

# RETENTION STRATEGIES



# Ways to Retain “Loner” or High-Risk Students

The adult learners most at risk for leaving an adult education program are the loners. These students do not form friendships with other students in the classroom and traditionally have little support outside of the classroom. Here are some ideas for going the extra mile to keep such students enrolled.

1. Consult your school counselor (or find a community counselor who would like to volunteer) about making a plan for regular contact with loner students. A regular, at least weekly, phone call to check up on progress and problems will go a long way in breaking the cycle of isolation.
2. Ask all of your students to list on their personal information sheets a person they think supports their work in adult education. Ask them to include a phone number or email address for this person. Either you or your counselor should contact this person and ask if he/she will check in weekly with this student and offer verbal encouragement. Offer yourself as a support person this mentor can contact if the student encounters personal or academic problems that require more support than this person can give.
3. Ask your students to volunteer to join a buddy-system in which they agree to phone a fellow student once a week and offer verbal encouragement. Both the student offering the encouragement and the student receiving the encouragement should volunteer and every student should get to play both roles.
4. Find out if your students have a workplace or attend a church regularly. Encourage them to identify one person from work or church who they think would be willing to serve as their encourager. Ask for contact information and make the contact for your student to formalize the commitment.
5. Be sure at the end of the term to help your student(s) who stayed enrolled to say thank you. They may want to write a thank-you note individually or plan and host a reception as a class.

# Groups Keep Students Coming

Based on Michael Pritza's article "Getting into Groups" from *Focus on Basics*, Vol. 2, Issue A. pp. 20-22, March 1998.

Michael Pritza reports that his Gilmer County, Georgia adult education classroom had the typical problems: diverse ages and abilities, low incomes, and a 34% dropout rate. When brainstorming ways to increase retention Pritza began to wonder about the way instruction was delivered in his classroom. His program "had been offering individualized, self-paced study with instructor assistance and self-directed computer-based programs." So his research question became: Will group participation in structured classes and discussion groups increase student motivation and retention? His answer was a resounding "Yes" with an increase of 50% in attendance hours.

To see if Pritza's formula can work for you and your students, try his methodology explained below. It won't cost you anything and the payoff could be phenomenal!

1. Ask your students to respond to a simple questionnaire about possible instructional approaches (included on the next page).
2. Interview students individually to determine in which subjects they feel they most need help and at which point in the process they think help would be most beneficial.
3. Begin informal classes by bringing together students who wish to work on related or the same material. Work together with these students for approximately an hour. Make student input and participation a major part of the "class" and focus on the concerns with the material that the students raise. Allow students to lead the answers to questions when possible and allow students to demonstrate how they solved a similar problem. If you wish, this can become a regularly scheduled time during the week, allowing students to plan for and save up questions to bring. For example, reading groups may meet on Mondays, math groups on Tuesdays, grammar groups on Wednesdays, etc.
4. Begin discussion groups. Allow the discussions to be about topics the students select. These discussion groups may or may not need your direction. These groups can be serving a purpose even if they are simply a place for students to discuss what is going on in their lives outside of school. Encourage them to always confront the question, "How is education going to improve the quality of my life?"
5. Keep attendance records and charts, as well as records of group meetings. This should help you see if group work is positively impacting the work of your students.



# Retention Strategies

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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.
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 make **referrals** to other community service for those 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.

Ensure **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, once 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*



## LITERACY 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 EDUCATION 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*



## INTERMEDIATE HIGH 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*



## **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 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*



## INTERMEDIATE HIGH READING

*This Award is Presented to*

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

ADMINISTRATOR

TEACHER

DATE

DATE

# *Certificate of Achievement*



**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*



## **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*



## 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*



## INTERMEDIATE HIGH 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*

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*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 of Consistent Scholarly Focus*



*This certificate is awarded to*

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*for consistent scholarly focus.*

*This \_\_\_\_\_ day  
of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Teacher / Presenter*

# *Certificate of Positive Attitude*



*This certificate is awarded to*

\_\_\_\_\_

*for consistent positive attitude.*

*This \_\_\_\_\_ day*

*of \_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Teacher / Presenter*