

Excerpt from the definitive source on flexible Adult Career Pathway models ...

# Adult Career Pathways: Providing a Second Chance in Public Education

by Richard Hinckley and Dan Hull

Authors Dick Hinckley and Dan Hull see America at a critical crossroads. They believe that if this country is going to advance out of the current economic crisis, leaders must focus on steps to align their efforts to build labor pools of highly qualified workers and actions to enhance the performance of our incumbent workers. The most successful communities will act proactively to leverage the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Stimulus Bill) and other resources to position themselves to compete in a global economy. Only with collaboration between education, industry, workforce boards, and community organizations will dislocated, unemployed, and underemployed workers be efficiently and properly retooled with the skill sets required to power business and industry's competitive success.

## Prologue Career-Limited Adults in the Era of High Technology and Globalization

**J**esse struggled in school. By the time he was in the fifth grade, it was apparent that he wasn't a "high achiever." When he entered middle school, things got worse. Math didn't make sense, he didn't like his reading assignments, and he had a hard time organizing his writing and "getting started." By the time he entered the eighth grade, Jesse was starting to question why he was still in school, why he needed to learn things that he would probably never use, and whether there wasn't something else he could be doing that he would like better than school.

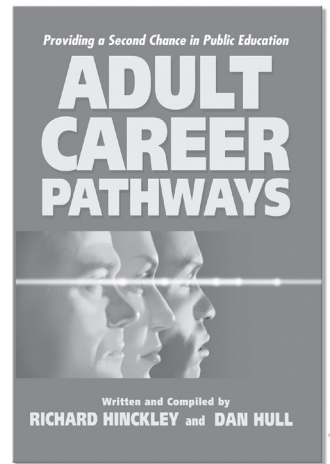
But then things began to improve for Jesse. During the eighth grade Jesse learned about different jobs, discovered his career interests and abilities, and found out that he could choose school subjects that helped him explore and prepare for a future in an interesting career area. Jesse chose to enroll in an IT academy in high school. In the eleventh grade, he switched to an engineering academy. By the time he graduated from high school, he had already earned 12 hours of dual credit through a nearby college, had earned a scholarship, and was well on his way to becoming a photonics engineering technician. Jesse enjoyed the benefits of Career Pathways!

**K**arla's experience in school didn't turn out as well. As with Jesse, her low performance in academic subjects was matched by her low self-esteem. By the time she reached high school, her mind was somewhere else. Her only goal in school was just to "get out." She took the easiest path, barely graduating. Although she avoided getting into serious trouble, she left school without a plan and without much preparation for a future. She got a job waiting tables, got married within a year, gave birth to a child, and began to "grow up." Within a few years, she became a single mother and had to return home to live with her parents, because she didn't have the resources or support structures to "handle life" on her own.

Karla was 24 years old and without much of a future before her. Yes, she has made some bad choices. But she was also the failure of our public education system. She wants a second chance at education, a career, and a more rewarding life—and we have a responsibility to help her get it!

\* \* \*

**T**hese two scenarios reflect the experiences of two large groups of students in U.S. public education. Students in the group represented by Jesse



This book excerpt is being released as a special issue of *Connections*, the newsletter of the National Career Pathways Network (NCPN). It consists of the prologue and first three chapters (abbreviated). To purchase copies of the book or for more information on the Adult Career Pathways model and available technical assistance, visit [www.adultcareerpathways.org](http://www.adultcareerpathways.org).



have benefited from their educational experience—and so has the economic competitiveness of our nation. They will get and keep good jobs, and they're prepared for career changes and additional education and training. They're the beneficiaries of successful Career Pathways.

Students like Karla just didn't "get it" when they were in school. Whether the fault lies in a mismatch between learning and teaching styles, a lack of career awareness and career foundations, poor self-image, or just plain immaturity, the students in this group represent a failure of public education and community support—and we have a responsibility to give them a "second chance" in education. So far, this responsibility has fallen on our community and technical colleges, and those institutions should and will continue to play a huge role in "second-chance" education. But more is needed. We need a more systematic approach that involves collaboration between business and education and helps adults balance the demands of family commitments and work as they get back on track in education and careers. The approach we envision is an extension of Career Pathways that caters specifically to the needs of adults. We call it Adult Career Pathways (ACP).(1)

Every American who needs and wants a "second chance" in public education should get one. The reasons should be obvious. American businesses cannot succeed without a well-educated workforce, and our communities need responsible, contributing, financially independent citizens. Most of all, every person in the United States should have the right to improve and to realize his or her dreams. And a high-quality, focused public education is still the key to ensuring that every American enjoys that right.

Over the last thirty years, our society has redefined what constitutes a high-quality, focused public education.

1. Public education should still focus on mastery of core academic subjects such as reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies. But today,

the academics should be *useful*—not just "math for math's sake" or math to learn more math, but math that can be applied to the real problems that confront us in life and work. The ability to use computers and the Internet is also becoming a foundational academic requirement.

2. Public education should teach social and interpersonal skills and should give students the tools and the desire to produce high-quality work. These are not merely "life skills," they're essential to effectiveness in the workplace. Today's employers value "soft skills" as much or more than career-specific technical skills.
3. Public education should provide a *career foundation*—the basic knowledge and skills that are necessary to get a job and continue to learn and advance in one's career.
4. Public education at the secondary level should lead naturally and seamlessly to at least two years of postsecondary education. In most career areas, a high school education alone is not sufficient to create opportunities for high-quality life and work. Nearly all rewarding careers require some form of education beyond high school. To be in demand and upwardly mobile in the workplace, most adults will have to engage in a lifelong pursuit of education and training. *Learning to learn* is vital.

Unfortunately, many of today's young people are entering adulthood (or are well into adulthood) without this type of education. Included in this group are:

1. High school dropouts;
2. High school completers who did not pursue further education and training;
3. College noncompleters;
4. Foreign-born U.S. residents (especially recent Mexican immigrants);
5. Veterans who entered military service immediately following high school; and
6. Criminal offenders who have completed their terms of incarceration.(2)

For the purpose of this book, "Adult Career Pathways" (ACP) is defined as the guidance, remediation, curricula, and other support elements required to enable career-limited adults to enter the workforce and progress in rewarding careers.

#### Notes

1. For a thorough discussion of Career Pathways, see Dan Hull et al., *Career Pathways: Education with a Purpose* (CORD, 2005).

2. There is another category of adults who require retraining or continuing education to change careers, reenter the workforce, or advance in their present careers. In a future book we will define an educational plan for this category as "Career Pathways for Retooling Adults."

## Chapter 1 Profiles of Adults in Need of a Second Chance in Public Education

The central premise of this book is that many adult Americans are capable of making good lives for themselves and their families but have stopped far short of their potential. Because of financial obligations, a lack of up-to-date technical and employability skills, and/or weak academic foundations, they feel that the door to a better life is closed to them. They need help in overcoming barriers to self-improvement. We believe that Adult Career Pathways (ACP) can play a vital role in helping to remove those barriers.

This chapter presents profiles of the six groups cited in the prologue.

### High School Dropouts

For several years the federal government reported the national high school graduation rate at just under 90 percent. In meeting the reporting requirement for the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the states have painted a similarly optimistic picture. But in the last four years, independent researchers have concluded that far fewer high school students are graduating than had previously been thought. The dropout problem may be affecting as much as a third of our student population, and even more among some minorities.

Despite the magnitude of the dropout problem, opportunities for high school dropouts to resume education and training are diminishing.

From an economic standpoint, most of today's recent high school dropouts are headed for a life of sporadic employment and relatively low wages. Among minorities, the outlook is even more grim.

It would be easy to assume that many high school dropouts lack of *ability*, but this would be a wrong assumption. Our nation's population of high school dropouts represents a vast pool of human potential that remains to be tapped.

### Snapshot

#### High School Dropouts

**How many?** Over 6 million; more if GEDs are excluded and older adults are included

**Ethnic makeup:** Disproportionately minority (The graduation rate for minorities has been estimated at around 50%.)

**Gender:** More males than females

**Family status:** Many from low-income and single-parent homes

**Services currently available:** Job Corps, YouthBuild, Service Corps, Challenge, AmeriCorps, Workforce Investment Act, Youth Opportunity Grants

**Special problems:** Lack of family support system; lack of literacy, technical, and employability skills

**Special needs:** Remediation, employability skills, core academic and technical skills

### High School Completers with No College

In 1988, Samuel Halperin of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship produced two landmark reports on the (at that time) twenty million American young people who had chosen *not* to go to college. Halperin referred to the target demographic as "the Forgotten Half"—forgotten because "educators have become so preoccupied with those who go on to college that they have lost sight of those who do not. And more and more of the non-college-bound now fall between the cracks when they are in school, drop out, or graduate inadequately prepared."

Most students who do not plan to attend college after high school graduation get no help in making the transition from school to the workplace. Federally supported job training programs are inadequate to meet the demand, and many students in the Forgotten Half face personal barriers.

Chapter 1 is much abbreviated in this excerpt. The book offers more comprehensive statistics and an extensive reference list.

**Snapshot**

**High School Completers with No College**

**How many?** 1.5 million per year (derived by subtracting the number of first-time college enrollees from the number of high school graduates [source: NCES])

**Ethnic makeup:** Disproportionately minority

**Family status:** Disproportionately from low-income households

**Services currently available:** Community colleges and technical schools (which offer credential programs that can be completed in as little as one year)

**Special problems:** Poverty, unemployment or underemployment

**Special needs:** Postsecondary-level skills

A decade after Halperin’s first reports came out, a follow-up study concluded that in key areas the situation had changed very little. Young people in the Forgotten Half were still employed at relatively low rates. Educational attainment continued to be strongly influenced by family income, and minorities continued to lag significantly behind their white counterparts. Without intervention, the bleak future faced by the millions of America’s young adults who lack any postsecondary education is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

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**College Noncompleters**

Over the past several decades, the percentage of America’s young people who enter college in the fall immediately following high school graduation has been rising. But the general upturn in college-going rates masks a serious problem: Far too few of the students who enroll in America’s colleges and universities succeed in earning postsecondary credentials.

The *consequences* of noncompletion have become more severe. Globalization has made it increasingly difficult for college noncompleters to keep pace with the competition. Today’s American college noncompleters find themselves at the lower end of a steadily growing gap between their earnings and the earnings of college graduates.

**Snapshot**

**College Noncompleters**

**How many?** 0.5 million students per year (Carey, 2004); 19% of total population age 25–34 (= 7,600,000 [Census Bureau])

**Ethnic makeup:** Disproportionately minority

**Gender:** More men than women; gender gap more pronounced among minorities

**Family status:** Disproportionately low-income

**Services currently available:** None specifically for this group

**Special problems:** Underemployment

**Special needs:** Means of dealing with personal commitments while going back to school

The number of people involved is large and disproportionately represented by low-income and minority students.

**Foreign-Born U.S. Residents (Especially Recent Mexican Immigrants)**

In 2003, 33.5 million U.S. residents were foreign born (U.S. Census Bureau). By far the greatest “sending” region is Latin America (representing 53.3 percent of all foreign-born U.S. residents). Among Central American countries, Mexico sends (by far) the largest number of people.

**Snapshot**

**Foreign-Born Residents**

**How many?** 33.5 million (in 2003)

**Ethnic makeup:** 53.3% Latin American; 25.0% Asian; 13.7% European; 8.0% Other; largest single group is Mexican (approx 10 million)

**Family status:** Tend to have large families and (among Hispanics) are more likely to be low in education and socioeconomic factors.

**Services currently available:** Title I and II of WIA, Refugee Resettlement Program, TANF, HEA; many (but not enough) community colleges and nonprofits offer ESL programs.

**Special problems:** Especially among Hispanics (of which people born in Mexico are the largest subgroup): Many lack high school diplomas; many lack the resources to move beyond low-paying jobs

**Special needs:** Remediation, language training, information about career options, high-level skills

In developing Adult Career Pathways for this group, there are several reasons to focus on Hispanics, especially Mexicans.

1. Hispanics, especially Mexicans, are the largest immigrant subgroup.
2. The *pace* of Hispanic immigration is rapidly increasing.
3. The distribution of Hispanic immigrants is becoming national in scope.
4. Most Hispanic immigrants have their most productive years ahead of them.
5. Hispanic immigrants stand to play a huge role in the future growth of the American workforce.
6. Hispanic immigrants—especially those from Mexico—have the greatest need for upward mobility.

### Returning Veterans

Only about half of returnees take advantage of Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) benefits. Many of the young people who enlist in the military do not have college aspirations prior to enlistment. Thus, many do not seek postsecondary education following their discharge.

Snapshot
<b>Returning Veterans</b>
<b>How many?</b> 238,000 a year
<b>Ethnic makeup:</b> Similar to general population
<b>Gender:</b> 85% male, 15% female
<b>Family status:</b> 60% married; many have children
<b>Educational status:</b> Most have at least high school diplomas.
<b>Services currently available:</b> MGIB, Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans' Employment and Training Service
<b>Special problems:</b> Many do not recognize the need for postsecondary education or have obligations that make pursuit of postsecondary education difficult.
<b>Special needs:</b> Technical and job-search skills (depending on nature of service)

*Returning veterans have strengths that other target groups often lack. They are disciplined, are more mature than nonveteran high school graduates, and have a variety of technical skills.*

### Ex-offenders

The last twenty-five years have witnessed a massive increase in incarceration in our country. Policymakers and corrections experts have had to turn increasing attention to prisoner reentry. The extent of reentry occurring today far surpasses anything witnessed in the past, and the needs of those being released are greater. Among the population of ex-offenders, problems such as child abuse, infectious disease, homelessness, unemployment, and domestic violence are common.

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Snapshot
<b>Ex-offenders</b>
<b>How many?</b> Approx 630,000 returnees/year
<b>Ethnic makeup:</b> High minority
<b>Gender:</b> 93% male, 7% female
<b>Family status:</b> Many (esp. women) are parents of minor children.
<b>Educational status:</b> About half the total inmate population [approx 2,000,000] receives educational or vocational training (this percentage is decreasing); about 40% have neither HS diploma nor GED (% higher among minorities); young inmates less well educated than older inmates; men less well educated than women
<b>Services currently available:</b> In-house prerelease, educational, and vocational programs (diminishing); nonprofit programs such as the Safer Foundation and RIO (Texas); federal programs such as FPI and PIE
<b>Special problems:</b> Antisocial behaviors (substance abuse, gang-related activities); lack of technical and employability skills
<b>Special needs:</b> Counseling, occupational and academic education and training, substance abuse treatment, social and family services (e.g., housing and transportation)

As states have increased their funding for prison construction and staffing, they have had to decrease funding for education and rehabilitation programs.

The population of ex-offenders is disproportionately minority and overwhelmingly male. Among their greatest needs are education and employment. Most leave prison with little education and training and without prospects for employment. ♦

## Chapter 2

# Components of the Adult Career Pathways Model

The development of a successful second-chance education strategy for adults has thus far confounded postsecondary educators because of the wide range of student abilities and personal needs involved, the lack of direction among people who most urgently need a second chance, and the difficulty those people face in accessing postsecondary education because of financial and personal limitations.

Every community and technical college in the United States receives applications from adult students in the six categories described in Chapter 1. Ideally those colleges would develop a unique program of study for each student. But, of course, that is impractical and cost-prohibitive. The typical (and largely ineffective) response to the needs of these students is threefold:

1. *Test the incoming students. If they show deficiencies in one or more academic areas, place them in remedial studies until they can "pass out."*

Despite an annual cost of around a billion dollars, little is known about the effectiveness of remedial courses on a national level.<sup>(1)</sup> By adding to student requirements and extending the time needed to complete degree programs, in many cases their effects may actually be negative. Many of the students who take remedial courses drop out.

2. *Once students have taken care of their remediation issues, advise them of conventional certificate or associate degree programs in which they can enroll, as either full- or part-time students.* Unfortunately, for many students, this isn't much help, if not supported by other measures. Nontraditional students tend to have personal obligations that make it difficult for them to enroll in school, especially full-time. As a result, "nontraditional students are much more likely than traditional students to leave postsecondary education without a degree."<sup>(2)</sup>

3. *Provide short-term, "quick fix" vocational programs.* Many of the adults who apply to community colleges are able to receive some form of financial assistance that would allow them to attend the college full-time for one semester, or a 4–6-month period. Typically, these students are placed in

"jump start" programs, where they are given "survival academics," personal needs assistance, entry-level skills training, and job-search skills. Most of these students leave the college after this initial period to take minimum-skills jobs. Frequently, they are employed for less than a year and are "back on the street," looking for more training or another job.

In a few cases one or more of these three intervention efforts results in a successful transition for students, but it is the exception rather than the rule. In general, these approaches have drained college (and government) resources, contributed to nontraditional students' sense of failure, and done little to help employers who need world-class workers who can participate in company-based career ladder systems.

Our community and technical colleges didn't create this problem. On the contrary, they have worked hard to correct it. But the reality is that, in most instances, they have not been very successful. In their defense it should be pointed out that the development of a successful second-chance education strategy for adults has thus far confounded postsecondary educators because of the wide range of student abilities and personal needs involved, the lack of direction among people who most urgently need a second chance, and the difficulty those people face in accessing postsecondary education because of financial and personal limitations.

Most of the groups profiled in Chapter 1 are characterized by one or more (usually several) of the following traits:

1. Ages range from 18 to 50's (average: probably late 20's)
2. Must support themselves and, in many cases, minor dependents; cannot afford to be full-time students for 2–3 years; limited access to financial aid

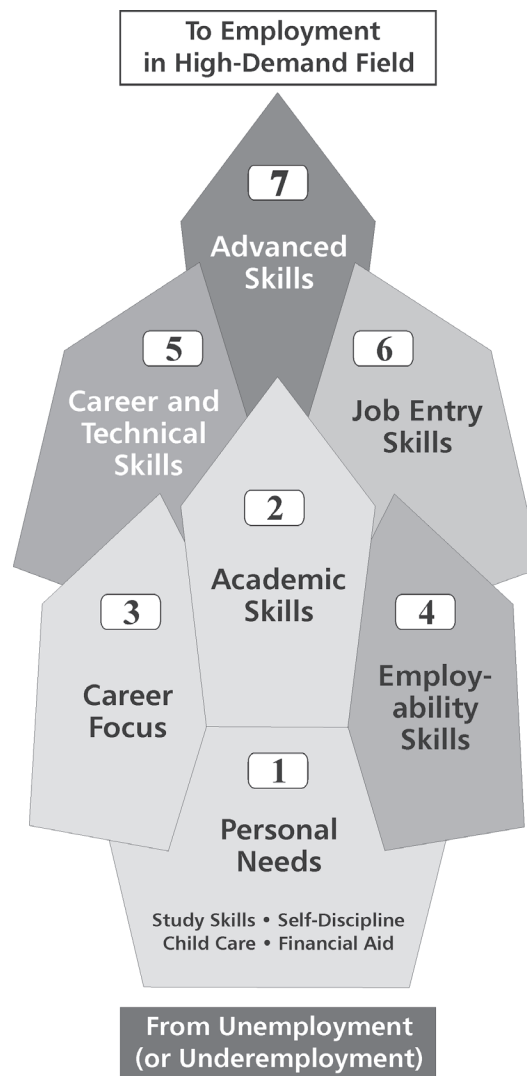
### Notes

1. E. P. Bettinger and B. T. Long, *Addressing the Needs of Under-Prepared Students in Higher Education: Does College Remediation Work?* (National Bureau of Economic Research, Education Working Paper 11325, 2006).

2. S. Choy, *Nontraditional Undergraduates: Findings from The Condition of Education 2002* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

3. May need childcare and/or transportation
4. Academically weak; require remediation in reading, math, communication, and basic computer skills
5. May lack proficiency in English
6. Low self-esteem, confidence, and interest in academics
7. Lack study skills
8. Need "soft skills"
9. May not have concern for timeliness or quality of their work
10. Know about "the real world"; may have "survival skills" but do not know how to channel that knowledge into the acquisition of marketable skills
11. Highly motivated to earn a good wage
12. May be interested in careers but don't know how to pursue them
13. Have no career guidance
14. Average to above-average intelligence; most are probably very capable
15. Know very little about what it takes to obtain and keep family-supporting jobs

to the next, or even from one individual to the next.



**Figure 2-1. The Seven Components of an Adult Career Pathway**

Based on the unique strengths and needs within each category of adults in need of "second chance" Career Pathways, it is possible to group the elements of an effective Career Pathway into seven components that constitute the ACP program as the authors envision it. Each phase, or "stage," of the curriculum addresses one or more of these components. (The term "stage" refers to a rung or step in the student's Career Pathway ladder. See the figures in Chapter 3.)

Descriptions of the seven components of the ACP model are provided in the following section. Figure 2-1 provides a visual sense of how they interact and overlap in leading from unemployment (or underemployment) toward a common goal—employment in high-demand fields. The differences in shading in the figure are intended to suggest that some target groups will need some components more than others. The shading pattern would probably change from one target group

### Component 1: Personal Needs

When they apply to colleges to gain career skills, the adults in our six categories usually require one or more forms of personal assistance. Most of these should be addressed in Stage 1. If personal needs are not identified and met early, adult students are often unable to enroll in school. Even those who do manage to enroll struggle to continue their studies long enough for them to be of any benefit. Most colleges have student intake staff, counselors, and financial aid officers who are dedicated to these tasks.

If personal needs are not identified and met early, adult students are often unable to enroll in school. Even those who do manage to enroll struggle to continue their studies long enough for them to be of any benefit.

In planning for support of personal needs, both staff and students should understand that we are not talking about a short-term “quick fix.” To be beneficial, an ACP will usually require an initial stage of approximately four months of full-time effort, followed by over three years of continuous studies on a part-time basis (six credit hours/stage).

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Personal needs can be grouped into four categories:

- *Financial*—Most adult students, particularly those who have been out of high school for five years or more, will not have enough financial resources to meet their educational expenses and provide for themselves and their dependents. The vast majority will require grants and/or student loans to pay these expenses during Stage 1 when they are full-time students.

At the end of Stage 1 (Prep Stage), it is anticipated that successful ACP students will become employed by participating employers, at least on a part-time basis (30 hours/week), with paid release time and benefits, while they continue their education. We are proposing that, at the end of Stage 3, participating employers move their ACP students to full-time status but continue to provide paid release time to enable the students to complete their educational requirements.

- *Logistical*—This category of personal need includes goods and services the students will need to participate in the ACP program. It includes childcare, transportation, and, in some cases, appropriate clothing. Community and faith-based organizations should be enlisted to provide these services.

- *Personal*—It is likely that many of the students applying to enroll in ACP programs will need help with personal problems such as chemical dependency, self-discipline, learning disabilities, and job-search skills. Counselors and tutors from the college and other community organizations should assist in these areas.

A significant factor encountered at many community colleges is the cycle of poverty that many of the adult students have experienced most of their lives. These students are the children of generations of welfare recipients, many of whom also dropped out of high school and have had only sporadic low-skilled jobs. Most of these applicants to the colleges have no family support (either financial or emotional) for committing to any form of continued education and career preparation. Mentors from the college staff must be available for one-on-one guidance, “hand holding,” and “cheerleading” during Stage 1.

- *ESL*—Many first-generation immigrants from non-English-speaking countries struggle to communicate in English, particularly if they continue to live in homes and communities in which English is not the primary language. Their inability to read, understand, and speak English fluently is also a barrier to learning and can be a barrier to employment. ESL classes for this group are offered by colleges, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations. We recommend that all students have at least basic English skills before they are admitted to Stage 1 (Prep Stage).

### Component 2: Academic Skills

This component encompasses two types of skills:

- Remedial skills, i.e., the student proficiencies necessary to foundational work in postsecondary programs, and

- Career foundation skills, i.e., the math, communication, and science skills necessary to pursue specific fields.

**Remedial skills**—Recent studies (e.g., by the Center for the Development of Leadership Skills at Rider University) have shown that employers value entry-level employees who possess useful academic skills (reading, writing, math) as much as they do career-specific skills. Unfortunately, most of the adults who apply to community and technical colleges score below the colleges' admission levels on mathematics, reading, and writing and require remediation to demonstrate adequate proficiency.

On average, colleges are less than 50 percent successful in correcting serious academic deficiencies in adult students. We believe that the success rates can be improved significantly by using "contextual" strategies in teaching. Contextual teaching presents concepts in contexts that are familiar to students and that demonstrate the concepts' usefulness. Our experience at CORD has shown that most low academic achievers are concrete learners. That is, they learn best when abstract concepts are taught in the context of how they are used outside the classroom. When concrete learners are taught contextually, their achievement, confidence, and interest improve. There is no shortage of contextual teaching materials, but materials alone do not solve the problem. Contextualization of remedial math, science, and communication is unfamiliar to many teachers and thus requires professional development.(3)

**Career foundations skills**—Math, science, and communication courses are also an important part of the career foundations curriculum, but they should be taught in the context of the career field that the student has chosen. Since 2001, extensive efforts have been made through Tech Prep practitioners in numerous states to foster collaboration among mathematics and career and technical education (CTE) faculty. These collaborations have resulted in the creation by CORD of authentic

classroom problems in which students apply twenty-one essential math concepts to problems in fields such as construction, automotive service technology, business, IT, and agriculture.(4)

### Component 3: Career Focus

Adults in our six target groups will most likely need career guidance just as much as teenagers in 4+2 Career Pathways do. The following elements of career guidance must be provided during Stage 1 of the ACP:

- *Help students identify their strengths.* In their book *Soar With Your Strengths* (Dell, 1995), Don Clifton and Paula Nelson make the strong point that the way to develop your abilities—and your self-esteem—is to identify your strengths and build on them. It seems that public education often tries too hard to make everyone a "well-rounded" person. Some students are naturally inclined to be "loners," and there are careers that require that type of personality. Helping students to identify their aptitudes and develop them in career pursuits can open doors of opportunity and improve self-image.
- *Help students identify where the good jobs are.* Counselors should be able to steer students in the direction of rewarding employment.
- *Help students choose educational pathways that will enable them to qualify for their careers of choice.* Students must be informed of realistic, available opportunities and the steps they must take to pursue them. One doesn't have to be a brain surgeon to enjoy a rewarding career in healthcare, if the costs and/or time commitments to learn brain surgery are unrealistic.
- *Help students acquire personal qualities and behaviors that will contribute to success in their chosen careers.*
- *Help students acquire strong job-search, application, and interview skills.*

Employers value entry-level employees who possess useful academic skills (reading, writing, math) as much as they do career-specific skills. Unfortunately, most of the adults who apply to community and technical colleges score below the colleges' admission levels on mathematics, reading, and writing and require remediation to demonstrate adequate proficiency.

### Notes

3. Contextual teaching is more than a remedy for low achievers. It is a proven strategy that helps all students achieve academic excellence. For more, see Michael Crawford, *Teaching Contextually: Research, Rationale, and Techniques for Improving Student Motivation and Achievement in Mathematics and Science* (CORD, 2001).

4. Information on CORD's CTE math enrichment curriculum is available at [www.cord.org](http://www.cord.org).

#### Component 4: Employability Skills

The employability skills, or “soft skills,” component of career and technical education has been identified, defined, and infused into the curriculum since it was introduced by SCANS in 1992. Employability skills are the third leg of the “standards stool” (academic, technical, employability). They include interpersonal relations, working in teams, critical thinking, and problem solving. In most 4+2 Career Pathways, employability skills are infused into the curriculum and teaching strategies. In ACP, they must be redefined, expanded, and, in some instances, taught very early in the adult student’s experience.

Many adults in our six targeted categories have weak employability skills. Consequently, those skills—punctuality, quality of work, organization/neatness, organization rules, and teamwork—should be stressed during the Prep Stage of the ACP. Employability skills should also be reemphasized, required, and evaluated during every subsequent stage of the ACP, both at the college and in the workplace.

Today’s workplace requires that employees be able to work in teams, think critically, and solve problems. Teamworking should be included in communication (language arts) courses and practiced in career and technical courses. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are easily introduced into math courses—if they are taught in the context of careers and technical skills—and can also be taught in communication and science courses. Every career and technical course should require and measure these skills.

Effective teaching and evaluation of employability skills require the participation of college and employer mentors. During Stage 1, college staff members should serve as mentors by helping and encouraging ACP students to learn, adopt, and practice employability skills in areas where the need for improvement is evident. This will probably require individual counseling sessions.

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Employee mentors, if properly trained, can continue to reinforce these practices. It may seem that we are calling for an excessive amount of individual attention, support, and just plain “hand holding,” but many adults in our six target areas are fragile and will need personalized help to overcome culturally entrenched attitudes and personal habits.

#### Component 5: Career and Technical Skills

Following the Prep Stage, students will be employed and will continue their studies part-time for several years. ACP curricula will prepare them for long-term careers, not just entry-level jobs.

The technical content of the curriculum for each ACP will be determined by a program advisory committee consisting of employers in the technical field addressed by the ACP. The committee will create (or modify) a skill standard that reflects anticipated employment opportunities in the relevant field. The curriculum content will be sequenced so that each stage of study corresponds to the knowledge and skills that the student-employee will need in the *next* step of his or her ACP. The student-employee should be formally acknowledged in some way at the completion of each stage of the curriculum.

Although the ACP student will have chosen a career field before taking career/technical education courses, he or she will not have been encouraged to focus on a particular job or level of attainment. Consequently, in the early stages of the curriculum, the career/technical component will concentrate on content that is applicable to a broad range of jobs within the student’s chosen career field. The later stages of the curriculum will focus on knowledge and skills that pertain to specific jobs and the specialized requirements of particular employers.

The close relationship between academic (math, science, and communication) content and career/technical content was mentioned earlier. Because of

this relationship, the teaching of both academic and career and technical courses should involve an infusion process that works in two directions. On the one hand, academic courses should be taught in the context of career problems. At the same time, a deliberate attempt should be made to infuse academic rigor into career and technical content and problem-solving exercises and practices.

It is likely that some aspects of the career and technical coursework can be learned, or applied, best “on the job.” These areas of coordination between the college faculty and employers can be identified and facilitated by the advisory committee.

### **Component 6: Job Entry Skills (including basic computer and Internet skills)**

Job entry skills are skills necessary for employment after completion of the Prep Stage. These skills will, of necessity, be determined by the employers represented on the program advisory committee.

To have effective ACP programs that will lead to long-term employment and growth in careers, we will need to redefine “job entry skills.” In the report *Who Is Most Likely to Succeed? New Skills for a New Workplace* (Rider University, 1998), a survey of 428 employers showed that they valued useful academics and soft skills as much or more than job-specific skills. The Rider University report also stressed the fluent use of computers and the Internet. Nearly all employers value workers who can use computers, productivity software, and/or the Internet. Basic IT skills are considered “job entry skills,” and job applicants who have some proficiency in the organization’s job-related applications of computers will have an edge over applicants who do not.

Because today’s workplaces call for broader skill sets than the workplaces of previous generations, every program advisory committee should call for a curriculum in the Prep Stage that is significantly different from the narrow job training we have been accustomed to seeing. For this to occur, leadership

from participating employers must “come from the top,” and the employer representatives in the program advisory committee must be at least “second-level managers.” Without buy-in from high-level management, employer organizations will not be able to participate at a sufficiently high level.

This is critical to the success of the ACP program. The college CEO must be committed to this approach and be willing to seek an equally high level of commitment from the leadership of the participating employers.

### **Component 7: Advanced Skills**

Advanced skills are a longer-range goal of the ACP. They will be introduced in only three or four of the later stages of the curriculum. Advanced (career) skills could be a place where “company-specific” knowledge or practices are taught. (This could be one way for an employer to hold on to the completers of the program.) Of course, some advanced skills could be taught at the employer workplace.

How an ACP partnership defines advanced skills will depend somewhat on the perceived goals of the program. If the program is designed to help the student acquire a certificate, and this is sufficient formal education to reach a desired rung on the career ladder, company-specific advanced skills are appropriate.

But if the goal is to enable the student to be a lifelong learner, and the program is designed to help the student obtain an associate degree (or higher), the advanced skills should be positioned so that the student can apply them toward higher education credits. In that situation, the credits would be considered “transferable.” In an ideal scenario, advanced skills training would be dual purpose—it would satisfy company-specific skill requirements *and* move the student closer to long-term educational goals (for example, the final “2” of a 4+2+2 pathway). Developing that kind of scenario will require a high level of collaboration between business and education. ♦

The teaching of both academic and career and technical courses should involve an infusion process that works in two directions. On the one hand, academic courses should be taught in the context of career problems. At the same time, a deliberate attempt should be made to infuse academic rigor into career and technical content and problem-solving exercises and practices.

## Chapter 3

# Putting the Components Together

### A Suggested Strategy and Curriculum Plan for Adult Career Pathways

Most of the strategies currently used by colleges to serve adults who are seeking career preparation are similar to the three plans cited in the previous chapter—*test and remediate, enroll in traditional plans, or provide short-term training for entry-level jobs*. These strategies are not yielding acceptable student retention and success rates, and they are not providing employers with sufficient numbers of capable, long-term employees who can progress through career ladders within their organizations.

This problem is not going away. Studies show that student transitions from secondary to postsecondary are only beginning to improve. Secondary-postsecondary Career Pathways (as described in Hull et al., *Career Pathways: Education with a Purpose*) will improve the transition rate over the next decade, but many adults and soon-to-be adults (many are minorities and single mothers) need and deserve a realistic second chance in education. And employers already suffer from a shortage of skilled workers.<sup>(1)</sup>

It's time to think differently about how we reeducate and prepare these adults. Yes, colleges have been "appointed" to lead this effort, but they cannot do it alone. A realistic, effective strategy will need the support and cooperation of employers and communities. Employer support must go beyond sitting on advisory committees and donating out-of-date equipment. Employers must be involved in making and executing plans, hiring adult students into the "corporate career ladder," and encouraging them to continue their education for several years. Community organizations, including faith-based organizations, must be willing to partner with businesses in meeting the personal needs of participating adults so that they can devote the time and

concentration necessary for their "second chance" at education to succeed. Many suitable organizations already exist, but they tend to work in isolation. The time has come for a more comprehensive effort to pool resources and expertise in the accomplishment of common goals.

*The following requirements are foundational to the design and delivery of the new curriculum:*

1. Students must be able to commit to at least one semester or a 14–18-week period of full-time education. (For many adults, this is not realistic without financial support, for both school expenses and personal needs.)
2. Students must have access to part-time (at least half-time) jobs following the Prep Stage.
3. Employers in the same fields, who might normally think of themselves as competitors, must be willing to work together in supporting the program, especially by hiring students—*part-time only*—after the Prep Stage.
4. Employers in similar fields must be willing to commit to a common "career ladder" in which each student is promoted, given a raise, and/or publicly commended each time he or she completes a pathway stage.
5. Curriculum should integrate the essential components identified in Figure 2-1 in each 4–6-month period of the curriculum.
6. Programs must provide frequent rewards so that students can mark their progress.

### A Ladder Curriculum that Correlates to a Career Ladder

The term "ladder curriculum" is not new. It is frequently used in healthcare programs to describe multitiered sequences of courses in which each tier, or group of

By 2020, baby boomers who retire will leave a void of over twelve million jobs unfilled by U.S. workers (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2002).

#### Notes

1. A. P. Carnevale and D. M. Desrochers, *The Missing Middle: Aligning Education and the Knowledge Economy* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

tiers, correlates to a level of progression in an employment "career ladder." In nearly all cases, a ladder curriculum and a career ladder are used where there are "job certifications," such as in nursing and other fields within healthcare. Some apprenticeship programs also employ a modified approach to a ladder curriculum matched to a career ladder.

We are proposing that ACP programs adopt a ladder curriculum/career ladder strategy that can be applied to almost any career field. To accomplish this will require close cooperation between colleges and employers in relevant career fields or career clusters. In a sense, the work of the college/employer committee would be to create a series of informal job certifications that could be tied to blocks of the curriculum. Graphical representations of the ladder curriculum/career ladder are shown in Figures 3-1 and 3-2.

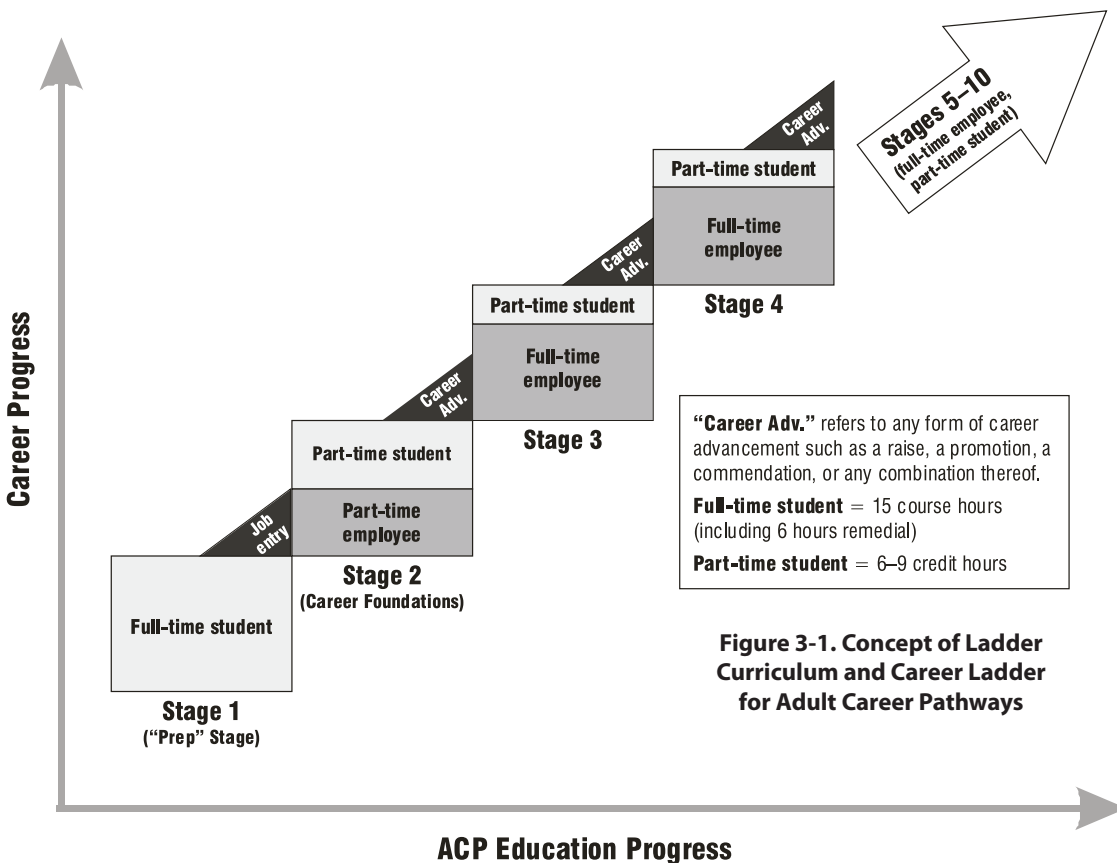
**Stage 1** (the Prep Stage) is typically a time when adults are given the opportunity to attend as full-time students. They

will generally need parts of six of the curriculum components:

1. Personal needs
2. Academic skills (including remediation)
3. Career focus
4. Employability skills
5. Career and technical skills
6. Job entry skills (including basic computer and Internet skills)

Most of the first stage coursework will be recognized as "nontransferable credits." It is a period for "repositioning" these adults to acquire the confidence, career focus, discipline, academic foundation, and employability skills that demonstrate their potential to enter higher education and long-term employment. The Prep Stage also serves as an opportunity for students to show employers they can reach long-term goals. Hopefully, at the end of this stage the students will be hired (by participating employers) at the bottom rung of a career ladder. In a typical situation, the student would work part-

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time (~30 hours/week) and continue his or her education in the ladder curriculum.

Employers who hire these adults are “betting on their future.” These adults are not limited to typical “job skills.” They have broad skills that demonstrate potential.

**In Stage 2**, most students will need to work 20–30 hours/week to provide support for themselves and their dependents. They will continue to require outside support for personal needs such as childcare and finances. Their course load should average nine credit hours, mostly in academics and career and technical subjects. Employers will participate in the students’ education by deliberately engaging the students in tasks that require “soft skills.” These students/employees will be assigned employee mentors, who will assist them in adjusting to the environment of the job and help them with personal and academic needs. Students who complete the second stage and perform satisfactorily on the job will be recognized by their employers with certifications, job promotions, salary increases, and/or full-time job status.

**In Stage 3**, most students are full-time employees who take at least six credit hours in the ladder curriculum. Some employers may be able to provide paid leave to allow the students to attend classes. Coursework will cover both academic (*in-context*) and career and technical subjects. Upon completion of the coursework and satisfactory performance on the job, students will again be recognized with an increase in status and/or salary or in some other form.

At about the third stage (and beyond), employers may be tempted to lure students away from school to take on full-time jobs and narrow, company-specific training. This is short-sighted and counterproductive. Employers are strongly encouraged to help students complete their programs of study and position themselves for even further education—even if, in so doing, the employers risk losing workers to competitors.

**In Stage 4**, coursework will be almost entirely career-related. A minimum of six

credit hours should be taken. Hopefully, the employer will recognize the long-term value of the student/employee and reimburse the student/employee’s educational expenses. This should reduce the amount of outside personal support required. Upon successful completion of the coursework and satisfactory work performance, students/employees are again recognized with an increase in job responsibilities and compensation.

**In Stages 5 and 6**, the curriculum begins to include advanced skills that earn postsecondary credit and are more specific to the needs of the employer organization. Again, satisfactory work performance and completion of the assigned coursework will earn additional job credentials and compensation.

**In Stages 7–10**, the student should complete the requirements for an associate degree or certificate. The course content in this stage (or stages) will be more directly job-related. Completion of this curriculum and the associated work experience will establish a foundation for a lifelong career and further education and/or training as desired or needed. This prescribed phase of an ACP will be completed, but the door to career opportunities and higher education and training is just beginning to open. The student will be able to achieve a desirable lifestyle, and the employer has gained a long-term employee with the potential for future growth within the organization.

### **The Challenge**

In the first three chapters we have provided evidence that undereducated young adults represent a significant challenge to our community colleges, our employers, and our society. But even more importantly, they represent a failure of our public education system to provide to every citizen of our country the opportunity to participate in interesting, rewarding careers. This missed opportunity also represents many jobs that our employers will have to export to other countries.

Short-term strategies to address this problem are ineffective because they only

Employers who hire these adults are “betting on their future.” These adults are not limited to typical “job skills.” They have broad skills that demonstrate potential.

produce short-term results. The workplace is constantly changing. Job skills can quickly become obsolete. To survive in today's world, adults need the broad skills necessary to progress and grow throughout their working years.

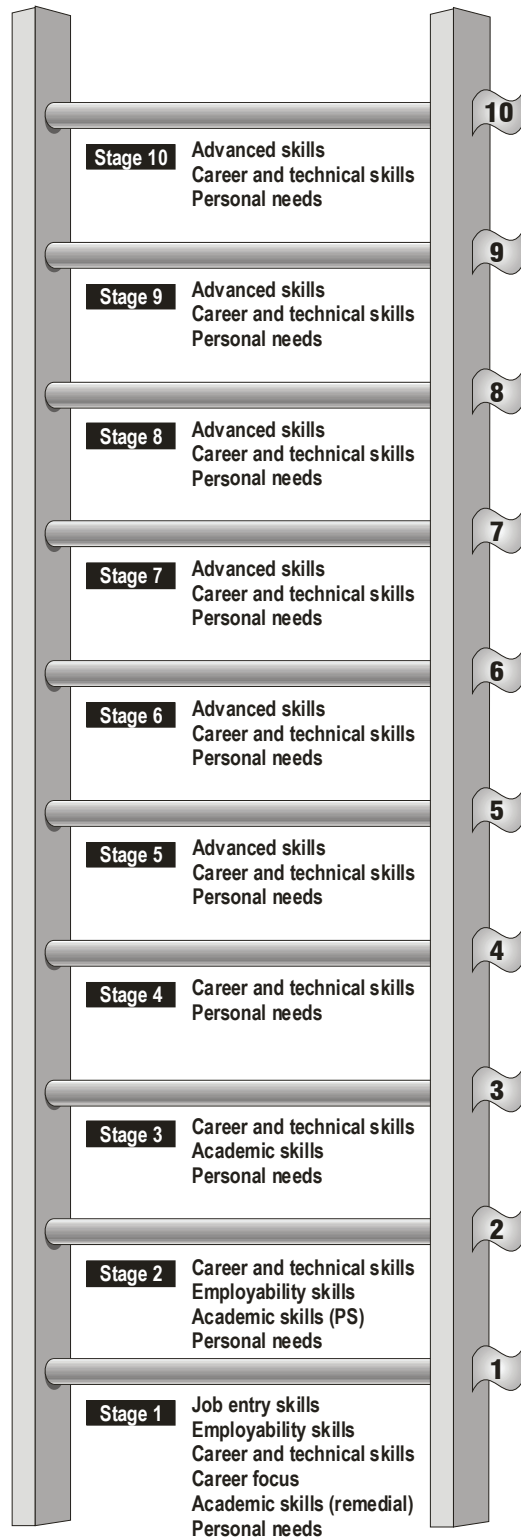
Giving career-limited adults a meaningful "second chance" in education will require a new and different approach.

The ladder curriculum/career ladder strategy proposed in this book is not entirely new or untested, but its use has been limited to careers that are highly regulated and certified. We are suggesting that this strategy be adopted in the many fields that are not regulated or certified. But, to accomplish this, groups of local employers with common job needs will have to create an *informal certification process*. In the last 5–8 years, career and technical education has moved closer to being *standards-based*. Thus, the process for designing and implementing a career ladder curriculum is fairly well understood.

Furthermore, the progress made among academic and technical educators to improve student success for these *applied learners* provides reasonable assurance that such a curriculum is achievable with these adult students.

The greatest challenge will not be the curriculum or the student achievement. It will be finding realistic answers and solutions to the following questions:

**(1) Will employers be willing to make the necessary investment in human capital?** The proposed plan will require that employers hire ACP students after they have completed the first stage of the curriculum, and support their continuing educational pursuit for three years, by providing mentoring, recognition/rewards, paid release time, and reimbursement for educational expenses. This is expensive, but the payoff is long-term employees who can grow in their organizations and help the organizations to prosper. The consequence of not making this investment is that the need for skilled workers will continue to grow, as will the population of underemployed (or



Short-term strategies to address this problem are largely ineffective because they only produce short-term results. The workplace is constantly changing. Job skills can quickly become obsolete. To survive in today's world, adults need the broad skills necessary to progress and grow throughout their working years. To be lifelong *earners*, we must all be lifelong *learners*.


 denotes periodic career advancement milestones marked by raises, promotions, commendations, or any combination thereof. For many ACP students, the first milestone will be job entry.

Figure 3-2. Model Ten-Stage Ladder Curriculum for Adult Career Pathways

unemployed) adults. For employers, it boils down to a choice between paying now and paying later. Employer participation must be supported by commitment at the highest level in the organization.

**(2) Will employers who normally would compete with one another for highly skilled workers be willing to cooperate for the sake of workforce development in their communities?**

If the ACP process is to work, employers who adopt similar career ladders for their ACP students/employees must agree not to “raid” one another’s students/employees while they are in the 3-year ACP program. They must be willing to take the risk that when employees complete their ACP programs, they may elect to “jump ship.” The participating employers must be willing to provide incentives that are sufficient to earn company loyalty.

**(3) Will local employers, college administrators, and state and regional funding and accreditation groups agree on a common curriculum for the ACP that will match their career ladders?**

If local employers insist that the advanced courses on the last four stages be specifically aligned with their companies’ needs, the credits earned for those courses might not be counted toward AS degrees or be transferable to other institutions. (That is, the pathway will be considered *terminal*.) And a college that provides courses that earn only nontransferable credits might not receive full compensation

from its state funding agency. These trade-offs must be explored and agreed upon.

**(4) Will there be sufficient unity, flexibility, and cooperation among colleges, employers, states, and community-based organizations to provide for the personal needs of these adult students until they can “learn enough to earn enough”?**

Financial and personal aid for most ACP students is usually available somewhere in the community. But can it be accessed, organized, prioritized, and accumulated? The process involves two phases.

*In Stage 1*, financial assistance and educational assistance would be funneled to the student from the college (which may receive funds from state allocations, grants, and other sources). Other personal needs may be provided by the college and community/faith-based organizations.

*In the remaining stages* (after the student is employed), most financial and educational expenses will be borne by the student and the employer. Other personal needs (childcare, transportation) should continue to be provided by community/faith-based organizations, until the student/employee can provide for these.

*The leadership and vision necessary to make this plan succeed must come from employers, educators, community leaders, and policymakers at the very highest levels.*

*It’s a huge challenge, but we think it’s doable—and that it must be done. ♦*

The leadership and vision necessary to make this plan succeed must come from employers, educators, community leaders, and policymakers at the very highest levels. It’s a huge challenge, but we think it’s doable—and that it must be done.

The remaining chapter titles are as follows:

Chapter 4: *Putting the Partnership Together*

Chapter 5: *Organizing Employers for Adult Career Pathways*

Chapter 6: *Recruiting and Assessing Students*

Chapter 7: *The Prep Stage*

Chapter 8: *Career Ladders and Ladder Curricula*

Chapter 9: *Who Foots the Bill?*

Chapter 10: *Federal Policies and Programs to Support Adult Career Pathways*

Chapter 11: *State Policy Models to Support Adult Career Pathways*

Chapter 12: *Community, Faith-Based, and Local Organizations to Support Adult Career Pathways*

To purchase copies of the book or for more information on the Adult Career Pathways model and available technical assistance, visit [www.adultcareerpathways.org](http://www.adultcareerpathways.org).