WITH A FOCUS ON THE LEARNER ...

Improve adults' access to job-relevant education and training, and make adult learning experiences more affordable.

**STRATEGY 2:**  
Create new, accessible pathways that make it easier for learners to prepare themselves for career-relevant postsecondary education and training – and to help them move smoothly from adult career-technical programs to a credential or degree program at a two- or four-year campus.

**METRICS:**  
- Increased number of adult Ohioans who earn a GED who continue their education by preparing for and entering a postsecondary credential or degree program.  
- Increased number of adult Ohioans who earn a credential or degree in an adult career-technical program or two-year or four-year college.  
- Increased number of adult career-technical students who continue their education by enrolling in and completing two-year and four-year colleges’ credentialing and degree programs.

Adults face many challenges as they pursue postsecondary credentials, and they have different needs and motivations than traditional college students. It is not surprising, then, that relatively few adults – many of whom left high school before earning a diploma and/or without the knowledge and skills required for postsecondary education – succeed in upgrading their skills, earning needed credentials and becoming self-directed, lifelong learners.

The challenges these adult face are many. An overwhelming majority of adult learners are financially independent, work part or full time, have dependents and must juggle many responsibilities with school. Since most of them are “employees who study” rather than “students who work,” their efforts to get an education are stymied by:

- inflexible course schedules and difficult-to-access locations;
- long course and program duration, and degree programs that are not designed to stretch-out completion over a longer period of time;
- a lack of open-entry, open-exit policies that allow adults to drop out of a course and return in another term, picking up where they left off without having to repeat the entire course;
- a legacy of substandard secondary achievement and, therefore, the need for extensive developmental or remedial education;
- a lack of adult-focused academic and non-academic supports; and
- “chalk and talk” teaching methods that ignore the real-life experiences and knowledge that adults bring to class.
Connecting Learning with Economic Success

Understanding these barriers to learning, the Ohio General Assembly directed the Ohio Board of Regents and Ohio Department of Education to develop a system of pre-college and college-level "stackable certificates" to help adult learners minimize the amount of time they spend in the classroom while maximizing the economic payoff of their efforts and providing a clear pathway to relevant educational experiences.

Consistent with this directive, the University System of Ohio has launched a "stackable certificate" initiative that provides a clear and accessible path for adults seeking to advance their education. It is being designed to help adult learners connect pre-college academic work to credit-bearing career-technical coursework.

With industry-recognized certificates, it will give adults an accessible pathway to college-level degrees and improved employment opportunities. It will:

- Be separate from, but connected to traditional education programs;
- Allow adults to see a transparent path to learning and skill development with an "open door" and drop-in and drop-out opportunities throughout their careers;
- Permit providers to market their programs and services in ways that are not possible now;
- Offer adults a series of small steps with defined rewards that build confidence for both students and employers;
- Avoid the shortcomings of “localized” programs that inhibit student transfer and flexibility;
- Offer “fluid” paths that recognize that adults can be at different levels in each of the skills – math, reading, writing and language; and
- Offer ESL (English as a Second Language) at all pre-college levels, recognizing that it is a unique skill area.

**ACTION RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. **Proceed aggressively to design and implement a competency-based stackable certificates program that offers industry-recognized certificates at both the pre-college and college levels.**
   - This stackable certificates initiative will be based on demonstrated competencies and experiences, as opposed to “seat time” spent in the classroom.
   - Certificates earned while an adult is enrolled in an institution of higher education may be turned into college credit in different subject competencies, subject to standards established by the University System of Ohio.
   - It will allow learners to access ABLE services for preparation through the GED, while focusing college remedial efforts on the transition between the GED and successful placement in the first college level-course.
   - Use the stackable certificates initiative to expand education and training services within Ohio's corrections and rehabilitation system.
In addition, it will give adults an opportunity to take a series of small educational steps with immediate rewards, offering quick benefits as well to employers who invest in the ongoing talent development of their staff.

Offer a variety of college-level stackable certificates through two-year colleges and adult career-technical providers.

2. Ensure that this transparent career pathway connects all of the state’s adult education assets, including the ABLE program, adult career-technical education services, and community and technical colleges’ developmental education programs.

- Align ABLE standards and assessments with the state’s college readiness assessments and standards.
- Expand ABLE services with greater access to them through adult career-technical programs and two-year colleges.
- Create a postsecondary certificate that bridges the gap between the GED and the first college-level course in math and English composition.
- Publicize the benchmarks (cut scores) for a common placement in the first college-level transfer course and align entry and exit assessments among various providers
- Maximize the use of technology both in learning strategies and in distance learning opportunities for ABLE and other adult learners.
- Expand professional development activities for ABLE, AWE and remedial education instructors through the Ohio Resource Center and Ohio Learning Network.

3. Expand and accelerate efforts to connect student data bases among adult education and ABLE providers to track students pursuing postsecondary credential and degrees.

4. Leverage partnerships among education entities with similar goals (e.g., OCAN, TechPrep, OLN, etc.) to increase participation in higher education and to ensure that adult learners have the academic supports required for success.