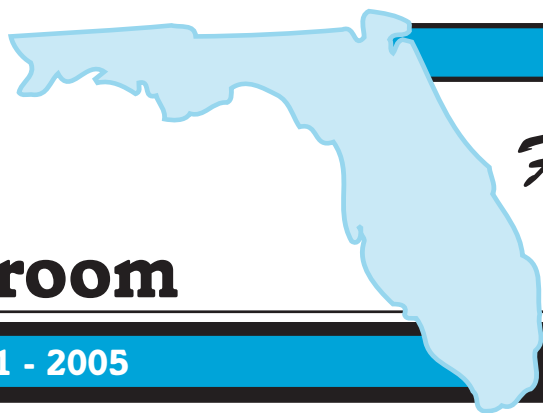


The

Adult Basic Classroom



*For Florida Adult Basic
Education Practitioners*

VOLUME 11 - 2005

www.ABEFlorida.org

Student orientation practices feel like unnecessary paperwork. Do they have any impact on student retention or success?

Never underestimate the power of a good first impression. Student orientation practices definitely impact both student retention and student success. Intake procedures set the tone of the learning environment, provide tools for student support, and solicit student commitment.

SETTING THE TONE

Student orientation practices and agency intake procedures are usually the first experiences students have with their new teacher and the classroom setting. Memories of hostile learning environments and failed relationships with teachers loom for these adults. Every rule communicated and every piece of information asked for should communicate to these adult learners that *this* experience will be different, that *this* experience is geared towards success.

The goals of orientation and intake procedures include enabling the student to complete required paperwork, sustaining the student's belief that she can complete a program of study, orienting the student to the programs offered him, completing the initial screening for accurate placement, and identifying the

student's personal goals. It should be clear to the student that adult education is a professional enterprise AND that he is qualified for it; our professionalism should INCLUDE adult learners, not exclude them. To that end, offer students written class policies and ask students to sign as a mark of their intention to follow class policies. Explain the use of the testing instrument before the test is given, and explain the results after the test is scored. Make it clear that the student's personal goals matter; be clear about the connection between student goals and the individual education plan. Show students how you and they will track progress. Though the relationship between adult education practitioners and students is not an equal partnership, students should see from the beginning that their input matters.

TOOLS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT

Orientation and intake procedures are tied to retention because they provide tools for student support. In order to put into place successful retention strategies, teachers must have accurate contact information for students and know a bit about what shapes students lives. Hav-

ing students fill out a form that includes home address and phone, cell phone, work address and phone (if applicable), and family members' addresses and phones enables the teacher to contact students about absences, to recruit people for student support when needed, and to invite people to celebrate student achievement. If you ask students to also include on this form the name and contact information for someone they would consider a mentor, a supportive friend, or an encourager, the circle of support widens for your student.

From the first day, and maybe even in the initial paperwork, learn about your student's living situation, transportation options, childcare or eldercare restraints. Encourage them to let you know what causes their absences so that you can connect them to larger networks of support. Pair your students by geography to share rides or homework assignments; pair them by family status for support and shared assignments so that they learn to create their own network of support.

Though you will continue to collect important and appropriate personal information after orientation and in-

take is completed, beginning that first day with it sends a clear message that the student's whole-life needs will be addressed in this classroom. Also, you are more likely to continuously record new or changed information if you have a place to record it. Teachers armed with knowledge about their students' lives outside of class and belief systems that impact class are better equipped to construct meaningful, "real-world" assignments that keep adult learners invested in learning. If two students are clashing because of religious or cultural differences, research projects can open up a discussion about how and when to agree to disagree and how and when to stand up for one's beliefs. If transportation becomes a problem for more than one student, a class project could be to petition the bus companies for more helpful service or to explore other modes of transportation. Seeing that there is a connection between their "real-world" lives and what they are learning in the classroom will help keep adult learners enrolled and meeting their goals. Believing their teacher knows them as individuals and is invested in their personal success will help them make a commitment to education.

STUDENT COMMITMENT

An individual education plan leads to success only when it is accurately geared towards a specific student's needs and is updated regularly. Getting signatures that mark commitment to specific classroom policies and focusing on student input into the education plan during intake ties together for the student that her

commitment directly effects her ability to direct her own education. Reviewing student progress helps the teacher and student see how commitment translates into success and lack of commitment translates into failure. It also lets students and teacher decide if the reason for failure or slow progress is that the educational goal has changed. In all of this, the student remains an individual, known by the teacher, and he begins to see ways in which he has power to change his world in a positive way.

We are all committed when we believe what we are doing is successful and important. If during the first encounters between student and teacher there is discussion of ways teachers enable success and ways a student's personal education is important to her, her family, and her community, then that student *begins* her fight for an education with tools. She can explain her own goals and plan to her doubters; she has identified areas of strengths and weaknesses in her own academics; she has created a list of people to call for help; she has a regularly scheduled time and place to work on her goals.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS LAST

We've all known in the first few minutes of a bad date or a bad movie or a bad workshop that we would not be coming back. Our students know, too. It is much easier to forgive a lesson plan that is a flop or a research project that is boring after one knows a teacher and has seen his moments of genius. It may not be only first impressions that bring

us back, but it can be only first impressions that keep us away. Orientation practices and intake procedures are adult education's first impressions. How strong are yours?

Orientation and Intake Resources: Aids in Creating Positive First Impressions

http://abeflorida.org/pdf/Resource_Guides/Get_Your_Message_recruitment04.pdf

http://abeflorida.org/pdf/Resource_Guides/Resource_Guide_retention04.pdf
<http://abeflorida.org/pdf/brochures/ABCNews1.pdf>

<http://abeflorida.org/pdf/brochures/ABCNews2.pdf>

<http://abeflorida.org/pdf/brochures/ABCClassroomspring.pdf>

<http://abeflorida.org/pdf/brochures/BACKTOBASICS-SPRING.pdf>

Editor: Margaret Wright-Cleveland
Writer: Margaret Wright-Cleveland

This staff development publication was developed by the Adult Basic Education Practitioners' Committee with an Adult Education State Leadership Grant, 2004-2005, from the Florida Department of Education, Office of Workforce Education.

We hope you enjoy this publication. If you have any comments or questions, please contact Lynn Cunill, Leon County Schools Adult & Community Education, (850) 922-5343, cunilll@ACE-Leon.org.



Florida Department of Education