

Learner Persistence Program Self-Assessment

This compilation of promising practices in learner persistence draws from the New England Learner Persistence Project, research by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (Comings, Parrella & Soricone, 1999) and the NCSALL Learner Persistence Study Circle Guide (2005), *Equipped for the Future*, the *Stick With It* project of the National Research and Development Centre in the United Kingdom, and others. The evidence for the promising practices comes from research and professional wisdom. Practices in some categories necessarily overlap, such as goal-setting upon entrance and during participation.

We hope that doing the self-assessment is a fruitful experience for you. For more information, please contact the New England Learner Persistence Project Director, Andy Nash at anash@worlded.org

Program self-assessment scale: 1 – Top priority need to address 2 - We should work on this at some point 3 – We’re already working on this but could do it better 4 – We do this adequately 5 – We do this well		
Promising Practices in Learner Persistence	Self- Assmt	Comments, Questions to Explore, Evidence for the Score
Intake and Orientation		
a. Build a trusting, respectful, and caring relationship with students from the beginning by ensuring that the first contact with prospective students is welcoming (e.g. there is someone to greet new students, there is clear signage and information in students’ languages) and informative.		
b. Provide clear and accessible information to enhance students’ ability to make informed decisions.		
c. Allow students to sample program activities before enrolling as well as clarify mutual expectations for students, instructors, and the program.		
d. Assess students’ skill levels and screen them for learning disabilities or other special needs, and make referrals as appropriate. Provide potential students with enough information that they can make an informed decision about enrolling, including a realistic assessment of skill levels and the time and effort required for achieving their goals.		
e. Build community by holding group orientations (where possible) for new students, during which students can get to know peers, establish rapport with staff and students, and find connections and commonalities across classrooms.		

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f. Help students plan for managing the positive and negative forces that will support or hinder their participation by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assisting them in strengthening the positive forces, such as identifying and/or building a support network; - counseling them in addressing critical barriers to participation before placement in instructional services; - referring them to agencies/services for assistance with non-academic needs. 		
g. Discuss students’ persistence, learning and aspirations. Begin the process of exploring and articulating long and short-term goals, and of constructing a learning plan that addresses instructional and support services that move them toward their goals.		
h. Engage students in considering opportunities and reasons for pursuing postsecondary education and training.		
i. Involve current students in orienting new learners to the program, answering their questions, and providing peer guidance.		

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Program Design and Management		
a. Offer learning options (e.g. classroom instruction, distance learning, computer-assisted instruction, drop-in instruction or activities, conversation or book clubs, peer learning groups, tutoring, and enrichment classes) to address diverse student needs.		
b. Create a comfortable, safe and welcoming learning environment that communicates caring and respect to students and staff, that encourages students to take risks in their learning, and that consciously counters racism and prejudice.		
c. Develop an organized curriculum (i.e. a master plan for selecting content and organizing learning experiences) that results from a clear process for making curriculum decisions, that addresses the needs and goals of adult students, and that is consistent with adult learning principles.		
d. Institute managed enrollment, where feasible, to reduce turbulence and promote class stability and continuity.		
e. Develop student “cohorts” – groups of students who participate together in program activities (e.g. study groups, goal-related workshops, classes) as a learning community.		
f. Provide training and support for teaches to implement persistence strategies, including meeting regularly to share strategies and concerns, discuss student work, and participate in overall program improvement planning.		
g. Solicit and use student feedback to make improvements in instruction, counseling, and program structures and processes.		
h. Use program data to analyze patterns of persistence and to inform program improvement.		
i. Work with external partners to align policies and procedures in ways that will help learners persist along cross-program learning pathways.		
j. Integrate basic skills instruction with work readiness, job training, or college courses.		
k. Institute an attendance policy that is clear and fair, and that explains the impact of individual attendance on learning and on the program.		

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Instruction		
a. Build explicitly on the skills, knowledge, and experiences that students bring to their learning.		
b. Use authentic materials and real-world instructional activities that are relevant and meaningful to adult students’ life contexts and prepare them to apply their new skills outside the classroom.		
c. Implement instructional activities that promote active learning, problem-solving and projects that advance learning objectives and have clear benchmarks for progress and successful completion.		
d. Implement differentiated instruction that accommodates individual learning needs by addressing multiple skill levels, intelligences, learning preferences and abilities.		
e. Continually build community and sense of belonging in the class among students.		
f. Involve students in decision-making about their learning, including making choices about lesson content and organization (timing, sequencing, etc.) and about other matters that affect their learning.		
g. Engage students in an ongoing dialogue about their learning progress.		
h. Promote the development of students’ self-efficacy (i.e. beliefs about their ability to be successful students) by providing mastery experiences early on, inviting graduates or peers to share their strategies for success, etc.		
i. Structure learning experiences as a mix of group and individual instruction that promotes peer learning, and help learners develop the skills and confidence for working and learning in groups.		
j. Teach study skills while recognizing learning strategies students already have.		
k. In open enrollment classrooms, manage the integration of new students without compromising the learning experience of the others.		
l. Integrate the use of computers and the Internet in instruction, using real world applications and websites as much as possible.		
m. Introduce relaxation and self-care techniques into classroom practice.		

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Seeing Progress		
a. Develop a comprehensive, non-threatening approach for assessing and placing students, evaluating their progress, and sharing this information with students.		
b. Provide students constructive feedback on their learning and progress, and opportunities to reflect on and self-assess their progress, including holding regularly-scheduled conferences with students.		
c. Help adults learn to identify signs of progress and strategies for monitoring their learning independently.		
d. Help students set achievable short-term goals or benchmarks toward long-term goals in order to see progress and feel a sense of accomplishment.		
e. Revisit goals with students, individually and in groups, so that they can monitor their progress and consider new goals and possibilities.		
f. Recognize a broad range of student achievements, both academic and non-academic, and celebrate students who accomplish goals.		

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Counseling and Support		
a. Assess and address learning difficulties, including vision and hearing screenings, trauma, addiction and other mental health issues.		
b. Have a system for identifying students’ needs for support services; determine which needs the program is equipped to address and which cases should be referred to other agencies; document counseling activities and referrals; and follow up on each case.		
c. Promote a support network within the program where staff, volunteers, or peer mentors make personal connections with specific students on a regular basis.		
d. Discuss students’ persistence, learning and aspirations. Begin the process of exploring and articulating long and short-term goals, and of constructing a learning plan that addresses instructional and support services that move them toward their goals.		
e. Establish learning plans for those who may stop out and help them find suitable ways to re-engage in learning until they reach their goals, including offering distance learning options.		
f. Implement a formal system for staying in contact with and supporting the continuous learning of students who are absent or stopping out, including admission policies that enable easy and timely re-entry to classroom instruction.		
g. Establish a system of providing support to students who are close to graduating or meeting their goals, and those who seem at risk of dropping out.		
h. Provide or arrange for student transportation to and from the program (e.g. car pools, van service) and advocate for improved public transportation.		
i. Arrange workshops and support groups on topics of concern to students, such as health and nutrition, violence and trauma, immigration policy, and stress management.		
j. Include students’ family and friends in program activities.		
k. Help adults develop career aspirations and make informed choices about careers and further education and training.		

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Student Involvement		
a. Provide meaningful opportunities for student involvement and leadership in areas such as new student orientations, program evaluation and governance, civic participation, and building connections to the community.		
b. Train and hire former students as outreach workers, peer mentors, peer support group leaders, or tutors or teachers.		
c. Engage students in exploring ways to take action to address their common barriers (e.g. lack of public transportation, access to daycare, funding for education)		