful advising is comprehensive, personalized guidance for adult learners so they can successfully navigate their academic and personal journeys. It ensures a clear and realistic path to completion, with access to support tailored to their unique needs. Successful institutional advisors proactively communicate with learners at critical times throughout the academic calendar.



## Strategy 1

### Implement a holistic model

Institutions with high persistence rates for adult learners implement a proactive, holistic advising model that considers all aspects of a learner's life, not just their academic career. This whole-person approach includes factors like family relationships, work, financial situations, motivation, and health, which all contribute to overall success.

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

- Recognizes and honors learners' multiple identities, competing priorities, and daily responsibilities.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the barriers to persistence learners face and proactively provides resources to mitigate them.

#### IN ACTION



Owens Community College shifted its advising structure to focus on program-based caseloads. Advisors proactively reach out to learners and discuss the larger context of their life to determine what resources are needed to persist. In the past, first-term advising meetings were as short as ten minutes. As the school realized that learners who came in for brief meetings did not do well, they shifted to the longer time frame. To make authentic connections, advisors **offer longer advising sessions, up to an hour**. This allows advisors to walk through the personal responsibilities of the learner and delve into questions like, "How do you plan to pay for college?"



#### IN ACTION (cont'd)

**INDIANA TECH** Indiana Institute of Technology provides holistic advising by developing personalized four-year degree plans. This approach allows for close relationships with learners, giving them clear pathways and a sense of belonging.

*"The advising model ensures students see the end goal with mapped-out plans, including transfer credits. The **institution also prioritizes customer service**, investing in training and empowering staff to go above and beyond in meeting student needs, aiming to create 'moments of magic' rather than 'moments of misery' that increase the student's sense of connection to the advisor and institution."*

—Caleb Resinger  
Director of Warrior Information Network





### REUP INSIGHT

ReUp Success Coaches take a holistic approach, supporting learners as they navigate their commitments and goals, and collaborating with campus advisors to support academic progress. ReUp recommends an advising model that considers the learner's life context—including employment, financial, and family responsibilities—to identify needs and risks for stopping out and to connect them to adult-focused resources.

### IN ACTION *(cont'd)*



University of North Carolina Charlotte works closely with pre-transfer learners through the **49er Intensive Transition (FIT)**, a 10-day program before the fall semester begins. FIT is part of a transfer learner's fall course load so there is no extra cost. [Transfer students](#) may benefit from a math bootcamp or other dedicated cohort focused on chemistry or computing, and they can meet other adult learners.



Through its [Hudson Scholars](#) initiative, Hudson County Community College formed the Restart Scholars program to assist returning adult learners. Learners work with an advisor trained to assist this population. The **learner-to-advisor ratio was reduced to 150 to 1**, allowing advisors to be proactive and engage more deeply.

## Strategy 2

# Offer learner incentives

Adult learners struggle to make time for everything in their lives. Incentives can help them prioritize actions that benefit academic progress.



### WHY THIS MATTERS

- Incentivizes participation in activities like academic advising, early enrollment, and continuous enrollment to motivate academic progress to graduation.
- Provides working adults helpful compensation for the time they spend away from work, family, and non-academic responsibilities.

### IN ACTION



University of North Carolina Charlotte provides financial incentives to **encourage summer enrollment** to support on-time graduation or for learners who 'missed a term.' Summer enrollment helps learners catch-up on yearly progression goals for four-year graduation. For those who may have missed a prior term, the generous financial aid and grants offered for summer term can keep them on a path to timely completion.

### IN ACTION (cont'd)



Hudson County Community College improves persistence of adult and returning learners through programs like Hudson Scholars and Restart Scholars. [Hudson Scholars](#) initially allows learners to earn an average stipend of \$650 per semester by completing tasks. Participants had high retention rates, met often with counselors, completed more credits, and showed other measures of success. The **Restart Scholars program** assists adult learners in their efforts to persist while providing a customized experience and dedicated advisor. Additionally, the school offers stipends for completing future-focused tasks and motivational milestones to incentivize continued enrollment from semester to semester.

*"What we've noticed is that while sometimes the thought of the stipend is very appealing to a lot of students - and certainly a lot of students actually follow through with everything - it's that connection with a person that they feel like, 'I have a person who really cares about me, who's thinking about me, and who has the resources and the availability, to really think about who I am.'"*

—Bernadette So  
Dean, Student Success



## REUP INSIGHT

Adult learners tell ReUp that life balance and finances are their biggest obstacles. Offering incentives like stipends or bookstore vouchers for participating in persistence activities—such as orientations or advising—helps ease these pressures and provides motivation to prioritize activities tied to improving persistence.



## IN ACTION (cont'd)



Westmoreland Community College welcomes many adult learners who are parents, especially single parents. To prevent these learners from stopping out again, the school incentivizes participation in **peer support groups** that address isolation and normalize shared experiences. Learners who participate are compensated \$50 to meet once a month to learn from one another about how to manage being a parent and a student.

*"We are trying to create more cohort style opportunities for these students... but one of the things that we know is that we have to compensate people for their time. Nobody has time. And so we're trying to be able to compensate students \$50, to meet once a month."*

—Julie Greathouse  
Director, Student Success



## Strategy 3

### Consider a **persistence-based model**

Advising often focuses on enrollment, guiding adult learners on the actions they need to take to return and proceed through the necessary courses. While this effort is critical, learners also benefit from future-focused advising with the goal of completion.

#### WHY THIS MATTERS

- Ensures learners have a clear and realistic academic plan to completion and know where they can access support that fits their needs.
- Keeps adult learners on their academic path through contact during critical times of the year, like registration, the start of a semester, and before final exams.
- Considers all of an adult learner's life experiences and responsibilities when providing the resources and support they need to persist.

#### IN ACTION



Guided by data, Kalamazoo Valley Community College targeted academic programs that have higher learner attrition for specialized advising support. The school added coaching roles to provide personalized support to learner populations where the data shows lower persistence. These **specialized coaching roles** are highly utilized and are enhancing learner success. Some of these coaching roles are funded through grants and programs that subsidize the cost.



Since finances are such a critical component of student persistence, Owens Community College has **trained case managers (financial advisors)** learners can contact with broad-ranging questions about financial planning, emergency funds, community connections, repayments, and external resources for assistance. They also assist learners with finding funding and making responsible financial decisions.





## IN ACTION (cont'd)



University of Idaho built a **career-focused advising experience** for learners through intentional initiatives like establishing career consultants in each department and tying back all learner experiences inside and outside of the classroom to their desired career path.

*"We work with the students and their families in zeroing in on their career interests. And we do a really, really great job. We use Lightcast Career Coach and we have a lot of students that utilize that tool to zero in on 'I don't know what I want to major in', well, let's go to this assessment and, maybe Career Coach can help guide them in finding just that right fit."*

—Dean Kahler

Vice Provost for Strategic Enrollment Management



University of North Carolina Charlotte posits that creating a proactive advising model is the first place to start when improving adult learner persistence. This approach focuses on maintaining frequent contact with learners, especially at critical risk points.

*"I think it's the **proactive advising**...it's identifying the points at which students need to hear from an advisor, and then having them hear from the advisor. Advising consistency is also important...A lot of the improvements we've seen in persistence are due to that process."*

—Dr. Lisa Walker

Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education and  
Dean of University College



REUP  
INSIGHT

ReUp survey data reveals that learners often return to school to finish what they started or to achieve a personal goal. Implementing a program-based advising model allows for tailored, expert guidance. This approach ensures learners receive personalized support, a clear education plan, and timely assistance from the outset.





## Does your institution:



- ☐ Consider advising one of the most important areas for improving learner persistence? Does advising have adequate funding and capacity?
- ☐ Train advisers to ask open-ended questions and consider the whole person and needs that extend beyond academics?
- ☐ Provide a clear connection between academics and career exploration and development?
- ☐ Have an expectation for regular and ongoing advising? Is advising required?
- ☐ Offer incentives for adult learners to engage in activities that enhance their academic confidence and connect them with peers?
- ☐ Outreach adult learners at critical points throughout the academic year?





CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF PERSISTENCE

## Holistic Adult-Focused Support

Adult learners have diverse needs, including employment, housing, food, transportation, and childcare. Meeting these academic, personal, and professional needs holistically promotes greater academic success.

## Strategy 1

# Offer **experiential** learning

Experiential learning connects coursework to real-world applications, making higher education more relevant and engaging for adult learners. This fosters collaboration, promotes proficiency in complex topics, and advances career skills in line with industry needs.

## IN ACTION



University of North Carolina Charlotte provides **on-campus jobs** for adult learners, as this

significantly increases the likelihood of graduating within four years compared to off-campus jobs, regardless of the hours worked. To support this, the school offers an internal professional internship program so learners gain relevant skills through on-campus work, even if not directly related to their major.

*"We're thinking about how to come up with more good jobs that then contribute to your sense of belonging, your competencies, and your skill development."*

—Dr. Lisa Walker

Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education  
and Dean of University College



REUP  
INSIGHT

When adult learners tell ReUp their motivations for returning to school, three of the top five reasons are explicitly career-focused: they want to increase earning potential (13%), advance in their career (12%), or make a career change (11%). ReUp advises integrating career-focused learning through internships, co-ops, on-campus jobs, and employer-aligned programs to meet workforce needs.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Provides adult learners with practical education that is meaningful to their lives.
- Accelerates knowledge acquisition through hands-on practice and active problem-solving.
- Develops career skills and prepares learners for professional advancement.

## IN ACTION (cont'd)



The University of Idaho (U of I) differentiates itself by offering **experiential learning components in every academic major**, providing hands-on experience for learners while they are in the curriculum. Career consultants work on a case-by-case basis with learners interested in internships or co-ops. U of I recognizes the importance of scaling these opportunities and the challenges of supporting returning adult learners who may lack the flexibility to participate. The school explores supplemental funding opportunities for internships and support from donors to cover living expenses for co-ops or internships.

*"We also need to talk to our industry, our employers, because we are in the business of training a workforce. Students are going to college to get a credential and establish a career and we need to listen to what our employers are looking for. Even for adults currently working in a job, we encourage them to look at what additional skills they can develop with their current employer to advance in the future."*

—Dean Kahler

VP of Strategic Enrollment Management

## Strategy 2

# Address **mental health**

Untreated mental health issues can lead to difficulty maintaining academic focus, which then creates other problems related to failing classes, incurring debt, stopping out and feelings of failure.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Addresses one of the top causes of poor academic performance and stopping out of school.
- Serves adult learners holistically by caring for all aspects of their lives.



## REUP INSIGHT

A survey of learners who re-paused their education found that improved mental health (28%) and personal or family matters (19%) were top factors influencing their decision to return to school. ReUp recommends investing in learner mental health, which supports social and academic success and drives benefits for individuals, institutions, and economies.

## IN ACTION



Westmoreland Community College developed an extensive **Mental Health Matters** initiative that includes mindfulness techniques and ongoing sessions with learners. The school contracts with a local provider to offer comprehensive mental health services, including psychiatry and medication checks. This particularly benefits learners who are the first in their family to enroll in higher education and those from under-resourced backgrounds who may not have access to care due to financial constraints, family circumstances, or a lack of awareness about mental health. Westmoreland staff was aware that mental health had been declining even before the COVID-19 pandemic. The school was fortunate enough to secure grants that allow it to focus on mental health efforts.

*"We try not to just put a Band-Aid on things. Trying to get students connected to services within their communities is extremely important so that they have ongoing support."*

—Julie Greathouse  
Director, Student Success

## INDIANA **TECH**

Indiana Institute of Technology ensures equitable support for all students, which includes **providing mental health resources to their online community**. The school's in-person student population is about 1,200 while its online population numbers between 3,000-4,000, including undergraduates and graduates. Online counseling, which is widely used by their adult learner population, ensures better access to necessary mental health support. The school added a mental health solution with 24/7 access to provide online counseling and learned that about 67% of service users are over the age of 25.

*"In my opinion, our online population very much mimics a community college population. I call them a very vulnerable and fragile population, one small life event may throw them completely off track, a car that breaks down will knock them out for this procession."*

— Caleb Resinger  
Director of Warrior Information Network



## Strategy 3

# Provide **basic needs** assistance

Experiencing any kind of basic needs insecurity makes it much more difficult to stay in school and graduate. Basic needs security is a prerequisite for adult learner success.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Makes academic persistence possible because life's basic needs—including food, housing, and transportation— are met.
- Demonstrates care for adult learners in a holistic manner. Services like food pantries, childcare, and transportation foster the connection and commitment of learners to the institution.

## IN ACTION



Hudson County Community College found that **providing emergency funding and support services is key to addressing issues outside the classroom** that could impact learner persistence. Services offered by the school include mental health care, a Career Closet, and outside services for immigration support. Learners can apply for emergency funding for essential expenses like car repairs or utility bills. A food pantry is accessible to both learners and staff, no questions asked.

*"We work on case-by-case scenarios and situations that come up. It could be an electric bill; it could be whatever's potentially causing a roadblock for a student and their pathway at Hudson. We're going to try to help."*

—Matthew Fessler, Dean of Enrollment

## IN ACTION (cont'd)



Westmoreland Community College provides wraparound services for learners, including basic needs—like food, temporary housing, technology, clothing resources, and childcare—to address barriers that learners face. The school **hired a social worker**, which significantly enhanced their connection to community resources. Partnerships with the county food bank and alumni donors have further strengthened their capacity to support learners and their families. As the largest provider of social services in the area, Westmoreland regularly leverages community partnerships and additional grants to expand and sustain these support services.

*"That's the one thing that we know makes us stand out in our community is that we do have those resources...Having that social worker work directly with students in need has been probably the smartest decision we've ever made. We know that folks cannot continue to focus on their mental health if their basic needs aren't met."*

—Julie Greathouse  
Director, Student Success and Director, Center for Equity, Inclusion & Belonging



## REUP INSIGHT

Three in five college students face food and housing insecurity, according to [The Hope Center](#). ReUp recommends offering services like food pantries, emergency funds, and transportation solutions, which reduce stress, enhance well-being, and improve persistence and equity.

## Does your institution:

- ☐ Ensure that adult learners are able to participate in experiential learning options? What efforts are made to provide funding or other support?
- ☐ Connect adult learners with regional employers in structured ways to facilitate career development and job placement?
- ☐ Create awareness of the prevalence of mental health challenges for adult (and online) learners and train faculty and staff on where to direct learners for flexible mental health resources?
- ☐ Offer childcare on campus or references to community-based childcare?
- ☐ Have a food pantry or food share program?
- ☐ Give clear instructions for learners seeking assistance with transportation, housing or technology needs?
- ☐ Ensure your advising team, faculty and student services are knowledgeable about basic needs resources so they can easily direct students to them when needed?
- ☐ Provide advising for non-residents, undocumented immigrants or individuals who are eligible for and have been granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status?
- ☐ Have a social worker, or other dedicated staff member, to connect learners with community-based services?
- ☐ Form partnerships with community organizations to amplify resources through strategic partnerships?





## CULTIVATE A CULTURE OF PERSISTENCE



### Success Tracking

Setting measurable goals for adult learner retention and actively tracking their progress allows institutions to address challenges early, providing support to prevent stopouts. Efficient tracking systems also help allocate limited resources to areas needing improvement.



## Strategy 1

# Leverage tracking systems and predictive modeling

Robust learner tracking systems, data analytics, and predictive modeling can shape the experience of college for adult learners from many backgrounds, preventing attrition and 'wrong turns' that take them off track and lengthen the time to earn a degree.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Offers greater insight into populations with persistence barriers and lower engagement patterns.
- Makes proactive outreach and intervention possible, providing the right resources at the right time.
- Allows institutions to use data to enhance policies, services, and practices that foster persistence.

## IN ACTION



Owens Community College leverages **early alert systems and retention data to address the unique needs of various student**

**populations**, including new high school graduates, non-traditional students, transfers, and returning adult learners. Noticing that returning adult learners have a persistence rate of just 55%, the school established a re-engagement office to provide ongoing support and adjust strategies based on enrollment trends and communication effectiveness.

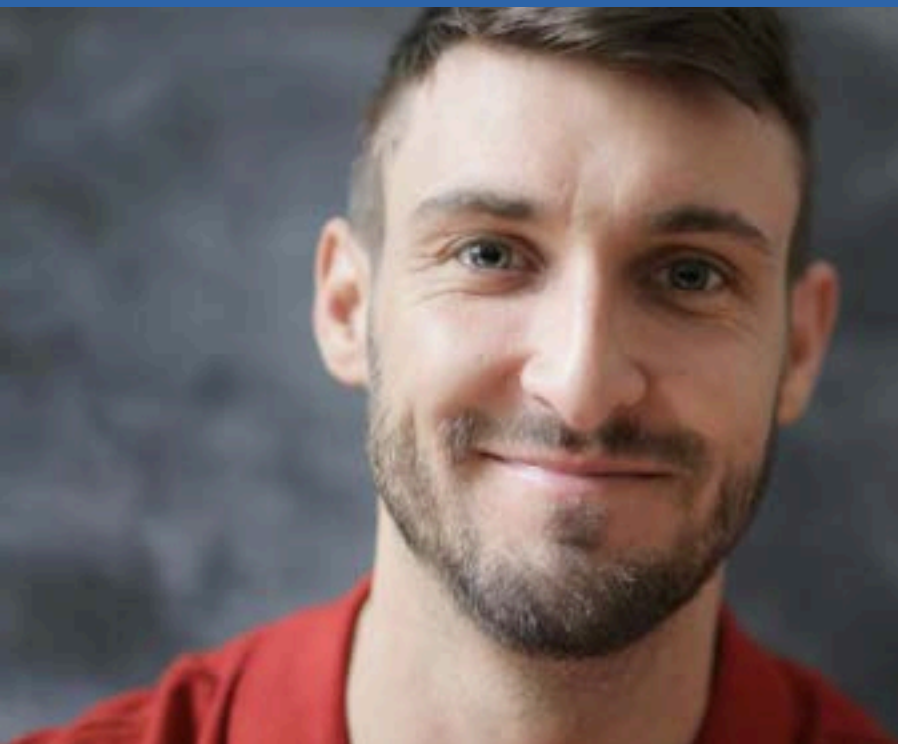


## IN ACTION (cont'd)

**INDIANA TECH** Indiana Institute of Technology invests in new technologies—like early alert systems, behavioral analytics, and AI—to monitor learner progress and engagement. Their system integrates Canvas data into a visual dashboard with red, yellow, and green risk indicators. This allows faculty and advisors to identify at-risk learners based on performance and engagement and to collaborate to address concerns through targeted outreach. This approach results in proactive interventions and a continuous adjustment of strategies to support learner success.

*"It's been really helpful visually for us to see who's at risk of failing."*

— Kris Bliss  
Associate Vice President of Student Success



## IN ACTION (cont'd)



Kalamazoo Valley Community College uses **data analytics** and **predictive modeling** to track early warning signs of learner disengagement, focusing on key indicators like academic progress, GPA, and withdrawals. Their dashboard identifies learners who withdrew from a plan, prompting outreach to support success in their remaining courses. Faculty also use an early alert system to trigger timely interventions, ensuring proactive support for learners who need it, particularly at critical times like midterms and withdrawal deadlines.

*"With predictive modeling, and action-driven metrics that are more or less in real time that we can collect and utilize, it's giving us more tools to be able to feel like we can impact persistence."*

—Evan Pauken

Director of Institutional Effectiveness



REUP  
INSIGHT

Predictive analytics is a cornerstone of ReUp's work, helping identify adult learners who are at-risk by analyzing factors like academic probation, financial holds, and learner behaviors. This data guides ReUp Success Coaches to provide timely, targeted support. ReUp recommends tracking outcomes across departments, applying success metrics to student segments, and using predictive modeling to trigger alerts and intervention plans for proactive support.



## Strategy 2

# Gather learner feedback

The views and opinions of returning and adult learners are valuable to institutions. Their experiences in higher education should inform current institutional leaders about changes needed.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Creates practical and innovative policies and services that address the unique needs of adult learners.
- Fosters connection to the institution and encourages persistence.

## IN ACTION

**I** University of Idaho places high priority on collecting learner feedback to direct change and adaptability on the campus. They **survey learners** who are inactive to understand their reasons for leaving and see how the institution can improve. With enrolled learners they provide extensive options to identify where and how the institution can better serve them. The critical aspect of the process is to not merely ask for feedback but to take action on the responses. Trust is lost if the university fails to gain confidence by acting on the feedback received.

*"It can be everything from a suggestion box, virtually or physically outside of the financial aid office. And it can be an institutional level student satisfaction survey, and all opportunities between there."*

—Dean Kahler  
VP of Strategic Enrollment Management

## IN ACTION (cont'd)

Kalamazoo**VALLEY**<sup>™</sup> community college Kalamazoo Valley Community College (KVCC) gathers learner feedback through **surveys to identify gaps in belongingness and inclusion**. The college is considering regular progress monitoring to stay connected with learners, and using focus groups to delve into questions that may inform a culture of care. As part of their strategic plan to improve belonging, KVCC will use benchmark data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement to determine how to best engage learners in ways that support persistence.



## REUP INSIGHT

ReUp gathers feedback from adult learners through surveys and user research, including insights on barriers to returning, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and preferred self-service resources. This process honors the perspectives of whole and capable adults to direct our services and interventions. ReUp recommends institutions collect and act on learner feedback to address persistence challenges, build trust, and offer impactful, barrier-reducing support.





## Strategy 3

# Set **persistence goals** for segmented populations

Tailored goals direct focus to the unique challenges and motivations of segments within the adult learner population, like working parents or those who are first generation college students. By addressing specific needs, such as flexible learning options or career-focused pathways, these goals ensure that institutions can support adult learners in overcoming barriers to complete their education.



## WHY THIS MATTERS

- Uses relevant, segmented metrics to provide a baseline from which persistence goals are appropriately set, units are held accountable, and success is measured.
- Reveals areas where support is lacking for groups of learners. This is particularly important for equity initiatives.
- Keeps institutions focused on learner outcomes and ways to leverage policy and services to improve persistence strategically.

## IN ACTION

**Kalamazoo****VALLEY**<sup>™</sup> community college Kalamazoo Valley Community College **prioritizes at-risk learners by leveraging data to guide outreach and measure success.** Each fall, the school establishes cohorts of first-time and transfer students, monitoring next-term persistence, course outcomes, and success rates across modalities. They align with the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System and the Voluntary Framework for Accountability, tracking three-year degree completions and six-year graduation or transfer rates. Re-enrollment rates and the impact of coaching on persistence are also evaluated, ensuring a comprehensive view of student success. Efforts focus on making data actionable by increasing visibility for administrators and staff, transforming metrics from passive measurements to proactive tools for intervention.



## IN ACTION *(cont'd)*



In response to their low persistence rate of 55% for adult learners, Owens Community College's vice president of enrollment and institutional research **set clear goals for student segments, including first-year, transfer, returning, and continuing students**, with an overall fall-to-spring persistence target of 68%. The school also tracks persistence rates for direct-from-high-school, non-traditional, and transfer students, recognizing the unique challenges each group faces. To improve outcomes, Owens plans to establish retention goals by school, collaborating with academic deans to develop tailored strategies.



University of North Carolina Charlotte established **persistence goals for various student population segments**, including transfer, military, veteran, parent, online, and non-traditional learners, using data to identify areas needing improvement. These goals extend to academic departments, holding them accountable for tracking and supporting learners throughout their educational journey. Departments are encouraged to help students transition within the university rather than dismissing them, ensuring continuous support and addressing challenges like those faced by engineering students who struggle with calculus.



REUP  
INSIGHT

ReUp sets persistence goals and tailors support for key learner segments. We recommend that institutions track learner segments and establish cross-departmental persistence goals. By refining these goals based on data, institutions can better target strategies and improve outcomes for each group, ensuring adult learners receive the support they need to succeed.



## Does your institution:

- ☐ Set overall retention goals that members of the campus community can articulate?
- ☐ Require departments across campus to contribute to these goals?
- ☐ Track learner outcomes, behaviors and communications to uncover places where proactive outreach is warranted?
- ☐ Share data across functional support areas to create a better understanding of learner success?
- ☐ Survey learners, conduct focus groups, and take pulse checks to monitor learners' sense of belonging, or other measures of satisfaction?  
Does your campus overtly follow up on feedback so learners are aware they were heard?
- ☐ Study learner feedback by segmenting specific populations, such as adults or transfers, or students who are parents?
- ☐ Have a retention workgroup that sets targets to improve student persistence within specific segments of students? Do you know where gaps in outcomes exist and are you taking action to address equity concerns?
- ☐ Review progress on retention goals on a regular cadence and adjust as needed?
- ☐ Publish retention outcomes and progress toward goals so anyone in the campus community can access this information?

