

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School
Morehead State University

December 5, 2013

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OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS TO GED SUCCESS IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

Abstract of Capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

Jennifer Leedy

Louisa, Kentucky

Committee Chair: Dr. Victor Ballesterro, Professor

Morehead, Kentucky

December 5, 2013

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OBSTACLES AND BARRIERS TO GED SUCCESS IN EASTERN KENTUCKY

This study investigated the reasons individuals in the counties of Pike, Floyd, Johnson, Magoffin, and Martin in Eastern Kentucky do not complete the GED. A survey questionnaire was mailed to former students of the Kentucky Adult Education programs located in these five counties in order to gather information and collect data concerning the barriers that caused the student(s) to drop out of their respective programs before obtaining their General Equivalency Diploma (GED). This information and data about obstacles and barriers was collected, separated into appropriate categories/issues and analyzed.

The analysis of the returned surveys from the former students of these five programs indicate that some of the reasons for non-completion dealt with such major obstacles as lack of confidence, transportation, and family issues. The survey also indicated that there were many other reasons that had a significant bearing on non-completion of a GED. In order for Adult Education Programs to be successful and help students attain a GED, they must be able to recruit, retain, and re-engage students that face these obstacles and barriers.

KEYWORDS: General Equivalency Diploma, Obstacle, Recruit, Retain, and Re-engage.

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CAPSTONE

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband Ross, my daughter and son-in-law, Kayla and Chris Whisenant, and my wonderful grandchildren Hanah and Logan Whisenant. They have been supportive of this endeavor through their patience, love, encouragement and understanding when I could not spend as much time with them as we all desired.

I would also like to dedicate this work to my wonderful staff. These individuals are more like family than co-workers. They have gone above and beyond their normal job duties in order to help me achieve my EdD goal. When my journey became seemingly overwhelming, I could draw upon their strength and encouragement to get me through. Thank you to Diane Lafferty, Phillip Gullett, Joey Conn and Ron Hampton. I would also like to thank a very special friend Shawn Gullett for her assistance with the presentation of the data. All of you have helped me much more than I could have ever hoped for or deserved.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first need to acknowledge God for His help throughout this endeavor. I faced serious health issues, financial and other obstacles while working on this project. I prayed daily for His guidance, support and strength and He graciously answered my prayers.

I would like to acknowledge my husband Ross, my daughter and son-in-law, Kayla and Chris Whisenant, and my wonderful grandchildren Hanah and Logan Whisenant. They have been supportive of this endeavor through their patience, love, encouragement and understanding when I could not spend as much time with them as we all desired.

My wonderful staff/friends, Diane Lafferty, Phillip Gullett, Joey Conn, Ron Hampton and Shawn Gullett have done everything possible to help me achieve this goal. I truly feel that they are as excited as I am about my EdD. I will be eternally grateful to them. No one could ask for a better support system than the one that I have.

Dr. Victor Ballestero, my chairperson, has been so helpful in this journey. He understood the health issues I faced and showed genuine compassion. He met with me at off campus sites to make our consults easier for me. His encouragement will never be forgotten.

Dr. Rocky Wallace was my rock throughout this journey. I first became acquainted with Dr. Wallace from his work with Kentucky Adult Education. He continued to be same leader to me now as when he was with KYAE.

Dr. Carol Christian must also be acknowledged for helping me through the rough spots. She was always there to help with my class schedule and to listen to me when I was at my lowest points, whether it was educational or health related.

The next person I need to acknowledge is David Walters, my KYAE supervisor and friend, without his encouragement, support and assistance with data, my project would not have been possible.

I must also acknowledge Dr. Michael Kessinger, without his assistance, this project would have never been accomplished. Even though he was added to my project later than the other committee members, he has been my rock, encouraging me to keep going when I was ready to give up.

Lastly, I must thank my colleagues and former adult education students who completed and returned surveys. I learned a lot from their feedback and hope to incorporate what I have learned in order to improve the adult education program in Johnson County.

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Executive Summary

The General Equivalency Diploma (GED) is a credential created to help individuals that did not or could not complete a high school education and receive a high school diploma. Individuals can obtain their GED by returning to school with enrollment in Adult Education Programs and GED classes; however, many individuals without a high school diploma fail to even enroll in GED Programs and classes. In addition, far too many that do enroll fail to complete the program and again drop out.

When individuals do not enroll in – or enroll and then fail to complete GED programs – there is a negative impact on the lives of the students, the success of the programs, community, and society. Therefore, it is important to try to ascertain the reasons why students do not enroll, or enroll and do not complete, thus resulting in recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems.

This capstone project was initiated to first investigate the obstacles and barriers faced by students that result in recruitment, retainment and re-engagement problems that hinder GED success for all concerned parties. Next, this capstone project was used the collected data and analysis to develop some recommendations and solutions to either remove or minimize as many of the identified obstacles and barriers as possible.

Using both a quantitative and qualitative approach data were collected. These data were then examined and analyzed resulting in the categorization of the obstacles and barriers into three major areas: school related issues, personal issues, and

home/family issues. Finally, analysis of these three issues was used to formulate some recommendations that may help students and adult education programs become more successful in battling the obstacles and barriers that cause the recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems that hinder GED success.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Virtually everyone realizes the importance and impact that education has on the economic advancement, freedom, and well being of an individual, a community, and ultimately, the country. In education, for the most part, the focus is on students from elementary, junior high, high school, and college levels. However, those who are not a part of the educational system are left behind – they should not be taken for granted. Those who for one reason or another left the system should not be given just token minimal attention. These individuals need to be remembered and access to education for them given a higher priority. Adult Education programs and the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) have been created, initiated, and instituted for these students and for this purpose - to give them a second chance to further their education. They need to be recruited, retained, and re-engaged in the educational system.

The core of this capstone is to gather information from research articles, a survey instrument, interviews, and past observational experiences to gain insight about the obstacles and barriers GED students and programs encounter. These obstacles and barriers cause recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems have to be overcome in order for students to attend GED programs and classes to obtain the GED. Furthermore, the information gathered in this study is used to find strategies and solutions that will help students overcome barriers and achieve their GED goals –hopefully to continue and/or better their education and career.

Recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement of students are the major events for adult education programs. Initially, recruitment is a great concern. Many people without a high school diploma or GED do not know about or know and chose not to come to adult education programs. Those prospective students who know about the GED and the adult education program and choose not to pursue their GED may be facing difficult barriers and obstacles. For example, as a program director I have encountered many students that do not think or believe they can achieve a GED and/or that the GED will not help them. Next, retainment is a problem with which adult education must contend. According to Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) Enrollment and GED Goals for 2012-2013, goals set for adult education programs reveal that far too many students enroll in GED programs in comparison to those expected to achieve their goal of getting a GED. This makes one wonder why there is such a large gap between the number of GED enrollees and the number of GED attainments.

Finally, the re-enrollment of students who have dropped out of GED classes is a very difficult problem faced by programs. For instance, when a student leaves a program after enrollment, the attempt may be deemed a failure. For some, this failure can reinforce their belief that they cannot be successful. Other students that drop out may view themselves as quitters and are too embarrassed to return and face program personnel and other students. It is very difficult to re-engage those that have dropped out of an adult education program. It is of utmost importance to re-engage these

individuals in GED classes. If they leave a program with a sense of failure, there is a closing of the doors to opportunities and an opening of the doors to frustration.

Examining the Problem/Issue

The problems this study investigated were the major obstacles and barriers that hinder the recruitment, retainment and re-engagement of students and those issues adult education programs experience which keep students from GED attainment. Also, an attempt was made to use the information to help develop strategies so students and adult education programs can overcome these obstacles; thus, success can become more prevalent for both the students and the adult education programs.

It is important that GED recipients and GED students, whether on a college campus setting or not, understand that the GED is not the end. They should realize the importance of becoming lifelong learners to prepare for gainful employment or to continue the education, if they so desire, just as their high school counterparts. Barriers to why GED students discontinue their education must be determined.

At one time, the traditional GED student was older and the nontraditional GED student was younger, in late teens and early twenties. However adult education programs are increasingly seeing young adults enroll in Adult Education and GED classes. The Big Sandy Community and Technical College (BSCTC) Adult Education Program routinely receives referrals from local school boards who feel that the GED setting is a better fit for the teenage student. Student surveys and interviews

indicate the major barriers to attending GED programs were those of flexibility with scheduling, transportation, and childcare.

Finally, ways to recruit new students, to retain those that are enrolled, and re-engage those who have dropped out, must be addressed and this must be done as early as possible. Developing and initiating plans and strategies that target the obstacles can improve these three areas and increase GED attainment.

Significance of the Study

I chose to focus on issues that affect completion of the GED program because as an adult education program director and educator, I have encountered issues of students leaving the GED program because of obstacles on a continual basis. I have witnessed so many students with promise, ability, desire, and the hope for a better future for themselves and their families who all of a sudden are faced with obstacles and barriers that slam the door to a better life. This topic is important because it revealed the obstacles and barriers faced by students, my program, and other programs which then can be used to develop strategies to help keep this door of opportunity open to as many individuals as possible.

Also, the revealing of obstacles and barriers that cause recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems in adult education programs is important because of the negative impact a lack of education has on individuals in the five counties examined in this capstone, the state of Kentucky, and throughout the nation. Successful GED attainment and further education for those students that do not have a high school diploma will lead to many benefits. Some of the benefits of raising the

educational levels may lead to a lowering of the unemployment rate, better job opportunities, higher self-esteem and an over better standard of living. Without an educated workforce, these counties and Kentucky cannot attract industry, without industry Kentucky cannot grow. The bottom line is education and it starts with a high school diploma or a GED.

Context of the Study

This project focused on the five county area in Eastern Kentucky consisting of Johnson, Floyd, Martin, Magoffin, and Pike counties. These counties, along with other surrounding counties of eastern Kentucky, are typically known as and referred to as the coalfields of eastern Kentucky.

This eastern Kentucky region is rural for the most part, but its people are like every other state; it does have its poor, its uneducated, and its lazy people, but no more than any other place. Although it is rural, for the most part, and because its economy is very dependent on the coal industry, the problems of recruitment, retainment and re-engagement faced by the adult education program are the same as any program; however, the reasons and solutions may or may not be the same.

As an adult education program director and educator for years, I have encountered many students who faced problems, obstacles, and barriers that they perceived as and accepted as insurmountable. This study will hopefully identify some of those problems, possibly unique to the area, and help students and programs overcome such perceptions for the future.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions: What are the major and minor obstacles and barriers that hinder GED success for Adult Education Programs and students in the eastern Kentucky counties of Johnson, Pike, Floyd, Martin, and Magoffin? Can these obstacles and barriers be differentiated in such a way as to determine the opportunities and constraints in alleviating and/or minimizing their negative impact on recruitment, retainment and re-engagement? What strategies and solutions can be ascertained and recommended to help students overcome these barriers to be successful in their GED attainment?

The capstone project asked questions of both adult education providers and adult education students in order to gain insight and knowledge regarding the obstacles and barriers related to the issues of recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement faced by both. The knowledge gained will provide insight to these three issues. If these three areas can be better understood and improved, then success rate for the students and thus the programs can be increased.

Once the major and minor barriers and obstacles faced by both the GED program personnel and the GED students are better defined, the program personnel can use the knowledge to develop a plan of actions to help deal with those issues. This will allow program directors and personnel to have a better understanding of those issues and to combat those barriers and obstacles faced by their students.

In conclusion, the findings reflected in this capstone can lead to better preparation, planning, and implementation of operational methods to hopefully

completely remove some of the barriers and obstacles for the students or at the very least, minimize them for those that complete removal is, for some reason, not possible. This capstone could have a favorable impact on the students in my adult education program, the other programs in the study, and other programs in Kentucky and other states.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Foundation of Undereducated Adults

A research article by Jensen, Haleman, Goldstein, and Anerman (2000) reveals that:

Undereducated adults---including both former and potential students' adult education clients---frequently hold oversimplified assumptions about adult education programs. These assumptions often prevent them from entering adult education programs and at other times cause clients to leave programs before reaching their goals. The following assumptions about adult education programs were among those held by respondents:

- Adult education classes will be like earlier school experiences
- Successful completion of the GED requires previous educational success
- The GED exam is hard (or easy), but without a sense of what it entails
- If you did poorly in school, you will do poorly in adult education classes
- The GED is the ultimate goal of adult education classes.

Many of the adults who participated in this study held one or more of these assumptions about adult education. Although our respondents did not always know where or when classes were offered, they almost always knew how to

find out. Clearly, it was not a lack of awareness of adult education programs that has kept them from participating. Instead, their decisions were based on an assessment of the efficacy of formal adult education for their lives. (p. 7)

The lack of education, according to Van Horn (2011) is directly linked to lower income and related challenges. “Researchers have studied the impact of obtaining a GED credential on candidates’ lives and found that the credential affects their perceptions of themselves and their future success in their terms of education, training, employment, and income” (p. 4).

In the article by Jensen et al. (2000), it was also discovered that too often adult education providers, many community leaders, and social service providers also undervalued education, falling victims to stereotyping individuals without a high school diploma or GED. This is a dangerous precedent.

The following statements are examples of what we heard in the research sites with regard to under-educated adults:

- They do not value education
- They do not recognize that “education pays” in important ways
- They do not recognize the need for educational credentials
- They do not participate in adult education programs because of shame or fear
- They do not participate in adult education programs because they are “lazy” or “unmotivated”

- The GED is the most appropriate goal for all these undereducated adults. (Jansen et al., 2000, p. 8)

Persistent Learner

The authors of this paper found a modicum of truth in all of these statements; however, a successful program director and instructors will find ways to alleviate these problems.

Comings et al. (1999) found that the persistent learner was one who was still there four months later. This study showed that immigrants over thirty, parents of teenage or grown children were likely to stay in Adult Education classes possibly because of outside support from children. Also adults who had been in a previous training program or self-study program were likely to remain in the program.

Comings et al. (1999) also described the following four supports to persistence:

1. The first support is management of the positive and negative forces that help and hinder persistence. (...from the time adults enter programs to the time when they either achieve their goals or drop out, both positive and negative forces are acting upon them.)
 - The first step is to identify all the forces that are acting upon an individual.
 - The next step is to identify which forces can have a significant effect on the individual's path.

- Building on that understanding each student must make plans to manage these forces so that persistence is more likely.
 - The strongest positive forces mentioned by adult students was support of people, particularly their families, friends, teachers, and fellow students followed by self-efficacy and personal goals.
2. The second support is self-efficacy. (...Self-efficacy is focused on a specific task and represents the feeling of being able to accomplish that task.) Adult Education programs should provide the following experiences to their participants as a means toward building self-efficacy:
- Mastery Experiences are those that allow an adult to be successful in learning and to have authentic evidence of that success.
 - Vicarious Experiences are those that are provided by social models. Adult learners should come in contact with adults who are just like them and have succeeded in an ABE, ESOL, or GED class.
 - Social Persuasion is support from teachers, staffs, counselors, fellow students, family, and friends that reinforces self-efficacy. These verbal assurances are needed in part to overcome the negative self-efficacy about learning built during schooling.
 - Addressing Physiological and Emotional States helps students to deal with the tension, stress, and other negative emotional states that can result from poor self-efficacy and can also lead to low self-efficacy.

3. The third support to persistence is the establishment of a goal by the student. (...The staff of the educational goal program must help the potential adult student define his/her goals and understand the many instructional objectives that must be accomplished on the road to meeting that goal.)
4. The fourth support progress toward reaching a goal. Since their goal is an important support to persistence, adult students must make progress toward reaching their goal, and they must be able to measure that progress.
(p. 5-10)

Comings et al. (1999) also found that students who stayed “in a program for longer than six months were more likely to persist than those who had been studying for a shorter period of time” (p. 59). This shows the importance of retaining the student in the program for as long as possible. Positive family support is crucial to the student’s success, as is support received from social networks such as friends, church, and other social outlets.

Relationship with Teachers

One-half of the students responding to a survey conducted by Comings et al. (1999) stated that relationships with teachers and fellow students were important in their success. It is crucial to build this relationship from day one in order to help the students overcome barriers. If they don’t feel comfortable enough with the instructor to discuss barriers then this student will be lost. According to Kefallinou (2009) Quinsignamond Community College Adult Community Learning (QCCACL) center

in Worcester Massachusetts serves approximately 400 students, which is approximately the number of students served by the Adult Education Program in Johnson County. The difference is, they serve a largely urban area, while the Johnson County program serves a more rural population. Both programs serve ESL, ABE, and GED students. QCCACL's issues of low retention and persistence are similar to the Johnson County program and the other programs in this study.

As with our own program, students left the QCCACL's program without accomplishing goals and the reasons why were baffling to them as it is with our program. Kefallinou (2009) stated that QCCACL instituted the Learner Persistence Project which they hoped would keep students in program long enough to accomplish at least some of their goals (p.106). QCCACL, Kafallinou defined persistence as "adults staying in program for as long as they can, engaging in self-directed study when they must stop out of their program, and returning to a program as soon as the demands of their lives allow" (p. 106).

The implementation team at QCCACL, according to Kefallinou (2009) consisted of program counselors, administrative assistant and the program manager (p. 206). The team talked with teachers and with students, visited classes, made telephone calls, monitored progress and collected data. They did not include students in the initial team because the project was for only five months and the funding was limited. However, I feel that they missed out on a valuable resource...who better to include than student – the actual people being affected by possible changes?

The implementation team, stated Kefallinou (2009), implemented a number of strategies. One strategy implemented was that all new students were placed in an orientation program that lasted about an hour. This orientation program discussed such topics as goals, expectations, and possible barriers. Another strategy that the implementation team initiated was that all students were considered at risk and counselors met with students to discuss any barriers. Also, teachers and counselors discussed ways to increase motivation with the students. Yet, another strategy implemented, according to Kefallinou (2009), was that teachers were asked to design check sheets so students could see their progress. Finally, all teachers and staff were kept up to date on the progress of the project at meetings.

In the QCCACL study, 93 students were in GED classes from Spring 2007 to Spring 2008. Learning gains Kefallinou (2009) revealed grew from 13% to 44% with the implementation of the program.

It is only fair, however, to point out that other factors were instrumental in this increase: the testing plan we put in place in 2008 allowed us to post-test 48% of our students in comparison to 26% in 2007, thus enabling us to capture more educational gain; and one of our GED teachers was new in 2007 when retention in her classroom was very low. Retention in her class improved greatly in 2008. (p. 108)

As in all Adult Education programs, relationships with students mean everything for success. They must know that they are cared for as individuals. In a report commissioned by the Department for Employment and Learning and

completed by Deloitte In partnership with IPSOS MORI entitled “Removing Barriers to Learning: Exploring Adult Perceptions and Attitudes to Participation in Further Education”. Some of the barriers found were the same as those encountered in this study. In this report, various needs were mentioned that would help battle these barriers such as: the need for either free or low cost child care close to or on site, free or at least low cost transportation to and from classes, and special accommodations need to be arranged for those with physical or learning disabilities. Advertising needs to be better in all aspects (Deloitte, 2012).

GED classes in correctional facilities come with their own unique set of challenges. Alewine (2010) conducted a study at a federal correctional institution in Manchester, KY in which he said:

Hypotheses were tested to determine if orientation to a mandatory GED class improved readiness in self-perception of mood state, teacher perception of mood state, and teacher perception of classroom behavior. (p. 9)

Alewine (2010) also stated that as in other GED classes, oriented students seem to be more active participants. The results of the study were mixed with no real differences shown between treatment and control group. However, the orientation process did help to eliminate negative behaviors, because the students/inmates knew expected and acceptable behavior.

Roadblocks and Remedies

King (2002) found the major roadblock to prospective GED students was related to their family. They often received very little if any support because they had to spend less time with them in order to study.

King (2002) suggested the following as possible remedies:

- Develop programs that are sensitive to family needs
- Involve family when possible
- Be flexible with times and days of classes
- Gear instruction to individual not the classroom
- Provide child care Westberry, 1994, found even though there is a growing body of information on adults with learning disabilities attempting and/or receiving the GED; there is not enough and needs to be studied in greater depth. (p. 155)

Characteristics of GED Participants

Data from Kentucky Adult Education and Literacy (KYAE) garnered from the United States Census was used in this section. It covers adults sixteen and older who do not have a high school diploma or credential and who were not enrolled in any educational program. Statistical data for the years 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009 are discussed in this section and displayed in the following table.

Table 1

GED Statistical Data for 2005 – 2009

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of GED Tests taken	11,746	12,095	12,201	12,480	11,201
Number of GED Tests passed	8,666	8,724	9,448	9,851	8,666
Gender					
Male	60.7%	40.0%	60.7%	60.4%	59.7%
Female	39.3%	60.0%	39.3%	39.6%	40.3%
Race					
White	77.2%	79.6%	80.4%	79.5%	78.9%
African American	18.5%	16.3%	15.6%	16.5%	16.9%
Hispanic	3.2%	2.9%	2.6%	2.7%	3.1%
Other	1.1%	1.1%	1.4%	1.3%	1.1%
Educational Data					
Mean grade completion level	9.4	9.8	9.9	.UA	.UA
Years out of school	7.9	7.9	8.2	7.9	8.2
Reasons for taking the GED test					
Educational	49.1%	46.2%	45.5%	53.9%	58.5%
Employment	46.7%	40.1%	46.8%	52.8%	50.7%
Military	5.1%	5.5%	3.8%	4.9%	5.0%

Note: The statistical data report for 2008-2009 was changed and the data concerning mean grade completion was no longer included and thus unavailable (UA).

These data are extremely important to the recruitment, retainment, and/or re-engagement of any adult education student. The data presented are broken down into the number of GED tests administered versus the number of GED test passed, male and female, race, highest grade completed, years out of school and reasons listed for taking the GED.

The reasons given for individuals taking the GED added up to more than 100%; this is because some had more than one reason for taking the test. The data clearly shows that the number of individuals without a high school diploma or a GED

is not decreasing. If our area, our state, and our country are to grow both academically and economically, this must be addressed.

Setting

The five counties located in Eastern Kentucky were chosen for this study because they are similar in many ways such as: location; economic base, culture, customs, beliefs, transportation mode, and family interactions/responsibility. However, there are also some differences in those counties that should be considered when addressing this study.

The five counties in this study have some differences in their educational school systems. For example, the Johnson County School Systems and to some extent the Paintsville Independent School System have been very successful in academic competitions and future problem solving competitions over a long period of time and seem to be viewed positively by state educational personnel. On the other hand, Floyd County had spent a number of years under state control and was viewed with skepticism by state education personnel. The other counties school systems seem to be operating on an average basis and viewed as such. This may have a significant bearing because of the outlook and views the students from the five counties have about education differ.

Size of Counties and Location of Programs

Another difference is the size of the counties. Pike County is the largest county in Kentucky and Floyd County is additional large. Martin County, Magoffin County, and Johnson County are all relatively average in size.

Another difference that should be accounted for is the location of the Adult Education Programs themselves. The Johnson County and Floyd County Programs are located on a college campus while the others are not. This may have a possible effect on those two programs and make it easier to recruit students. On the other hand, the location of being on a college campus may have a negative effect or no effect at all, but the difference in location should be noted.

One of the most important differences in the counties is related to size of the counties in that their population seemingly follow suit with the exception that Johnson County has a larger population relatively speaking, than Martin and Magoffin Counties.

The size and population of the counties have a direct bearing on the five respective GED programs because the Kentucky Adult Education (KYAE) Administration and Personnel set the goals for all 120 county programs in the state based on population information. The goals set by the state for each county were previously based on census data; however, according to the KYAE the “county goals for 2012-2013 are based on data from the 2006-2010 American Community Survey (ASC), age 18-64. The ACS data set has replaced 2000 census data” (p 1). KYAE sets the enrollment goal and the GED goal based on the 2012-2013 ACS data.

Table 2 presents the population with ages 18 to 64 that are without a high school diploma or GED certificate for the 2006 to 2010 timeframe for each of the five counties in this study along with the 2012-2013 enrollment goal and the GED attainment goals, set by KYAE, based on the 2006-2010 ACS for each of the five counties.

Table 2

Population, Enrollment, and GED Attainment Goals

County	Population ^a	Enrollment ^b Goal	Attainment ^c Goal
Pike	9415	1148	227
Floyd	6707	818	162
Johnson	4123	503	100
Martin	2890	352	70
Magoffin	2402	294	58

a – County population age 18-24 without a high school or GED diploma (2006-2010 ACS)

b – 2012-2013 enrollment goals by county (2006 - 2010 ACS)

c – 2012-2013 GED goals by county (2006 – 2010 ACS)

Enrollment Goals

The enrollment goal set by KYAE, as the numbers reveal, is approximately 12.2% of the county population ages 18 to 64 without a high school diploma or GED certificate (2006-2010 ACS) for each county.

Although the enrollment goal set by KYAE seems small, and most people not involved in Adult Education might view this goal as one easily met, those directly involved in Adult Education know that the goal is not a simple task. These numbers reveal why recruitment is so very important. There are so many people without either

a high school diploma or a GED, yet so very few enroll in GED programs or – as indicated – are even expected to enroll.

The GED attainment goal set by KYAE, as the numbers show, is only about 19.8% of the enrollment goal for each county and only about 2.4% of the county population age 18 to 64 without a diploma or GED certificate (2006-2010 ACS). These goals are not lofty and, in fact, they seem small. However, these seemingly small goals can be very difficult to meet. These percentages are the same percentages set for all 120 counties in Kentucky. The sad thing is that most counties in Kentucky, (not just these five counties), find it difficult to meet the enrollment goals and even more difficult, if not impossible, to meet the GED attainment goal.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

Methodology

For this project I used, for the most part, a quantitative method of inquiry with the development of a survey and questionnaire that was mailed to students who had stopped attending GED classes in the programs within each of the five counties. The survey was an effort to identify the obstacles and barriers why these students stopped attending and to quantify, as much as possible, those issues.

This capstone also incorporated a qualitative approach in a small portion of the study as some useful information from questions and answer interviews via email with students and other program directors were included in the survey and interviews. A pseudonym will be used for any information and quotations garnered from students in order to protect their identities.

Impact on Organization

The capstone's goal was twofold. The first goal was to find some of the major barriers and obstacles faced by GED programs and students that prevent students from the attainment of a GED. The second goal was to attempt to use the information collected to reveal possible solutions that could be used to minimize or remove those obstacles, so that both the students and thus the programs could experience more success in the area of GED attainment. The data collected in this study and the subsequent analysis of that data can be used to impact not only my program, but other programs in positive ways.

Procedures and Analysis of Data Collected

A survey instrument (Appendix A) was mailed to 150 students of which 36 were undeliverable and returned unopened. So, only 114 were delivered and of that only 49 were returned (Table 3). Therefore, the following analysis will be based upon those 49 returned surveys. The first part of the data analysis focused on the demographic section of the survey and presents the numbers in tables.

Table 3

Survey Information

Number of Surveys Mailed	150
Number of Surveys Undeliverable	36
Number of Surveys Delivered	114
Number of Delivered Surveys, not returned	65
Number of Surveys Returned	49
Percentage returned based on 114 delivered	42.9%

As Table 3 shows 24% or virtually one out of four surveys were not deliverable. Also, 57% or nearly 6 out of 10 delivered surveys were not returned.

Table 4 shows that the females returned the survey at virtually a 2:1 margin. Also, revealed is, as was expected, the age group that is and should be of most concern to GED programs is the 20 to 40 segment of the targeted population with the 41 – 64 age group following. Lastly, the 16 – 19 and 65+ age groups should not be forgotten but it must be realized they do not have much impact.

Table 4

Demographics: Gender, Age, and Martial Status

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	16	32.7%
Female	33	67.3%
Age		
16 – 19	8	16.3%
20 – 40	27	55.1%
41-64	10	20.4%
65+	4	8.2%
Marital Status		
Never Married	14	28.6%
Married	17	34.7%
Separated	6	12.2%
Divorced	5	10.2%
Widowed	7	14.3%

Table 5

Demographics: Labor Status, Educational Background, and Possible Assistance

Labor Force Status	Number	Percent
Unemployed	13	36.7%
Employed (part-time <35 hours/week)	7	14.3%
Employed (full-time >35 hours/week)	18	26.5%
Disabled	11	22.5%
Highest Grade Completed		
Elementary School	3	6.1%
Middle School	4	8.2%
Some High School	42	85.7%
Public Assistance		
Yes	26	53.1%
No	23	46.9%

As presented in Table 5, although they did not complete their GED, students who were employed (either full time or part time) were just as interested to pursue their GED as those who were unemployed or disabled. In addition, those with some high school education seem to be more interested and place more value on attaining a GED than those that did not make it to high school. Finally, all these who reported that they were on public assistance expressed that being a recipient had no effect on their completion of the GED.

Table 6

Academic Background of Parents (N=49)

Highest Level of Education Obtained	Mother		Father	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Less than high school	15	30.6	20	40.8
High School	12	24.5	16	32.7
GED	11	22.4	2	4.1
Some College Hours	N/A		1	2.0
2-year College Degree (Associates)	9	18.4	7	14.3
4-year College Degree (BA, BS)	2	4.1	2	4.1
Unknown	N/A		1	2.0

An interesting observation from Table 6 is that a much higher percentage of GED student's mothers (22.4%) obtained their own GED than had the fathers (4.1%). Similarly, a higher percentage of the GED student's mothers had a two-year college degree (N = 18.4%) than did the fathers (N = 14.3%).

Barriers Hindering GED Attainment

Table 7 is an overview of the barriers hindering GED attainment. These barriers and obstacles are broken down into more specific and detailed reason in part two of this survey instrument analysis.

Table 7

Barriers Hindering GED Attainment

Barrier	Student Responses
Lack of confidence / overwhelmed by work load experience	46%
Transportation	23%
Childcare	16%
Family Illness, Responsibility, Lack of Support	9%
Other	3%
No Barriers indicated	3%

Table 7 reveals some interesting observations: the largest percentage, 46% of the students who responded said that lack of confidence and/or overwhelmed by workload expectations are the main barriers to them completing their GED. I think programs can easily minimize or remove the workload obstacles with program planning and design, but directors and staff must keep this barrier in mind, as it is one so easily overlooked. Lack of confidence would be more difficult to overcome, as it is a personal/internal issue. However, it is a barrier that can be addressed by first forming a good and trusting relationship with the student and then moving forward with encouragement, quick, positive feedback and student achievement. The next two

barriers, transportation (23%) and childcare (16%) are still personal barriers but they are external not internal. To minimize or remove these two barriers, in most cases, involves money. The fourth barrier is the home and family barrier and would be a very difficult one to help a student minimize or remove.

Chapter 4

Findings

Indicated Obstacles and Barriers

The analysis of the returned surveys revealed some interesting patterns related to the obstacles and barriers that cause recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems. This capstone focused upon many of the possible barriers to GED attainment. There was a list of 28 obstacles and barriers presented that could cause students to drop out of GED programs. Of the 49 responses to the survey, 48 responded to all 28 questions. One respondent did not complete this section at all; therefore, the data in the following table are based upon the 48 respondents who completed the section.

The 28 barriers and obstacles ranked in the survey were divided into 3 main categories: School Related Issues, Personal Issues, and Home/Family Issues. Questions 1-10 covered the School Related Issues; questions 12-14 and questions 16-19 and 21 and 22 were the Home and Family Issues; and questions 15, 20, and 23-28 investigated the Personal Issues.

School related issues.

Table 8 presents the statements related to the School Related Issues contained in the survey. Presented depict the major reasons, in descending order (by percentage), that students answered in the affirmative as the reason they “dropped out of the GED Program.”

Table 8

School Related Issues

REASONS	TRUE	NOT SURE	NOT TRUE	N/A
You did not understand what was being taught in the class	52.1%	6.2%	35.4%	6.2%
Lack of interesting courses	14.6%	8.3%	64.6%	12.5%
Too many assignments	12.5%	12.5%	68.8%	6.3%
Inconvenient class schedule	12.5%	8.3%	68.8%	10.4%
You were not allowed to borrow book or other materials	10.4%	2.1%	81.3%	6.2%
No tutors for GED students	8.3%	0.0%	85.5%	6.2%
Disagreement with the teacher	4.2%	8.3%	77.1%	10.4%
Strict attendance policy	2.1%	4.2%	83.3%	10.4%
Teacher did not have enough knowledge of the subject he/she was assigned to teach	2.1%	2.1%	89.6%	6.2%
Teacher’s repeated absence or late arrival for the class	2.1%	0.0%	87.5%	10.4%

Responses indicated that the main problem of the School Related Issues is that students “did not understand what was being taught in class”. This is an issue that can or should be easily minimized and even removed at little or no cost. The other 9 reasons of School Related Issues are less than 50% added together. They too, for the most part, can be minimized or removed at little or no cost to a program with the exception of providing tutors for students.

Personal issues.

Table 9 clearly shows that the obstacles and barriers due to Personal Issues are a major hinderance to the recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement of students for Adult Education programs. Some other quick observations from this table are:

- Three out of the first or top four Personal Issues deal with studying – no time to study, don't know how to study, and don't like to study. Adult Education programs may be able to design some strategies to minimize these barriers.
- Transportation was the second major Personal Issues at 52.1%. In an urban area with public transportation, this may not be a major problem. But for a rural area without public transportation, it is a major obstacle to overcome.
- The last five barriers in the Personal Issues were all under 30%. Legal troubles at 29.2% would be a difficult problem for Adult Education programs to become involved. The issues of being tired of school (27.1%) and thinking they were too old for school (25%) can be addressed and possibly minimized or removed if these barriers can be discovered in time. This is also true for the last Personal Issues barrier of the student feeling that education has no purpose for them (16.7%). The Adult Education program can design strategies to meet this obstacle.

Table 9

Personal Issues

REASONS	TRUE	NOT SURE	NOT TRUE	N/A
You didn't have time to study	56.3%	0.0%	39.5%	4.2%
Transportation problems	52.1%	0.0%	41.7%	6.2%
You did not know how to study	50.0%	6.2%	41.7%	2.1%
You did not like to study	39.6%	4.2%	50.0%	6.2%
Legal trouble	29.2%	4.2%	58.3%	8.3%
You were tired of school	27.1%	6.2%	62.5%	4.2%
You felt you were too old for school	25.0%	4.2%	64.6%	6.2%
You received a low grade and felt disheartened	25.0%	6.2%	66.7%	2.1%
You felt that education had no purpose	16.7%	6.2%	72.9%	4.2%

Home and family issues.

Table 10 presents a summary of the Home and Family Issues in the survey and it reveals the impact that Home and Family Issues have on the recruiting, retraining, and re-engagement of students. One must also realize that Home and Family Issues, like Personal Issues, are very difficult for programs to overcome. In reality, they may be even more difficult than Personal Issues to overcome because program personnel can make plans for and talk to students about study problems, not liking to study, or seeing no purpose for an education; but, it is much more difficult for programs to make strategies for or even just talk to students about family instability, illness, death, pregnancy, lack of support, or spousal abuse.

Table 10

Home and Family Issues

REASONS	TRUE	NOT SURE	NOT TRUE	N/A
Home responsibilities*	62.5%	6.2%	31.3%	0%
Job responsibilities	41.7%	2.1%	56.2%	0%
Friends or family members did not like you going to school	33.3%	14.6%	43.8%	8.3%
No babysitter	27.1%	2.1%	66.6%	4.2%
Illness	22.9%	0.0%	70.8%	6.2%
Instability in the family	20.8%	4.2%	66.7%	8.3%
Death in family	16.7%	4.2%	72.9%	6.2%
Pregnancy	14.6%	2.1%	77.1%	6.2%
Spousal abuse	6.2%	2.1%	85.4%	6.2%

*One very important component of home responsibilities is eldercare for parents.

Conclusions.

In this part of the survey analysis it seems that School Related Issues are the easiest of the barriers for program personnel to minimize or remove but they, unfortunately, are the least of the three categories that hinder recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement of GED students. Personal Issues appear to be where the most barriers and obstacles to GED attainment are rooted, followed closely by the Home and Family Issues. Some personal issues seem to be ones that can be dealt with by knowledge, careful planning, and some intervention at a minimal cost. Other personal issues would be very difficult to deal with, such as legal issues, or quite costly, such as transportation. Finally, Home and Family Issues for the most part

seem to be the most difficult barrier and obstacles for which program personnel and students must contend.

Information from Former Students that Attained their GED

A questionnaire containing seven short answer questions were sent to former GED students who had successfully completed the GED program and attained their GED (see Appendix C). The purpose was to gather information and insight about the students who achieved their goal. I then could do a small comparison of those who did stay in the program and succeeded to those who did not stay in the program and did not succeed. The answers of three former successful students were included in this study. I will call them “Mary”, “Jane” and “Ruth”.

1. Describe how you felt when you first came into the Adult Education Classroom.

Mary: I was excited when I came into the Adult Education Classroom, as if that’s where and what I was supposed to be doing.

Jane: August 2011 I walked into the Adult Education room feeling like I was the worse mother around. I have two small children who look up to me and depend on me. I promised them I would get my GED when my oldest daughter Kendra started school. That first day after I picked her up, she looked at me and asked, “When are you going back to school mommy.” I walked in and talked to Jennifer Leady about what I need to do to achieve my GED. I went from feeling like the bad parent to feeling like I could do anything.

Ruth: I was terrified because I was attempting to do something that I was told that I could never do. I was constantly told when I was in elementary and high school that I was a “reject retard” and I believed it! I also did not know what to expect because I had been out of school for so long. I did not even know if I was going to make it because I had to depend on others for a ride because I did not have a car at the time and all of my family lives away from here.

2. What is your marital status then and now?

Mary: I was a single parent.

Jane: When I started my GED I was married with two children. I depended on my husband at the time for everything. Now I’m divorced with two small children who depend on me for everything.

Ruth: Divorced.

3. What is your living status? (For example: on your own or with your family or friends?)

Mary: I lived on my own with my daughter.

Jane: I was living with my husband and two children. Now I am divorced out on my own working and going to college and taking care of my children.

Ruth: I live with my two daughters.

4. Did you go on to work...continue education...both...neither...why?

Mary: I worked and continued my education at the same time. I had to work because I am a single parent and I had to survive.

Jane: After I passed my GED with a 572, I started work right after. I worked for about 7 months, then decided to go back to school. I just finished my second semester at Big Sandy Community and Technical College.

Ruth: After I got my GED, I was inspired by the support and mentoring that I received from the faculty and staff that I decided to try and get a degree in Respiratory. I was three-fourth of the way through the program when I had a heart attack. The doctors would not release me to go back into the Respiratory program so I decided to get my Associate in Arts degree. During the last semester, I found out that I was not eligible for financial aid and student loans. I was horrified and was ready to quit everything. I was working as a work-study during that time with the Johnson County Adult Education program and the director told me not to give up, and she would do what she could to help me finish my degree. I got a call a few days later from her and she asked me if I would like to have a job; it was just part time. I was ecstatic, and I responded, "YES! Where at?" She said that they could use someone part time to help with data entry and helping students. So February 2010, I started working for Johnson Country Adult Education. Since then I have finished my Associate of Arts degree, obtained my Bachelors of University Studies, and currently working

on my Master of Adult-Higher Education degree. I love my job and could never know how to thank the Adult Education director for all that she and her staff have done for me and the opportunities that were extended to me through them, not just means of employment but educational and to give back to others what Johnson County Adult Education has given to me!

5. Why didn't you complete high school?

Mary: I didn't complete high school because I was married at the time and I was told that I needed ½ credit to graduate and I would have to come back in August until December of the next year.

Jane: I dropped out of high school because I was stupid. I wanted the freedom of being an adult and not having to go to school. I never knew how hard it would be after to get a job or to just be proud. Like the saying goes, "If I knew then what I know now" I would have stayed in school.

Ruth: The reason I did not finish high school is because during the beginning of my senior year, my foster sister was raped by our bus driver and that really affected me. I was in foster care because my mother and her boyfriend had abused my sisters and me sexually, physically, mentally, and emotionally. When my foster sister was raped, I felt I was responsible for this because I felt I should have known what was going on. I fell into a deep depression and had a lot of anger against

myself, my bus driver, my sisters, my mother and her boyfriend and the world! I ended up being institutionalized for over a year. When I got out of the hospitals, the school told me since my class had already graduated that I would just have to quit.

6. Do you plan on completing a degree?

Mary: I do plan on completing my degree.

Jane: Yes I do, I'm completing my Associate in Arts and then transferring into Morehead State to complete my Bachelors in Business Management. I will then be going back for my Associates in Accounting.

Ruth: I have finished my Associates of Arts degree, obtained my Bachelors of University Studies, and currently working on my Master of Adult-Higher Education degree. From there I am not really sure, but you NEVER know what the future holds!

7. What inspires you?

Mary: My kids inspire me to be a better person.

Jane: My daughters inspire me to finish what I started. To become the mother they both need. I want to be able to sit back when I am an old lady and hear my girls say with pride their mother really did all this just for them. I don't want them to see me fail.

Ruth: My biggest inspiration has been my girls, but I have many others that have been inspiring me. I also have a support network that I have

never had in the past. I have my family, co-workers, friends, and strangers that constantly encourage me and my goals whatever they may be.

In examining the answers to these questions by “Mary”, “Jane” and “Ruth”, there is some similarities that seem to stand out. Two were divorced (Mary and Ruth) and the other became divorced (Jane). All three had children thus they were single mothers. All three “Mary”, “Jane” and “Ruth” stated that their children were what inspired them to complete.

In a small comparison and contrast of the answers of these three students to those that did not complete the program, there are some interesting things to note. First – like “Mary”, “Jane” and “Ruth” – many of those who did not complete the program were divorced. Also, (like “Mary”, “Jane” and “Ruth”) many were single parents. However, whereas “Mary”, “Jane” and “Ruth” used their children as inspiration to do well and to succeed, those who did not succeed either did not or could not use their children to inspire them enough to complete and obtain their GED.

Information from Other Program Directors

An eight question, short answer questionnaire (see Appendix B) was sent to other program directors of the five counties in this study and also to a few other program directors in other counties under the belief that “the more information and ideas the better”. Below I have included some views and quotations from these questionnaires that are important to this capstone. As a Program Director, I included some personal observations and comments in this section.

Major obstacles.

The Floyd County Director, in response to question number one, regarding the major obstacles that she believes students face stated, “Some just do not have the resources to participate.” I agree with that assessment and the student survey seems to support this also, as many students face transportation, childcare, and other such problems that call for resources that students just don’t have.

Recruitment.

Responses to question number two, concerning recruitment and what they view as the best way to recruit new students, virtually everyone mentioned one or more of the following methods: advertising, word of mouth, praise from other students, and letting students know the benefits of a GED. Program Directors answered questions number three and four, concerning their thoughts on retainment and as to why students fail to stay in the program and the best way to keep students after they start, the Hazard Program Director stated, “Barriers- lack of family support, hesitation to send their children to childcare, transportation issues, and substance abuse.” I have to also agree with this statement, as did many of the other directors who answered the questionnaire. Also, these were major issues that students answered “True” to on their survey. Interestingly, I did not include substance abuse on my survey questionnaire to the students. I did not include substance abuse as a choice, not because I do not believe it to be a barrier because I do, but because I was not convinced that students would readily admit to substance abuse as a barrier.

Also, both the Gateway Program Director and the Floyd County Director seem to be in agreement on the answer pertaining to question four about the best way to keep students. The Gateway Director indicated that one approach is to “increase their confidence and self-esteem” and the Floyd County Director wrote, “Lessons that engage and are relevant. Give them opportunities to succeed and sharing a genuine interest in helping students obtain this goal.”

I agree with their answers fully because in order to retain GED students, they want and need to know that their goal of getting a GED is the programs main interest as well as their own. They, for the most part, will not stay with a program very long if they feel they are doing work that is not beneficial and not helping them move toward their goal. This reality brings us to question number five.

Reengagement.

All of the directors seemed to have similar answer to question number 5 regarding reengagement and mentioned one or more of the following ways to try to re-engage students: phone calls, letters, texts, and emails, although as one director mentioned “even this is not always possible.” I agree with this because many students are transient. They move frequently with no forwarding address, they no longer have the phone number(s) that are on their enrollment forms, and they lose or change their email addresses. It is very difficult to reengage students who drop out.

Previous educational level.

In question six, which asks about the educational level of students that is the most difficult to keep/retain until they attain their GED, the program directors were in

agreement. The program directors that responded stated one or more of the following: low to intermediate, those below fourth grade level, low level literacy, NRS levels one and two. I have also found this to be true because I think the students have so far to go and so much to learn that most tend to give up.

Why?

Program Directors stated the most prominent reasons of why students failed to get their GED. Most Program Directors listed more than one reason with the following reasons being the most popular: “fear of not being successful”, “failure to understand how the GED will benefit them”, “personal barriers”, “learning disabilities”, and “undiagnosed learning difficulties”.

Ideas for success.

Finally, the last question and a very important question is question number eight which asked program directors about any ideas or suggestions, which they might have that would help students obtain their GED. Some of their ideas/suggestions are as follows: “...every effort should be made to help them understand the benefits of raising their educational level” – Floyd County Director; “Keep testing free, provide instructional professional development (PD) training for teachers” and the ever popular “Better levels of funding” – Gateway Director. The reason why I chose the following quote to be last is because it, in my opinion, shows great insight and concern for students. “Many students that come into GED programs need counseling. They suffer from depression, anxiety, and addiction (just to name a few). I think the funding of a position for a counselor in each program would help

students to overcome many of their personal barriers. Public schools provide counselors and so do post-secondary institutions, so why shouldn't Adult Education have counselors?" – Hazard Program Director. I think this is an idea based in reality of adult students and their situations, which is well worth considering.

Chapter 5:

Conclusions and Recommendations

Lessons Learned

This study has confirmed some information known about barriers and obstacles the students and programs face that were held before the study and revealed some new needful information about obstacles and barriers. It was learned that program or school related barriers are certainly present and must be faced and solved if possible, but they are not the major obstacles/barriers. Personal Issues and Home/Family issues were the major obstacles and barriers that hindered the success of students and programs. They are the more difficult problems with which both stakeholders must contend.

Limitation of the Study

The belief is that, this current study supplied some very useful information about the obstacles and barriers that lead to the recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement issues faced by adult education programs and their students in regards to GED attainment. The study has some inherent limitations that should be acknowledged. Some of these limitations are more easily discussed, quantified, and understood than other limitations.

One limitation was that the study focused only on one rural five county area in eastern Kentucky and on those counties' adult education programs, directors, and students. Thus, the findings may not be applicable to other areas in the state especially urban areas, as the barriers/obstacles faced by other programs and students

may be different and/or vary in their severity. For example, transportation in the eastern Kentucky area is a major barrier and in an urban area with public transportation this may be a minor problem.

Another limitation of the study is that the survey had to be mailed to former students of the five programs, and this inherently had two problems. The first problem was that the survey had no guarantee of reaching the students as a number of them had no current address or no forwarding address. The second problem was the number of respondents could not be controlled. Many former students failed to respond, even though they received the self-addressed envelope. This limited the conclusions, which were based only on the 49 returned surveys.

Implication for Practice

The hope is that the information gathered in this study will have a positive impact on the five adult education programs and their students, as they were the focus of the study. Maybe the information gathered and the resulting conclusions will lead to better program designs for GED students when they first enter the program and better contingency plans and solutions for the major obstacle and barriers that may arise for the student as they continue in the pursuit of the GED.

Some obstacles and barriers are more easily quantified than others and there was a couple that was unquantifiable and therefore was limitations. One unquantifiable obstacle not revealed in the study faced by the programs, program directors, and staff is the acceptance of the frustration and futility that becomes so very ordinary as so many capable students fall by the wayside. These students quit

the GED program no matter how much the program personnel invest in those students, and it happens so often that eventually the frustration is just expected and accepted.

Another and possibly greater unquantifiable obstacle not revealed in the study faced by the students is how readily students accept failure for themselves. They easily allow obstacles and barriers – that may be overcome – to become insurmountable. Also, in far too many cases students cannot see themselves being successful because they are afraid to move forward out of their comfort zone.

Future Implications

The results of this capstone add to the body of knowledge regarding the obstacles and barriers that hinder GED attainment for adult students and GED success for Adult Education programs. As stated in Chapter 1, this study focused on three main questions. The first question was: What are the major and minor obstacles and barriers that hinder GED students in eastern Kentucky? The answer to this question was answered, for the most part Table 7. In a review, those responses revealed that about 46% of the students say that a lack of confidence/overwhelmed by work load expectations are their main barriers. The next two barriers are transportation at 23% and childcare at 16%. The final barrier was family illness/responsibility/lack of support at less than 5%. The second question was: Can these obstacles and barriers be differentiated in such a way as to determine the opportunities and constraints in alleviating and minimizing their negative impact? This was done as the obstacles and barriers were separated into the three issues of school related issues, personal issues,

and home and family issues. These issues were explored in Tables 8, 9 and 10.

Finally, the third question was: What strategies and solutions can be ascertained and recommended to help students overcome those barriers to be successful in their GED attainment? This is answered in the recommendations part of this section.

This study focused on a five-county rural area in eastern Kentucky. It was explained that the GED goals for those five counties, as with all the counties in Kentucky, are set by KYAE and are seemingly small in the comparison with the number of eligible people without a high school diploma or GED certificate. We learned, however, that these “small” goals of GED enrollment and GED attainment are very difficult for programs to meet. This difficulty is the result, as shown in the capstone, of the obstacles and barriers that cause the recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems that hinder GED success for everyone involved.

The results of the survey instrument, the interviews, and GED Program Director experiences and observations show the myriad obstacles and barriers that students and programs continually face. The majority of the students in the survey checked more than three obstacles and barriers. This indicated that even if a program were to help minimize or remove one or two of the obstacles and barriers – more would still probably remain. However, this does not mean programs and students should not give every effort to plan, to intercede, and to erase these obstacles. On the contrary, it shows that every effort must be made to tackle these obstacles and barriers in order for success in recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement to be attained.

Many students have overcome obstacles and barriers in order to successfully complete their GED goal. Therefore, we know it can be accomplished. So programs must plan, design, and implement strategies and structures that will afford students the opportunity, assistance, and support to be successful.

Recommendations

As shown, there were several obstacles and barriers that the students and programs of these five counties faced. This capstone separated these barriers into three main categories: School Related issues, Personal issues, and Home and Family issues.

The data analysis revealed that the school-related issues consisted of the least amount of obstacles and barriers for students. One very important barrier in this category was the student “did not understand what was being taught in class”. Some recommendations for this category are:

- Involve the student more in the planning a Program of Study to meet the individual’s needs and skill level.
- Get more timely and informational feedback from the student(s).
- Let the student be more involved in their individual progress assessments and evaluations.
- If possible, provide more individual instruction and tutoring.

- Program personnel need to become more aware of learning disabilities and learning difficulties and better trained to diagnose those problems and to teach those students

Next, the Personal Issues category seems to be the one that contained the next most troublesome obstacles and barriers for students. These barriers were largely internal and thus quite difficult to overcome. However, programs can help minimize or remove many of them. Some recommendations for this category are:

- Teach the student healthy, effective, and efficient study skills.
- Try to relate lessons and homework to the student's interests, hobbies, and careers.
- Explain the benefits, opportunities, and purpose education and GED attainment provide.
- Encourage students during their time in class and in all their work.
- Institute transportation services for students (this would require additional funding in order to initiate programs to help with this issue).
- Explain that age is not a barrier to education but is and should be viewed as a positive. Encourage this view with examples, with relationship development, and with their own success.

The final category of Home and Family Issues also was shown to provide many obstacles and barriers to student success. These barriers - illness, death, pregnancy, no babysitter, job, lack of support, spouse abuse, legal troubles, and

family instability – seem to be the most difficult to deal with for both students and programs. Possible strategies for addressing home and family issues are:

- Try to provide class schedules that minimize conflict with job and home responsibilities.
- Try to provide support from program personnel and other students to students that lack family and friend support for their educational goals.
- Provide students information, referrals, and contact phone numbers to appropriate agencies that can assist them with particular situations.
- Institute childcare and eldercare service for students (this would call for additional funding to be provided to initiate programs to help with these issues).
- Providing counseling for students faced with legal issues, family instability, and/or spousal abuse would also call for the need of new funding to initiate programs to help with these issues.

Summary

In summary, we see that programs and students can work together to develop strategies that will make the obstacles and barriers that cause recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement problems manageable and in many cases completely removed at minimal or no cost. However, some major obstacles – such as transportation, childcare, and eldercare – will need monetary commitments. Another suggestion (made by one program director and one that has great merit) is the need for programs

to provide counseling services for students. This too would require additional funding. The cost to society of committing additional funds to such new programs now would be less than what it will cost society in the long term.

The findings reflected in this capstone can lead to better preparation, planning, and implementation of operational methods of adult education programs not only in Johnson County and surrounding counties of eastern Kentucky, but across the United States. It shows how many of the barriers and obstacles for the students can be at the very least minimized but that complete removal is possible.

Every effort must be made to tackle obstacles and barriers of recruitment, retainment, and re-engagement to be attained in order to successfully have a successful GED student and thus a successful GED program. Programs and students need to work together to design an individual learning plan. When students take ownership in their learning they are more likely to stick it out.

President John F. Kennedy said it best with this thought: “There are risks and costs to a program of action. But they are far less than the long range risks and costs of comfortable inaction.”

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Appendices

Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

Part One

1. **Gender**
 - Male
 - Female
2. **Age**
 - 16-19
 - 20-40
 - 41-64
 - 65+
3. **What is your marital status?**
 - Never Married
 - Married
 - Separated
 - Divorced
 - Widowed
4. **What is the highest grade level you have completed?**
 - Elementary School
 - Middle School
 - Some High School
5. **What is your labor force status?**
 - Employed Full-time (35 hours per week or more)
 - Employed Part-time (less than 35 hours a week)
 - Unemployed
 - Disabled
6. **What is the highest level of education of your mother/female guardian has completed?**
 - Less than High School
 - High School
 - GED
 - 2-Year College Degree (Associates)
 - 4-Year College Degree (BA, BS)
 - Master's Degree
 - Doctoral Degree
 - Professional Degree
7. **What is the highest level of education of your father/male guardian has completed?**
 - Less than High School
 - High School
 - GED

- 2-Year College Degree (Associates)
- 4-Year College Degree (BA, BS)
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree
- Professional Degree

8. Which of the following best describes the barriers keeping you from continuing your GED (Check all that apply)

- Lack of confidence/overwhelmed by work load expectations
 - Transportation
 - Childcare
 - My barrier is not listed (please fill in below)
-
-

9. Do you currently receive any type of public assistance?

- No
- Yes

10. If you answered yes to question 9, what affect could this have on you completing your GED?

Part Two

Below are reasons believed to have caused many adults to drop out of the GED Program. Please check the box of your choice.

You dropped out of the GED Program because:

Reason	Not True	Not Sure	True	N/A
1. Too many assignments				
2. Inconvenient class schedule				
3. Strict attendance policy				
4. Lack of interesting courses				
5. Disagreement with the teacher				
6. Teacher did not have enough knowledge of the subject he/she was assigned to teach				

7. Teacher's repeated absence or late arrival for the class				
8. You were not allowed to borrow books or other materials				
9. You did not understand what was being taught in the class				
10. No tutors for GED students				
11. You didn't have time to study				
12. Home responsibilities				
13. Job responsibilities				
14. No babysitter				
15. Transportation problems				
16. Friends or family members did not support you going to school				
17. Pregnancy				
18. Illness				
19. Death in the family				
20. Legal trouble				
21. Spousal abuse				
22. Instability in the family				
23. You felt you were too old for school				
24. You did not like to study				
25. You received a low grade and felt disheartened				
26. You did not know how to study				
27. You were tired of school				
28. You felt that education had no purpose				
29. Financial reasons				

Appendix B

Questions Asked to Program Directors

- 1.) What do you believe is the major obstacle that your program faces in trying to recruit new students?
- 2.) What do you think is the most successful way to recruit new students?
- 3.) Why do you think so many students that start the GED program fail to stay in the program?
- 4.) What is the best way you have found to keep students once they start?
- 5.) After a student stops coming to GED classes, how do you re-engage that student?
- 6.) What education level of students is the hardest to keep until they attain the GED?
- 7.) As a program director, what do you believe is the most prominent reason students fail to get their GED?
- 8.) Do you have any ideas as to what can be done to help students obtain their GED?

Appendix C

**Questions asked to Former GED Students whom Successfully
Completed and Attained A GED**

- 1.) Describe how you felt when you first came into the Adult Education Classroom.
- 2.) What is your marital status then and now?
- 3.) What is your living status? (For example: do you live on your own or with family or friends?)
- 4.) Did you go on to work...continue education...both...neither...Why?
- 5.) Why didn't you complete high school?
- 6.) Do you plan on completing a degree?
- 7.) What inspires you?

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