

PROGRESS

A publication of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

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Moving the Needle in Virginia Adult Education: Reaching One Adult at a Time

by Margaret Patterson

It may come as a surprise to adult educators to learn that nationally adult education programs serve about 10% of those in need of services—and that 90% of adults who are eligible for program services don't get involved. Researcher Margaret Patterson, of Research Allies for Lifelong Learning in Vienna, Virginia, calls them the "Forgotten 90%," after a 2018 paper of the same name published in *Adult Education Quarterly*. Dr. Patterson recalls sitting in her office at the American Council on Education in D.C. about ten years ago and poring over GED® testing statistics. "I kept seeing percentages of 4%, 2%, or 8% in different states—very small proportions of the target population that we were reaching. I didn't believe the numbers were that low." After confirming the percentages were on target through Census and other national data, she realized something had to be done.

Fast forward to 2017: After submitting for publication the "Forgotten 90%" paper, which reviewed U.S. Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) data on adults with less than a high school diploma (LHS) who were not involved in education, Dr. Patterson realized that although largescale quantitative data on LHS adults were informative, they didn't answer the most important questions. "It was one thing to know that these adults were older than our typical students, that many had low social trust and fair or poor health, and that adults from the South and Midwest were overrepresented. But that didn't tell us *why* they did, or how it came to happen," she explained. "We needed to know more about the barriers they faced."



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VCU

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Thus, CAPE was born. Working with VALUEUSA, Dr. Patterson wrote a grant to the Dollar General Literacy Foundation for Critiquing Adult Participation in Education (CAPE) research, which was funded in mid-2017. Pennsylvania-based VALUEUSA, which calls itself the national alumni association of adult learners, believed the best way to learn about adults' barriers was to ask them. With Dollar General's generous support and VALUEUSA's sponsorship, Dr. Patterson, her research partner Dr. Wei Song, and their team were able to visit five states and survey and interview 125 adults.

CAPE work started in Virginia. Drs. Patterson and Song visited an adult education program in Salem, Virginia, first surveying adults and then conducting a small group interview. Most were former adult learners; one was considering enrolling and another had no interest in learning more. Researchers guided them through a root cause analysis technique to help "peel back the layers" of the reasons adults gave for not participating in education. After the Salem research session, the researchers knew they were on to something big—information about prospective learners that could not only explain barriers, but also offer solutions on how to move the needle to recruit and keep more of the 90% involved in adult education.

In 2018, three reports came out of the CAPE research (available for free download at the [VALUEUSA website](#)):

- [**Report 1: Deterrents and Solutions \(May 2018\)**](#),
- [**Report 2: Motivation around Adult Education \(June 2018\)**](#), and
- [**Report 3: Technology Use \(July 2018\)**](#).



In May 2018, Dr. Patterson was asked to present the first report at a congressional briefing to the Adult Literacy Caucus on Capitol Hill. She was impressed with the interest congressional staffers showed in the results, particularly in the solutions that adults recommended to get them involved. Since then, she has presented CAPE results to approximately 500 adult educators across the U.S. A recent participant said, "I want to thank you for offering this CAPE session today. It reminded me of how I need to get back to my roots and why I even got into adult education in the first place. It's all about the adults."

In fall 2018, Dr. Heidi Silver-Pacuilla of the Virginia Department of Education and Joanne Huebner of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center approached Dr. Patterson about sharing CAPE results with Virginia adult educators. They had read the CAPE reports and wanted Virginia adult educators to have the opportunity for a deeper dive into the material, especially since the reports focused on two issues of importance to Virginia adult education, boosting recruitment and enhancing retention.

Dr. Silver-Pacuilla envisioned a virtual study circle, employing technology to allow program administrators from across the state to read and discuss reports, think through adults' recommendations on how to reach

them, and identify ways to implement solutions to keep adults involved in adult education through completion. Dr. Patterson developed a four-part online series of study circles, offering Outreach and Advocacy (Part 1) in December 2018 and Customizing Instructional Services (Part 2) in January 2019. Marty Finsterbusch, Executive Director of VALUEUSA, participated in the first two parts and shared the adult learner perspective.

Approximately ten Virginia adult educators at a time participated in one of two study circle sessions offered per part. Sessions focused on reaching adults through messaging that explained how adult education would meet their needs and focusing on customizing services so that those who did come would realize adult education programs can meet those needs successfully. Feedback on the first two virtual study circles was positive. In evaluations, educators wrote about how they planned to share CAPE information with staff, to work on specific outreach methods they gained from the study circles, and to find ways to involve adult learners in outreach. "We will look at ways to involve current students in outreach... not just our grads but our persisting learners," one participant shared.

Part 3, Motivation around Adult Education, took place on May 22 and discussed how adults value education and ways educators

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can work with adults who have experienced trauma. The fourth part is slated to be offered face to face at the July 10–12 Virginia AE&L Conference. “Online Technology Use of Adult Nonparticipants in Education” will share and discuss survey findings on adults’ technology use, learning via online technology, using online technology for collaboration and problem-solving, and recommended technology-related solutions. Participants will receive a set of adult interviewee recommendations for future use in planning.

For more information on CAPE, visit the [Research Allies website](#) or contact Margaret Patterson directly at margaret@researchallies.org. 

Dr. Margaret Patterson, Senior Researcher with Research Allies for Lifelong Learning in the Washington, DC, metro area, partners with nonprofit organizations, postsecondary institutions, and state agencies to apply research and conduct evaluations that support adult educators and learners. Previously, she served as Research Director at GED Testing Service® and Associate Director of Adult Education in Kansas. She administered and taught in adult education programs in Nebraska, Nevada, and Kansas and presents extensively throughout the U.S.



Register Today! July 10-12, 2019



July 10-12, 2019
Blue Ridge Hotel & Conference Center
Roanoke, VA

Access•Equity•Opportunity

<https://www.aelconference.com>

Learning Circles and XPRIZE Apps: One Program's Perspective

by Maryann Peterson

In the [December 2018 issue of PROGRESS](#), David Rosen describes a Learning Circle as "a non-formal, organized study circle that includes an online course or other online resource." This spring, the Thomas Jefferson Adult and Career Education (TJACE) program at Piedmont Virginia Community College piloted Learning Circles using the XPRIZE Adult Literacy apps as its resource.

Following the English Now! model adopted by World Education, the TJACE Learning Circles are free, inclusive, learner-led, and open to ESOL students of all levels. Our Learning Circles have met a need by engaging students on the waiting list, extending learning for students enrolled in traditional classes, and providing an alternative option for students who cannot attend traditional classes due to time or financial constraints. Enrollment is open, meaning students can join at any time during the term.

The *English Now! Learning Circles Implementation Guide* provided a flexible model for our pilot program. Through some trial and error, we developed the following strategies, which could easily be adapted to serve the needs of other programs:

- **Consider space and resource needs.** TJACE Learning Circles meet in a small conference room with WiFi, where students gather around a table instead of sitting in traditional classroom rows. This arrangement encourages conversation and connection. Students face each other rather than the facilitator or the board, and the facilitator is able to join students as a member of the circle.
- **Survey students on access to technology.** In order to access the apps, students need to bring a charged smartphone to class each week. We have surveyed our students using the English Now! Digital Skills Self Assessment and found that all of our students own or have regular access to smartphones; more than half of our students have iPhones; and most of our students use their smartphones, rather than a personal computer, for computing needs.
- **Establish a sense of community and camaraderie.** Because attendance is encouraged rather than required, it's important to establish a sense of community and belonging early on. Welcoming and greeting rituals are important. For the first few meetings, the facilitator modeled these introductions; soon students themselves were leading introductions and warm up activities, welcoming and orienting new students, and bringing concerns and suggestions before the group.
- **Set clear expectations.** We help our students understand how Learning Circles differ from traditional classes. In traditional classes at TJACE, attendance is expected and course content is cumulative. In Learning Circles, attendance is encouraged but not required, learning is flexible and student-led, and the XPRIZE apps, rather than traditional texts, provide content.

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What TJACE students are saying about mobile learning and the XPRIZE APPS

“
Thank you for the information about Cell-Ed. I studied it 30 minutes tonight. It was very good and for me. It seemed like listening to [an] English class. I was interested.

“
I like the conversation. I like the questions. I can send the answer. I remember.

“
I am learning how to talk in some common situations. Like in shopping. I would recommend this app to another student because it is easy to apply and it is convenient.

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- **Prepare meaningful learning activities.** In addition to lessons on the apps, which students complete at their own pace, each Learning Circle includes an instructor-led lesson. At TJACE, we focused on digital literacy and included a smartphone orientation, which prepared students to use the apps.
- **Designate class time for using the apps.** We have found that giving students a flyer about the XPRIZE apps and the communities competition access code isn't enough. Rather, we help them download the apps (experienced students can help new students with this), devote class time to completing at least one lesson on the apps, and debrief by asking students to provide written and verbal feedback about their learning experience. At the end of each class, students set a learning goal or intention for using the apps in the future.
- **Encourage student leadership.** As the first in our program to try the XPRIZE apps, the Learning Circles students serve as “app ambassadors,” visiting traditional classes and helping their peers launch the apps on their smartphones. They recommend the apps to friends and family outside of class. By providing feedback, our students are educating us about the benefits and limitations of mobile learning.
- **Keep the conversation going outside of class.** Students are encouraged to text the facilitator and each other between class meetings if they have questions or need support with the apps.

Learning Circles are not a replacement for traditional classroom instruction, and apps are not a language-learning panacea. Because students have not completed enough hours for post-testing, it is too soon to say if students who participated in Learning Circles and tried the XPRIZE apps will show learning gains. However, students who participated in the TJACE pilot report that they are grateful for this free and convenient resource, they appreciate the face-to-face support and sense of community, and they feel confident using the apps to support their learning.

You can find [more details about the English Now! Project on the EdTech Center@World Education website](#) and learn [more about the XPRIZE Communities Competition at the Team WorldEd page](#). English Now! Learning Circles for English Language Learners is a project of World Education’s EdTech Center, funded by Dollar General Literacy Foundation. 

Maryann Peterson is an ESOL instructor for the Thomas Jefferson Adult and Career Education program at Piedmont Virginia Community College, where she facilitates the new Learning Circles program.

Have You Heard about the Sector Strategies and Career Pathways Academy?

by Virginia Department of Education staff

Virginia received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to cross-train practitioners from the workforce development partner agencies on sector strategies and career pathways. This will facilitate collaboration of regional networks of colleagues on workforce development initiatives with common understandings and goals to offer high-quality career pathways programming responsive to labor market opportunities in every region of the Commonwealth.

See the key definitions for this work in the sidebar. These definitions drive the work of the Academy and regional initiatives that arise from it.

Career pathways programming is not new to adult education; both local and regional programs have been implementing pathway programs for various occupational tracks and cohorts for several years. However, implementing career pathways as the new service delivery **norm** for all workforce clients could bring great benefits. When students receive career pathway services from day one, they can experience meaningful career awareness and exploration opportunities; more explicit, seamless, and efficient course-taking sequences; and access to the supportive services they need to persist and complete education and training. When students understand how to earn and stack credentials to advance in a field, they can set near- and long-term goals and plan further education and training.

A sector strategy approach brings together many employers in a single industry, such as all the health care providers in a region, to discuss the current and future workforce needs and training plans. Pairing career pathways with sector strategies allows regional workforce partners to address in a proactive manner both the supply and demand sides of a regional economy.

The Academy is a blended learning model, combining in-person regional events with online self-paced courses and workgroups. Certain online courses are required for successful completion, but there are also elective online courses available so that participants may choose those that are the most applicable to their work. Participants who successfully complete the Academy requirements will earn a 26-hour SSCPA Certificate of Completion.

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SECTOR STRATEGIES

Sector strategies are partnerships of employers within one industry that bring government, education, training, economic development, labor, and community organizations together to focus on the workforce needs of an industry within a regional labor market. At the state level, they are policies and investments that support the development of local sector partnerships.

CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM

A career pathways system is a series of connected education and training programs and support services that enables individuals to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education or employment in that sector. Each step on a career pathway is designed explicitly to prepare for the next level of employment and education.

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The first of the Academy cohorts will convene in May and June, beginning with the Foundations events and continuing with online learning components to earn badges and Certificates of Completion. A second wave of training will be offered in September and October. Ask your local and/or regional program manager about your program's participation in the Academy and watch for opportunities to get involved.

Every adult education class should be considered part of a career pathway and offer learners opportunities to prepare for future education, training, and employment. Explore the featured links to find career pathways resources curated by VALRC. 

This article was prepared by the staff of the Virginia Department of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education.

Featured Resources on Career Pathways

VALRC's Career Pathways Page

<https://valrc.org/learning/careerpath/index.html>

This page features reports, training resources, and planning tools for developing and implementing career pathways programs.

VALRC's Integrated Education and Training Blueprint Site

www.ietblueprint.com

The Integrated Education and Training (IET) blueprint is based on the [PluggedInVA](#) model, a career pathways program that integrates academic and occupational training content through co-enrollment in adult education programs and postsecondary education and training. The site contains a map of IET programs in Virginia, a technical assistance roadmap, instructional career pathways materials for all skill levels, and resources for partnering with our WIOA partners and with employers.

Virginia Career Works

<https://virginiacareerworks.com>

This is an online one-stop shop for information, policies, toolkits, and partner resources for building career pathways systems that are responsive to local industry needs.

The Employability Skills Framework

<https://cte.ed.gov/initiatives/employability-skills-framework>

The Employability Skills Framework is a comprehensive resource for information and tools to inform the instruction and assessment of employability skills. Employability skills are general skills that are necessary for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors and have a number of names—soft skills, workforce readiness skills, career readiness skills. Check out the Employability Skills Checklist to support the integration of workplace readiness activities into adult education instruction.

The 2019 Adult Education & Literacy Conference

by Katherine Hansen

From July 10–12, the Adult Education and Literacy (AE&L) Conference will be held at the Blue Ridge Hotel and Conference Center in Roanoke. The AE&L conference mission is to combine state-funded adult education conferences, symposia, and meetings into one: one purpose, one focus, one voice to advance adult education in Virginia. The conference provides a great opportunity to engage with colleagues, network, and learn together while showcasing emerging trends and practices in the field of adult education.

The Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC), with support from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) along with this year's featured partner, the Virginia Literacy Foundation (VLF), is proud to offer a diverse range of learning opportunities reflecting best practices in adult education. This year's theme is "Access, Equity, & Opportunity."

When asked how the conference theme was determined, VALRC specialists Jeffrey Elmore and Kate Daly Rolander explained that economic disparity in Virginia is one of the most pressing issues affecting adult education today. "Along with this goes the realization that many Virginians are being shut out of the American economy, prosperity, and society as a whole because of who they are and/or where they are located," explained Jeffrey. VALRC wanted to find a theme that would address what the majority of our program staff are facing right now so that solutions could be targeted and shared.

Kate pointed to current research which supports why economic disparity is having such a profound effect on adult education. She cited the [Rural Horseshoe Initiative](#), which demonstrates that those living in rural Virginia have a vastly different educational and occupational outlook than those who live in other areas. She also underscored research from the [Eviction Lab](#), which shows that Virginia has five out of the top ten cities in the country with the highest eviction rates—eviction rates being a determiner of educational inequalities particularly in relation to race. In addition, she explained that, according to the [Migration Policy Institute](#), Virginia is in the top ten states in percentage of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) from immigrant families.



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Access

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Keeping these facts in mind, this year's AE&L Conference has been designed to help adult educators by showcasing emerging trends, offering strategies, and sharing practices from experts in the field that address the three areas of access, equity, and opportunity. Conference speakers and workshop presenters will share their creative ways to improve **access** to the materials and/or programs necessary for adults to gain knowledge and skills for success. They will address challenges such as those found in rural communities, or in programs where financial considerations may limit the ability to provide important resources, or in overcoming logistical barriers. Keynote speaker Judy Mortrude, who is Senior Policy Analyst with [CLASP's](#) Center for Postsecondary and Economic Success, will speak to "Designing Access to Achieve Equity and Opportunity." She will share ways that innovations in adult education access are increasing equity and opportunity in Virginia and across the country.

Equity

To address **equity**, conference speakers and workshop presenters will offer innovative ways to facilitate unbiased learning experiences for adult students. In a multilevel classroom with a range of barriers to success, it is a challenge to provide an even playing field for each learner. Our speakers and presenters will share creative ways to build all-encompassing learning activities providing students a fair and equal chance to succeed. Keynote speaker and President of the [Oliver White Hill Foundation](#), Ramona Taylor, will give a historical and legal overview to access, equity, and opportunity as it relates to the life of Mr. Oliver White Hill. She will present excerpts from his cases, which transformed the American educational landscape and clarified that equity, access, and opportunity are part of a Constitutional legacy. With Hill's life as a metric, Taylor will also provide insight on how to recognize opportunities and obstacles to fair and equitable access to educational and professional opportunities. Moreover, through her own personal reflections, Taylor will provide guidance on how to challenge those obstacles.

Opportunity

When it comes to **opportunity**, we all want adult learners to succeed both in our classrooms and in the future steps of their lifelong journeys. Conference speakers and workshop presenters will share how they have forged new partnerships and opened up opportunities for adult learners. They will focus on successful practices, including partnerships, that lead to adult learners' classroom successes and the transition into secondary education or employment. Keynote speaker James Wasilewski of [HaHa to Aha](#) will utilize his 20 years of experience in improvisational comedy to guide conference participants through an interactive practice of creating opportunity for themselves and those that they serve. Participants will learn how to establish confidence and better express themselves through the crafting of a personal elevator pitch; they will participate in exercises highlighting executive presence characteristics, storytelling techniques, and nonverbal recognition and cues.

Other notable invited speakers include Anne Gibbons from the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities, who will present "Pressing Pause on Unconscious Bias," and Marty Finsterbusch of VALUEUSA, who will host a panel of adult learner leaders so that participants can "Hear The Voices of Adult Learners Who Have Gone Beyond." Amy Dalsimer with the Adult Education and Literacy Practice Group at the American Institutes for Research will speak to "Designing Integrated and Contextualized Curriculum: Lesson Plans, Teaching Strategies and Tools." Not to be missed is Dr. William Crowder, Principal of the Advanced Career Education Center at Highland Springs, who will discuss programs offered within his school as well as business partnerships formed with employers that have resulted in building long-lasting relationships with his students. Katie Brown, Senior Federal Policy Analyst with the National Skills Coalition, will give attendees an overview of where the Higher Education Act reauthorization currently stands in Congress and will take a deep dive into proposed legislative changes that can help adult and other nontraditional students succeed at higher rates in the postsecondary education system.

In keeping with this year's theme and due to the overwhelming number of conference presentation proposals, the number of 75-minute workshop sessions has been expanded to 70 in order to offer a diverse and equitable range of subjects. This also gives as many presenters as possible the opportunity to share their work and experience with others across the state. Back by popular demand are the well-received Think Tanks. These are dedicated opportunities at the end of each day for conference participants to network and share with others in their field (ESOL, CBLO, workforce, corrections, etc.) what was taught, shown, and learned in the workshops. It is hoped that Think Tanks will allow for new relationships to be formed and for time to innovate and apply what has been received through the conference.

Also offered this year is a pre-conference event sponsored by VATESOL (Virginia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages). VATESOL is a professional organization dedicated to promoting professional development, strengthening instruction, and supporting research opportunities at all levels for teachers and administrators of English language learning (ESL/EFL/ESOL). On Wednesday, July 10, from 8:30 a.m. to 11:15 a.m., VATESOL will offer a workshop entitled "Burnout, Trauma and Resiliency in the ESL Classroom: Strategies for Caring for Ourselves and Our Students." The workshop will focus on specific needs in ESL classrooms, but the principles can be applied to any classroom and all are welcome to attend by selecting the workshop when registering for the conference.

Last but certainly not least, Dr. Heidi Silver-Pacuilla will open the conference with the state of adult education in Virginia. Her staff will be on hand throughout not only to speak about Virginia's most compelling issues, but also to offer their counsel and assistance as needed. All involved are working hard to make this conference one to remember. We would like to give a shout-out to the advisory committee for volunteering their time and expertise to ensure that all areas are represented. We encourage you to register today and tell others. For more information, visit the [conference website](#) or send an email to aelconference@vcu.edu. 

Katherine Hansen, M.Ed., serves as the Workforce Policy Support Specialist and AE&L Conference Coordinator for VALRC. She is a certified TESOL instructor and Project Management Professional (PMP). Katherine's career experience bridges the academic, nonprofit, and corporate worlds in global intercultural communications, teaching/training, and program/organizational development.

2019 PROGRESS CALENDAR

JUNE

10 Differentiated Instruction (Writing & Math) TEAL Online Courses Begin
tinyurl.com/tealSpring2019

19-20 Experience Works—Engaging Business Leaders & Educators Richmond, VA
tinyurl.com/WorkBasedLearningVA



JULY

8 Effective Lesson Planning (Writing & Math) TEAL Online Courses Begin
tinyurl.com/tealSpring2019

10-12 Adult Education & Literacy (AE&L) Conference Roanoke, VA
www.aelconference.com

24-26 GED® Annual Conference Chicago, IL
tinyurl.com/GEDchicago

28-31 Correctional Education Association (CEA) Conference Detroit, MI
www.ceanational.org

29 Deeper Learning Through Questioning (Writing & Math) TEAL Online Courses Begin
tinyurl.com/tealSpring2019

AUG

19 Formative Assessment (Writing & Math) TEAL Online Courses Begin
tinyurl.com/tealSpring2019

28-30 Literacy Education & Second Language Learning for Adults (LESLLA) Conference Pittsburgh, PA
www.leslla.org

31 Adult Literacy XPRIZE Communities Competition “Deployment Phase” Ends
<https://edtech.worlded.org/team-worlded-xprize>

SEP

9 Student-centered Learning: Keys to Motivation and Persistence (Writing & Math) TEAL Online Courses Begin
tinyurl.com/tealSpring2019

19 Virginia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (VATESOL) Conference Charlottesville, VA
www.vatesol.cloverpad.org

25-27 National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Regional Conference Boston, MA
www.nctm.org/events

25-28 ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Education San Diego, CA
www.proliteracy.org

OCT

2-4 National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) Regional Conference Nashville, TN
www.nctm.org/events

8-9 National Council for Workforce Education (NCWE) Conference San Antonio, TX
www.ncwe.org

8-11 American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) Conference St. Louis, MO
www.aaace.org

NOV

4-6 Families Learning Conference Louisville, KY
conference.familieslearning.org

11-13 National College Transition Network (NCTN) Conference Cambridge, MA
www.collegetransition.org

21-24 National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention Baltimore, MD
<https://convention.ncte.org>