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Transitioning Adult Learners to College

A User Guide for Ability to Benefit and Adult Dual Enrollment

By Career Ladders Project

CLP

Career Ladders Project

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An Anti-Poverty Strategy: Transitioning Adults into College

Over five million California adults do not have a high school diploma or its equivalency, like a GED®. These Californians face barriers to prosperity because educational attainment and income are linked. Among adults aged 25-64 who don't have a high school diploma/equivalency, over 30% are in poverty compared with just under 8% of adults who are college graduates (Public Policy Institute of California [Poverty in California Fact Sheet](#)). Adults without a high school diploma/equivalency earn less and have a higher rate of unemployment than those with a high school diploma. And in California the percentage of Black, Asian and Latinx adults without high school diplomas is dramatically higher than of whites ([StatisticalAtlas.com](#)). Generally, unemployment rates are lower and wages are higher as adults attain more advanced degrees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [Education pays](#)).



Adult schools in California help adults earn their high school diploma/equivalency and provide a wide range of other offerings from English language learning to technical certificates. In 2019-20, 363,993 adults participated in adult education programs for Adult Secondary Education (ASE), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and English as a Second Language (ESL). Among those adult learners, 7% (26,475) transitioned to a non-developmental course at a community college and only 4% (15,637) completed six or more credit units at a community college (LaunchBoard [Adult Education Data Pipeline](#)).

An Open Door is Not Enough

The good news is that students in California can attend a community college without a high school diploma or its equivalency. In California, unlike most other states, the door to college attainment—and jobs that provide family-sustaining wages with greater potential for economic mobility—is open for adults who have not yet earned a high school diploma/equivalency. However, the unfortunate reality is that students who lack financial resources may not be able to walk through that door because adults without a secondary credential do not readily qualify for many forms of financial aid.

But a remedy is available. Adults without a high school diploma/equivalency can be eligible for federal financial aid, including Pell grants, if they use a special provision in federal law called Ability to Benefit (ATB). Furthermore, California recently passed legislation in 2019 that allows adult students who are enrolled in a GED® or high school diploma equivalency program to register for community college as dual enrollment students. Dual enrollment allows adult students to start college, often tuition-free. Unfortunately, there are few intentional dual enrollment programs to support both secondary and postsecondary credentialing; more are urgently needed.

By opening dual enrollment to adults without a high school diploma/equivalency, California is uniquely positioned to support adult students, their families, and communities. Using ATB and adult dual enrollment in tandem, we can accelerate adult students without a secondary credential toward college attainment and provide financial support toward that goal. For students on the economic margins, this can mean all the difference in certificate and degree attainment.

About This Guide

The information in this guide is intended to help institutions in California—adult schools and community colleges—work in partnership to use ATB and adult dual enrollment as postsecondary transition strategies for adult students without a high school diploma/equivalency. The guide provides background information and outlines the basic requirements for ATB and adult dual enrollment. It also includes tools and approaches to successfully align adult education and college services. (Note: Although ATB is governed by federal law, this guide covers details that are specific to California.)

ATB composes the bulk of this user guide because it is underutilized in California and the majority of adult school and college practitioners aren't familiar with its many technical aspects. Dual enrollment, on the other hand, is common even though California has only recently allowed adults without a high school diploma/equivalency to participate in it. Many colleges already offer dual enrollment for high school students.

Career Ladders Project (CLP) has worked with several colleges and expert practitioners to explore the potential for increasing use of ATB in California and developed this guide in partnership with World Education, Inc. CLP piloted an early version with practitioners at Chaffey College, El Camino College and Ohlone College. The user guide is intended to be a living document, and CLP will update it to reflect any law or regulations change.



Ability to Benefit

Ability to Benefit (ATB) is a provision in the Higher Education Act (HEA) that allows a person who has not yet received a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent to be eligible for Title IV federal student aid. This includes eligibility for federal Pell grants, need-based aid that helps low-income students cover the cost of tuition and living expenses. If a student meets the ATB criteria, they will be able to work toward their high school diploma/equivalency, while simultaneously taking college courses and receiving federal financial aid.

However, the ATB criteria present hurdles for students, particularly those who may have limited resources of time or money. By partnering to provide adult dual enrollment opportunities, adult schools and community colleges can support adult learners in beginning to accumulate college credit toward a certificate or degree while they work toward meeting the ATB criteria.

Why Expand the Use of ATB in California?

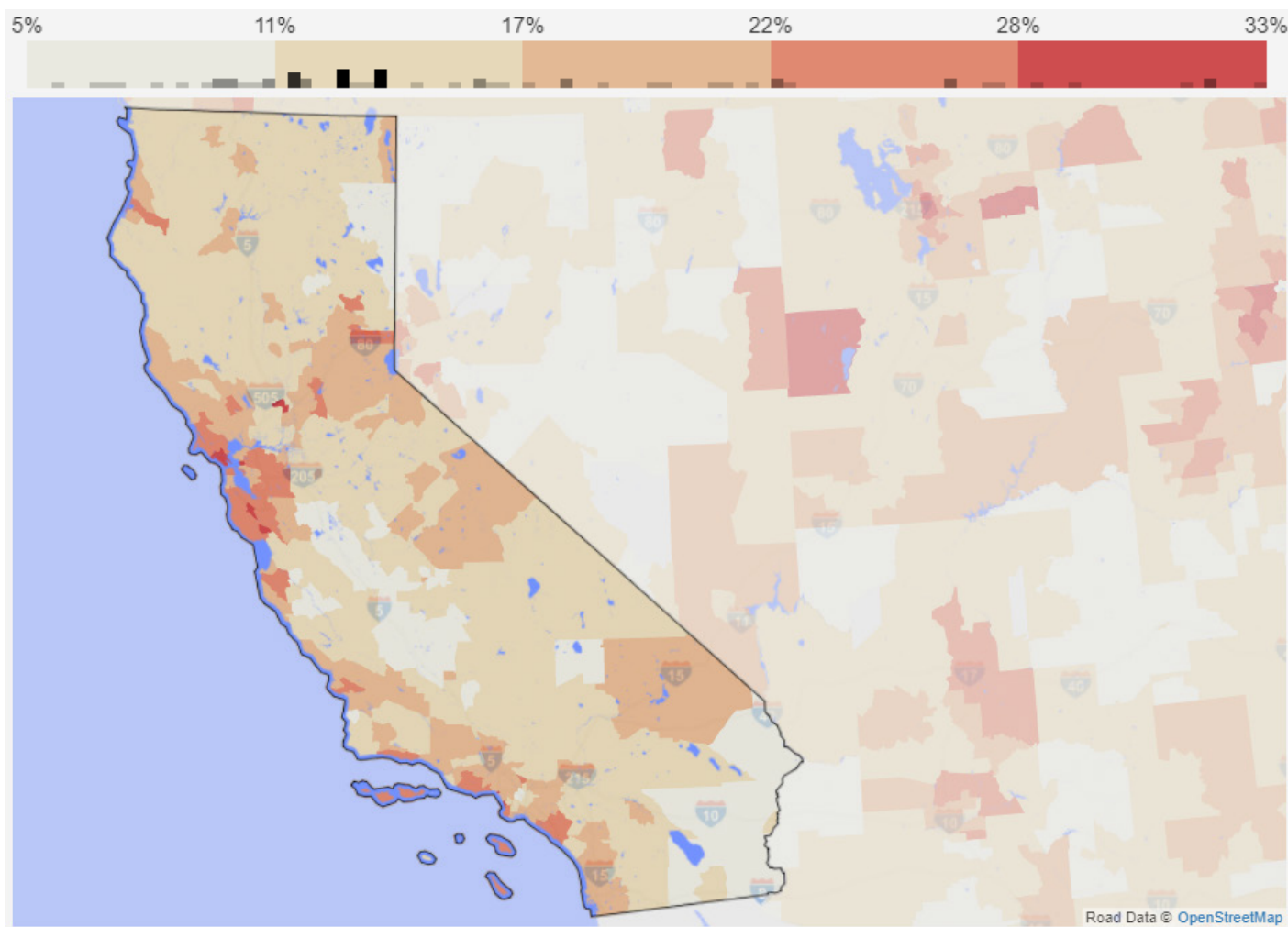
Among U.S. states, California has the largest population of adults without a high school diploma or equivalency. Adults without a high school credential are often locked out of jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and lead to upward economic mobility, and they also aren't eligible for federal financial aid for college. ATB provides an opportunity to make college accessible and affordable for those without a high school credential.

Although less-populated California counties such as Imperial, Colusa, and Tulare have the highest percentages of adults without a high school diploma/equivalency, a number of populous counties including Los Angeles, Fresno, and San Bernardino have more than 20% of adults without a secondary credential. In Los Angeles County alone, there are 1.5 million adults without a secondary credential (see Figures 1 and 2). And the statewide percentage of adults without a high school diploma/equivalency is substantially higher in communities of color (see Figure 3). Using ATB, thousands more California residents might qualify for financial aid to attend college, earn postsecondary credentials, and gain jobs that pay family-sustaining wages. Increasing access to college for this population would also benefit local and regional economies and employers seeking workers with certificates and degrees. Access to college is a way to lift people and their families out of poverty. Unfortunately, ATB is poorly understood and massively underutilized.¹



¹ [Ability To Benefit: Developing a State-defined Process](#)

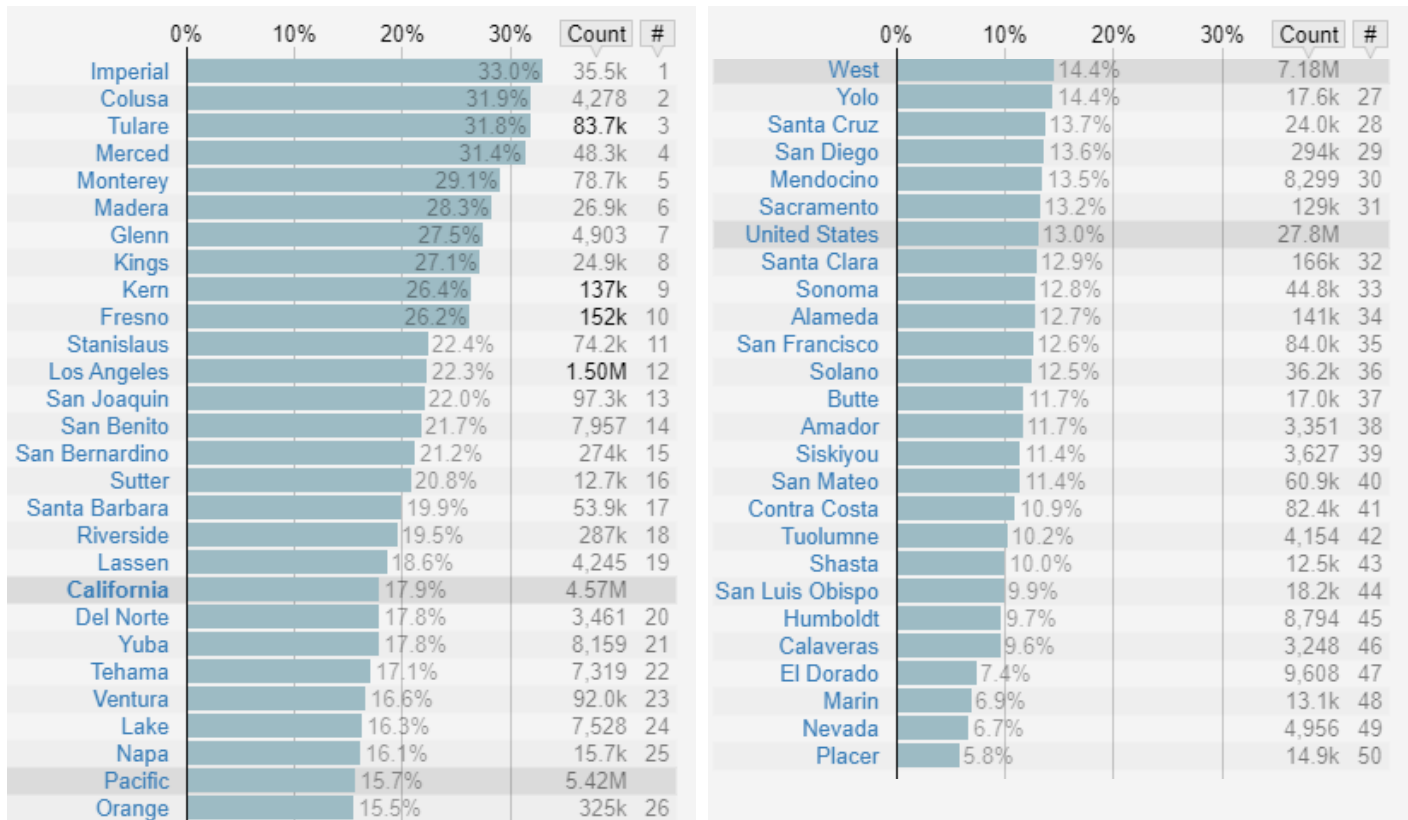
Figure 1. California Map of Adults without a High School Diploma by California County



Note: Percentage of the population 25 years and older with given highest level of educational attainment.

Retrieved from <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/California/Educational-Attainment#data-map/county/coarse:-no-high-school-diploma>. Data presented are from the 2010 U.S. Census and the 2012-2016 American Community Survey.

Figure 2. Percent of Adults without a High School Diploma or Equivalent by California County



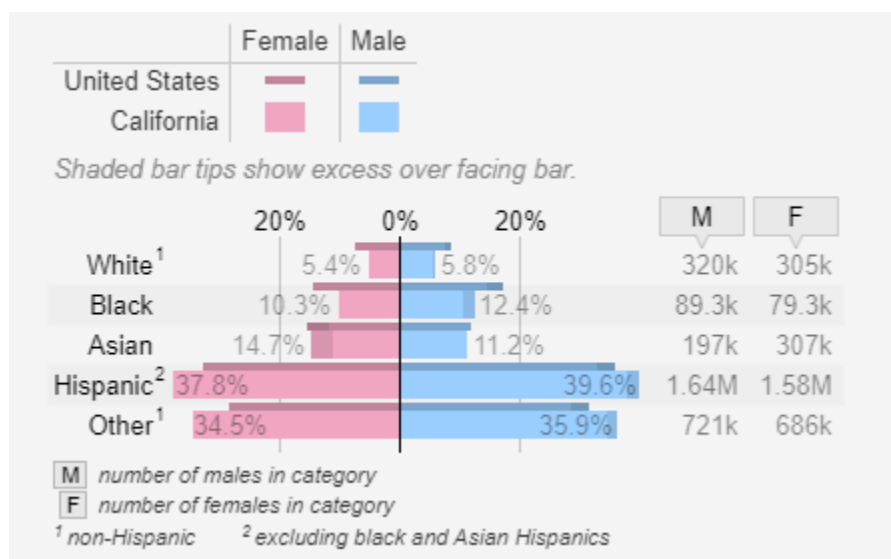
Definitions: number of people in category; #: rank of county out of 50 by percentage of population 25 years of age and older without a high school diploma(or equivalent); adults are 25 years of age or older.

Note: There are 58 counties in California. This section compares the 50 most populous of those to each other, California, and other entities that contain or substantially overlap with California. The least populous of the compared counties has a population of 21,361.

Retrieved from <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/California/Educational-Attainment#figure/county/no-h.s-diploma>. Data presented are from the 2010 U.S. Census and the 2012-2016 American Community Survey.



Figure 3. Percent of Adults without a High School Diploma or Equivalent by Race



Scope: population of the United States and California

Retrieved from <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/California/Educational-Attainment#figure/lacking-high-school-diploma-by-race>.
Data presented are from the 2010 U.S. Census and the 2012-2016 American Community Survey.

Benefits for Adult Schools and Community Colleges

Documenting Measurable Skill Gains

Adult schools are charged with transitioning adult learners to progressively higher levels of education and supporting adults without a secondary credential to achieve a high school diploma or equivalent. Performance toward these goals is assessed using a set of accountability metrics called “Measurable Skill Gains,” which is defined under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)². Five types of [Measurable Skill Gains](#) can be used to demonstrate learning during program participation. Under WIOA Title II funding, adult schools primarily use the Measurable Skill Gains metric known as Educational Function Level, which is documented through pre- and post-testing. In California, however, Measurable Skill Gains can also be achieved by participants through Transition to Postsecondary and demonstrated with a college transcript.

The California Adult Education Pipeline LaunchBoard defines the [Transition to Postsecondary](#) metric as follows:

“Among all ESL, ABE and ASE Participants, the number who transition by enrolling in either a K12 adult education or community college noncredit or credit CTE course, or a non-developmental credit college course for the first time at any institution within the selected or subsequent year.”

² [WIOA Performance Indicators and Measures](#)

Adult schools that use ATB could therefore document Measurable Skill Gains by using the Transition to Postsecondary metric. Furthermore, adult students who complete college courses with the support of ATB can accelerate their attainment of a high school credential or equivalent through dual credit. Dual credit would enable adult learners to utilize the credit earned in the college course at both the adult school and college.

Supporting the Vision for Success and Gaining Supplemental Funding

For the California Community College system to realize its role as a driver of social and economic mobility as outlined in the [Vision for Success](#) and the [Multi-year Roadmap Between the Newsom Administration and the California Community Colleges](#), colleges must engage students furthest from opportunity. Gaining skills, both technical and academic, can help students earn employment at family-sustaining wages. The partnerships built between adult schools and community colleges using Adult Education Block Grants³ have laid a strong foundation to better use strategies like ATB to support student transitions to postsecondary education. ATB can also help support students in transitioning from non-credit to credit classes within a community college.

Community colleges can also benefit from ATB. The Student Centered Funding Formula rewards colleges that serve Pell grant recipients who meet academic milestones. Using ATB can provide financial support for students and enable the college to gain supplemental funding for serving more Pell grant recipients.

Using ATB

When using ATB to fund postsecondary education in California, both the individual student and their chosen educational program must meet specific requirements:

1. The student must be enrolled in a career pathway program that meets the federal definition, and
2. The student must complete one of two options⁴ for ATB.

Program Requirement: Provide Career Pathway Program Services

A career pathway program eligible for ATB must concurrently enroll students in adult education and Title IV-eligible postsecondary programs as well as provide students with course sequences that are articulated and contextualized. The program must contain two primary items: an adult education component integrated with a *Title IV*-eligible postsecondary program component. The college or postsecondary institution determines if a career pathway meets the federal definition and is therefore eligible.

³ California funds community colleges and K-12 adult schools to support the needs of adult learners through Adult Education Block Grants.

⁴ Federal law provides a third option, using a “state-defined process,” for students to qualify for ATB. In this case, the state must have an alternative ATB process approved by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the student’s college must be a participant. This third option, which is not yet available in California, could allow the state to develop an ATB option centered on equity. The three ATB options are also commonly referred to as “alternatives.”

The federal definition of a career pathway program under HEA is identical to the definition under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the Carl D. Perkins Act (Perkins V). HEA defines a career pathway as *“a combination of rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that:*

- A. Aligns with the skill needs of industries in the economy of the State or regional economy involved;*
- B. Prepares an individual to be successful in any of a full range of secondary or postsecondary education options, including apprenticeships registered under the Act of August 16, 1937 ... ;*
- C. Includes counseling to support an individual in achieving the individual’s education and career goals;*
- D. Includes, as appropriate, education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;*
- E. Organizes education, training, and other services to meet the needs of an individual in a manner that accelerates the educational and career advancement of the individual to the extent practicable;*
- F. Enables an individual to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least one recognized postsecondary credential; and*
- G. Helps an individual enter or advance within a specific occupation or occupational cluster.” (U.S. Code § 3102)*

Student Requirement: Complete One of Two ATB Options

Students in California have two options to meet this requirement—a) pass a test, or b) complete at least six applicable college credit hours. The specifics are as follows:

- a. The student must receive a passing score on one of the ATB tests approved by the U.S. Department of Education. Tests must be administered according to federal [ATB Test Policy](#). Each test has a specific score to meet ATB criteria. (An example of the cut scores for Accuplacer and a list of approved tests can be found in the FAQ section of this guide.)
- b. The student must complete at least six credit hours or 225 clock hours that are applicable toward a Title IV-eligible degree or other credential offered by the postsecondary institution. Pre-college level course work, sometimes called remedial or developmental, does not qualify toward this credit hour requirement.

How Adult Dual Enrollment Supports ATB

Both of the ATB options present challenges, particularly for students who are experiencing poverty and students from communities of color. The first option relies on standardized tests, which have a history of inequitable pass rates. Students from underserved populations, particularly communities of color, have experienced adverse impacts from test bias, and California’s postsecondary systems have been moving away from using standardized tests, for several evidence-based reasons. It is doubtful that a student could even find an ATB-eligible testing process.

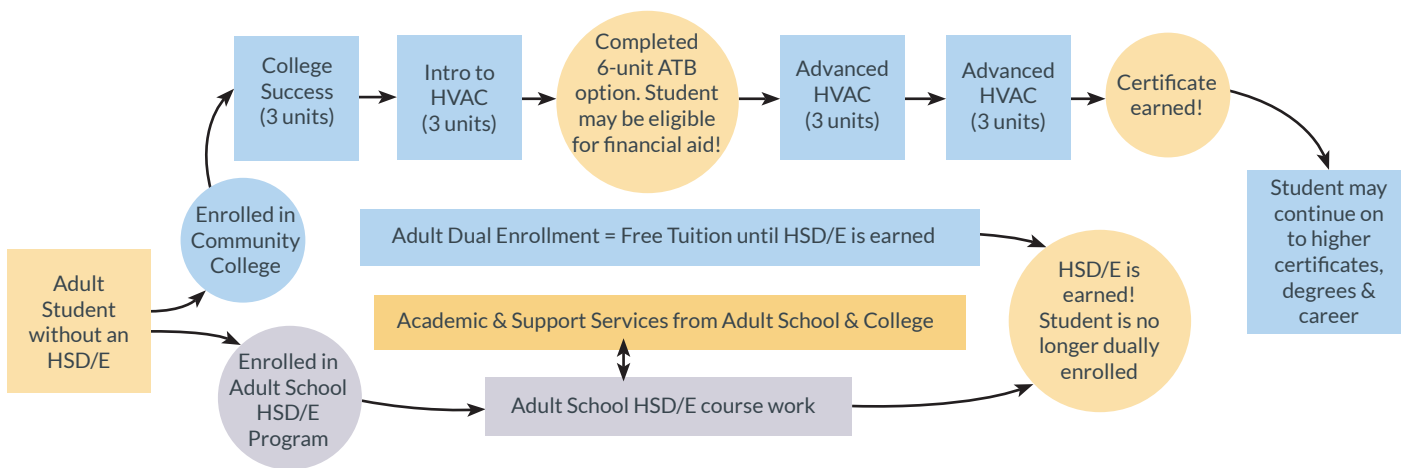
The second option has been proven to be more feasible for many students, especially those in community college settings.⁵ In this option, adult learners must complete at least six credit hours (or 225 clock hours) applicable toward a Title IV-eligible degree or other credential from a postsecondary institution. Although adult learners who take this route would begin to accumulate college credits, they would not receive any federal financial aid until completing the required six hours. This can pose a financial obstacle for many students, but adult schools and community colleges can help students overcome this through adult dual enrollment.

Tuition-free Adult Dual Enrollment

A certain type of dual enrollment, College and Career Access Pathways, requires colleges to waive tuition and fees as well as provide free textbooks and supplies for students. Colleges have the option of making other types of dual enrollment tuition-free and many choose to do so.

Adult dual enrollment is designed for adult students who are enrolled in both a high school diploma program (or equivalency program) and college at the same time. The college can classify these students as special part-time admission, the same enrollment status as high school dual enrollment students. Adult dual enrollment students can often take college courses tuition-free. This would remove financial barriers to completing the required six credit hours to qualify for ATB and gain eligibility for federal financial aid.

Figure 4. Using Adult Dual Enrollment and ATB



The flowchart in Figure 4 shows an example of an adult student taking college courses via adult dual enrollment while enrolled simultaneously in a high school diploma/equivalency (HSD/E) program. Adult dual enrollment allows the student to receive support and take courses in a career pathway program such as HVAC, beginning to accumulate credit toward a postsecondary credential. After successfully completing two courses in the pathway—College Success and Intro to HVAC—the student will have met the ATB six-unit option, and therefore may be eligible for federal financial aid to support completion of a postsecondary credential.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. [Analysis of Ability to Benefit Usage](#).

Growing Aligned ATB

To increase use of ATB, it's important to have support from leadership because both the adult school and college will need to commit resources and time to build and scale ATB processes. These processes also need to be aligned internally within each institution and between the partnering adult school and postsecondary institution.

It's important for each institution to identify an internal champion. This champion can support the growth of ATB by acting as a facilitator or liaison within each institution. Ideally, the champion is a department chair or individual who interacts regularly with the other offices involved in the ATB processes (e.g., Student Navigator). This person will serve as a common link between different areas of the institution and will provide the intake, assessment, documentation, and support necessary to ensure that the student is successful. An ATB champion can also work with the partner institution to smooth the transition for students.

TIP. Identify the ways that potential ATB students contact your programs to learn more about completing a high school credential or equivalency. Explore how you can use these opportunities to generate dialogue on how students can finish their high school equivalency/ GED® and concurrently enroll in a college program.

Tools for Getting Started

The appendix of this user guide includes three tools to help adult schools and colleges expand support for student use of ATB. The tools are described below. You can also [download editable versions](#) from the CLP website.

- The [ATB Planning Tool](#) can help adult schools and colleges establish a baseline for alignment of ATB processes. The tool is organized into internal and external elements. For each element, you will describe the existing conditions at your institution, rate the status of actions taken, and identify next steps for enhancement.
- The [ATB Process Checklist: Option 1 – Test](#) is a form to help document that a student has qualified for ATB using the test option. The checklist outlines the specific steps required and includes a section for recording test scores, along with a sample student acknowledgment.
- The “[ATB Process Checklist: Option 2 – Complete 6 Units](#)” is a form to help document that a student has qualified for ATB using the credit-hour option. It includes a step-by-step list of tasks.

TIP. When building a team and identifying an ATB champion, find the best person or persons to use the ATB Planning Tool. Consider assembling a cross-functional team that includes members from all parts of the education and workforce development community.

Frequently Asked Questions About ATB

This section includes answers to common questions about ATB and links with detailed information.

1. Who approves the career pathway program for ATB enrollment?

Currently each college or institution determines the eligibility of its own career pathways and documents ATB student enrollment in the pathway.

2. What documentation should my college maintain regarding an eligible career pathway program and the students who receive Title IV aid for their enrollment in that program?

The college is responsible for maintaining documentation that each of its eligible career pathway programs meet the requirements as defined in section 484(d)(2) of the HEA and described in [Dear Colleague Letter GEN-16-09](#). This includes documentation that the program includes workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster and is aligned with the skill needs of the state or regional economy.

Also, for each student who received Title IV aid for enrollment in an eligible career pathway program by successfully completing one of the options to qualify for ATB, the institution must document:

- Evidence that the student successfully completed one of the options to qualify for ATB; and
- That the student was enrolled in both the Title IV eligible postsecondary program component and the component that enables an individual to attain a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.

It is the college's responsibility to [document its compliance](#) with all applicable programmatic and student eligibility requirements.

The college must also designate the student as an Ability to Benefit student in the college MIS record after the student successfully completes one of the options to qualify for ATB eligibility. (The two options currently available in California are described in the section on [Using ATB](#). The state has not yet adopted the third option, a "state-defined process.")

3. Does remedial or developmental coursework count toward the six-credit option for ATB eligibility?

No, the requirement is that the six credit hours (or 225 clock hours) must be applicable to a degree or other credential offered by a Title IV eligible postsecondary institution. The completion of remedial or developmental coursework does not qualify.

4. Is an ATB student required to be concurrently enrolled in both a high school diploma (or its recognized equivalent) program and postsecondary coursework throughout the student's enrollment in an eligible career pathway program?

Within the overall scope of the program, a student should be concurrently enrolled in both components; however, it is allowable for there to be times (e.g. between semesters, during summer break) when a student is participating in either the adult education or the postsecondary education but not both simultaneously.

Note that the eligible career pathway program must include a Title IV eligible postsecondary program component as defined under 34 CFR 668.8, and provide a component that enables an individual to attain a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent under 34 CFR 600.2.

Therefore, the eligible career pathway program must be designed in such a way that students participate in both the Title IV eligible postsecondary program component and the component that enables an individual to attain a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. *However, the attainment of a postsecondary credential is not contingent on obtaining a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent.*

Similarly, a student who has met the requirements of the secondary component of the eligible career pathway may be awarded a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent without completing the full program.

Career pathways additionally require that the educational components provide training for introduction to a career or advancement in careers that are in-demand in the regional or state economy, that they are in context with the workforce preparation, and that students are provided career counseling to help them meet their educational goals.

5. Which tests are approved to establish Title IV, HEA eligibility for students without a high school diploma or its equivalent?

The U.S. Department of Education publishes a list of [Approved ATB Tests](#) and accepts new tests for the list annually. Some of the approved tests as of November 2020 are listed below.

- Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA), Forms 1 and 2
- Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
- Spanish Wonderlic Basic Skills Test (Spanish WBST) Verbal Forms VS-1 & VS-2
- ACCUPLACER computer-adaptive tests and COMPANION ACCUPLACER Forms J and K: Reading Test, Writing Test, and Arithmetic Test (Note: As of December 2022, the U.S. Department of Education has provisionally approved this ATB test.)



6. What is the process for testing students for ATB eligibility using the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER testing process for ATB is different from regular ACCUPLACER testing because it must be done through the College Board ACCUPLACER ATB account, 004592. This is a specific testing site reserved only for ATB eligibility testing. ACCUPLACER tests taken through an alternative site are not valid for ATB.

- Tests can only be administered by a certified ATB Test Administrator.
- Tests must be completed in one testing session. Students must pass all parts of the test in a single session.
- More information regarding the [ACCUPLACER ATB test policy](#) is available on the U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid website.

7. What score must a student achieve on the ACCUPLACER ATB test?

A candidate must meet or exceed the minimum scores on each of the three parts of the ACCUPLACER test in a single test administration. Candidates who do not meet or exceed all three passing scores must retake the complete set of three parts and pass all three parts in that test administration. Scores from two different administrations cannot be mixed or combined. A student must pass all three tests during a single test session ([College Board Policies and Procedures for Administering Ability to Benefit Tests 2022](#)).

Approved passing scores can change depending on when the student takes the test. Refer to the test provider (e.g., College Board) for the approved passing scores. As an example, the passing scores from 2019 are shown below:

ACCUPLACER Test Parts	Passing Score
Reading Comprehension	55
Sentence Skills	60
Arithmetic	34

8. How does AB705 figure into this testing requirement?

ATB tests are not used for placement purposes. Although a particular test may be used for placement in some instances, for the purpose of ATB, the test is used to document an individual's ability to benefit from postsecondary education and federal financial aid eligibility.

AB705 was a bill that eliminated developmental and remedial education in the community colleges in favor of directly placing students into transfer-level college English and math, paired with concurrent supports for students who might need them. This essentially eliminated the use of placement tests at community colleges in California. As a result, it's doubtful that a student could even find an ATB-eligible testing process at a community college.

9. After a student qualifies for ATB, how do they then access federal financial aid?

After a student meets ATB criteria and becomes eligible for federal financial aid, they should work with the adult school or college to access financial aid.

10. When is a student no longer considered an ATB student?

A student who gained Title IV eligibility under ATB is an ATB student until the student obtains a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent. At that point, the student can enroll in any Title IV eligible postsecondary program and receive Title IV assistance (assuming they meet all other eligibility requirements).

11. How can we share ATB opportunities with potential students?

To easily identify ATB participants, it's important to partner with internal and external stakeholders to share ATB options and eligibility criteria.

Two common ways that potential ATB participants connect with the college are:

- Working with the Adult Basic Education departments and other community programs to learn more about getting their GED® or high school diploma/equivalency

- Applying for entrance to a college program where the potential student indicates that they do not have a high school diploma or equivalent credential

All potential candidates should be guided to a one-on-one meeting with an adult school or college staff member to determine their eligibility for ATB. This function is often performed by a Student Navigator or Academic Transition Specialist.

12. Some colleges use a Student Navigator to coordinate the ATB process. What does a Student Navigator do?

The Student Navigator connects current and prospective students to the appropriate student support services experts in the relevant areas of the application process: financial aid, programs of study, program qualifications, course content, course selection, advising, registration, admissions, and college pathways opportunities.

The Student Navigator also helps students identify career goals by supporting activities such as career exploration, decision making, college choices, and searching for jobs using a variety of resources based on the needs of the student.

13. Who should be involved with this work outside of my institution?

Stakeholder partners in your community include workforce boards, job centers, community-based organizations, and others who may have contact with potential ATB students.

Colleges are encouraged to use the [ATB Planning Tool](#) to explore opportunities for alignment with internal and external partners.

14. Where can I find more resources and information about ATB?

The National College Transition Network maintains an [Ability to Benefit Resource page](#) with a wealth of information including federal guidance, practitioner-informed resources, and relevant data and research.

TIP. Consider direct communication and marketing to reach students through social media and in the community. Some ideas include:

- Job centers/One-stop agencies
- Staffing agencies and local businesses
- Social media (e.g., Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat)
- Internal and external visual marketing (e.g., flyers, posters, billboards, brochures)
- High schools, particularly school officials (guidance counselors and social workers) who work with students who are 18 or older and are at risk for not graduating from high school
- Community centers (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, YWCA)
- Community agencies including social services agencies, workforce and job centers
- Local churches and community-based organizations

Adult Dual Enrollment

Adult dual enrollment is designed for adult students who are enrolled in a high school diploma program (or equivalency program) and college at the same time. The college can classify these students as special part-time admission, which is the same enrollment status as for high school dual enrollment students.

As noted in the [Ability to Benefit](#) section, adult school and college partnerships can use adult dual enrollment to support adult learners in beginning to accumulate college credit toward a certificate or degree while they work toward meeting the ATB criteria and becoming eligible for financial aid.

Why Dual Enrollment for Adult Learners?

College and career readiness efforts are restructuring the relationship between secondary and postsecondary institutions and providing real results for high school students. To support our local economies and communities, an equally important effort focused on adult learners is needed. Dual enrollment for adult learners is one way to meet this need.

The U.S. Department of Education Institute of Educational Sciences What Works Clearinghouse documents dual enrollment programs' medium to large positive impacts for high school students across these core outcomes:

- Completing high school
- General academic achievement
- College access and enrollment
- Credit accumulation
- College degree attainment⁶

Postsecondary institutions have had wide success working across institutional boundaries and bureaucracies to create dual enrollment options for in-school youth. Recognizing that these programs are “powerful and impactful,” states introduced 168 pieces of dual enrollment legislation in 2019.⁷ Important efforts focus on college acceleration strategies for low-income and minority high school students as an equity strategy.⁸ Although the evidence base has not yet been established supporting use of similar strategies with adults, the potential of dual enrollment to benefit adult learners without a high school diploma/equivalency is compelling.

Adult Dual Enrollment and ATB

In California, there are millions of older youth and adults without a high school diploma/equivalency who can benefit from career pathway programs that integrate education and training, accelerating secondary and postsecondary credential attainment.

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, [What Works Clearinghouse](#). (2017, February). Transition to College intervention report: Dual Enrollment Programs.

⁷ [Who's College in High School? July Spotlight Out Now!](#)

⁸ [Getting a Jump on College: How To Strengthen the Benefits Of Dual Enrollment and Other College Acceleration Strategies For Low-income and Minority High School Students](#)

Adult career pathway programs produce outcomes:

[C]areer pathway participants are employed and retained in employment at higher rates and attain higher wages and annual earnings than students with similar characteristics who enroll in training that does not use a career pathway approach. They also earn entry-level credentials and gain basic skills at higher rates than the comparison group.⁹

Fortunately, the federal legislation that can support adults in dual enrollment to attain secondary and postsecondary credentials already exists.¹⁰ The Higher Education Act (HEA) Ability to Benefit (ATB) provision provides access to federal financial aid, primarily Pell Grants, which allow an adult without a high school credential to simultaneously complete the high school credential while earning a postsecondary credential. (See the section on Ability to Benefit for more information.)

The California legislature recognized the benefits of dual enrollment for adults in 2019 when they passed Senate Bill 554 that allows adults in GED® or high school equivalency certificate programs to enroll simultaneously in community college as special part-time students. This is also known as dual enrollment.

Creating an Adult Education Partnership: Strategies for Coordinators

Adult education to college transition strategies, like dual enrollment and ATB, start with a partnership between colleges and institutions serving adult learners. These are usually adult schools run by K-12 schools or districts, but may also include county offices of education and community-based organizations. Sharing a solid understanding of each partner's limits, strengths, and areas of flexibility is essential to a strong partnership. The partners will face numerous decisions together, so a successful adult education dual enrollment partnership depends on cooperation.

This section, geared for partnerships in California, outlines six of the most important topics to discuss. The appendix of this user guide includes an [Adult Dual Enrollment Planning Tool](#) to guide discussion.

- 1. Choosing courses.** Coordinators should start by deciding whether they want to include courses that are part of defined pathways at the college. Questions to consider include:
 - If the courses are part of pathways, do they build on adult school offerings? Would the courses help address college access, completion, and transfer rates for groups of students that are typically underrepresented in college?
 - If the students want to use ATB, does the pathway meet the eligibility criteria?
 - If the courses are not part of a pathway, would they fill an immediate or long-term need at the adult school such as credits for high school diploma equivalency? Would they help students prepare to continue in college?
 - What supports will the adult education dual enrollment partnership offer students?

⁹ Bragg, D. D., Endel, B., Soricone, L., & Acevedo, E. (2019, July). What Works for Adult Learners: Lessons from Career Pathway Evaluations. Retrieved February 22, 2020, from <https://jfforg-prod-prime.s3.amazonaws.com/media/documents/SPUB-Adult-Learners-070219.pdf>

¹⁰ [Federal Guidance Explains How the Ability To Benefit Provision Aligns with a Career Pathway](#)

- 2. Scheduling and location.** Where the courses meet and at what time of day also has implications for the shape of an adult education dual enrollment partnership. Courses held on the adult school campus during the regular school day are accessible to more students, including those who may not otherwise go to college. But scheduling may pose a challenge because adult school and college schedules rarely line up; for example, the college semester might start before the adult school semester and end sooner. Sometimes, a college might delay starting a course and offer flexibility in how often it meets. And the total time a student must spend in class and on related coursework is governed by Carnegie units (a time-based measure of educational attainment used by American universities and colleges).

Holidays and local school district schedules should be considered in the choice of locating and scheduling adult education dual enrollment courses. Many adult school students are parents or caregivers of school-aged children and may be affected by local school district schedules.

- 3. Ensuring strong communication among the partners.** Planning for ongoing, open communication among the partners will help them anticipate issues before they become problems. And it will help the partners to resolve the logistical challenges of dual enrollment that are inevitable, especially in scheduling and transportation.
- 4. Student recruitment, enrollment, and external communication.** Partners should consider all the steps that students must take to learn about and then to complete the college application and enrollment process. Applying to and enrolling in college can be especially challenging for first-generation college students who don't have "college knowledge" in their families. It is essential for adult education dual enrollment partnerships to reach out to underrepresented groups and communicate clearly with families to ensure everyone understands that the benefits and opportunities offered by dual enrollment are meant for all students. Outreach to adult school staff and faculty is equally important as they are a direct resource for adult school students.
- 5. Instructor selection and support.** All adult education dual enrollment courses are considered college courses and therefore must be taught by instructors who meet [minimum qualifications](#) set by the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges. Generally, to teach an academic class, a college instructor must have a master's degree in the discipline; to teach career technical education, an instructor must have an associate degree or bachelor's degree and a specified amount of recent experience depending on the program. Individual colleges may impose additional requirements.

Adult education dual enrollment instructors are hired and approved by the college, whether they are adult school or high school teachers who meet the college's qualifications or they work regularly as instructors at the college. It's important to note that colleges must always follow their own bargaining agreements, which may mandate that they offer a dual enrollment course first to senior instructors at the college before a new hire (even if the new hire is a teacher at the adult school who is qualified and eager to teach the course).

After instructors are selected, they need support. Those who regularly work as college instructors may not have expertise in teaching methods, even if they have specialized knowledge in the subject area they are teaching. And adult school teachers may need support learning the college's grading system, course outlines and objectives, and expected learning outcomes.

6. Type of agreement governing the partnership. Dual enrollment in California takes on different characteristics depending on whether the partnership chooses to make an agreement governed by the College and Career Access Pathways law (known as CCAP or AB 288) or a different kind of agreement. CCAP partnerships are between a community college district and either a K-12 school district, a charter school governing organization, or a county office of education. A CCAP partnership can include adult schools when they are part of an eligible partner institution and the adult students are in a high school equivalency or GED® program.

Following CCAP allows college classes that are offered on a high school campus during the school day to be limited to high school students and focused on students who may not otherwise be college-bound. Under CCAP, dual enrollment classes must be designed along pathways, and the college may collect funding for the classes without reducing funding to the high school as long as students meet the minimum instructional minutes for the high school.

A non-CCAP partnership must focus on advanced scholastics or career technical education, or both, and its courses must be open to the public in order for the college to claim state funding. A high school or K-12 district that independently funds non-CCAP dual enrollment courses can limit access to them.

Appendix: Tools

Editable versions of the tools in this appendix can be downloaded from the [CLP website](#).

ATB Planning Tool

Internal Considerations	Current State: Note the current state of this element.	Not Applicable	No Action Yet	In Progress	Implemented	Next Steps: Note next action steps for enhancing this element.
Internal Elements to Consider						
The adult school/ college has leadership support to fully utilize the provisions of Ability to Benefit (ATB).						
The adult school/ college has a mechanism to engage all parts of the institution around a collaborative strategy to expand the use of ATB.						
The adult school/ college offers academic support services such as tutoring, study skills training and mentoring to support ATB students.						
The adult school/ college has a mechanism to inform ATB students of available support services.						
The adult school/ college's processes are aligned in such a way that all potential ATB students can quickly and efficiently find the information they need.						
The adult school/ college has a process to monitor ATB student progress toward completing their High School Equivalency/GED and program requirements.						
The adult school/ college has connections with community and/or workforce partners to assist the student in accessing wrap-around support services such as financial aid, scholarships, childcare assistance, transportation assistance, food assistance and healthcare assistance.						

External Considerations	Current State: Note the current state of this element.	Not Applicable	No Action Yet	In Progress	Implemented	Next Steps: Note next action steps for enhancing this element.
External Elements to Consider						
The adult school/college has a process around community engagement and has identified the key stakeholders in workforce, industry and the community.						
The adult school/ college has a process in place to engage stakeholders for outreach and referral of students who can benefit from ATB.						
The adult school/ college has a strategy or plan to strengthen and maintain partnerships with external stakeholders.						
The adult school/ college has a strategy or plan to engage business and other industry stakeholders to ensure that ATB options align with in-demand career pathways.						
Ability to Benefit options are promoted externally and in collaboration with the adult school/college marketing department.						

ATB Process Checklist: Option 1 - Test

This form can help document that a student has qualified for ATB using the test option.

ATB Test	Initials & Date Completed
Meet with financial aid specialist	
Apply for financial aid	
Notify Assessment Center of student taking ATB test	
Schedule ATB test	
Take ATB test	
Notify financial aid office of ATB test scores	
Schedule appointment with advisor/counselor	
Review ATB results with advisor/counselor	
Confirm eligibility for ATB with financial aid office	

ATB Test Score Information

- The student must pass all three (3) parts of the Accuplacer test in one sitting.
- If one or more parts is/are not passed, the student must wait two (2) weeks to retest and must take all three (3) parts again.

Subject area	Assessment Center			Student's Score
	General Education Score Requirements	Program Requirements	SAMPLE ATB Score Requirements** (For financial aid purposes only)	
Arithmetic	250*		34**	
Algebra	250*		Not applicable for ATB	
Reading	250		55**	
Sentence Skills	250		60**	

*Some program courses require Accuplacer Scores higher than 250.

****IMPORTANT NOTE:** These score requirements are only samples. Passing scores are subject to change each year. You must consult the test provider for current passing scores.

ATB Scheduled Check-Ins		
This section may be helpful in supporting the student to stay on track. Check-in meetings are not part of the required ATB documentation. College and/or adult school program staff can use these check-ins to connect students with resources including basic needs and academic supports, review program and ATB requirements, and connect student to offices such as financial aid and the assessment center.		
Date	Comments	Advisor/ Counselor Initials

ATB Process Checklist: Option 2 - Complete 6 Units

This form can help document that a student has qualified for ATB using the credit-hour option.

Student Name: _____ Email: _____

Student ID: _____

Advisor: _____ HS Completion Option: _____

Activity	Initials & Date Completed
Complete CAEP assessment/orientation	
Determine program pathway	
Complete CCC Apply and Adult School Intake Form	
Confirm path to apply for ATB is completion of six (6) credits. (The student will not pursue the ATB test option.)	
Met ATB requirements for six (6) credits of postsecondary coursework (The student must successfully complete courses with a "C" or better. These cannot include developmental education credits. These credits can be earned at any HEA Title IV eligible program/institutions, not only at the institution implementing an ATB strategy.)	
Print and attach unofficial transcript with classes that qualify	
Review documentation with financial aid office representative	
Print and attach proposed student schedule	

Adult Dual Enrollment Planning Tool for Co-locating Courses at an Adult School

Adult education dual enrollment partnerships can use this tool to guide discussion of the six key topics. This list of questions is meant as a starting point for building a partnership. Other issues will come up.

1. Choosing courses:

- What criteria are we using to select our adult education dual enrollment courses? Are they part of a pathway? Will they fill immediate or long-term needs at the adult school?
- How are we embedding supports such as tutoring and college knowledge? Are we utilizing non-credit college classes for additional support?
- How do we design outreach and support to serve traditionally underrepresented students?

2. Scheduling and location:

- Are the classrooms we plan to use appropriate (size, lecture hall vs. properly equipped lab, sufficient internet access)?
- If students have days without college classes (for example, at the beginning of the adult school semester, before the college semester begins), how will they spend their time?
- Can we arrange relevant workshops or college speakers?
- Will the college course meet twice a week? Five days a week?
- Will student schedules consistently match?
- If a class is held at the adult school, then it must remain open to the public (due to requirements attached to funding). How can the school prepare for members of the general public being on campus?

3. Ensuring strong communication among the partners:

- Is there a planning team or advisory group?
- What is our procedure for sharing student data, such as grades, between schools?
- Who are the points of contact on each campus?
- How will we convey campus policies to instructors? How will we identify their point of contact and convey that information to them?

4. Student recruitment, enrollment, and external communication:

- How do we ensure all students know about adult education dual enrollment? Do we have events? What other outreach are we planning?
- How do we support students in applying and enrolling? Will instructors, counselors, and outreach personnel from the college or adult school lead this?
- How do we communicate about and address incomplete applications or enrollments?

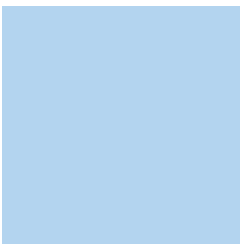
5. Instructor selection and support:

- What training or support do our adult education dual enrollment instructors need to teach students who may need basic needs supports? Do they know the local students?
- Do the instructors have support in using innovative classroom methods?
- Do the instructors know how to work with special needs students?
- Do instructors know how to ensure student safety and privacy?

- Do instructors know the procedures for dealing with issues such as a fire alarm or if a student takes ill during class?

6. Type of agreement governing the partnership:

- Is the adult school governed by a K-12 school district? If yes, is there already a College and Career Access Pathways (CCAP agreement) between the K-12 district and the college district?
- Would adult students benefit more from “closed” college courses as allowed by CCAP or courses open to the general public and located on an adult school campus?
- Is the partnership amenable to the requirements of CCAP such as data sharing and impacted courses being unallowable ?





Career Ladders Project promotes equity-minded community college redesign. We collaborate with colleges and their partners to discover, develop, and disseminate effective practices. Our policy work, research, and direct efforts with colleges lead to system change — and enable more students to attain certificates, degrees, transfers, and career advancement.

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