



**Here Today...  
Gone Tomorrow**

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**The Role of State Staff in Promoting  
Student Persistence**

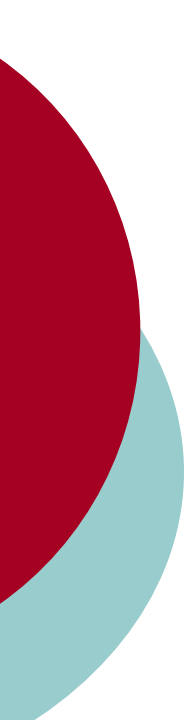
# We All Know The Issues...

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- Here today, gone tomorrow!

Why don't our  
students  
stick around longer?





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Introduce yourself to your  
table partners and  
share one reason  
why you think students leave  
our program early.



# The Bottomline...

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- There is no ONE reason why they leave.
- That's what makes student persistence such a challenge.



# Today's Training Objectives

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- Examine the latest research on learner persistence to determine factors that promote retention.
- Explore a variety of instructional and management strategies that address the research findings.
- Examine state policy/guidance, state procedures, and professional development options for supporting student persistence.

# Why is persistence so important?

Learner Persistence Study, NCSALL (2004)

**GLE Increase**

**EFL Gains**

**Duration and Intensity**

100 hours required for a 1 GLE increase

75 percent chance of making a 1+ GLE increase at 150 hours

Another gain after 250 – 300 hours

# So how important is student persistence?

## Relationship of CASAS Reading Scale Score Gains with Instructional Time

Reading Pretest Scale Score Ranges	Hours of Instruction					
	12 to 74 Hours		75 to 120 Hours		121 or more Hours	
Program Years	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
<180 ESL Beginning Literacy						
1999-2000	19.2	1067	19.9	882	22.9	1036
2000-01	20.3	2229	22.4	1526	26.1	1811
2001-02	20.2	2298	22.3	1290	25.9	1584
2002-03	19.7	2939	22.5	1410	27.8	1852

# Data Check ...

## When You Return Home

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- On average, how long is it taking for learners to complete and/or advance to a higher functioning level?





# Intensity and Duration

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The data tell us we need:

- **intensity** (hours/month) and
- **duration** (months/year)

for many adult learners to succeed.



**DUH-HUH!!!**

**BFO**

**So how do we get it?**



# Listen to our learners!

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Let's say what some of our students had to say about what they wanted.



# What does the research tell us?

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- Latest Research - Learner Persistence Study
  - John Comings et al., NCSALL, 2004
    - [John\\_comings@harvard.edu](mailto:John_comings@harvard.edu)
    - <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report12.pdf> Surveyed 150 adult learners
  - Observed 9 programs that were trying to improve persistence

# Student Pathways

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- **Long-Term**: highly motivated, few barriers, older, slow progress
- **Mandatory**: poor motivation
- **Short-term**: project learners
- **Try-out**: fairly large, too many barriers, drop out
- **Intermittent**: largest group, motivated, participate, barrier emerges, stop-out, return later

Comings, 2004

# Activity 1:

## Indicators of Persistence

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Which of these do you think characterize the “persistors” in the NCSALL study?

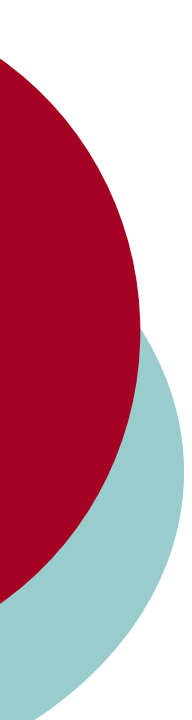
- Gender
- Immigrant status
- Age of children
- Employment status
- Working hours
- Goal
- Negative school experience
- Parent’s education
- Involvement in previous training
- Single parent status



# Adult Student Characteristics That Support Persistence

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- Immigrant status, age over 30, and parent of teen or adult children
- Involvement in previous efforts at basic skills education, self study, or vocational skill training
- Specific goal



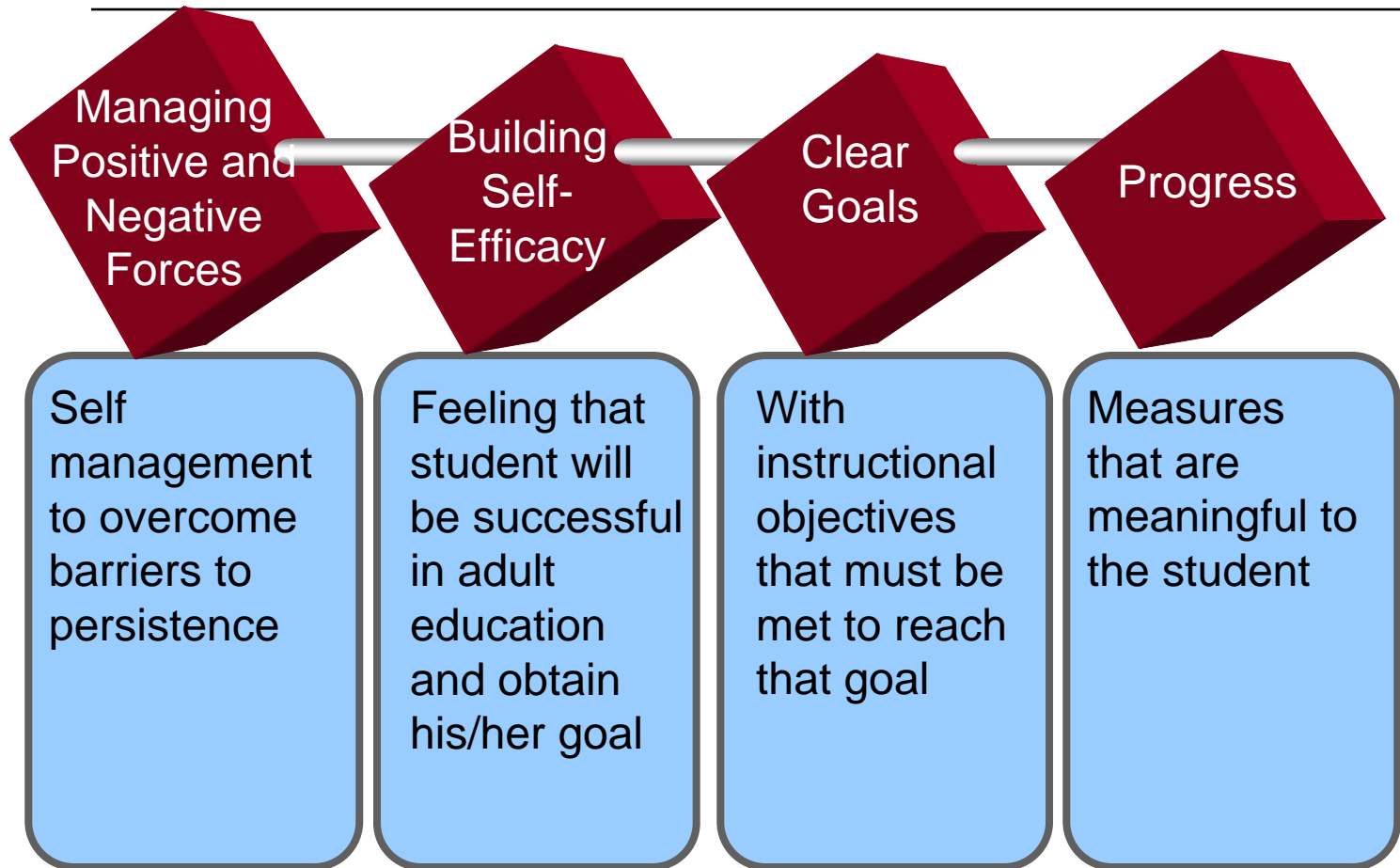
# Adult Student Characteristics That Did Not Influence Persistence

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- Gender and ethnicity
- Single parent status
- Employment status/working hours
- Negative school experience
- Parent's education

# Persistence Supports

John Comings et al. (2004)





# Program Improvement

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- When programs improved services,
  - Months of engagement did not increase but hours of participation did.

Learner Persistence Study  
Comings et al., 2004

# Stop Outs, Not Drop Outs

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Alisa Belzer (1998)

- Leavers don't consider themselves "drop-outs"
- Stop attending but plan on returning later
  - Stop out for reasons "beyond their control"
- Departure from a program not viewed as a "negative" or "failure," but rather as a temporary hiatus

## Persistence Should Be...

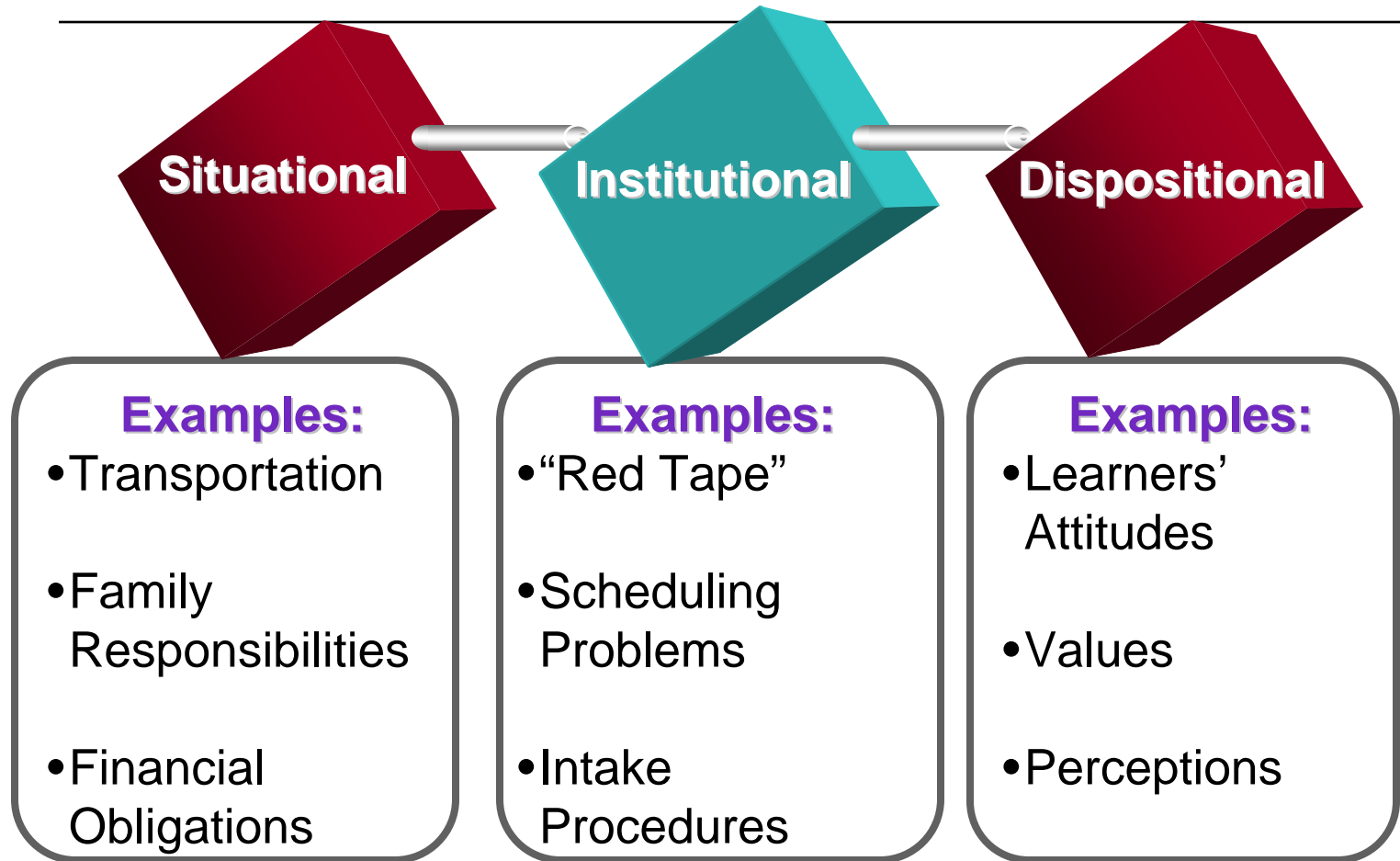
“Adults staying in programs for as long as they can,

engaging in supported self study or distance education when they must stop attending program services, and

returning to program services as soon as the demands of their lives allow.”

John Comings, 2004

# Three Barriers to Persistence



B. Allan Quigley (1993)  
The Critical First Three Weeks



# Classroom Dynamics

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## Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy Education

Hal Beder and Patsy Medina

- Instruction focuses on basic skills, not higher-level abilities.
- Teachers are not student-centered.
- Class composition and enrollment turbulence shape classroom dynamics.
- Continuous enrollment and mixed skill levels are serious and understated problems in the adult literacy classroom.



# Turbulence and Focus

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Thomas Sticht et al. (1998)

- Open-entry/continuous enrollment makes it harder for students to stay in the program.
- Multi-focused/multi-level classes make student persistence more difficult.
- Persistence rates increase in classes where the focus of students and classrooms are more closely aligned (e.g., job readiness, GED).



# Copies of Briefs in Your Packet

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- Four research briefs
  - Persistence Among Adult Basic Education Students in Pre-GED Classes (Comings, et al)
  - The First Three Weeks: A Critical Time for Motivation (Quigley)
  - Stopping Out, Not Dropping Out (Belzer)
  - Classroom Dynamics in Adult Literacy Education (Beder and Medina)



# Research Implications

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- **From an accountability perspective**
  - Participation ends when an adult drops out of a program
- **From a student's perspective**
  - Participation may continue after leaving the program through self study or distance learning



# Research Implications

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- New definition values self-study, transfer, re-entry into a program
- Increased need for programs to stay connected and offer alternative services



# Episodic Learning and Re-engagement

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- Set the expectation at intake
  - Acknowledge the need for **regular attendance** BUT acknowledge the possible reality of **episodes of participation**
  - Review available **non-instructional support and distance learning opportunities to keep them engaged**
  - Review **re-entry procedures**
  - Review **transitions** to other programs and post secondary



# Episodic Learning and Re-engagement

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- Set the expectation during class or small group instruction
  - **Acknowledge re-entering students**
  - In group discussions, include **re-entry and transitions**

# Research Implications

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- Learner persistence impacts everything we do.

## **The Three P's**

### Practice

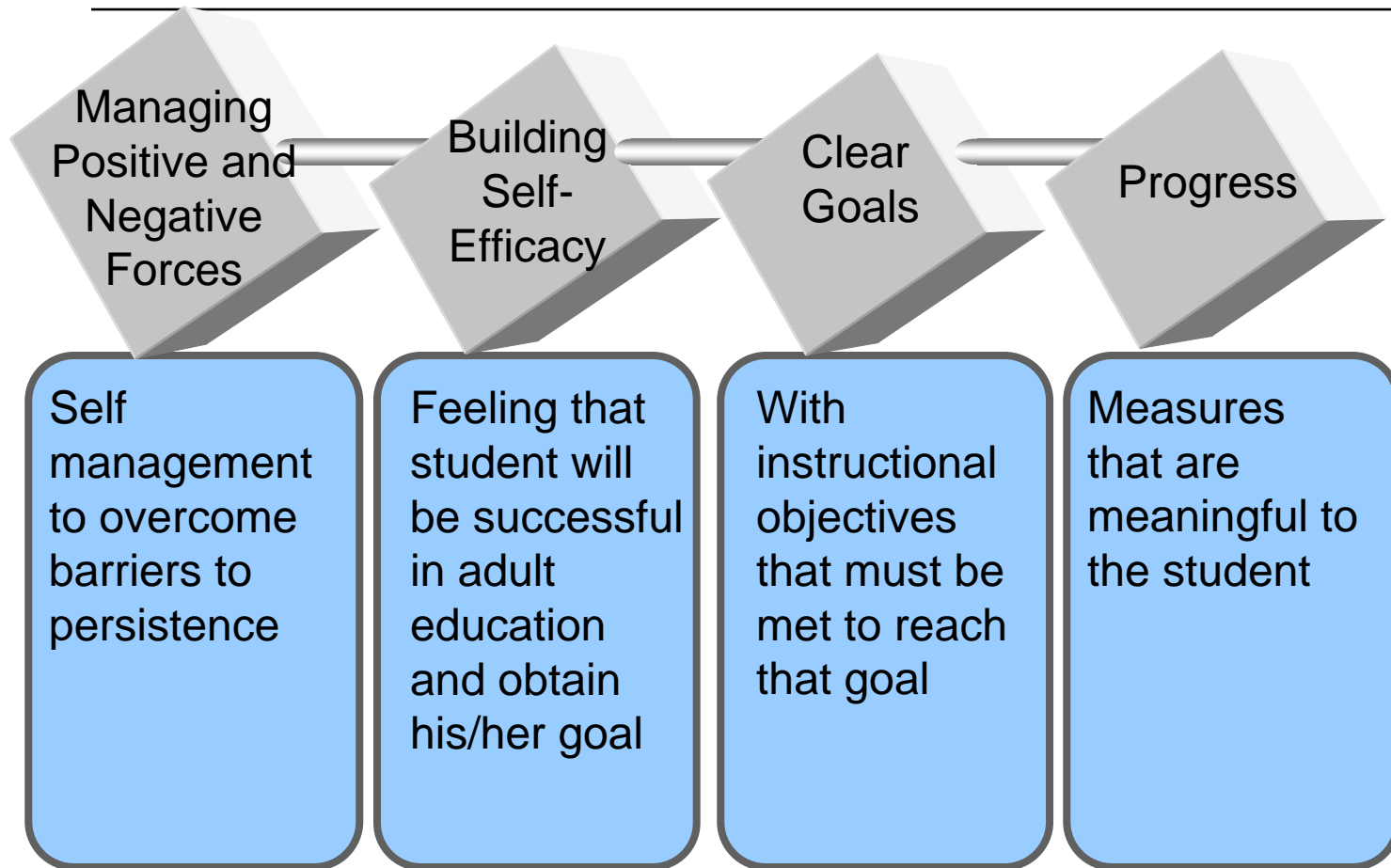
(instructional delivery and program structure)

### Policy and Procedures

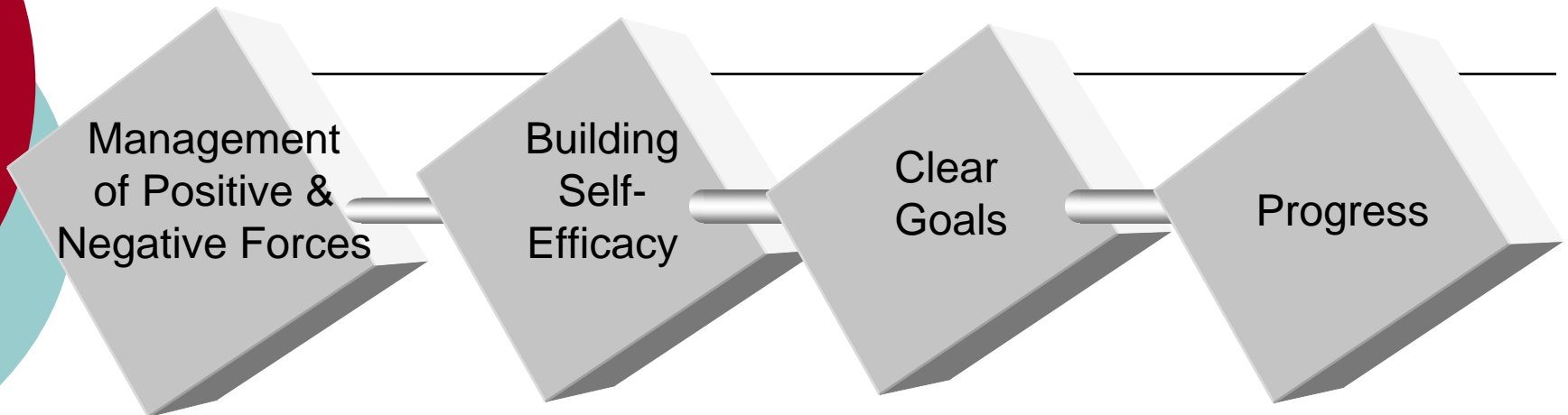
### Professional Development

# Persistence Supports

John Comings et al. (2004)



# Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence



- Student Needs Assessment
- Sponsorship
- Sense of Community
- Accessibility

# Management of Positive and Negative Forces

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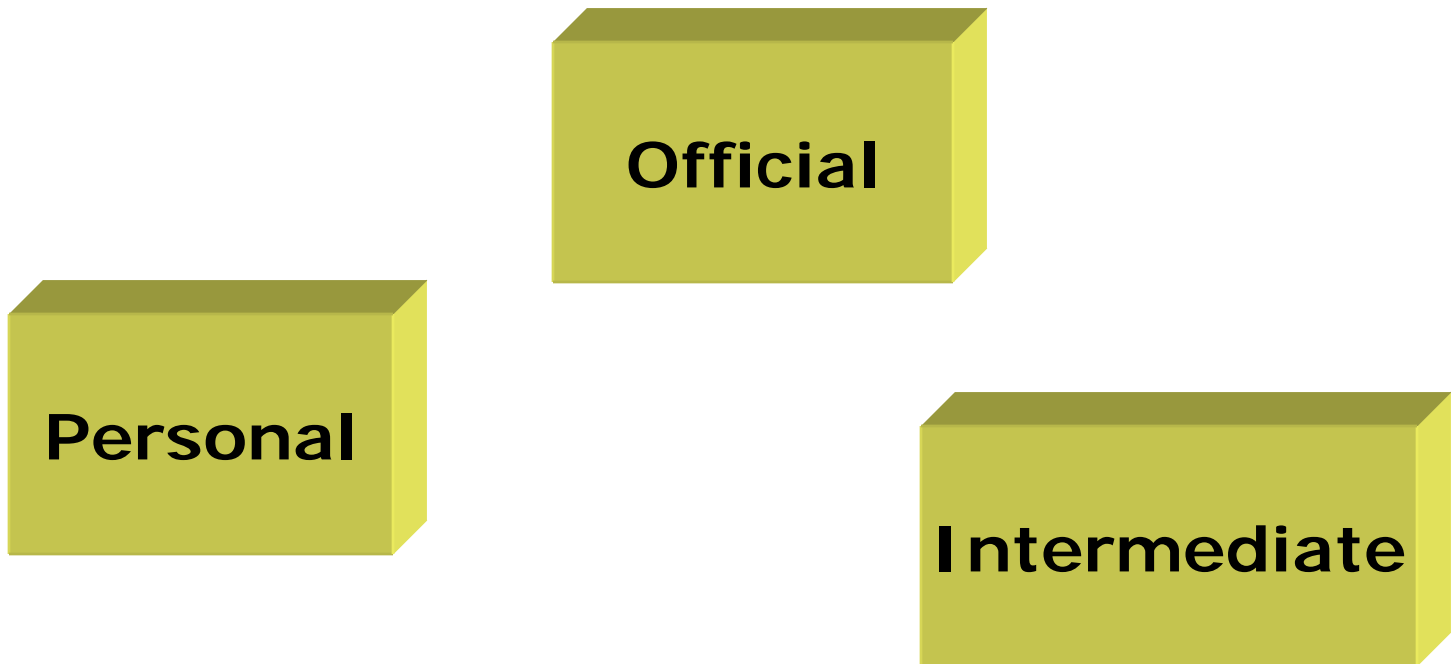
- **Strategy 1:** Student Needs Assessment
  - Involving students in examining their supporting and hindering forces to achieving their goals
- Sample needs assessment processes
  - Brainstorming and prioritizing
  - Acting it out
  - Classroom discussion
  - Snowball consensus
  - Affinity diagramming
  - Learner-to-learner interviews

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# Management of Positive and Negative Forces

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- **Strategy 2:** Sponsorships





# Management of Positive and Negative Forces

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- Sponsorship Strategies
  - Identify sponsors during intake process.
  - Discuss with student the sponsor's role.
  - Help students identify sponsors if they don't have any.
  - Ask student's permission.
  - Employ a Student Persistence Coordinator (paid or volunteer) to support students.
  - Form a Student Retention Team to contact and support at-risk students.

# Management of Positive and Negative Forces

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- **Strategy 3:** Building a Sense of Community
  - Managed intake and managed enrollment classes (students begin and progress together)
  - Field trips, potluck dinners, etc. that bring learners together in different ways
  - Student-run activities (e.g., Second Chance Prom)
  - Class ground rules set by students
  - Buddy system for new and returning students
  - Group activities and projects (e.g., *Dear Abby*)

# Management of Positive and Negative Forces

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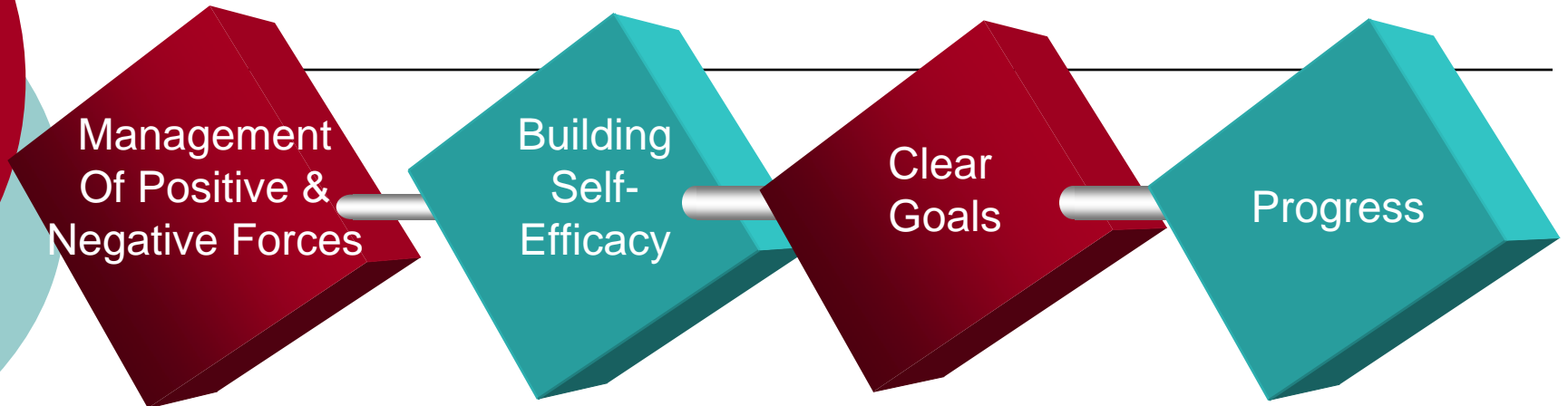
- **Strategy 4: Accessibility**
  - Intake Process: Barrier resolution process
  - Persistence Plan for stopping out
  - Support Services: networking with community agencies
  - Enrollment and Attendance Policies: changing policies to reduce classroom chaos from constant entering and exiting of students
  - Flexible Scheduling

## Activity #2: Managing the Forces

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- With your table partners, discuss:
  - What policy/guidance do you have in place to enable practitioners to help students manage those negative factors that interrupt persistence?
  - What areas would you like to explore?

# Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence




- Student Leadership
- Assessment
- Recognition
- Learner-generated Materials
- Learning Styles and Special Learning Needs



# Building Self-Efficacy

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- A belief by learners that they can be successful when attempting new activities as learners.
- What do some teachers think about their role in building self efficacy? 
- What are you doing now?



# Building Self-Efficacy

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- Strategy 1: Student Leadership
  - Peer orientations
  - Peer teaching
  - Advisory board members
  - Student Advisory Board
  - Student Retention Team
  - Student-led projects

# Building Self-Efficacy

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## ○ Assessment

- Begin with informal non-academic measures before using formal (TABE, CASAS) measures
- Begin standardized testing with the student's greatest comfort area
- Involve learners more in assessment process
  - Portfolio assessment
  - Conferencing
    - Student Teacher Evaluation Process (STEPS)

# Building Self-Efficacy

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- Strategy 3: Recognition and Incentives
  - National Adult Student Honor Society  
<http://www.naehs.org/Default.htm>
  - Student of the Month
  - Family of the Month
  - Graduation Ceremonies
  - Perfect Attendance Recognition
  - Incentive Store
  - Other



# Building Self-Efficacy

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- Strategy 4: Learner-Generated Materials
  - Student newsletter
  - Student writings publication
  - Class anthology



# Building Self-Efficacy

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- Strategy 5: Addressing Learning Styles and Special Learning Needs
  - Learning style inventories
  - Special learning needs screening instruments
  - Special equipment
  - Quiet work space
  - Work load
  - Repetition and variety

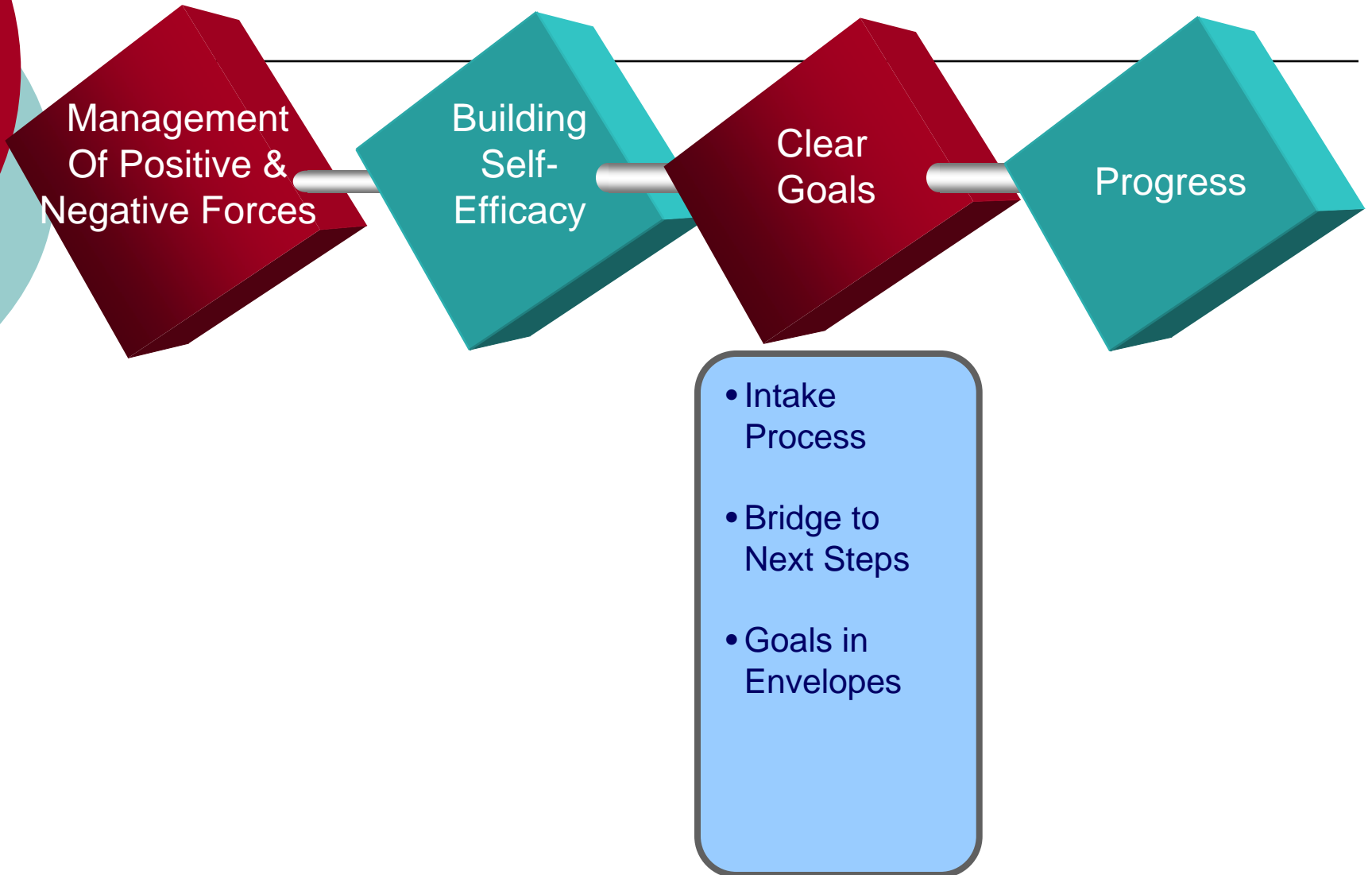


## Activity #3: Building Self Efficacy

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- With your table partners, discuss:
  - What policy/guidance do you have in place to enable practitioners to help students build self efficacy?
  - What areas would you like to explore?

# Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence





# Clear Goals

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- Adults are motivated to enroll by the desire to reach a specific goal.
- Therefore, you must
  - Identify their specific goals
  - Show the student how the class/program will help them reach their goals
  - Understand the difference between student and NRS goals
- Important to:
  - Help them determine realistic goals (short-term and long-term)
  - Set interim success benchmarks
  - Regularly review progress to those goals

# Clear Goals

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- Most adults are motivated to enroll by the desire to reach a specific goal.

How can you use that to your advantage?

# Clear Goals

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- Strategy 1: Intake Process
  - Do not focus on academic goal setting only.
    - “What do you want to do that you cannot do now?”
    - If he/she wants a GED, “What will the GED do for you that you cannot do now?”
  - Begin with a preliminary goal setting activity during the intake process to identify interests and strengths
  - Complete academic assessments before finalizing NRS goals.

# Clear Goals

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## ○ Strategy 1: Intake Process

- Schedule regular teacher/student conferences
  - discuss short-term and long-term goal attainment, realistic timelines, and interim success benchmarks
- Discuss the reality of “episodic participation” and available support
- For NRS goals, refer to the handout Considerations for Setting Realistic NRS Goals. Pg. 48



# Clear Goals

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- Strategy 2: Bridge to Next Steps
  - Broaden their horizon
    - “You don’t know what you don’t know.”
    - Short-sighted vision
  - Provide opportunities for students to become aware
    - Field trips to community college
    - Job shadowing opportunities with local employers
    - Guest speakers from your One Stops

# Clear Goals

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## ○ Strategy 3: Goals in Envelope

- Goals can change over time.
- Once the initial goals are determined, have the student write them down.
- Place the goal sheet in an envelope.
- Explain to the student that you will mail the envelope to the student in six weeks as a reminder and to determine if the goals need to be changed/adjusted.

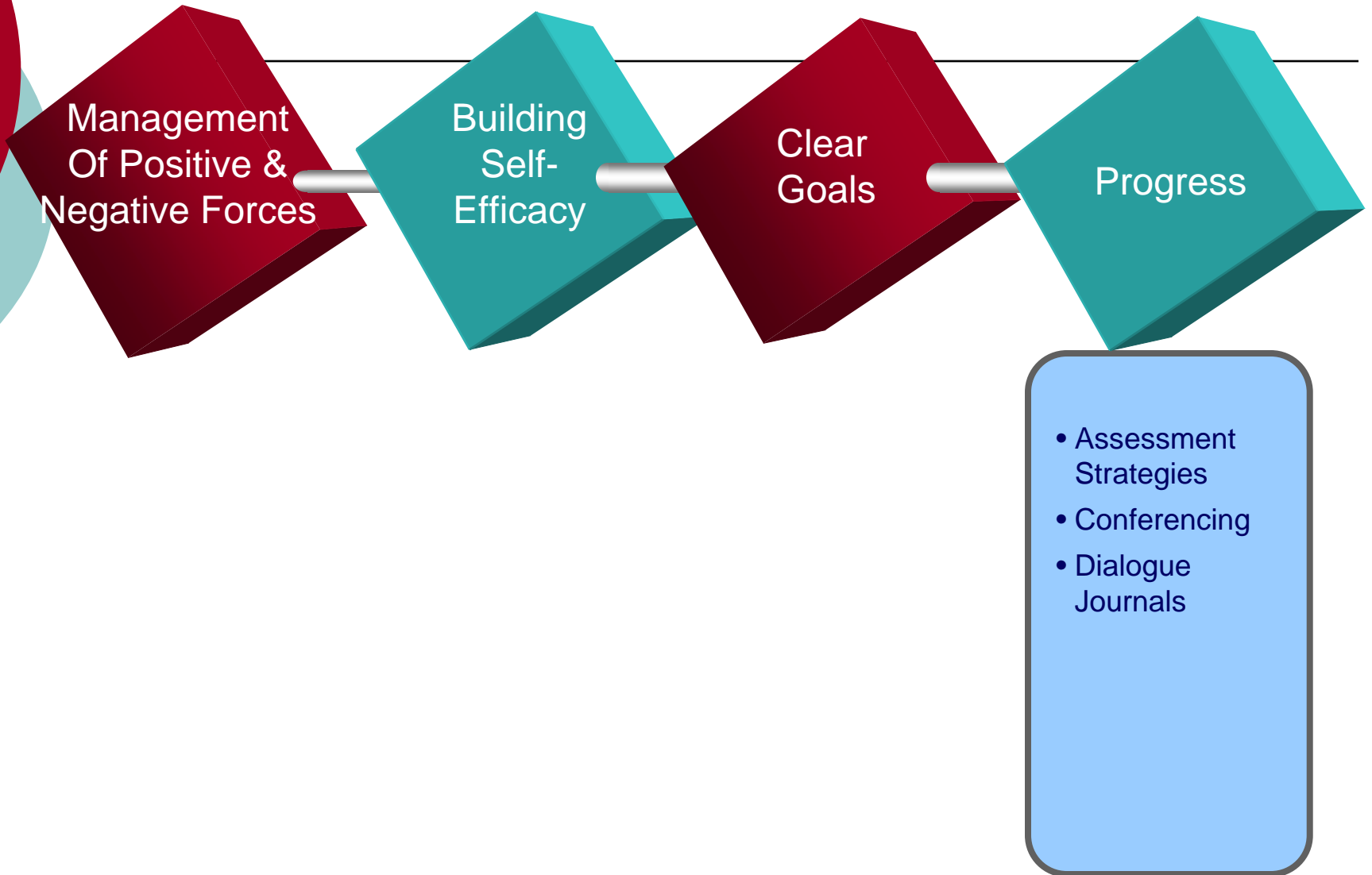
# Activity #4: Setting Clear Goals

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- With your table partners, discuss:
  - What policy/guidance do you have in place to enable practitioners to help students in setting clear goals?
  - What areas would you like to explore?


Additional  
strategies  
on pg. 29

# Four Supports and Sample Strategies for Learner Persistence



# Progress

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- Let's take a look at a sample scenario. 
- Do you think the student feels like she is making progress?
- What were some of the problems with the way the teacher approached the situation?
- What would you do differently?

# Discussion Point

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- What are you doing now to make sure that students are experiencing progress **and** seeing the results?

Examples on pg. 31





# Activity #5: Showing Progress

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- With your table partners, discuss:
  - What policy/guidance do you have in place to enable practitioners to help students see progress?
  - What areas would you like to explore?

# If we really want a change in practice...

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- Two factors that positively affect teacher change (Smith, 2002) are:
  - Involving teachers in the decision making process
  - Teachers working together to solve problems—collegiality
- Involve teachers/tutors in the process of analyzing student persistence data and recommending program improvement strategies



# Professional Development Options

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- Organize study circles on student persistence
  - Resource: NCSALL's Study Circle Guide on Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education  
<http://www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=25>
  - Follow-up the study circle with pilot tests of various persistence strategies



# Professional Development Options

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- Select a few research studies to review and discuss at the next staff meeting or training workshop
  - Variety of research included in your notebook
- Conduct your own practitioner research projects related to student persistence

# Professional Development Options

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## Student Retention course

- <http://www.floridatechnet.org/in-service/retention2005/retention2005.htm>
- <http://www.aceofflorida.org/in-service/region3/retention/indexa.html>

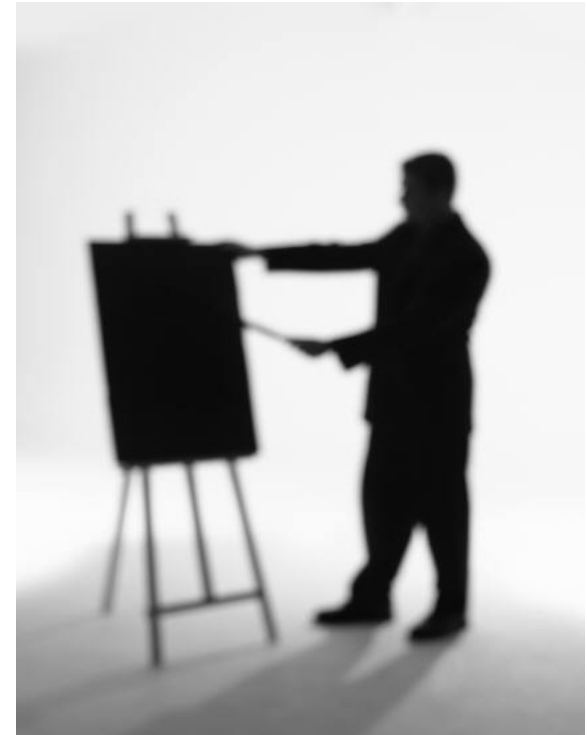
## Persistence websites

- <http://www.floridatechnet.org/lib-persistence.asp>
- California Adult Learner Persistence Website
- <http://www.adultlearnerpersistence.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Home>

## Activity 6:

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- What would you like to encourage?
- What policy/guidance would you like to develop?





# Activity 7: Making a Learner Persistence Plan

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Review Activity 7 to outline your Learner Persistence Policy Development Project.



# Final Reflection

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- Think about one thing that you learned today that had the greatest impact.
- What effect will that have on how you approach learner persistence?

# Always willing to help...

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  - [klpolis@suddenlink.net](mailto:klpolis@suddenlink.net)
- Lennox McLendon
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