

Retention Strategies

Contributors: Rochel Abrams, Fran Riotte, Karen Shipman, Susan Pittman, Marianne Kearsley, Phil Jones

There are three essential elements to student retention in Adult Education Programs. They are: make each student feel welcome and valued; make each class worthwhile; make each student believe in a positive personal future. Following are some suggestions for keeping your students once you have them. Many of the suggestions are simple, common sense and common courtesy suggestions; others are more involved suggestions that take some planning. All of the suggestions offered are possible for any teacher in any setting and reading through them should help us remember that mostly our students come to us to learn to believe that they matter.

1. Know your students. Know and call them by their names. Know and ask about their interests outside of class, their problems, their jobs, and their families.
2. Call after several absences. Encourage classmates to call friends who are out. Check with an employer or family member about an absent student. Find some way to get the message to them that they are missed and are missing important work in your class. After a teacher has tried calling numerous times, have someone else from Adult Education call students who have poor attendance. Sometimes it is a conflict with the teacher that is keeping a student out of class and contact from someone other than the teacher allows the student a forum for working through this.
3. Encourage students to become friends with each other. Build new friendships by pairing students together who could benefit from each other's personalities or skills. Encourage students to bring old friends to class with them. Allow friends to work together who can do so effectively.
4. Invite graduates back to class to encourage others and to serve as mentors.
5. Interview students about current work and family situation. Express understanding of current responsibilities and work out a variety of study plans to accommodate for the student's work or family schedule.
6. Interview students about career goals. Help students set realistic short and long-term goals. Consider working on a literacy contract with your student.
7. Remember birthdays of students.
8. Make work relevant. Teach students one new skill everyday that they can use at home or work.
9. Give students a choice in selecting materials.
10. Vary classroom activities. Do group and individual work everyday. Use "brain breaks" such as brainteasers, crossword puzzles, etc. to break up the class time.

11. Have newspapers available for reading and activities. This makes students a more active part of a broader world. Spend a few minutes at the beginning of each class to share opinions and ideas about current events.
12. Score work on the basis of number of correct answers rather than noting only wrong answers.
13. Praise, praise, praise.
14. Maintain a positive attitude; leave outside troubles outside.
15. Listen, listen, listen.
16. Allow non-messy snacks. Plan potluck lunches at the end of class, allowing students to organize, calculate amounts or fees, etc.
17. Celebrate successes with verbal congratulations, potluck parties, awards, etc.
18. Be attentive to all students, checking with them daily to monitor progress and make sure that they understand directions and goals.
19. Help students focus on the positive they have to offer. (See the Marianne Kearsley exercise which follows.)
20. Review Lois B. Queen's booklet *Retention Plan for Student Success*.
21. Have a family night with food some evening or weekend. This gives the students and the teacher another way to connect with each other.
22. Give monthly attendance awards and include awards for being on time.

MORE STRATEGIES FOR RETENTION

Recent annual reports of withdrawals in Adult Basic Education programs throughout the United States indicate that LACK OF INTEREST ranks highest in the known reasons for withdrawals from ABE programs. The seriousness of the problem of retention reflects how important it is for instructors, recruiters and administrative staff to work in a team effort to get and hold the interest of those who enroll. The following retention strategies should be considered as possibilities for any adult education program.

- Congratulatory note (for enrolling)
- Follow-ups on absentees
- “We Care” flyers or cards to longer absentees
- Periodic success stories from “Graduates”
- Buddy system for attendance checks
- Informality and humor in every class
- Public programs chaired by a “Graduate”
- Coffee hours
- Surveys
- Paraprofessional visits to the home-bound
- Direct help to transfer to another level or program
- Monthly newsletters of events, success stories and news of students
- Promptness in beginning and ending class
- Class accounts of local news
- Counseling service on a regular basis
- Adult-oriented materials only
- Arrangements for car pools
- Peer planning of content
- Formal recognition of major achievements
- Informal periodic recognition of student achievements
- Active participation in learning experiences and social events
- Class visits by local politicians, professionals, role models and mentors
- Patience

Maryland State Department of Education, *Basic Education: Teaching the Adult*, (Owings Mills, Maryland: Division of Instructional Television, 1975) p. 286.

Specific Counseling Strategies for Retention

The importance of the **initial contact** with a student cannot be overemphasized. Many students exit adult education programs after their first encounter. Sometimes the encounter is with a counselor, sometimes with office clerks or others, sometimes in person and often by telephone. It is the responsibility of the counselor to ensure that students move from the initial contact to enrollment with whatever motivation brought the student to the educational center still intact.

Provide an **intake service** which attracts the student to the program, supports him through the paperwork process and encourages his belief in his ability to attain his goals through adult education.

Carry out **initial screening** in compliance with proper testing procedures which provide the student a positive, supportive experience and which assign students according to their needs and goals.

Orient the student to the adult education program and services which will enable him to remain in the program long enough to achieve his goals and meet his needs.

Make a determined effort to **understand the goals** of the student.

In conjunction with teachers, develop an **individual educational plan** for each student

Periodically **follow-up** on student progress and/or problem resolution.

Counsel, assist and **referral** to other community services students identified by teachers.

Devise and implement a plan to **increase student identification** with the adult education program.

HOW TO REDUCE STUDENT ATTRITION

by Cynthia Fenwick (1977)

“Maryland Association for Publicly Supported Continuing Education Newsletter”

Provide a positive and supportive educational setting with **student involvement** in the learning process and self-directed progress-monitoring system.

Insure **early academic success**.

Use adult oriented coursework, geared toward **real life** situations.

Provide consistent **one-on-one contact** to assure students of your interest in them.

Provide information about **community services and resources**.

Incorporate students' interests into instructional material whenever possible.

Develop and utilize a student **recognition and rewards** program.

Foster **group cohesiveness** within the class and encourage **cooperative learning**.

To prevent first-class no-shows, **call students** the day before and confirm attendance.

To prevent early dropouts, plan **non-threatening activities** for first class.

Establish a **system for contacting students**; call them after the first class missed.

Implement **individual educational plans** based upon student goals and needs.

Model healthy **problem resolution** techniques in the classroom.

Give frequent **positive feedback and reinforcement**.

Build self-esteem through an **immediate sense of progress** and a **clear path of small steps to goals**.

Involve the learner in active **goal setting** and program **planning**.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES AID IN RETENTION

It is the educator's responsibility to be aware of specific detractors which influence the student's class participation. While it is not possible for the teacher to solve each problem, directing the student to appropriate resources for help does increase student retention. By alleviating the problems, the student is better able to concentrate on the successful completion of his/her educational goals and is more likely to stay in school.

The following listing includes a variety of agencies capable of resolving problems which could be adversely affecting your students. Though not all communities will have all of these exact agencies, many will have similar ones. We include this list in the Resource Guide as a **SAMPLE** to encourage you and your class to develop your own resource list. Once the list is compiled, it can become a class activity to find and record telephone numbers.

ABUSE, CHILD AND SPOUSE

Abuse Registry	1-800-962-2873
TDD#	1-800-862-5098
Bureau of Victim Compensation	1-800-226-6667
Florida Runaway Hotline	1-800-runaway
Boy's Town	
Child Protection Team	
Community Intervention Center	
Guardian Ad Litem Program	
HRS Services	
Missing Children Help Center	
Telephone Counseling and Referral Shelter	
Healthy Start	

ABUSE, DRUG AND ALCOHOL

Al-Anon	1-800-344-2666
Self Help Clearing House	1-201-625-7101
Alateen	
Alcoholics Anonymous	
Crack Self-Help Support Group	
Department of Children and Families	
Detox Center	
Mothers Against Drunk Driving	
Narcotic Anonymous	
Rational Recovery Systems	

ADOPTION AND POST ADOPTION

Adoption Information Center	1-800-962-3678
Catholic Social Services	
Children's Home Society of Florida	
Florida Baptist Children's Home	
Guardian Ad Litem Program	
HRS Post-Adoption Services	

CHILD CARE/ADULT DAY CARE

Headstart	
Elder Care	
Even Start	
Easter Seal Rehab. Center	
Adult Day Care	

COUNSELING

American Red Cross	
Community Crisis Response Team	
Family Source	1-900-Flalove
FL Network of Youth and Family Services	
Runaway Hotline	1-800-runaway

EMERGENCY SHELTER/FOOD/ENERGY/ CLOTHING

American Red Cross	
Salvation Army	
Housing Authority	
Homeless Shelter	
Women/children's Shelter	

EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE/JOB TRAINING

Board of County Commissioners	
Dept. of Education, Blind Services	
Goodwill Industries	
Job Corps	
Literacy Volunteers	
Technical Training Center	
Senior Community Service and Employment Program	
Job Line	
Urban League	
Veteran Center	
Vocation Rehabilitation	
Workforce Development Center	
Chamber of Commerce	

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

American Red Cross	
Child Support Enforcement	
Consumer Credit Counseling	
Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center	
Student Aid Resources	
Department of Children and Families	
Social Security Administration	
WAGES, Foodstamps, Medicaid	

HEALTH

Alzheimer's Resource Center	
American Cancer Society	
American Diabetes Assoc.	
American Heart Assoc.	
American Lung Assoc.	
American Parkinson Disease	
American Red Cross	
Psychiatric Hospital	
Arthritis Foundation	
AIDS Hotline	
Community Health Assoc.	
Children's Medical Services	
Epilepsy Association	
Sickle Cell Foundation	
Neighborhood Health Services	
Lion's Club	
Lupus Foundation	
March of Dimes	
Muscular Dystrophy Association	
Multiple Sclerosis Society	
Poison Information Center	
United Cerebral Palsy	
Pregnancy Hotline	
La Leche League	
Women's Health Center	

HOME HEALTH CARE

Hospice	
Medial Center Home Health	

PARENTING

Black Families of America	
Boy's Town	
Childbirth Education	
Even Start Family Literacy	
La Leche League	
Healthy Start	
Divorce Class	

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Big Brothers/Big Sisters	
Boy Scouts	
Girl Scout Council	
School Volunteers	
Literacy Volunteers	

PREGNANCY SERVICES

Childbirth Education	
Teenage Parent Program	
La Leche League	
Healthy Start	
Planned Parenthood	
Health Department	
Salvation Army	

SENIOR CITIZEN SERVICES

Adult Day Care	
Alzheimer Resource Center	
American Assoc. of Retired Persons	
Area Agency on Aging	
Dial-A-Ride	
Elder Care Services	
Foster Grandparents	
Geriatric Residential Treatment	
Retired Senior Volunteers	
Senior Citizens' Center	

SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Association for Children with Learning Disabilities	
Autism Society of America	
Center for Autism and Related Disabilities	1-800-3autism
Center for Independent Living	
Children with Attention Deficit Disorders	
Children's Home Society of Florida	
Deaf Communication	
Dept. of Education, Blind Services	
Developmental Services Dept. of Children and Families	
Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers	
Easter Seal Rehabilitation Center, Inc.	
Exception Student Education	
Assoc. for Retarded Citizens	
Muscular Dystrophy Assoc.	
Multiple Sclerosis Assoc.	
Social Security Admin.	
United Cerebral Palsy	
Vocation Rehabilitation	

SERVICES FOR PETS

Animal Spay and Neuter Clinic	
Animal Services/Animal Shelter	

TRANSPORTATION

Dial-a-Ride	
Medicaid Transportation	
City Bus Transit	
Share-a-Ride	

A Certificate Program and Retention

Recognition for accomplishments, no matter how small, is very important in the success of adult learners. Students who have had little or no success in school in the past need ways to mark success fought so hard for as adults. One tried-and-true way to reward adult learners is to implement a Certificate Program.

The statewide ABE Taskforce investigated the possibility of implementing a statewide Certificate Program to reward adult learners at levels other than the earning of a GED. Though the taskforce ultimately decided not to recommend a statewide certificate program at this time, they did strongly recommend that districts and other providers of adult education implement local certificate programs as tools for retention, recruitment and public relations. Adult learners who are rewarded for achievements before the GED level are more likely to stay in school and continue learning. Potential employers who can be shown a certificate which lists the skills acquired by its owner are more likely to offer that student an interview and more likely to return to that program when new employees are needed. A public that reads of adults earning educational certificates is more likely to evaluate that program as successful and also more likely to volunteer in an ABE classroom.

There are many ways districts and adult education providers can structure a certificate program. Certificates could be awarded when all the LCPs for a level are completed; certificates could be awarded in particular subject areas or for across-the-board progress. Certainly a certificate could be awarded when a student has attained functional literacy in all subject areas and is ready to move out of Adult Basic Education and on to GED preparation or job training.

Certificates can be awarded in a public ceremony once a semester; they may be mailed out at the end of each term. Some districts may want teachers to award the certificate as soon as the criteria is met and then announce certificates once a month in the local newspaper. However districts and other adult education providers decide to award the certificates, one can be sure that each recipient will be proud and interested in returning to class.

Following are some sample certificates that you may want to use in your classroom or lobby to get your district to use. Whatever you choose, remember that rewarding adult learners is crucial to retention.

Certificate of Achievement



BASIC MATHEMATICS

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



BEGINNING MATHEMATICS

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



INTERMEDIATE MATHEMATICS

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



FUNCTIONAL MATHEMATICS

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



BASIC READING

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



BEGINNING READING

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



INTERMEDIATE READING

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



FUNCTIONAL READING

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



BASIC LANGUAGE

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



BEGINNING LANGUAGE

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



INTERMEDIATE LANGUAGE

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR _____

TEACHER _____

DATE _____

DATE _____

Certificate of Achievement



FUNCTIONAL LANGUAGE

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



WORKPLACE READINESS

This Award is Presented to

*In Recognition of Academic Achievement
having satisfactorily completed all the requirements for educational competence*

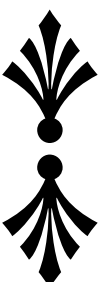
ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

Certificate of Achievement



This certificate is awarded to

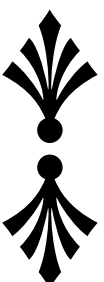
for achievement in Reading

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Achievement



This certificate is awarded to

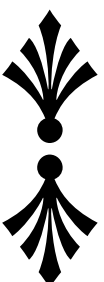
for achievement in Mathematics

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Achievement



This certificate is awarded to

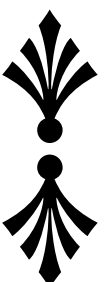
for achievement in Language

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Achievement



This certificate is awarded to

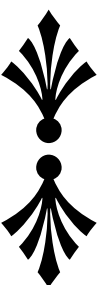
for achievement in Workplace Readiness

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

_____ *Teacher / Presenter*

Certificate of Improvement



This certificate is awarded to

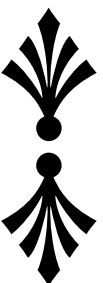
for improvement in Reading

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Improvement



This certificate is awarded to

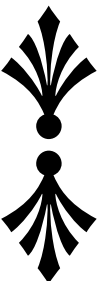
for improvement in Mathematics.

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Improvement



This certificate is awarded to

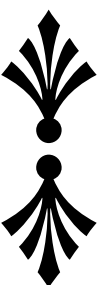
for improvement in Language.

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Improvement



This certificate is awarded to

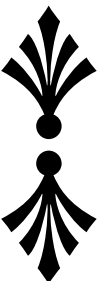
for improvement in Workplace Readiness.

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

Certificate of Attendance



This certificate is awarded to

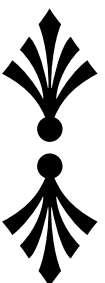
for Attendance

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

Teacher / Presenter

*Certificate for
Consistent Scholarly Focus*



This certificate is awarded to

for consistent scholarly focus.

This _____ day

of _____ 20__

_____ *Teacher / Presenter*

Retention Resources

Davis, Richard. "Retaining Adult Education Students, A How-To Guide for Practitioners." LERN Research Report No. 109.

Fitzgerald, Nicholas B. and Young, Malcolm B. 1997. "The Influence of Persistence on Literacy Learning in Adult Education, *Adult Education Quarterly*, Volume 47, Number 2, 78-91.

Florida Literacy Coalition, 1997. *Literacy, It's a Whole New World*, Orlando, Florida.

Maryland State Department of Education. "Basic Education: Teaching the Adult." Maryland Division of Instructional Television.

Queen, Lois. B. 1996. *Retention Plan for Student Success*, Brevard School Board Adult/Community Education, Melbourne, Florida.

Stein, Sondra Gayle, 1995. *Equipped for the Future: A Customer-Driven Vision for Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning*, National Institute for Literacy, Washington, D. C..