

Community Education Pathways to Success
Preparing Young Adults for GED Programs

A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTATION



YDI

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

ABOUT THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Youth Development Institute (YDI) is an intermediary organization. Founded in 1991, YDI strengthens non-profit organizations and public agencies and builds programs that address gaps in services, in New York City and nationally. It provides training, on-site technical assistance, conducts research, develops practice and policy innovations, and supports advocacy. YDI's work is founded on several principles: caring and sustained relationships with adults, safety, belonging, opportunity to build competency and mastery, engaging activities, high expectations, and student voice and participation.¹ These principles form the youth development framework, which research over many years has determined are important in enabling youth to achieve positive outcomes and a successful transition to adulthood. YDI applies these principles across all youth fields including education, after-school, services to youth who have dropped out, and internships and across all key institutions including schools, community-based organizations, colleges, and major institutions such as museums and libraries that have programs for young people.

YDI's research, training, coaching, and organizational and program development is tailored to each field and institution, and helps them to apply promising lessons from research and practice so that they operate efficiently and the young people they serve grow and develop through powerful, sustained, and joyful experiences. YDI helps organizations to design their programs based on sound knowledge about what works and provides their leaders and staff with the information and skills to implement them effectively. Additionally, YDI addresses gaps in youth services by developing new programs and policies for populations that are inadequately addressed. YDI's major projects are rigorously evaluated by independent firms, and the results published and widely disseminated to advance the field.

¹ Eccles, J. and J. Gootman, eds. Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. (Washington, D.C: National Academy Press, 2002).

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INTRODUCTION

A GUIDE TO IMPLEMENTATION

Preparing Young Adults for GED Programs Community Education Pathways to Success

CEPS has allowed our students to accept success as an option and fostered positive initiative among them, supporting their transformation into dedicated, responsible, educated, accountable, motivated, and self-sufficient young adults.

-DREAMS

Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS), an initiative of the Youth Development Institute, serves young adults who read between a 4th- and 8th-grade level. Through CEPS, YDI builds the capacity of community-based organizations to serve these young people with a highly structured and integrated program. CEPS enables young adults to get on track to a GED, higher education, and a career.

In CEPS:

- Community-based programs meld high quality instruction, personal support, and career development within a youth development framework.
- Staff teams embrace a unified philosophy and communicate consistent and coherent messages.
- Young adults take charge of their own academic and personal development and move forward

This guide provides an overview of CEPS, its core elements and principles, and examples of strategies and practices. It is intended to help practitioners and others understand what CEPS is and how it works. It is not, however, intended as a stand-alone guide for implementing strong education programs for young adults, but rather to be accompanied by hands-on assistance and training from YDI. For organizations that do not work with YDI, the guide will provide information about how an effective program is structured.

This guide draws from the successes as well as the struggles of practitioners. The work, while often rewarding, is not easy. Commitment to the young people is a hallmark of the programs. This guide attempts to convey how that commitment is translated into action that makes a difference.

This guide is organized in four sections:

**Section 1 - CEPS: A Vision for Young Adults and the Community
Organizations that Serve Them**

[Section 2 - The CEPS Program Model](#)

[Section 3 - Seven Stages of Student Progression Through CEPS](#)

[Section 4 - What Organizations Need to Implement CEPS](#)

Extensive additional material regarding work with young adults is available on the YDI website (www.ydinstitute.org), including a description of the College Access and Success initiative and detailed description of effective practices in *Promising Practices In Working with Young Adults*.

SECTION I

CEPS: A VISION FOR YOUNG ADULTS AND THE
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE THEM

WHY CEPS?

At any given time in the United States, 3.8 million young adults aged 16 to 24 are out of school and out of work.¹ In New York City, that number hovers around 170,000 young adults, of whom 148,000 are between the ages of 16 and 21 and are still eligible to be enrolled in the public school system. The reasons why these young people have disconnected are varied, but a significant percentage has difficulty with reading, writing, and mathematics—close to 70% enter high school reading below the 8th grade level.² Falling behind in credits and older than their peers, these young people leave school without a diploma and with limited prospects for the future.

In recent years, new options have become available to support them. In 2005, the New York City Department of Education established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation to help young people aged 16 to 21 who are over-age and under-credited. Transfer High Schools and part-time afternoon/evening programs (Young Adult Borough Centers) confer a high school diploma to those who complete the New York State graduation requirements of 44 credits and pass five Regents exams. Part-time and full-time GED programs prepare students to take the exam for a GED.

Some of these young people, however, will not return to school. In some cases, it may not make sense for them to return if they have too few credits to have any chance of completing before they age out of the public system at 21. For those reading below the 8th grade level, appropriate services are scarce. They may seek employment, but lacking a diploma or GED, their best employment choices are limited to low wage, dead-end jobs, if that. The emerging economy is of particular concern for these young adults. Indeed, the last economic recovery in New York City bypassed youth completely and the economic crisis of 2008 bodes ill for their future prospects.

For these young people there are few options. Funding from both federal and state sources stresses GED and job-readiness (e.g., the Workforce Investment Act and GED-preparation programs). Adult literacy programs, supported by the major funding stream for low-literacy students, often have a culture and structure geared toward a more mature student, while funding levels limit the resources available for counseling and other supports essential for the young-adult population.

CEPS was created to reconnect these young people to learning and get them on the path to further education and productive employment. The model is an

¹ Laudon Y. Aron. 2006. *An Overview of Alternative Education*. The Urban Institute. Pg. 1.

² The New York City Department of Education. 2006. *Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation: Developing and Strengthening Schools and Programs that Lead to High School Graduation and Post-Secondary Opportunities for Over-Age, Under-Credited Youth*. Pg. 18.

intentional departure from conventional programs that focus on job placement with limited attention to education. CEPS recognizes that reading is at the heart of all parts of the GED exam, regardless of the topic area, and that the skills of proficient readers are also the skills of proficient thinkers and workers. CEPS helps young people raise their reading and math skills, build enjoyment of reading, and gives them the tools and inspiration to look beyond the GED to plan for productive futures. CEPS emphasizes awakening an enjoyment of learning in young people.

CEPS was established by YDI in 2005, in collaboration with America's Choice, Inc. (ACI), and in partnership with community-based organizations across New York City. The pilot began with three organizations, expanded to six in 2006, and then to eight in 2009. The model continues to be refined, but evaluations indicate that YDI is successfully building the capacity of community-based organizations to implement CEPS. Funding has come from the Altman, Clark, W.K. Kellogg, and Pinkerton foundations, Deutsche Bank, and the New York Community Trust.

Across sites, the CEPS model is achieving impressive student outcomes consistently. Students are making large academic gains and significant numbers are moving into GED-level programs across all sites. Sites have been able to increase levels of student retention sharply as they have received assistance and gained experience. (Copies of evaluation documents are available on the YDI website at www.ydinstitute.org.)

Sites were able to scale up while maintaining the same level of gains in student literacy. “Between the second and third year, CEPS sites from Cohorts one and two almost doubled both the number of students they were serving and the number of students staying in the program, while keeping the same level of increase in literacy scores.”³

Recruitment has been successful. The sites have no trouble attracting students. All programs have as many students as they could serve and some have waiting lists of up to 150 students. It is clear that CEPS responds to a significant issue for a sizeable portion of the young adult population.

A team approach makes a difference. Staff that works together and are unified in their support of students conveys coherent messages. Staff communicates the enjoyment of reading. These have a powerful effect on the direction young people take and the life choices they make.

CEPS has focused on building an integrated model with learning at the center. Because of resource variations, sites vary in their ability to provide stipends and

³ Campbell, P. and J. Weisman. 2008. *Youth Development Institute: Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS) - Final Evaluation Report*.

work experiences. While all sites have performed well and demonstrated continuous growth, when these incentives are present, they add considerably to the overall program. YDI is working with local and national funders to build out these elements of the model so that they are available to all sites.

WHAT CAN CEPS DO FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

CEPS is designed to help young people:

- Become literate, engaged learners.
- Get on track for the GED and beyond.
- Take the initiative about their education and career development.
- Acquire strategies to overcome obstacles and stay on their path.
- Plan their futures and take steps to achieve their ambitions.

CEPS seeks to strengthen young people's resolve—not just to get to and pass the GED, but to raise their aspirations and put college in their sights. The goals are made explicit to young people in every stage of the program, and are reinforced in messages, practices, and plans.

When young people sign up for CEPS, they are seeking a credential that will help them get a job. What they discover as they get involved in the program is an enjoyment of reading and writing and strengths and talents they might not have known they possessed.

Young people are making bigger gains at a faster rate than their counterparts in non-CEPS programs. They are moving on to GED programs, and reclaiming their futures.

What makes the difference?

- Adults and peers who care about them in a place that offers opportunities as well as necessary supports
- Rigorous, compelling academics with “rituals and routines” that help them develop habits of mind and provide consistency and structure
- Explicit strategies for reading comprehension that gives each of them a toolbox which they can draw upon in any situation
- Books and libraries are part of the program setting
- Connections to next steps and practical life planning
- Primary Person or anchor who is always there for the young person

WHO ARE CEPS STUDENTS?

While growing up, school wasn't so easy for me. I had trouble going to the next grade. I got left back in the second grade. I would get frustrated very quickly. People would say things to discourage me, and I would fall for them. I didn't have any confidence in myself. As I was getting older, I started to change, my grades got better and my behavior was improving a lot. Then I went to high school and I started messing up again. School was always a struggle for me so I just stopped going.

In November 2007, I started the DREAMS Young Adult Training Program. Because of my scores I was placed in the CEPS class. This was the best class for me because I was able to understand the work and soon do well. I was doing a lot better. I am more focused now. At DREAMS I had to go through mental toughness training. I didn't think I was going to make it, but thanks be to the most high God, I made it through. I cried a little but I still survived. I am now in the GED class and on my way to my dreams.

-DREAMS program participant

Many CEPS students have endured hardships but have rebounded with courage. They are willing to try again.

They read between the 4th- and 8th-grade levels. Most have decoding skills, but the majority have not progressed from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.”

CEPS students have typically not experienced much academic success. They have left school and the traditional education system. In a national survey of high school dropouts by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2006), young people said they left because of lack of motivation, boredom, having fallen too far behind to catch up, being poorly prepared at high school entry, had too much freedom and not enough structure, became a parent themselves, had to get a job and make money, or had to care for a parent or sibling. Any or all of these reasons may apply to CEPS students in the aggregate; it is important to understand why each individual student has disengaged and what each student needs in order to reconnect.

CEPS meets a need among this population, yet there are young people the CEPS model and technical assistance is not yet equipped to serve. They include non-readers and those reading below a 4th-grade level (who may be referred out to programs in libraries or literacy organizations), students with serious learning disabilities, and English Language Learners. However, CEPS programs are

responsive to the populations served by their community organization, and several programs do engage these young people by using the expertise of the sponsoring organizations.

What motivates young people to return? Young people said:

I'm 21. This is my last hope.

It's a second chance. It's my last chance.

I'm more mature now and take things more seriously.

I want to be someone.

Why do they stay? Young people said:

The staff goes out of their way to help you achieve your goals.

They check on you, to see how you're progressing.

People help me when I'm having trouble with something.

Everyone welcomes you and shows respect.

I was incarcerated. I came here. If I don't show up, my teachers and others call me and tell me I gotta be here. You don't find that at a lot of schools. If they call you, it's to tell you you've been suspended. The teachers here, if they come down on you, it's because they're motivating you.

And a program director said:

We tell them the truth. We tell them the truth with kindness.

CEPS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

CEPS is designed for application in community-based organizations, though increasingly, schools and school-based GED sites are drawing from it. The community organizations that deliver the program are committed to local economic and social development and take a holistic approach to their work with children, youth, and adults. These community groups are both an alternative and a partner to the public school system. While the New York City public schools are developing approaches to enable young people who are over-age and under-credited to graduate there are still large numbers for whom continuing in regular school is not a viable option. These students turn to community-based organizations (CBOs) for help.

CEPS responds to the growing need to support CBOs as they expand their services to address educational outcomes for young adults. The demand is there. The first six CEPS sites reported high numbers of young people who qualified for CEPS services: fully 66% of those taking the TABE were reading at the 6th-grade level or lower.

YDI provides capacity building and technical assistance to these organizations through meetings, workshops, consulting advice, and materials. Formative and outcome evaluations have been conducted by Campbell-Kibler Associates, Inc. which provided data that has informed YDI and the sites about what is working and what needs to be done to strengthen CEPS. YDI shares results and promising practices with participating sites as well as others across the nation and acts at the policy level to increase attention and resources.

SECTION 2

THE CEPS PROGRAM MODEL

CORE ELEMENTS OF CEPS

The CEPS model combines principles of youth development; rigorous and engaging academics/instruction; and preparation for work and further education. Student supports, including student conferencing, counseling, a network of caring adults, and opportunities for young people to contribute to their progress and to the program community. These are the core set of practices that support the work.

The **youth development framework** shapes the CEPS program. Each program stage shows careful attention to all seven principles of practice:

- 1) Safety and a sense of belonging
- 2) Caring relationships with adults and peers
- 3) Clear and high expectations
- 4) Youth voice, participation, and informed understanding of roles and opportunities
- 5) Experiences that build competence and mastery
- 6) Engaging activities
- 7) Continuity in relationships, resources, and pathways

Rigorous and engaging academics are guided by a unifying educational philosophy and approach to learning:

- Daily “routines and rituals” immediately involve students in reading, problem-solving, and discussion.
- Instruction is based on strategies of proficient readers and mathematical thinkers. Instruction makes these strategies explicit to young people, giving them tools and demystifying reading and math.
- Continual assessment of student progress by teacher and by each student allows for differentiated instruction paced according to individual needs and helps students keep track of their progress. Collaboration between students and teachers directs the instructional process.

Social supports and program activities provide opportunities to focus on the young person’s assets, obstacles, independence, and progress. Structures and strategies include:

- Primary Person and student conferences
- Goal setting (personal, academic, and vocational)
- Social services

- Academic supports
- Life skills instruction
- Career development and employment training
- Information about college and post-secondary education

Work preparation gives young people skills, connections, and a vision of themselves as productive, creative, life-long learners and workers:

- Career exploration opens new vistas and possibilities, and goal setting and planning clarify what young people need to pursue various paths.
- Internships, practice in work skills and behaviors, and incentives such as stipends and working in the organization's after-school programs enable young people to feel comfortable in work environments and help them build attractive resumes.
- Assigned staff ensures that students are connected to post-GED options.
- Career preparation. The focus is on continuing education, however, students also explore a variety of other employment and training opportunities.

The **blended approach** is an organizational strategy that combines all these elements into a coherent package. Staff works together across the program, giving consistent messages and staying in close touch about individual students. Academics, work preparation, supports, and opportunities are all connected through the youth development framework. For example:

- The instructor and the Primary Person meet in a regular student conference to discuss how to engage the student more fully in independent reading. The instructor and Primary Person elicit from the student his or her interests, and help choose an appealing book. The Primary Person also considers whether the student might need glasses, and sets up a referral for an eye exam.
- Instructors work with career readiness staff to integrate work-based literacy activities in the classroom. The career readiness staff connects instructors to people who can come in and talk to students about their careers. Primary Persons help young people plan their next employment and higher education choices, while career staff find jobs for those who are ready.

- Primary Persons work directly with students about how they can achieve their academic goals and inform instructors about ways to support the student in the classroom.

In CEPS, everyone works together to share information, address issues, and enable the young person to move ahead with a strong web of caring support.

SECTION 3

SEVEN STAGES OF STUDENT PROGRESSION THROUGH CEPS

SEVEN STAGES OF STUDENT PROGRESSION THROUGH CEPS

From first contact to transition and beyond, young people move through the program building their academic skills, reflecting on who they are and where they're going, and working in collaboration with adults and peers to overcome barriers and seize opportunities. Some of the “stages” are recurring, such as assessment, support, and transition planning while others are sequential, such as recruitment and intake. Instruction and student support are the continuous threads throughout the program, and are at the core of the experience.

STAGE	CHARACTERISTICS & STRATEGIES
Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach focuses on young people who can benefit from the program • Staff discusses program purpose and values with prospective students, making it clear what the program offers, what it does not, and for whom it works best • Young adults understand the relationship between their individual goals and the goals of the program
Intake & Admission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The setting is warm and comfortable, and young people know what to expect • Students who are not matched with the CEPS program—are at too high a level or need decoding help—are counseled, supported, and referred to a more appropriate program • The young person is introduced to his or her Primary Person • Young adults identify their goals • Students begin to identify their aspirations and map out their future plans
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students participate in assessments to measure literacy and math levels, as well as career interests • Staff and students build files to track progress • Staff give students immediate feedback on their test results, along with an action plan for meeting goals; they make it clear to them how long the journey to the GED might take

<p style="text-align: center;">Orientation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are introduced to the organization, structure, and staff • Students hear about the academic program, and educators introduce learning philosophy, rituals, and routines • The orientation lays out next steps and a longer-term vision • Staff conveys high expectations to students, and high expectations of staff and program are assured in return • Intentional activities and messages establish a sense of connectedness with all students, the program community, and the community at large
<p style="text-align: center;">Instruction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A research-based approach engages young adults in learning and learning how to learn • Instructors set clear rituals and routines for the classroom • Instructors scaffold instruction and model effective strategies • The instructional process enables young people to discover their voice and make choices about their learning • Young adults select books, plan projects, and play critical roles that build their engagement and responsibility for their work • Instructors provide periodic assessments at the end of each unit and administer individual diagnostic measures on an on-going basis • Young adults have knowledge of their own benchmarks for mastery and the necessary steps for meeting these benchmarks
<p style="text-align: center;">Supports & Opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Person, student conferences in which all staff meet to discuss each student, and brief student updates keep every student in sight, on track, and connected • Goal setting (personal, academic, and vocational) involves the young person in reflection, planning, and action • Life-skills instruction is an explicit focus of the program • Young people have strong roles within the program by giving feedback, having their voices heard, and contributing to the life of the program • Staff identify and address social service needs • Students have ready access to a variety of academic supports such as library resources, tutoring, and college counseling

Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students move up to the next level as soon as they are ready and progress into a GED class • Young people have a plan for taking the GED and moving beyond • Career development, employment training, and connections to internships and job are an integral part of every student's experience • College and post-secondary education are assumed to be part of a young person's trajectory • Staff and alumni provide post-program supports to students through the transition process and beyond
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RECRUITMENT

The purpose of recruitment is to identify young people in need of CEPS, help them assess how the program might help them progress, and clarify what the program can do for them.

The first contact with young people sets the stage for all that follows. Enthusiasm, caring, and promise of support attract potential students and convey the message that this could be a good place for them to get back on track. The recruitment process reaches out and draws in young people who are likely to be well served by CEPS. In turn, young people make an informed and active choice to sign up. The program is clear about what it offers and helps young people to be clear about their needs and expectations.

Outreach focuses on young people who can benefit from the program. CEPS organizations make intentional efforts to recruit young adults who are most in need of CEPS services and most likely to gain from participation. Recruitment materials are accurate, friendly, and easy to understand. Students are referred to sites through the New York City Department of Education, other CBOs, family members, and probation officers. Since the organizations are already well established in their communities and known to young people, many applicants come through word of mouth. Space is at a premium; most sites have waiting lists.

Staff discusses program purpose and values with prospective students. Staff explains what a pre-GED program is. They describe why CEPS was established and how it combines instruction, support, and planning for the future. They share the philosophy behind CEPS and describe how youth development principles guide the program. They lay out expectations for attendance, behavior, and commitment.

Young adults understand the relationship between their individual goals and the goals of the program. Staff encourages young people to reflect carefully about what they are looking for and why they think this is a good match for them. Most young people expect to participate in a GED program for a short period of time regardless of their academic level. Staff helps students understand what is involved in getting the GED and how long it is likely to take in relation to their current academic level.

A lot of our students were encouraged (by parents, counselors, friends, etc.) to drop out of high school and just take the GED examination. Our students didn't understand the preparation needed to obtain a high school equivalency diploma. A lot of our students believed that they would place directly into the GED class and that in a couple of months they would test and receive their GED.

-Citizens Advice Bureau report

Young people get the message that enrolling in CEPS must be their decision. They ask questions and are fully informed about:

- **Eligibility and Placement.** Enrollment is contingent upon either reading or math levels that fall between the 4th and 8th grade—many students will have different levels for each area, usually lower in math. Students need to understand that if they test below that level in literacy, they may be referred to a basic literacy program.
- **Options and Advancement.** The program makes clear how students move to the next level, whether there are GED programs in-house, what services are available outside, and what connections the program offers to those next steps.
- **How Long It Is Likely to Take.** Students know where they are starting and about how long it may take to move to the next level and to get their GED. They are told that this information will be updated and repeated throughout their participation in the program.

If a student expresses interest in joining the program, an initial assessment takes place to determine eligibility. Sites use the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education), a good indicator of readiness to progress to the GED, at entry and then as an indicator of progress. Assessment is discussed more fully in the following section, “Intake and Admissions.”

INTAKE & ADMISSIONS

Intake welcomes the student back to the educational process. The purpose is to:

- Help the student to understand where he or she is on the path to the GED.
- Develop realistic goals and a plan to move forward.
- Establish the Primary Person relationship.
- Ascertain if the program is right for the student and if the student is ready to commit to the program.

The setting is warm and comfortable, and young people know what to expect.

Students are informed in advance (by mail, phone, on the website) about what will happen during the intake process and how long it will take—usually one to two days.

Most CEPS programs use rolling admissions. They may have new cohorts every few months. Depending on the numbers who are admitted, the first contact may be in a group session or it may be one-on-one with the student. Incoming students are greeted with smiles and warmth as they walk in the door, and made to feel that they have come to the right place. Sites indicate that admitting individuals throughout the program year poses a challenge to building a cohesive cohort, and some have opted not to use this approach. Others, however, indicate that setting concrete and consistent expectations and making sure everyone gets the same message at the outset appears to help build a sense of community. Sites also create rituals to introduce new students, making them feel at home and connecting them to current students. Having established routines and rituals in the classroom helps old students stay on track, while new students are quickly folded into the daily activities.

At this first meeting, staff:

- Help students think about where they want to be in life—in college, in a career—and tell them they will be working to create a plan that will help them set reasonable and achievable goals.
- Provide an overview of what the program will be like, including the curriculum, schedule, and homework; career development components; and college and post-secondary planning.
- Introduce expectations: What the program will require of them, and that the effort they will need to put into it will be for their own advancement. These are conveyed in a positive manner by caring adults, who focus on the strengths that young people bring.

- Discuss how students can learn from their earlier experiences in school to succeed. Staff asks young people to think about what worked for them in high school, and what they did well; and to identify negative patterns they need to break, with assurances that they will help with new positive approaches.

Students who are not ready for CEPS are counseled and supported. Programs determine appropriateness for CEPS based on young people's TABE scores and conversations about readiness and commitment. If a student cannot be well served by CEPS, all programs offer next steps, some within and some outside of the organization or program.

Sites refer students who test below a 4th-grade reading level to literacy programs that concentrate on decoding and the basic skills necessary for learning to read. In New York City, these are offered by the New York City Public Library's Adult Education Programs, at New York City Department of Education's GED Hub locations, by organizations such as Argus Community Center and the Literacy Assistance Center, and by City University's CATCH program, among others. Other students may be at too high a level to benefit fully from CEPS and are referred to GED, Workforce Investment Act, or other programs.

Programs employ a variety of strategies to ensure they don't lose these young people. Depending on the site, they:

- Admit students testing below the 4th-grade level to CEPS and provide basic education outside of regular program hours to bolster their skills.
- Provide counseling and continue to work with students who have not yet demonstrated commitment.
- Develop a contract and allow for part-time engagement based on an agreement.
- Connect young parents to child-care services.

The young person is introduced to his or her Primary Person. Students who meet the age and reading level requirements for admission and are ready to commit are immediately assigned a Primary Person. The Primary Person serves as advocate, monitor, and the point of contact for and about the student.

At intake, the Primary Person:

- Greets the student, explains the process, and conducts an extensive interview.

- Establishes with the student a schedule of their meetings, their purpose, and contacts.
- Develops mutual expectations for the relationship, and makes clear what the student's responsibility is, and what the Primary Person's responsibility is.
- Contacts family members or significant others to arrange a meeting and inform them of student entry and progress and to ask them to be available.

Staff begins discussions about the student's learning experiences, strengths, and skill level. The initial conversation sets the expectation that young people will talk about and reflect on their experiences. Staff asks the student about their experience with reading and learning, and the story of how the student came to seek help. Students talk about their strengths and interests, and comment on their history with reading, writing, and math. Staff gathers information about other areas where young people might show strengths that are related to literacy and math—music, art, film, languages, and technology skills.

Students also talk about what stopped them in the past, and what they hope will be different in this program.

Young adults play an active role in identifying their goals. Staff emphasize to young people that this process is about them, for them, and owned by them. Young people are encouraged to say what they would like to see for themselves. Staff gives them guidance about what is doable in what period of time, while conveying the message to think beyond the GED. Together, staff and young people write down a beginning set of goals. Young people understand that they will refer to these goals throughout the program, and review and revise them as necessary.

Students begin to plan for their future. At intake, students begin to chart the relationship of securing their GED to their goals and future prospects. They:

- Identify what additional training and/or higher education will be necessary to achieve their goals.
- Create a timeline to track progress with benchmarks and a schedule. At intake, the student and Primary Person begin filling out the timeline.
- Use the program's resources to find information about college and careers. The intake process shows the young person where to find this information and starts an initial search.

- Do an analysis and identify forces in the student's life and experience that will help or hinder their progress toward literacy, GED, higher education, and employment. The initial interview with the Primary Person begins to identify what some of these forces are and how to capitalize on the strengths and minimize the weaknesses.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment helps students understand what they will need to do to succeed. It determines level and placement, since most sites offer multiple classes and have both pre-GED and GED programs. Assessment also engages the young person in analyzing his or her own progress. It uncovers interests and talents, and motivates young people to pursue pathways to further education and careers.

Assessment begins prior to formal admission and continues throughout the student's experience in the program.

Students participate in assessment to measure their literacy level and career interests. Components of the assessment include:

- Interview(s)
- Standardized assessment
- Interest inventories for career and college identifies career interests, higher education aspirations, and need for social services
- Rubrics and predictors help staff and students to track progress and make changes

Interviews. Each student has an individual conversation with his or her Primary Person. The Primary Person makes initial comments both for the file and to share with the student their assets and strengths, needs, level of maturity, suitability for the program, and the program's suitability for the student. This interview also elicits information about issues that might require social or health services, and the Primary Person follows up with the young person to make those connections.

Standardized Assessment. Students take an entry test to determine level of academic readiness as part of data for placement. Test results are shared with students immediately, and their significance discussed and made clear to the students. In New York City, most programs use the TABE (Tests of Adult Basic Education) or ABE (Adult Basic Learning Examination). While imperfect as assessments, they are used widely and are relied upon by most public funders. Most programs, however, use other instruments in addition to these to track

student progress. These require little training, are easy to administer, allow for quick placement and startup, and are nationally valid. As norm-referenced tests, they compare students to other students, which is one way to determine their “grade level.”

CEPS practitioners are careful in their interpretation of these tests, and look at a variety of factors that may influence student performance on standardized assessments. They are aware that many of the young people have not taken tests for a while and may be out of practice. They try to control the conditions under which young people take tests—time of day, room, level of noise, how many tests are administered in one sitting, and so on. They spend time with students to describe the purpose of the TABE and what it includes. They tell students to make sure they eat well before the test.

Staff is sensitive to countering the discouragement and sense of failure that can come with testing. As one practitioner commented, “We finally get a young person to come back, and the first thing we do is give him a test just like the ones he didn’t do well on in high school, and tell him again that he’s not good enough.” Practitioners comment that while they see the downside, these assessments are the best they have at the moment.

Interest Inventories for Career & College. Interest inventories can encourage students to envision their futures in both the short term and long term. They often serve best not to measure but rather to promote change; that makes them less useful as baseline evaluation tools but quite effective as motivating experiences. Good career tools can expand students’ horizons about what is available and what they might consider doing. Current programs use web-based tools such as CareerCruising which includes inventories, are rich in career information, fun to use/user friendly, and clearly designed for a youth and young-adult audience. These career tools are good jumping off points for talking about what kind of higher education is needed.

This information helps to schedule students into appropriate career and college activities while in the program, and guide transition planning.

Rubrics and Predictors. CEPS programs may use the GED predictor tests that help young people know how they would score on the GED and give them a sense of the kind of questions they will face on the actual exam. Since all aspects of the GED require proficient reading skills, the predictor tests are good measures of literacy levels as well as subject-specific knowledge. Other measures, such as the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI)⁴ help staff and students to identify how they are doing in particular areas and design differentiated instruction in response.

⁴ <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/educator/academic/product/0,3110,0205443273,00.html>

Frequent assessments as part of the classroom work are important to enable students to identify their progress and challenges. Literacy and math programs provide evaluations that tell staff and students where they are ready to move ahead, and where they need to continue to concentrate effort.⁵

Staff and student build a file. A complete file on the student keeps track of assessments and data on student interest, progress, and commitment. It includes plans, student work, resumes, and references. The organization of the portfolio varies across programs, but is an essential tool to assure that interventions are consistent and leave a record in case there is turnover among staff.

Staff gives students immediate feedback on their test and inventory results, along with an action plan for meeting goals. Communicating results with sensitivity and candor is critical to supporting young people's renewed commitment. Staff presents the results in a supportive and caring manner. They show students where their strengths and potential assets lie and suggest ways to capitalize on those assets. They identify areas of weakness, give students a clear idea of what kinds of skills and attitudes they need to build, and discuss ways the program will help them build those skills. For example, a student might learn that s/he does well with questions that require mastery of the main point in a reading comprehension passage. However, s/he may need more help in identifying and understanding questions that call on the student to make inferences or make predictions.

Students are strongly encouraged to take responsibility for their own progress, and move from being a consumer of services to taking an active role in forging ahead. Feedback enables students to understand:

- Where they are in the process.
- What the paths are from pre-GED to GED, and from GED to college and employment.
- How they will make progress toward the next step.
- How long each phase is likely to take.
- That their attendance will affect their progress. They will be reading books together with their classmates and having discussions that are cumulative. In math, they will be focusing in on a few concepts deeply; if they miss class they miss critical scaffolding. They hear that students who attend regularly succeed at higher rates than those who don't.

⁵ Some sites use variations of Lewin's Forcefield Analysis to help students identify strengths and potential obstacles and to anticipate them. For information, see: *Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports*, National Center for the Study of Adult Literacy and Learning, Focus on Basics. Volume 4, Issue A, March 2000.

Staff helps students to determine if the program is right for them. If the assessment, interview, or other measures indicate that a student may not yet be ready to make the commitment to the program, staff propose alternative programs or services. They may provide counseling and support within the program or organization, or outside. They can suggest that the young person reapply at a specific, later date.

ORIENTATION

The purposes of the orientation are to:

- Introduce the program to the student and the student to the program.
- Set high expectations of students and of what the program will provide to students.
- Enable the student to experience a connection to other students and staff, and to identify the program as a community to which he or she now belongs.
- Address important points that will help students become engaged without overwhelming them. Below are topics that sites cover, though all may not be covered in orientation.

The orientation sets the stage for achievement in a supportive environment. It connects the student to the program, staff, and peers. It expands on messages conveyed during intake: What the program will offer, what is needed to progress to a GED program, what is on the GED exam, and what happens after a student leaves. It sets expectations for excellence, and for becoming an ambitious and skillful student.

CEPS encourages staff to have upbeat orientations, with food that are energetic and create a sense of discovery and possibility for the students. They are well-organized, start on time, and move quickly. Students sit in on classes and participate in activities.

Students are introduced to the organization, structure, and people. The orientation takes students around the space—the offices, classrooms, library, and other resources that are part of the program. Current students as well as staff conduct the presentations and serve as guides. Incoming students hear about the community-based organization that operates the program—its mission, history, and commitment to CEPS. They see what they have access to through the program—the library and books they can borrow, computers and programs that help them navigate through career choices and college

possibilities, social and support services and how to access them. They receive materials written at their reading level, with straightforward information about the program, expectations, rules, and benchmarks.

Staff talks about the Primary Person system—why it exists, what to expect, what to do if it's not working. They give students a list of staff, what they do, and whom to contact for what.

Incoming students are also matched with a caring CEPS student veteran. This mentoring system puts newcomers at ease with a peer who has been through the same transition.

Students hear about the academic program, and educators introduce learning philosophy, rituals, and routines. The academic program is the core of the experience, and the methods that are used in CEPS are designed to build habits of mind as well as solid literacy skills. Educators:

- Provide an overview of the classroom structure, and the content of each class.
- Introduce the routines in class that will help them get right into their work and know what is expected of them. In literacy, that means reading independently and in groups, aloud and silently, reflecting and dissecting their reading in “Think-Alouds.” In math, it includes skills practices, working solo and with partners, and reading and talking about math so they know what they understand and how it works.
- Discuss reading comprehension strategies that proficient readers use: Using prior knowledge, asking questions of the text, inferring, re-reading, and identifying importance.
- Convey how the program will help them become capable mathematics learners: a focus on the concepts of math and revising misconceptions; using an approach to basic math that makes the transition to algebra much easier; learning the technical vocabulary of math; and a classroom environment in which they'll work with partners, share strategies, discuss concepts, and explain their work.

Staff talks about building “stamina”—being able to read increasing amounts of text and to study for longer periods of time than students may have been used to; and what it means to be an “ambitious student,” aggressively seeking knowledge and learning how to study and learn.

The orientation lays out next steps and a longer vision. Even though students are in a pre-GED program, they will want to know what the GED test is like. Subject areas, length and timing of each subtest, sample questions, and a

practice activity may be part of the orientation experience. Staff talks about the scoring of the test and introduces the goal of scoring well on the exam, not just passing. They connect high scores to students who progress on to college and avoid remediation, increasing the likelihood they will attain a college degree. Programs make a deliberate effort to convince young people that the GED is a necessary but not sufficient achievement. The orientation introduces the career development and college planning components. Students are encouraged to talk about career goals, and are taught about the print, on-line, and staff resources there are for learning about the range of job opportunities. Alumni who have successfully moved on to college and employment present their experiences, and provide living proof to students that these are achievable outcomes.

Programs emphasize that:

- College is a real possibility.
- Vocational, technical, and employment training programs can increase their earning potential and skills.
- Learning does not stop with the exam, and successful adults are people who learn new things throughout life.

High expectations are conveyed to students, and high expectations of the staff and the program are assured in return. Staff explain to students that they are expected to:

- Attend every day and to call if they are ill or cannot attend for any reason.
- Engage fully by reading, writing, and discussing.
- Work hard and understand that learning requires effort and that effort can actually increase aptitude.
- Reflect constantly and critically—but not judgmentally—about how they are doing, what is working, and what they need.

Young people hear that they have a precious opportunity that is not widely available:

We tell prospective students that we have a waiting list. If they're even two minutes late for the TABE assessment, they can't take it. If they don't come to class, they get a wake-up call. If they don't attend for two weeks, they're suspended. But they have the option to come back when they're ready.

-Program administrator

These expectations are continuously reinforced by adults and young people. As 20-year-old Isaac said, “If you don’t have the teachers telling you, you have the students.” At the same time, staff tells students what they can expect of the program and pledge to:

- Provide high quality instruction that will prepare them for the next level, giving them the skills and habits to be proficient readers and strong students.
- Help them to set goals and track benchmarks along the way.
- Connect them to internships and ready them for work, with resumés, mock interviews, help in applications, and coaching.
- Open up the world of continuing and higher education with information, visits, and interactions with alumni and others.
- Offer the supports that young people need to make it, including: academic, health, legal, financial, child care, and social services.

Intentional activities and messages establish a sense of connectedness and community. Cohesive community depends on establishing connections, shared expectations and values, and people cooperating to achieve goals. At every opportunity during the orientation, staff encourages students to become full participants in the program. They conduct town hall meetings, “Shout Outs” (open mike conversations about how things are going and what they’d like to see happen), and “Student Spotlights” that recognize a young person for a particular achievement or talent during that period.

Staff asks open-ended and intentional questions to get students to open up. They urge young people to:

- Ask questions, telling young people that “There are no stupid questions. If you have a question, chances are someone else does too. Ask until you fully understand.”
- Ask for help for academic, health, legal, social, and emotional issues.
- Use the resources to start learning for themselves and for the rest of their life.
- Read and write every day. Read for pleasure as well as for study. Read the newspaper every day. Tune into what’s going on outside of New York City and outside of the United States. Keep a journal.
- Believe that they can succeed. We care if you make it. We believe you can make it. We will give you support and resources to make it.

INSTRUCTION

The quality of the instructional component is critically important. Done well, instruction ensures that young people are engaged and acquire essential academic content and skills towards the GED, supports their developmental needs, frees their talents, and enhances their strengths. It engages them—possibly for the first time—in the pleasures of learning.

What goes on in a CEPS classroom not only raises young people’s reading and math skills, but also gives them stamina, fluency, and the ability to analyze increasingly complex text, which in turn is associated with success in college:

- **Stamina:** Increasing the amount of text and material that is read and absorbed, extending the level and length of effort applied.
- **Fluency:** Increasing speed and/or facility.
- **Complexity:** Moving from simple to increasingly complicated text and problems.

As students acquire these skills, they experience the pleasure of reading.

Similarly, mathematics instruction fosters an understanding of basic mathematical concepts that lead to algebra, the gatekeeper to advancing in mathematics. They emphasize collaborative problem-solving, unpack young people’s misconceptions about concepts, and address negative attitudes and anxieties. They infuse math learning with literacy, creating a coherent curriculum across math and reading:

For the first time with a math class, the students are asked to explain verbally and through writing how they reached a particular conclusion in a math problem. This is something that previously had been presented in the Literacy component; however, many of the students have had difficulty in written expression and generally shy away from it. The introduction of Math Navigator has given the program the opportunity to introduce writing across the entire curriculum and not isolated to perhaps just the English class.

-F.E.G.S. report, June 2008

A research-based approach engages young adults in learning and learning how to learn.

We have no trouble getting young people to read.

-Program instructor

Decades of research, practice, and policy reports have produced a wealth of information about how to promote effective literacy learning. Somewhat more recent but equally compelling research about mathematics learning sheds light on the most important considerations in content and approach. America's Choice has created strategies and programs built on this research—the Ramp-Up to Literacy program and Math Navigator, and several other organizations worked with YDI to adapt the principles on which these and others are based for the young adult population and for a non-school setting. Through its ongoing observations and discussions with site staff as well as review of research, YDI continues to update its instructional strategies.

CEPS embeds this knowledge in a youth development framework. The “rituals and routines” within the classroom create a level of comfort. Students know what to do and what is expected, and that in turn enables them to take charge. The strategies that students are taught to become proficient readers and mathematical thinkers are made explicit and become tools that they can use intentionally and consciously. Students acquire tools to learn new vocabulary, to build skills of inference and synthesis, and to comprehend the characteristics and structures of different genres. They master algebraic notation even while doing simple arithmetic, tackle mathematical concepts, and make connections across their mathematics learning, and see where they got confused in the past and what to do now.

Surrounded by books likely to capture their interest, young people see their peers reading intently, writing their thoughts, discussing their ideas. They are enveloped by the expectation that they will read and that they will discover themselves and worlds beyond as they read. And they do.

“Striving readers” is the term used in CEPS to refer to students who are building their literacy skills. The CEPS instructional approach involves:

- **Explicit instruction in comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency.** ACI states that “Comprehension is not an automatic result of reading. Striving readers need explicit instruction in comprehension strategies and in vocabulary. And they need ongoing support and practice to learn to read fluently—with speed, accuracy, and expression.”
- **Intensive writing.** Writing and reading reinforce each other, and instruction is provided in various genres.
- **Self-directed learning and motivation.** “Striving readers are often disengaged learners. CEPS builds their confidence with a powerful set of classroom rituals and routines that keep all students working independently and productively. The course captures their interest with reading and writing activities that use texts they can read, and assignments they enjoy in a learning environment that responds to individual needs.”

- Classroom libraries. Books are ubiquitous, with shelves of books in every classroom that young people are likely to enjoy and want to read, and are appropriate at their current reading level. These are books in their original form, not abridged simplified versions.

Formative assessments. Assessments are a regular part of the classroom and allow teachers and students to monitor progress and strengthen skills. Teachers use these to differentiate instruction.

The CEPS approach to math instruction emphasizes a balance of concepts and problem-solving and skills and focuses on:

- “Deeper study of fewer, more critical concepts.” Students take time to think and form questions, rework computations and try other methods. They learn a, “complete process for solving work problems: they consider the problem and make an estimate; show all work; represent the mathematics in an equation; use a number line, chart, or other graphic to illustrate the mathematics; and write an answer to the problem in a complete sentence.” (ACI)
- Language-rich environment. Students read, discuss, and talk through the math concepts, using lay and technical terms. They increase their understanding of the concepts, and they become comfortable with thinking and speaking math.
- The algebraic structure of arithmetic. “Algebra is the fundamental language of math.” The use of horizontal notation and graphical representations in all the modules introduces students to the structure of algebra. The example given by ACI’s Math Navigator shows how this is done:

Simple adjustments in the early presentation of arithmetic can create a fundamental cognitive shift for students. For example when students are asked to add 13 and 5 simply by ‘lining the numbers up on the right,’ the concept of place value is left ambiguous.

$$\begin{array}{r} 13 \\ + 5 \end{array}$$

However, if a horizontal format is also introduced, students become familiar with the notation used with algebraic equations.

$$13+5+ _ 5+_ =8 _ +5=8$$

And then, some time later, it is no great leap for students to grasp the essential algebraic concept of using letters to represent values.

$$3+5=y \quad 5+x=8 \quad x+5=8$$

- Analysis of persistent misconceptions in mathematics. Research reveals a limited number of common mistakes (e.g., “you can’t divide smaller numbers by larger ones,” “letters represent particular numbers”). These are not necessarily wrong thinking but necessary stages in development, and “interventions can be targeted at these misconceptions and their related concepts,” (The Research Basis for Math Navigator, p. 3).

CEPS math instructors seek to embed these strategies across their teaching. They:

- Balance conceptual understanding, problem solving, and skills development.
- Model questioning and meta-cognitive learning strategies.
- Encourage students to grapple with math.
- Highlight common misconceptions.
- Use rituals and routines to help students become independent learners.
- Conduct formative assessment through the pre-test, on-going questioning, and checkpoints and use those sets of data to inform instruction.

Instructors set clear rituals and routines for the classroom.

Miguel started the program in November, and was assigned to Mr. John’s class, joining a group which had already been together for a couple of months. How did he know what to do? “They were all reading quietly,” Miguel said. “So I did the same.”

Daily routines allocate set times to each of the components. Students, instructors, and visitors know what is happening and what is expected. These rituals and routines minimize the need for heavy-handed classroom management, so students can take control and be treated as the responsible adults they are. In the literacy segment, the routine includes:

- **Independent Reading (10-15 minutes).** Students enter class and immediately settle in to read books they have selected themselves from the classroom libraries. Latecomers follow suit. The focus is written on the white board, for example:

Determine importance: Indicate places in your book where you come across important pieces of information. Bring them together (synthesis) and make a prediction (inference).

-East Side House classroom

- The instructor checks in with students to see what page they're on and how they're doing. Students write down what page they've reached in the logs in their binders. The atmosphere is relaxed but focused.
- Read Aloud/Think Aloud (up to 15 minutes). The instructor reads aloud from the book that the class is reading together. Each student has a copy of the book and follows along. As the teacher reads, he or she pauses periodically to "think aloud," demonstrating one or more strategies of proficient readers. She uses mental images evoked by the text. She wonders what she would do in that character's position. She analyzes the story line and predicts where it might go next. She hones in on one of the vocabulary words and defines it using contextual clues and morphology.
- Daily Word Study – Vocabulary (5-10 minutes). This may come before or after Read Aloud. Target words for the week, with prefixes, suffixes, and other forms the word takes have been written on white boards. The words will likely have come up in the Read aloud. The instructor reviews the words they've been working on, and asks students for definitions and usage. Students use examples from their reading or lives to illustrate the concepts and the vocabulary discussions can be very rich and personal. Students keep track and take notes in their binders.
- Classroom Conversation (5-15 minutes). Students engage in spirited discussion following the Read-Aloud. The instructor will have presented a topic or questions. Students follow the instructor's lead and talk about the images the language has evoked for them, what is going on in the character's mind, how the story line is moving, and the choice of vocabulary. They ask questions of the text, and why the author might have been explicit about what happens or left the reader to wonder. They identify how the text reflects the genre in which it is written, and place the story in its historical, literary, or social context.
- Mini Lesson/Whole Class Instruction (up to 15 minutes). A short lesson varies daily and may focus on comprehension, vocabulary, writing, or syntax. It is followed by a work session in which students apply the lesson.
- Work Period (at least 30 minutes). Students work individually or in small groups. The instructor works with individual students, diagnosing and using differentiated instruction. At the beginning of the course, students work on the same task. As the students progress at their own pace, each has an independent workplan as well as set activities through which he or she rotates. Work stations are set up around the room.

- Check In/Review (5 minutes). The close of each session is both a group and individual review that captures where students are, from number of pages read to reading capacity. This gives students immediate information for their self-assessment of progress, and foreshadows the next day's instructional focus.

In the math segment, the rituals and routines include:

- Skills Practice (5-10 minutes). Instructors emphasize patterns and strategies for computation.
- Lesson (20-25 minutes). A math task is presented by the instructor with students reading and understanding the problem. The work period includes "Solo Work," where students are on a task for a few minutes, followed by "Partner Work" in which students work in pairs to refine and edit their answers. Instructors circulate and guide students' mathematical thinking, clear up confusions, and celebrate successes.
- "Probing for Understanding" and "Closing the Lesson" (5-10 minutes). Students reflect on their reasoning and that of their peers. They ask questions. The instructor helps students see what approaches did and did not work, clarifies concepts, articulates the misconceptions students have cleared up, and reviews the key concepts.

Instructors scaffold instruction and model effective strategies. In literacy, CEPS instructors make reading come alive for young people. They model the processes of reading to students in ways that are easy to imitate. They know where each of their students is in the quest for fluency, stamina, and complexity. They differentiate their instruction to address individual levels, whether they are working one-on-one or with the full group.

The seven strategies of successful readers, drawn from the work of David Pearson⁶ and others, are made explicit and taught to students. Strategies are reinforced by instructors and cited by students as they use them. By integrating a strong youth development focus, CEPS instructors turn these reading proficiency techniques into empowerment strategies. They help young people take charge of reading and generalize the lessons to other parts of their lives:

- 1) Activating background knowledge to make connections between new and known information. Students make connections from text to self, from text to text, and from text to world. In the process, they personalize reading and make it their own.

⁶Pearson, P. David, L.R. Roehler, J.A. Dole, and G.G. Duffy. 1992. "Developing Expertise in Reading Comprehension." In S. Jay Samuels and Alan Farstrup, eds. *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, 2nd Edition. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, cited in McElwain, E., (2004), *Seven Strategies of Highly Effective Readers: Using Cognitive Research to Boost K-8 Achievement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, SAGE Publications

- 2) Questioning the text. Proficient readers ask questions as they read. Students are taught to stop, mark up text, and write down questions. Asking questions is a path to understanding, and gives young people license to pursue an idea of interest, challenge the authority of the written word, and think critically for themselves.
- 3) Drawing inferences. Readers use prior knowledge about a topic and what they have gathered from the text to make predictions about what might happen next. In turn, young people may gain skills to look ahead – in the story and perhaps to their own futures.
- 4) Determining importance. Students sift and sort to identify markers and cues—bullets and lists, headings, strong verbs, new paragraphs. Lead ideas stand out in the text, as less relevant passages recede. As young people recognize the intentional choices made by the author, they may consider their own decisions and priorities.
- 5) Creating mental images. Readers picture scenes, action, characters, and connect words and images to make meaning. The visualization takes on personal dimensions as students move between the mind’s eye and the symbols on the page. They expand their repertoire of ways to reflect on what is happening in the text and in their lives.
- 6) Repairing when meaning breaks down. Tools such as re-reading help students go back and figure something out rather than continuing on. They reinforce the ethic that learning requires effort and that there are effective ways to move forward and overcome obstacles.
- 7) Synthesizing information. This requires combining the first three strategies—connecting, questioning, and inferring—to form new understanding. Students make sense and put it all together, and as they do, they gain the capacity to learn how to learn.

Strategies to become a proficient reader:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use existing knowledge to make sense of new information • Ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading • Draw inferences from the text • Determine what is important • Use mental images • Use “fix-up” techniques when you don’t understand what you’re reading • Synthesize what you’ve read, asked, and inferred
From a sign on the wall of an East Side House classroom

“What readers do:”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create mental images • Analyze what they read • Create persuasive writing • Put themselves in characters’ positions • Make notes of facts, quotes, and other important information • Ask questions • Read often • Like books, know many words • Know names of authors
From a sign on the wall of an East Side House classroom

In mathematics, instructors help students become mathematical thinkers, talkers, and problem solvers. They:

- Probe for understanding to determine whether students have grasped concepts.
- Challenge students to think about mathematics and encourage students to articulate their thinking.
- Create classroom routines (what is done every day) and rituals (how it is done) that establish an environment conducive to independent learning.
- Encourage a classroom culture where discussion about the mathematics is valued regardless of whether an answer is right or wrong.
- See errors as learning opportunities.

Students learn to:

- Apply concepts to a range of mathematical situations.
- Problem solve with peers to deepen strategies and perspectives. First they think through the problem by themselves, then share their thinking with a partner or the group.
- Focus on misconceptions. Each module contains a list of typical misconceptions about that concept. Instructors probe for understanding and show students how to look for common errors. Students work to explain the error, which helps them revise their own understanding and misconceptions. Both young people and instructors look for these errors in their skills practice and during the lesson.

- Articulate their process and thinking. They talk with their fellow students. They use math vocabulary as they discuss math concepts. They record all their thinking; they do not erase but instead are taught to cross out and rethink so both they and the instructor can see how their mathematical thinking moved. They use “Ask Myself” questions during the session to check on what they do and don’t understand. They write about their learning at the end of each session with “Your Thoughts.”
- Develop strategies for when they are stuck.
- Understand what a complete answer to a mathematical task is.

The instructional process enables young people to discover their voice and make choices about their learning. As the routines and rituals create comfort, the reading strategies encourage young people to examine, question, talk, and reflect about their lives as well as about the characters and subjects in the text. Elements in the story resonate with their own experience, and they draw parallels. The environment is safe, and young people begin to trust staff and peers. They begin to share their own stories and talk about their hopes and dreams.

Young adults select books, plan projects, and play critical roles that build their engagement and responsibility for their work. The instructional process gives students choice and power.

Students select books for independent reading that appeal to them and are both challenging and appropriate for their reading level. They become interested in an author and/or story and ask for more books. They discover fiction, non-fiction, and poetry and share what they like and don’t like about what they are reading.

They tutor younger children in after-school programs, so that they are no longer striving readers but experts passing on their newfound skills.

They assist each other. CEPS programs establish a strong culture of peer support. An instructor at East Side House says, “With a new cohort, I don’t say anything. I say to the students, ‘you do that.’” Young people pass on the rituals and routines to newcomers. They provide academic support to one another during class work periods, and they offer moral support continuously to their fellow learners. At one site, the pre-GED and GED classes meet together from one to two each day so they can tutor each other.

Students collaborate. In one class three young men were writing a screenplay inspired by the book Monster, while young people from across the East Side House program were writing a play, titled “East Side Story.” At New Heights,

students were producing a video, interviewing staff and students, and using their literacy skills as they go through the editing process.

Instructors provide assessments at the end of each unit and administer individual diagnostic measures on an on-going basis. Assessment is constant. Instructors follow students daily with easy-to-capture indicators—number of pages read, ease in reading aloud, ability to talk about the math problem and the concepts, comments in class. They do solo/partner work and make rounds during independent reading and at closing to ask more pointed questions around individual student learning. As they finish one cycle, they review students' study sheets and study books with their recorded learning, have group discussions and individual conferences, and design the next stage of learning for the class and for each student. The mathematics curriculum includes pre-tests and post-tests connected to each module, and checkpoints in which students take practice tests.

Young adults have knowledge of their own benchmarks for mastery and the necessary steps for meeting these benchmarks. Young people monitor their own progress. As part of their planning process and their ongoing work with their Primary Person, they set goals. They have a clear sense of what they must do at each step. To move up in their academic work, they know what skills and concepts they need to work on, and how that is measured on the TABE or other assessment.

SUPPORT

Often, young people who have made the decision to restart their education have a range of issues that must be addressed to help them get back on track. High expectations for effort in academics must be accompanied by a system of support that helps young people fill in gaps and address challenges. This component—tutoring and academic support, counseling, legal assistance, crisis intervention—provides the connections and services to enable young people to succeed academically and to progress developmentally. Opportunities that connect them to college and careers are covered in the following section, “Transition: Planning & Moving On.” Supports are customized to each student's needs and strengths, and developed in consultation with the student. Sites provide an average of an hour of “wrap-around services” daily to each CEPS student.

These wrap-around supports include small group instruction, individual tutoring, leadership development, group counseling, health education, life skills training, and other needed supports as identified by the Development and Achievement Specialist [Primary Person] in consultation with the stu-

dent. CEPS students are now connected to a wider range of supports which are individually tailored to their Individualized Life Plans.

-Site report, June 2008

Primary Person and student conferences keep every student in sight, on track, and connected. The heart of the blended approach is the formal system that staff establishes to work as a team. It allows them to support each other, and it increases their capacity to support students.

A Primary Person establishes a relationship with the young adult for the duration of the program and beyond, and meets regularly with the young adult to keep him or her on track. The Primary Person is the coordinated point of contact and advocate for the student.

Staff at one site reports that students receiving intensive support from the Development and Achievement Specialists, “are more likely to attend programming regularly.” At Turning Point:

The primary person approach has had the most significant impact on our educational program as a whole. The X Foundation and the Y Foundation will be funding case managers in 08/09. We plan to use this funding to expand our primary person approach to embrace all our classes for young people. We hope that the retention rate we have observed recently in the CEPS class will be replicated in our other pre-GED/GED classes.

-Turning Point report, June 2008

Formal student conferences involve the young person, Primary Person, teachers, and other key staff on a regular basis. They are an opportunity to learn about the young person and provide needed support. They review student work, progress, and challenges. They identify follow-up actions, and staff takes notes to assure that this follow-up occurs. They focus on the positive as well as the areas where students need help.

The student conferences have proven to be an invaluable tool, and it is an element that will be introduced and used in all levels and not just CEPS. The conferences allow the support staff and the instructional staff the very real and important opportunity to connect and identify a plan for a student’s continued success.

-F.E.G.S. report, June 2008

Programs designate a safe space, often a counselor's office, where conferences among staff take place. Because finding enough time is always a challenge in these programs, sites have developed a variety of strategies to pre-structure these meetings and to conduct their exchanges quickly when possible. They call it a variation of speed dating.

In this space, young people can also go to meet with their Primary Person, if they have an issue, or are simply having a bad day. Young people know that there will always be someone available to talk with them or refer them to additional counseling or services.

In both formal and informal ways, the program communicates to young people that they can always seek help and there will always be someone there to answer their call.

Goal setting—personal, academic, and vocational—involves the young person in reflection, planning, and action. From the moment young people enter the program, they are encouraged to think about their futures. In discussions with their Primary Person and other staff, and in activities with their peers, young people:

- Develop a vision of their future that is based on expanded knowledge of college and careers.
- Make a personal commitment to a short- and long-term plan.
- Understand how their future plans relate to their participation in the program.
- Set goals, and put them in writing.
- Create a plan and timeline for how they will meet those goals, such as the one on the following page:

PARTICIPATION PLAN

Your Name: _____

(Record your reading and math scores here. Circle improvements.)

Date ___/___/___ Reading Score _____ Math Score _____

Date ___/___/___ Reading Score _____ Math Score _____

Date ___/___/___ Reading Score _____ Math Score _____

(Check the box next to every goal that you plan to work on right now or in the very near future.
Highlight with a marker any area for which you may need extra support.)

IMMEDIATE LEARNING GOALS

- attend class every day
- get to class on time
- focus on independent reading
- participate in class book discussions
- expose myself to GED materials (get a practice GED book)
- read at home (borrow books from the class library)
- other _____

IMMEDIATE PERSONAL GOALS

- participate in job readiness workshops
- get a job/internship
- change something about myself, such as _____
- participate actively in advisory/workshops
- join extra-curricular program activities
- participate in college trips/workshops
- start to make plans for my future
- other _____

LONG-TERM GOALS

- improve my reading abilities
- improve my math skills
- graduate from CEPS
- move up to Access
- achieve GED
- enroll in college

ADVICE TO SELF

Life-skills instruction is an explicit focus of programs:

- These planning and goal-setting strategies are part of the life-skills instruction in a CEPS program. In separate workshops, within academic classes, and in activities during intake and orientation, young people reflect on what they are doing and how they are doing. They consider their attitudes, personal development, and academic progress then ask what they might do differently to help themselves progress along their paths. With support, they strengthen positive habits or learn new ones that help them to become effective in the classroom, their work, and in their personal lives. Attendance may have been an issue in their past schooling: Primary Persons conduct continual outreach to students: they call any student who has missed classes or is late, and in some cases even give students a wake-up call throughout the first week of the program. Both the act of calling and the tone of the calls convince students that people care about them and want them to succeed.
- Students get help in assessing their strengths. Staff helps them develop ways to articulate what they are good at and how those talents relate to academics, jobs, and community connections. They also get advice about how to shed habits and attitudes that may have kept them from realizing their strengths. They get clear information about what they need to do to succeed within the program, pass the GED, and to pursue further education.
- Young people are asked to examine experiences and think out loud about their actions and the consequences of their decisions. They are encouraged to write, speak, and think critically but not judgmentally.
- Reading becomes part of their lives. They read the newspaper. For many, they read more books in a few months than they've read in their entire lives.
- They become part of a community of learners and are surrounded by young people who are experiencing academic success.
- The comprehension strategies they practice in their math and reading lessons help them strengthen their problem-solving skills. These strategies are very explicit. While some may have used them before, they now learn to name them and this helps to transfer those strategies into other areas of learning and life.

These new and strengthened skills and competencies in turn increase young people's confidence. That confidence fuels their desire to learn more and be more.

Young people have active roles within the program. Besides setting goals and taking responsibility for their own learning, young people are involved in various roles in the program. During orientation, they make presentations and serve as mentors to incoming students. Graduates return and share their experiences with current students. Programs hold town hall meetings to solicit young people's suggestions about program direction. They involve young people in program evaluation, and in some cases, in hiring staff.

Cypress Hills has created opportunities for young people to participate in advocacy projects directly related to their futures, and some have gone to the state capital to speak on behalf of jobs for youth.

Staff identifies and addresses social service needs. In the majority of cases, it is the Primary Person who identifies what additional services a student needs. Given the range of issues with which young people may need help, programs have a fairly extensive and varied list of supports at hand, including: academic support, tutoring, child care, counseling, family outreach, health, and legal services. As much as possible, these services are offered under one roof, and a major advantage of housing CEPS in community organizations is the co-location of educational, social, and community services.

Students have ready access to a variety of academic supports. Tutoring in specific subject areas is provided by instructors or other staff. Students form study groups to support one another. Study-skills workshops promote the habits necessary to become an ambitious student. "Boot camps" are organized for students getting ready to take assessments to move up to the GED level: intensive sessions for a week or two prior to the test help students review content, hone test-taking strategies, and feel motivated and supported to take the exam.

Opportunities for recognition and social activity keep young people coming. Making the program a place where young people want to be helps attendance and builds community. Programs offer incentives for attendance, such as gift certificates to bookstores and movies, and conduct award ceremonies that acknowledge gains in participation, leadership, achievement, and attendance. They have talent shows, dances, trips, sports and games, adventure learning programs, and team-building workshops.

TRANSITION: PLANNING & MOVING ON

Young people who have returned to build their skills and seek their GED have taken an important step in committing to their future. But they need help to think beyond the GED. Shifting their perspective to include the possibility of college, training programs, and careers, rather than dead-end jobs, is neither

easy nor quick. From the moment young people encounter the program, they get the message that getting a GED is a beginning rather than an end. They play an active role in shaping and tracking their plans for the immediate and long term future. The program culture reflects this forward movement. As students make progress in the program, future talk accelerates.

Students move up to the next level as soon as they are ready, and move on to a GED program. The CEPS model stresses continuity. There is always a next step.

Staff has accurate and timely information about how students move up within the program. This information aligns with GED-predictor and assessment tests. Students know when they can take predictor tests and what score they need to be able to take the exam and do well. In some cases, students in the CEPS program make rapid enough progress and can skip the GED program level altogether, proceeding directly to the exam.

Young people have a plan for taking the GED and moving beyond. Young people continually review and revise the planning that began at intake. They know how they will progress to the GED and get ready for the GED exam. They know what kind of study it will take to pass the GED, and what the test will actually contain. They have a realistic sense of where they are and when it is reasonable to expect that they will be able to take the exam.

CEPS programs use a variety of formats to help students record their plans and keep track of their progress. Staff keeps files that include lists of planning and work readiness tasks, whether the student has completed the task, and comments. They monitor academic progress and plans for progressing to the next level and to the GED. They elicit young people's career goals and assess their work readiness. Regular meetings of staff with the student ensure that the planning documents reflect the young person's learning, progress, and challenges.

Students have accumulated a robust body of knowledge about themselves and their opportunities. They have:

- Data from their interviews and career inventories. They have analyzed the results with their Primary Person and reflected on how their responses relate to careers and higher education choices.
- Experience with internships and work readiness seminars.
- A sense of what college is like through exposure to college campuses and to alumni who have successfully matriculated.
- Ideas for what they like to do and what they are good at.

Programs that have several academic classes may organize by reading and/or math level, and have a transitional class of students reading at grade 7.0 to 8.0, or above. Ideally, a GED program is offered on site and there is an easy and expected transition for students.

At New Heights, students move up on a regular basis, and their achievements are celebrated at the weekly student gathering on Fridays, known as “Shout-Outs.” Names of students who have advanced from level one to level two, and to the GED program, are called out. About 60% of the pre-GED students have moved up since the program was established. Not surprisingly, this is a major motivating factor for the young people that they too will be able to join their peers.

Following the CEPS class at Turning Point, students are promoted to the first of three levels of preparation for the GED. When CEPS students are promoted to the next level (introductory GED class) they arrive with strong reading strategies and an established support system. Because entering CEPS students are still at least a year away from taking the GED, they must be able to maintain their commitment. This is sometimes difficult, due to outside stresses (family, work, life), but we have found that even if students need to leave, they usually return at a later date.

The transition requires care. Students are anxious to move up and programs have tried a variety of strategies to ensure that young people are well prepared.

Staff suggests:

- Discussions with students who are about to move up, to give them an idea of what will be different.
- Observation by the student of the GED classroom and follow-up discussion about the difference in pace, teaching style, and expectations.
- Central involvement of the Primary Person through the transition and for some period beyond.
- Some students moving to the GED class continue to spend one day a week in the CEPS classroom for the initial weeks.

At Cypress Hills, staff pays close attention to “what transition means for our youth. We acknowledge that some of our youth do not experience change as a good thing and suffer from fear and anxiety of change.”

-Report, June 2008

Programs need to be vigilant and provide supports not just to those who are moving on, but to those who remain in CEPS as well. When young people have made connections to each other and one of them moves up, the effects may be positive or negative on those still in CEPS. It may demonstrate that it is possible to succeed and provide encouragement to stay with it. Or students may be discouraged by the loss of their class buddy. Programs need to watch for signs of decreased attendance or interest.

Career development, employment training, and connections to internships and jobs are an integral part of every student's experience. Students participate in career exploration and development and build the skills they will need for the workplace. A dedicated transition program includes seminars and workshops, internships, field trips, and job exposure. In academic classes, teachers highlight how skills and concepts in the academic classes apply to job situations and college-level work and content.

Students learn key workplace skills such as problem-solving, working in teams, and professional behavior and ethics.

The relationship of employment to CEPS is a challenge for some youth who feel anxious to move into paid employment. CEPS staff must provide interim experiences that help young people build work-related skills, while encouraging them to persist in their academic studies. The point is that with higher skill levels they are much more likely to get good jobs and hold them. Getting exposure to careers becomes an important step towards setting goals.

Young people—most people in fact—have very limited ideas about the range of careers that exist and what is required to prepare for them. Even before they are asked to identify their interests, they need context and exposure for inspiration. CEPS programs:

- Introduce students to web-based information that expands their knowledge of available careers, makes clear what skills and credentials are required, and helps them plan for college and post-secondary preparation. Students use computers with Career Zone and CareerCruising and navigate the web to investigate college and career options.
- Establish a career resource center that includes materials such as the Dictionary of Occupational Titles and videos about specific careers provided by trade associations.
- Arrange short informal visits from different kinds of workers who enjoy what they do, to talk with students about their paths and choices.
- Encourage young people to visit workplaces, especially those that are easily accessible, such as museums and public institutions.

- Share news and magazine stories about careers and how people view their work.

New Heights Neighborhood Center uses a set of monitoring forms for their Worker Advancement Through Technology program (WATT) to make clear to young people what they need to do to be ready for an internship position within WATT.

List of WATT Tasks Young People Must Complete at New Heights
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover letter and resume • Career assessment • Pre-post balance sheet that identifies strengths and areas in need of improvement • Employment application • Mock interview and self-evaluation of the interview • Crisis intervention activities and omitting offensive language, as needed • Career Zone exploration • List of “jobs I could apply for” • Setting goals • Writing sample • Reflections on keeping track of time

Students who are ready for internships or work are placed by CEPS program staff. Staff supports students through the application process, coaches them for interviews, and debriefs after the contact.

At New Heights, a workforce manager connects students to 1199, the health care workers union; many have been hired. Partnerships with local businesses and the Armory, which houses a multi-level sports arena, produce internship and job opportunities for the students. The program also enrolls students in certificate programs to become security guards (state-certified) and customer service workers (national industry certification).

CEPS programs create a workplace culture, and all staff emphasizes the message that the GED is a step toward a longer term future. Professional and civil behavior is expected on the part of both staff and students, without

compromising the informality and supportiveness of the environment. Students are expected to:

- Attend regularly and be on time.
- Call when they will be late or absent.
- Dress appropriately, with some days set aside as “dress-for-work days.”
- Act with decorum in the classroom and school.
- Deal with issues between students and with staff in a mature and professional way.

College and post-secondary education are assumed to be part of a young person’s trajectory. Young people are expected to move from pre-GED to GED programs, and continue with further education, training, and employment preparation. CEPS programs use the “vocabulary of college,” speaking as if college is the expectation for all students. They lay out a variety of options that young people can consider and feel comfortable with—vocational and technical schools, community colleges, local senior colleges, and colleges and universities outside the city and state. Students get information, make visits, hear from alumni who have gone on to college, and get support and encouragement to pursue college.

Students participate in discussions and read about such topics as the relationship of level of education to salaries and advancement opportunities, the economics of poverty, and inequality and access to high quality education and careers. Instructors make connections between the academic content and 21st-century skills and how they apply to what students will encounter in college and work.

One of the organizations that sponsors CEPS is involved in The New York City Partnership for College Access and Success which is designed to increase college admission and retention rates for this population. In this collaboration between the Youth Development Institute and the City University of New York, participating community-based organizations offer assistance in college enrollment, support services, and academic preparation. The CUNY college partner provides services to the young people, including summer orientations, college tours, test-taking workshops, help on the enrollment process, and academic guidance. A vocational component provides construction training for some, through a collaboration between NY City College of Technology and the Carpenter’s Union.

The education/career director at New Heights reports that nine students have moved on to community college in the two years of the program and that this is powerful motivation for the current CEPS students:

In CEPS the students talk about the GED not being enough, that they should at least go to a two-year college. They're so excited to pass the GED and come back and get their college application. I help them with the process.

Staff and alumni follow up with students after they leave the program to maintain the personal connection and offer support as young people take the next step.

Sites celebrate students' successes and progress. Most programs have graduations for the GED students, and CEPS students attend and receive formal recognition there and at CEPS ceremonies.

As the CEPS program matures and more and more students progress to the GED and beyond, programs are developing more systematic ways to support and track their students. At New Heights, for example, students rely on staff for job placement after they leave so they have a built-in mechanism for continued contact. Eastside House and New Settlement Apartments offer college counseling as a hook. Programs are currently testing strategies to ensure continuity for students so they will continue on to higher education and productive careers.

Staff also follows up with students who have left the program to encourage them to rejoin and/or discuss other ways to help

SECTION 4

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO IMPLEMENT CEPS

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO IMPLEMENT CEPS

CEPS is breaking new ground. It starts with a powerful belief in young people and a responsibility to support their full development as learners, workers, and people. It is a marked departure from many past programs for this population that were characterized by low expectations, quick work placement, and a lack of systematic approaches.

CEPS instead offers clear and detailed structure and high expectations rooted in the youth development approach. It connects education and career development as equally essential aspects of a young person's transition to adulthood. Based on intensive research and practice, the model is being tested, evaluated, and refined.

This section presents what we know so far about what organizations need to implement CEPS successfully and talks candidly about the continuing challenges.

VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

CEPS requires a high level of direction and participation from executive directors and boards. Leaders see CEPS as essential to their mission in their communities and are committed to their success. They create the necessary organizational structures. They secure the necessary funding, allocate appropriate space and materials, and seek to continuously build the scale and quality of the program. They insist on high quality staff, who are inspired, and build a collaborative team. They are fully committed to young people and involve them in significant roles within the organization.

CEPS leaders integrate the program into their larger organizational efforts.

The support of YDI and the CEPS program has been critical to New Settlement's success in introducing a pre-GED course and its steady improvement over the past two years, in partnership with the NYC DoE. The pre-GED course is a very important and much-needed program service for young adults in our neighborhood, many of whom are not prepared to enter our more-comprehensive YAOI (Young Adult Outreach Initiative), which positions them to re-enter high school, enter college, and get paid employment. After two years of implementing the pre-GED course and improving outcomes of students, we are preparing to introduce a GED course on-site as well, beginning in fall 2008, also in partnership with NYC DoE. Our larger YAOI program will continue to provide much-needed continuity

and support for all students in the pre-GED and GED courses on-site, and will greatly improve the youths' possibilities of continuing their formal education and gaining the skills needed to seek and retain gainful employment.

CEPS becomes part of the organization's overall community development strategy:

The mission of New Settlement is to support the revitalization of the southwest Bronx neighborhood in which our apartment complex is located—beginning with the youth. In each year of the past ten, we have expanded youth services steadily and intentionally. In 2008, our increasingly comprehensive matrix of programs for youth will serve approximately 2,800 children, teens, and young adults through programs that are simply not available at other organizations or institutions in our immediate community. Our Young Adult Outreach Initiative has also grown over the past five years and now serves 250 youth, through an increasingly comprehensive array of services provided by a diverse professional staff and skilled partners—including NYC DoE. The provision of pre-GED and, soon, GED courses for youth on-site at New Settlement is a tremendous boon to our neighborhood, where these classes—for youth [as opposed to adults]—are simply not otherwise available.

THE BLENDED APPROACH & STAFF WORKING AS A TEAM

The combination of rigorous academic instruction and a comprehensive set of student supports is the foundation of CEPS. Both are predicated on youth development principles that shape the environment, culture, roles, and actions within the organization. It's easier to say than to do. The Blended Approach has implications for every part of the CEPS program—philosophy, leadership, structure, staffing, and resources.

The combination brings together different professional disciplines: youth development, formal education, and social services, among others. Everyone at CEPS programs is concerned about outcomes for young people, but language, approach, and priorities may vary. CEPS requires that everyone be on the same page, giving coherent and consistent messages to young people. That means strong messages from leadership, constant reflection by staff, explicit definition of terminology, and creative ways to learn about each others' approaches:

Several advisors within the support staff have entered the classroom for the “Read Aloud/Think Aloud” portion of the CEPS class. This inclusion has given the advisors the opportunity to have a “look” into the classroom and connect with the students in a different way.

-F.E.G.S. report

Everyone works together on behalf of every individual student. There are formal structures for collaboration among staff, and there are multiple opportunities for informal check-ins and conversations. Staff meetings and student conferences are frequent, well-organized, and focused.

The regular CEPS meetings have been particularly rewarding since they are key in introducing the educational philosophy of the program as well as giving the group the chance to talk many of the aspects through. It was helpful hearing the experiences of others as well as being able to learn from the points presented by others in the group. The meetings also were important since, in a sense, we were creating our own learning community. There were many points presented by others in the group that our group would reflect on in our own meetings. Some of the points were simple techniques that could perhaps help us in working more effectively and efficiently.

-F.E.G.S. report, June 2008

The program has explicit goals for outcomes for students, and equally explicit goals for how staff supports students. Young people know what they are supposed to do and what they can expect from the program and from the adults. Staff is clear about their roles. They hold themselves and the program to high standards. They help each other adhere to youth development principles and demand the effort of staff and students alike.

Adults all push together in the same direction. The coherence and teamwork translate to messages and actions repeated throughout the program. Each student gets consistent support. No student has to manage conflicting orders or mediate between staff that disagrees. At every stage and in every component, young people are surrounded by people and processes designed to move them ahead.

HIGH QUALITY STAFF

Energy, the ability to engage students, and an unshakeable belief that these young people can succeed are prerequisites for staff in programs for returning youth. Young adults are particularly sensitive to their instructors' level of commitment. Much of their reason for disconnecting in the past was that no adult seemed to know who they were, care if they did well, or help them when they needed it.

Given the challenge of what these programs set out to do, assembling a full complement of staff requires identifying people with a range of talents, skills, and expertise. Programs emphasize how important it is that prospective staff has experience working with young adults and tough populations, are resilient themselves, believe in the capacity of the young people, and have no illusions that the work—though ultimately satisfying—is easy.

Staffing patterns reflect the attention to individuals. Class size is kept small, and the program is predicated on close relationships between young people and adults with ratios of about one staff person to twelve students. A typical CEPS staff configuration includes:

- Supervisor or educational coordinator
- Instructor
- Primary person
- Career planning counselor

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development builds capacity for the blended approach, and creates deep skills in the instructional, service, and transition planning areas. The time commitment for training is significant but critical to success. Everyone on staff participates—leaders, supervisors, instructors, career specialists, counselors, social workers, and interns.

Building supervisor capacity is a high priority. While supervisors within CEPS organizations are generally well-versed in youth development, they are generally not trained as educators. They need consultation and coaching to guide CEPS instructors and make sure that instruction combines high quality academics with youth development and support. They ensure that student conferences are timely and effective, and that Primary Persons and instructors are working together on behalf of the students.

Professional development for CEPS programs includes:

- 1) Leader network meetings to build supervisor capacity. Those who will be responsible for supervising teachers learn about effective pedagogy and approaches to literacy and math, Ramp-Up and Math Navigator strategies, and tools for observation.
- 2) Onsite coaching and demonstration lessons, with experts working alongside instructors at least once a month. Trainers get to know the students and how to help staff help students reach their goals.
- 3) Collaborative training sessions with the instructors and the service staff to blend the academic priorities and the youth development principles.

Continuous internal support is essential. Much of the training takes place through formal weekly supervision. Peer training, visiting and observing colleagues, and exchanging advice build respect for each others' expertise.

Because of the math training and materials, the instructor significantly altered her approach to math instruction. She describes herself as an instructor who taught (and learned) by procedure. Now she is introducing math through concept. As a result, she is having her own “aha” learning moments, and so are her students.

RESOURCES

Funding

CEPS programs are currently funded through a combination of public, private, and in-kind dollars. Funding levels across the programs vary widely. Still in the pilot phase, they have not fully identified the costs of developing a new model and then steadily sustaining that program.

Programs report per-student costs ranging between \$4,000 and \$8,000. It is important to confront the true cost, and it is equally important to weigh this against the cost of not serving this population—lost tax revenue and government subsidies, a shortchanged local workforce, and an increasingly divided society.

Not surprisingly, the bulk of the cost is to support a sufficient number of high quality staff—educators, social workers, and youth workers—to stay true to the promise that every young person will be fully supported. Outlays for materials, books, and computers are largest at the outset but must be constantly refreshed and maintained. Professional development is a critical budget item.

Libraries

Books and other resources must be omnipresent. There are central repositories and libraries in every class. Bookshelves line the walls and the halls. Computers with Internet access are in every room. Signs point to shelves of “favorite books.” CEPS programs invest heavily in books that young people will enjoy reading, and are constantly updating and expanding their library collections.

Space

Successful CEPS programs have classrooms and facilities that encourage learning:

- Work stations with computers and tables for manipulative and hands on experiences
- Flexibility in furniture (not bolted to the floor if possible) so young people can work in groups and have back and forth discussions
- Lots of materials, books, and computer resources
- Encouraging and informative signs, posters, and messages on the walls
- Student work and strategies of effective readers are clearly visible

Sometimes it may not be possible to have ideal physical space. But it is always possible to establish an environment of warmth and support, and a set of norms and values among adults and students that says, “This place is for you.”

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES

While the rewards can be great, CEPS programs face significant issues in addressing the needs of these young adults, including:

- Attendance and retention of students
- The integration of instructional and social service staff
- Staff turnover
- Establishing a system of continuous improvement

Attendance & Retention

Despite careful intake procedures, it takes vigilance to keep young people in the program. As site staff gains experience and training, they are able to achieve significantly higher levels of retention. New Heights says that for every 20 who start, 15 stay. But losing even a quarter of these young people is not acceptable to CEPS organizations, and they are constantly seeking ways to keep young people involved.

CEPS programs use a variety of strategies, incentives, sanctions, and social supports to increase retention. They:

- Create a warm and welcoming environment thereby cultivating a sense of belonging to a community that cares.
- Insist on attendance. Staff makes it clear that young people will progress more rapidly if they come. They establish clear rules and consequences. They develop contracts with students that include standards for attendance, and present students with data about their attendance. They call students who are absent. Programs may have a limit on the number of absences or time away before they “suspend” a student. In most cases, they leave the door open with the invitation to return when the student is ready to make the commitment.
- Offer incentives including cash/stipends, gift cards (to places like Barnes & Noble), and raffles with prizes (usually movie or concert tickets).
- Connect young people to jobs, paid internships, and opportunities to work in after-school and other programs operated by the community organization.
- Organize activities that young adults enjoy—performances, shows, and concerts.
- Give students evidence that the program works and that it can work for them. They share data about how many students have moved up, passed their GED, gotten jobs, and gone to college. They share testimonials from students, graduates, parents, and teachers.
- Fortify the connection of student to staff.

After initial interviews, students participated in discussions about goals and outside stresses, wrote poetry based on identity, and met with primary persons for one-on-one “check-ins.” The teacher also set aside time at the end of each class day to have short conversations with students. Students responded very positively to all this individual attention. The higher than usual retention rate in this term (85%) could be attributed to the expanded caring adult experience of our students. The strategies were very productive: higher retention rate, improved TABE scores, and an obvious enjoyment in their learning environment and experience.

-Turning Point report, June 2008

Integrating Instructional, Youth Development, and Social Service Staff

Everyone on staff is committed to young people’s success. But they may not

agree on how that is best accomplished. Youth development workers press for an asset-based approach that focuses on strengths. Social service staff addresses serious issues, and may focus on the problem at hand. Instructional staff pushes for academic skills and knowledge. Bringing these three groups of professionals to common ground may not be easy. Priorities, language, and approaches often clash.

CEPS programs are developing strategies to overcome these separations.

They discuss the intersections of their work:

- How are high expectations for students supported by each partner?
- What sanctions and rewards are acceptable from each perspective?
- Are there times when a student's life situation excuses or relaxes those expectations?

They focus on language and introduce each other to the words and phrases that have particular power and import within their profession. They use each other's terms, and check in to see if they are using them appropriately. They develop ways to question each other's usage constructively and without offense.

It's important to name our practices with youth. Then we can begin to have the context to build collaboration. Educators I have worked with often have a complete, formal template of their curriculum. And as a community person, I think, oh my god, what I do is like breathing. I just do it. Instead, it's imperative that we identify the premises of our work; the things that drive us and the specific practices. Otherwise, we are at a risk of not being an equal partner. If people aren't naming their practice and their intended outcomes, they can't be reflective together: they're working in isolation.

-Youth Development Institute

They work together. Instructors, social services staff, and youth development staff plan lessons, link their content, make explicit the critical thinking and life skills that carry over from one area to another, and implement consistent behavioral and academic expectations. They meet on a regular basis to review the progress of specific students and to reflect on how well they are doing as team and program to move students toward their goals.

Staff Turnover

Staff turnover in community organizations has a strong impact on CEPS

programs. In order to address this, YDI trains staff at all levels within the organization, encourages careful record-keeping, and assists supervisors to build strong bonds with their staff and sustain elements of the CEPS model through training and support. YDI also encourages sites to be transparent with students about staff changes so that they do not feel excluded or rejected. Programs invest in professional development and watch staff grow in capacity and young people thrive, only to lose talented staff to higher pay or less demanding situations. Sites are also challenged when staff members are promoted to other positions in the organization.

This underscores the need for continual professional development for new staff to learn the key components of the CEPS model. Veteran staff and leaders can smooth transition and turnover by building in a “train-the-trainer” component to acclimate new staff. Supervisors play a lead role in helping new teachers and develop an orientation guide for new instructors on key elements of good instruction. Sites create a strong professional community by building a network to develop rapport among teachers. They create opportunities for on-the-job training through a series of inter-site visitations.

Establishing a System of Continuous Improvement

While CEPS programs embrace data collection about student progress, tracking program progress and devising strategies for improvement are more problematic.

Continuous analysis of student outcomes and service delivery provides a base of evidence on which to make informed decisions about the program. Setting up the system takes time, but CEPS programs find it is well worth the effort. Still, few sites are making full use of the data they have collected.

Programs collect baseline data as students enter: quantitative data such as reading levels, past schooling and number of credits/Regents); standardized assessments; qualitative data such as reasons for applying, goals and aspirations, plans for the future, strengths, weaknesses, family or other issues; demographic data such as race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, language spoken, born here or recently emigrated.

They add to this database with quantitative and qualitative documentation of students’ experiences as they move through the program, including:

- [Examples of work](#)
- [Interviews and observations by a range of adults to accumulate evidence of growth, change, or need](#)
- [Attendance and other quantitative data in the context of a students’ work](#)

Student work and the collected data are actively used to monitor student progress, inform student conferences, and guide the development of differentiated instruction.

These data are then viewed within the context of information about the program content and activities, staffing, and participation by students. Documentation captures comments and questions from students and adults, with pictures and examples of students' work and products. Programs conduct focus groups and interviews of students and staff about the content and process of the program components and set up quick feedback mechanisms to measure satisfaction, level of participation, and what students and staff are learning.

In order to track student progress and analyze outcomes in relation to effort, programs must have clear definitions of what constitutes an instructional hour and how many hours students actually participate in instruction. Attendance data must be accurate in order to assess how much instruction each student is participating in, as well as for staying on top of student engagement and commitment. Clear procedures for data entry and management are essential and accuracy is critical.

Being able to track student progress is one of the important benefits of keeping a good system. But an equal benefit comes from reflecting on the information in order to improve the quality of the program and its effectiveness in reaching youth. CEPS programs recognize that it is the process of reflection about the data that will make the difference in building a strong program. They examine program-wide data in staff meetings, and conduct retreats to discuss what programs and services are working well, why, and what needs improvement.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

The CEPS model has already demonstrated its effectiveness as a community-based solution to a chronic challenge. Sites are experimenting and evaluating their efforts. Combining research and best practice from youth development and literacy and mathematics education, CEPS programs are learning and sharing what works so that young adults in New York City and beyond can recapture their talents, potential, and futures.