

How Can We Support Adult Learner Success in Adult & Continuing Education Programs?

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In a recent survey, over half of adult learners (56%) in the eastern Ontario region indicated that they joined Adult & Continuing Education (A&CE) to complete their high school diploma. It is likely that this group of adults did not have the support they needed to fulfill their high school requirements in the regular high school system. This document outlines six tips for supporting adult learner success in A&CE programs.

01 The more flexibility, the better.

Adults have complex lives with multiple responsibilities (e.g., work, family, etc.). Flexible A&CE program options, like hybrid learning, online learning, and evening classes, enable adults to fit education into their busy schedules. Flexible course completion schedules are also helpful when adults encounter personal or family issues.

02 Pathway planning is essential.

There are a number of pathways that adult learners can pursue (e.g., high school completion, employment certification, career retraining, course upgrading for post-secondary education). Trained guidance counsellors can help adults develop and monitor individual pathway plans.

03 Build in regular check-ins.

Adult learners benefit from regular check-ins with at least one A&CE staff member. Check-ins help adults feel connected to their program and cared for by staff.

04 Provide learning supports.

Learning supports are critical for adult learner success. Some adult learners may have learning gaps that can be addressed through programs like literacy basic skills (LBS) or individual tutoring. Other adult learners may have learning disabilities that require special education assistance. The availability of homework help (in-person or virtual) is beneficial for all adult learners.

05 Make adults aware of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

Prior learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) allows eligible adult learners to earn up to 26 high school credits for past work, life, and learning experiences. PLAR honours adults' experiences and helps them earn a high school diploma quickly.

06 Offer wraparound services.

Wraparound services help meet the holistic needs of adult learners, like transportation, childcare, food, and mental health services. A&CE programs that offer wraparound services remove barriers to success, making it easier for adult learners to focus on their educational goals.