

# Helping Students Stay: Retention in the Classroom

Forum for  
Excellence  
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Illinois PD  
Network



**Welcome!**

# **AGENDA**



**01**

**Setting the Stage**

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**02**

**Retention Research**

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**03**

**What Can I Do?**

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# Introductions



01

## Setting the Stage

Why are we talking about student retention?

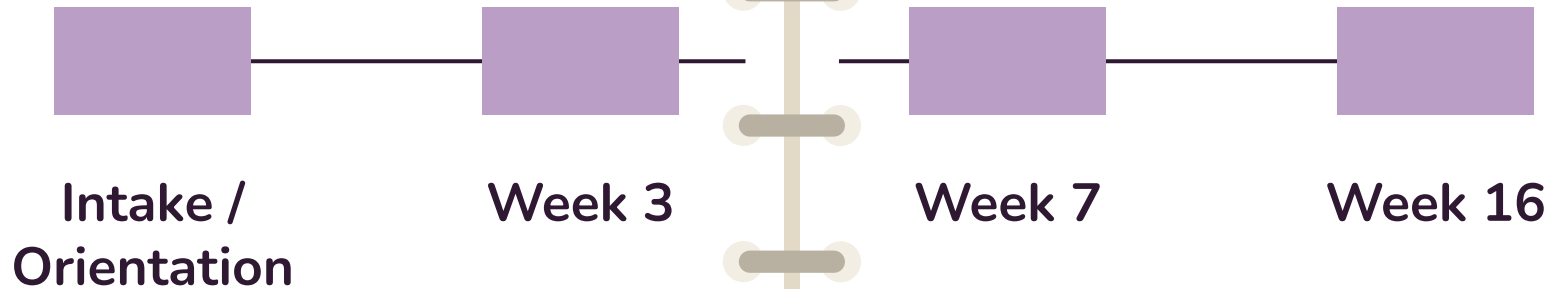
Quote of  
the day

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“A student is the most important person in the school...A student is not an interruption of our work - the student is the purpose of it.”

—William Purkey, educator

**In a 16 week class, when should we really begin thinking about retaining students?**



How can I determine my class needs?

Which retention strategies will work in my class?

From the moment instructors receive their class rosters, they can begin asking, “**What can I do to retain my students?**”

Let’s look at **relevant research** on student persistence, consider our **own student retention data**, and look back at **past experiences** with students to determine which **retention strategies to apply**.

We can “**Help Students Stay!**”

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# Consider class types

In-person class

Math class

Online class

Beginning Reading

Hybrid class

HSE Prep class

Issues and considerations for retention differ depending on class subject and mode of delivery - but we all face challenges with retention!





**Retention is a complicated issue, with countless reasons students don't persist.**



## Barriers to Retention for Adult Students

### Academic Barriers

Interrupted education  
Learning disabilities  
(diagnosed or not)  
Test/school anxiety  
Negative school  
experiences  
Mindset of "I'm not a  
good student"  
ELL barriers

### Personal Barriers

Mental health concerns  
Low self-esteem  
Perceptions of  
school/teachers  
Transportation  
Work schedules  
parenting/caregiving  
Poor time management,  
organization skills  
Cultural barriers  
Justice-impacted

### Programmatic Barriers

- Class schedule doesn't  
work for them
- Fixed or open entry  
Attendance policy too  
rigid / too loose
- No case management  
or student support  
staff available

All these barriers are legitimate concerns.

# However...

Let's focus on where we have  
impact and influence!



02

## Retention Research

Let's look at some data...

# Retention Research

Attrition is described as the **#1 problem in adult basic education. Attrition rates as high as 60-70% are reported in state and federal statistics (Quigley 1995).**

Attrition=  
Reduction  
in number

A recurring theme in these and other studies is **the crucial importance of the first few weeks**, especially the first class. Kambouri and Francis (1994) reported that most leavers stayed only 2-3 weeks, and Malicky & Norman (1994) also found **the highest attrition rates occurred early in the program.**

<https://www.ericdigests.org/1996-3/adult.htm>

# Retention Research

*From a report by ACE of Florida in 2020:*

**“Approximately 58% of adult learners enroll in adult education programs for 6 months or less.”**

Recent quantitative studies on retention done in 2011 report **attrition rates between 38-54%** for local programs.

*From Mellard, D.F., Krieshok, T., Fall, E. in a 2012 paper:*

**“For several decades ABE/ASE program data show patterns of poor persistence as many adult literacy learners do not persist or participate in enough instruction to measurably improve their literacy skills.**

**About a quarter of learners separate from these programs before completing even one adult educational functioning level...”**

# Retention Research

## ~National & State~

NATIONAL ADULT ED RETENTION DATA  
Source: COABE, August 2021

In fiscal year 2019, national data indicate an adult education retention rate of **31.3%** for all students who did not achieve a measurable skill gain.

Studies in the 1990s indicated **the crucial importance of the first few weeks**, especially the first class. In several studies, **the highest attrition rates occurred early in the program.**

<https://www.ericdigests.org/1996-3/adult.htm>

Illinois Adult Education data from FY20 & FY21 supports the idea that programs lose most students early in their participation, **often before day 1 of class.**

# Retention & Performance

Students who exited BEFORE they achieved an MSG = **35%** (of the total approximately 39,000 students served in Illinois in FY22).

**We are losing a large number of students before they can earn that important measurable skill gain.**

## Students who have pre and post tests - FY22

| NRS Level     | % Achieving MSG |
|---------------|-----------------|
| ABE Level 1   | 77.1%           |
| ABE Level 2   | 58%             |
| ESL Level 1   | 83.6%           |
| ESL Level 2   | 80.3%           |
| ESL Level 3   | 76%             |
| <b>Total:</b> | <b>57.5%</b>    |

When we retain students long enough to post-test them, they do **VERY WELL!**



# Key Takeaways from the Research

1. **All adult educators face the challenge of retaining students** - at the national, state, and individual classroom levels.
2. **Students who don't see personal successes achieved or goals accomplished** are more likely to leave class.
3. The **earliest class sessions** are when we lose the most students.

All this data can seem defeating...

**But remember ~**

We can make choices to influence student retention in our own areas of impact!



03

## What can I do?

How can instructors influence student retention?

## What are the most important practices in retaining students?

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Student engagement and motivation                       | 88.7% |
| Positive and collaborative teacher/student interactions | 87.2% |
| Multiple instructional approaches                       | 62.4% |
| Student goal setting                                    | 56.4% |

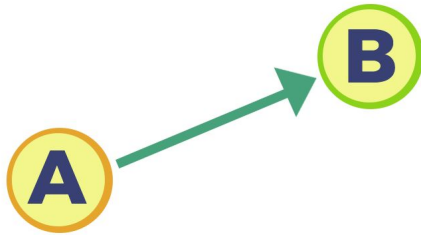
What do teachers say impacts retention?

The Institute for the Professional Development of Adult Educators (IPDAE) and the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) survey results, February 2020.

01

What do we mean by...

## Student Engagement & Motivation



“ The usefulness of what is learned generally is a greater influence on adults’ motivation to learn than its intellectual value. Therefore, **the more new material is contextualized and the students can see its importance and utility, the greater the motivation to learn it.**”

*A Framework of Contextualized Teaching and Learning, 2013.*

02

What do we mean by...

## Positive, Collaborative Teacher/Student Interactions



A key to retention is “interactions between teachers and participants that show mutual respect and acceptance with opportunities for learners to form social and support relationships with each other.”

~ Ziegler and Durant (2001)

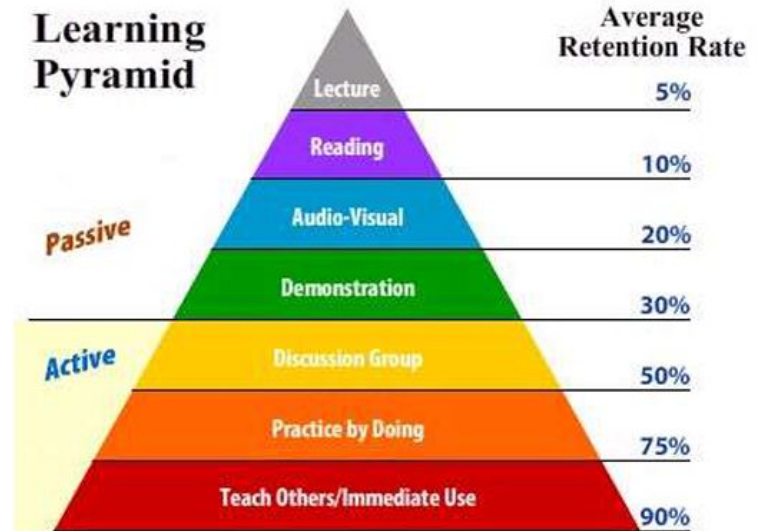
Positive interactions can be **simple** but they should be **intentional**.

03

What do we mean by...

## Multiple Instructional Approaches

The most effective instructional approaches for adults involve active learning rather than passive.



Source: National Training Laboratories, Bethel, Maine

04

What do we mean by...

# Goal Setting

**Identify** goals - long & short term  
**Write** goals - SMART  
**Share** goals - be accountable  
**Revisit** goals - relevant? redirect?

Who/what  
makes it  
hard

Who/what  
helps

More +  
or -  
forces?

2 forces to  
strengthen  
/weaken?

## Force-field analysis

*"Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education," CALPRO's  
Research Digest, 2005*

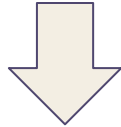


# Level of Impact

*Texts with motivational or reminder messages*



Changes to orientation,  
counseling, peer support



**Instructional  
improvements**

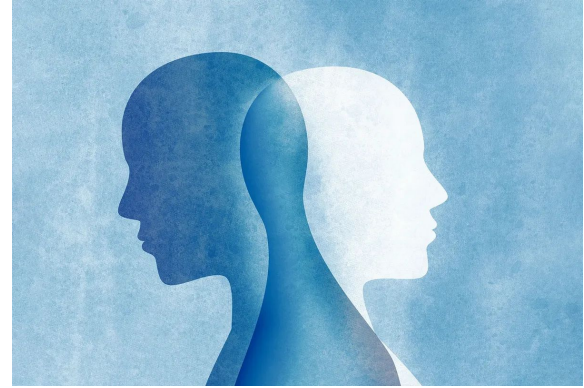


# Brainstorm

Consider the category of **Student Engagement & Motivation**.

**Which retention efforts in this category might be effective in your classes?**

# CHANGE MY MIND



“How can we  
make attendance  
attainable for all?”

From “We’re just  
going to lose a bunch  
of them anyway.”

TO

## Consider your own classroom data



REFLECTION  
TIME

- Who are you losing?
- When are you losing them?
- Are your retention numbers consistent term to term?

## Next Steps

What new strategy will you try in your classroom this term?



Particular students you intend to reach out to?



Long-term goal for your semester retention?



Have  
questions?  
Reach out!

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Thank  
you!

Link to padlet of resources  
[HERE](#)



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