

Community Education Pathways to Success Promising Results for Youth Who Have Dropped Out of School

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In New York City, reflecting national data, nearly 70% of students who drop out are at very low literacy levels when they enter high school.¹ With adult education funds too limited to provide the multiple supports they need, and Workforce Investment Act and GED programs designed for those with more of the skills required for a job or GED, these young people have few program options.

In 2005, in an effort to address the needs of this underserved population, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) developed Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS). This model provides the academic, vocational, and personal support young people with low skill levels need to become eligible for GED programs and enter the workforce. Ten New York City community based organizations (CBOs) have since integrated CEPS within their existing programs and evidence of the difference it can make is mounting. Students involved in CEPS are becoming readers and making significant gains on standardized tests, even though before dropping out, many attended their regular high schools less than 20 percent² of the time. CEPS has received support from both national and New York City-based foundations.³

The CEPS model has three building blocks: research-based youth development principles, rigorous instruction and highly structured student supports. YDI designed CEPS to tightly integrate these elements, creating a blended model. For example, the youth development principle of caring adult relationships shapes the provision of student supports through the Primary Person Approach,⁴ and the literacy practice of adults modeling good reading habits. Thus, each of these building blocks emphasizes the youth-adult relationship. The other youth development principles, for example, high expectations, are also reflected in each of the key program elements, as is described below.

For the CEPS instructional component, YDI partnered with America's Choice (ACI), a leading provider of adolescent curricula and instructional support, to adapt and integrate features of the ACI Ramp Up to Literacy program with the rest of the model.

Before testing CEPS' impact on youth, YDI designed a rigorous program of organizational assistance and training and worked with CBOs to ensure that they could implement the model with fidelity.

The CEPS Model

A key element of the CEPS strength-based approach is to build teamwork among the staff at each site so that students experience a coherent set of expectations with the support of the adults who are all pushing in the same direction.

¹ Data from *NYC DOE Multiple Pathways Strategy*, Presentation to the New York State Board of Regents, October 2006.

² School district data as above in 1.

³ The Altman, Clark, W.K. Kellogg, New York Community Trust and The Pinkerton foundations.

⁴ For a detailed description of this practice, contact YDI.

Instructors and counselors are trained together in all components—youth development, academics, and student support. Together they learn how to engage students in meaningful conversations about setting realistic learning goals, the results of their educational assessments, and their progress in the program. Counselors also help young adults identify past obstacles to their academic success, create new strategies for success, and continually assess and modify their strategies as needed.

CEPS Design Elements

- *Youth Development Principles:* Seven youth development features, the foundation of the CEPS model, guide program design and practice. These are safety; caring adult relationships; high expectations; youth voice and participation; mastery and competence; engaging and meaningful activities; and continuity.
- *CEPS Instructional Features:* YDI and ACI have worked with CBOs to adapt Ramp Up to an out-of-school setting. In the classroom, CEPS instructors implement routines and rituals that include independent reading, read-aloud, talk aloud, whole group instruction, and work periods. Students learn explicit reading strategies that can be used both within and outside the program, such as determining importance, asking questions, visualizing, inferring, retelling, summarizing and synthesizing, and monitoring comprehension. Ramp Up strategies and highly structured classrooms work well for older students, giving them a sense of purpose and consistency and helping them understand clearly how to progress.
- *CEPS Social Support Features:*⁵ CEPS programs include extensive social supports to engage young people, help them identify and build on their strengths, overcome personal obstacles, foster independence, and bolster their progress in academic and work-based skills and understanding. The Primary Person Approach, in which one adult is assigned to advocate for and provide support to individual students, helps to ensure that they receive the support and guidance they need.⁶ Through regular student conferencing, teams meet together to discuss students and jointly plan strategies to support them. Often, they jointly review student work as a way of building understanding about their progress.

A Student Success Story

When AB first came to CEPS his attendance was poor and he appeared distant in class. In a one-on-one conference, his counselor learned that there were issues at home and AB had moved out of his mother's house. With the assistance of his counselor, AB was able to work things out and move back home.

With improved attendance, AB earned the position of Peer Leader. The CEPS staff recognized that providing AB with the opportunity to be involved in day to day operations would engage him in the program. AB now attends regularly and is an active participant in classroom activities.

⁵ The social supports component is supported by YDI consultant, Eileen Lyons.

⁶ YDI prefers the term *student conferencing* and the practices it describes to the more commonly used term, *case conferencing*, which implies a medical approach to working with students

Organizational and Staff Practices

- *CEPS Team Activities:* The collaboration among CEPS staff on-site is key to the success of the model. Instructional and support staff work together in many different ways, from program planning and design to facilitating intake and orientation, and meet on a regular basis in student conferences to discuss and direct their work with individual students.
- *CBO Commitment:* The comprehensive nature of the CEPS model requires the commitment of the CBO at all levels and the creation of strong, high functioning teams. CEPS team leaders supervise instructional and counseling staff, work to bridge gaps between their different perspective, and seek to foster a culture of open and consistent communication.
- *YDI Capacity Building:* YDI supports the work of CEPS teams through extensive training and technical assistance including training in youth development, Ramp Up, and student conferencing. CBOs receive on-site coaching three and a half days per month, and YDI facilitates regular meetings for CBO staff that share similar responsibilities as well as opportunities for practitioners to network and discuss challenges and share best practices. These exchanges between teams and CBOs provide opportunities for practitioners to step away from their own work, reflect on their practice, and deepen their skills.

A Student Success Story

Jorge was home schooled. Coming to CEPS, he was able to move from a 4th grade reading level to his current 7.4 reading level. He is also in a career internship... He has been a leader and his relationship with his peers is one of respect and genuine concern. He has come a long way.

CEPS Implementation and Assessment

The first step in assessing CEPS' impact was an examination of how fully CBO sites were following the CEPS model. During the 2006/07 year, most sites moved much closer to fully implementing the model, with five of the six implementing the youth development and support components at levels that were adequate or above. The biggest challenges and most significant changes for sites were the use of the primary person approach and in the use of case or student conferencing, where staff meet formally and regularly to learn about and support participating youth. For two sites another major change was to establish higher behavioral and academic expectations for students. Such expectations appear to result in fewer attendance/retention issues.

Sites have found that Ramp Up's rituals and routines work particularly well in situations where new students come into existing classes on an ongoing basis and where attendance can be inconsistent. At three of the sites, instructors have been modifying Ramp Up to better meet the needs and time limitations of an educational program for out-of-school youth, while staying within the overall curriculum framework.

CEPS and Student Achievement

Based on their Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) scores, CEPS student achievement has been increasing at an accelerated rate. For example, the 67 students who remained in CEPS an average of five months saw their TABE literacy scores increase from 6.1 to 7.5, a gain of 13 months⁷—more than twice the expected five-month increase. In addition, for all CEPS students with more than one TABE literacy score, the increase was from 6.0 to 7.4. There were major differences across sites, with average student increases ranging from 3.0 to -.2. These differences appeared to be related at least in part to the quality of the implementation of the Ramp Up curriculum, highlighting the importance of instructor training and supervision. Not surprisingly, increases in student literacy scores were also significantly higher for those with better attendance.

Five sites provided instruction in math as well as literacy, each using their own math materials. Math gains were smaller, from 5.0 to 5.9, with no significant differences in gains across sites. In four of the five sites increases in literacy were greater than those in math, indicating that having a specific curriculum in which instructors are trained is an important component to the model.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

This program summary touches on many features of CEPS as well as its challenges. YDI will continue to share our learning so that the field as a whole can further develop services for this dramatically underserved group of young people. Specific program features, such as the Primary Person Approach, are documented in detail; while a full package of materials is in process and will be available in the summer of 2008. A related component, in which GED students are supported in entering and remaining in college through community organization partnerships with the college campuses, is also available. Several publications describing this component are available, indicate “College Access and Success.” YDI’s website is down temporarily while it is being redesigned following our move, but will be up in March of 2008. In the meantime, for more information about CEPS and the Youth Development Institute contact: avolonis@ydinstitute.org or call 646.943.8829.

⁷ TABE scores are reported as grade equivalents (GE). In GE, the integer is the school grade level and the decimal is the month of the nine month school year. In five months the expected gain would be from 6.1 to 6.6; for these students the gain was an average of 13 months. Additional analysis is currently being done including comparing CEPS students with students in other preGED programs.