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Postsecondary Outcomes of Georgia's Adult Education Students

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Child & Family Policy Lab and Adult Literacy Research Center

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Context

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) oversees Georgia's public technical colleges, workforce development programs, and adult basic skills education ("adult education") system. Classes in the adult education system help adult students ("adult learners") improve literacy, numeracy, communications, and other skills that can lead to higher-paying jobs, enrolling in and obtaining postsecondary education and training, and reaching other personal goals. A better understanding is needed of adult learners' enrollment and success in postsecondary education.

This Report

This report examines the number and characteristics of adult learners in Georgia who subsequently enroll in the state's public technical colleges, colleges, and universities and the postsecondary academic outcomes for these adult learners. To do so, it analyzes administrative data from the TCSG adult education system, TCSG technical colleges, and the University System of Georgia (USG). It also compares the characteristics of technical college and USG students who had and had not previously enrolled in the adult education system.

Key Findings

- Georgia's adult education system serves learners with a wide distribution of skills, including many who enter with very low (primary grade) skills. Among the total population of adult learners, few subsequently enroll in the state's public postsecondary institutions: 5.7% enroll in TCSG technical colleges and 0.9% enroll in USG institutions. Postsecondary enrollments are much higher for learners who enter with more skills; nearly a quarter of learners who start adult education with high-school-level skills enroll in public postsecondary institutions.
- Postsecondary enrollment rates generally increase with adult education attendance beyond 12 hours. However, among the adult learners who enroll in a TCSG or USG institution, postsecondary academic outcomes, including credits, grades, and credentials earned, are only weakly positively associated with hours of adult education attendance.

- Learners who earn high school equivalency credentials enroll in postsecondary institutions and earn postsecondary credentials at much higher rates than average as do learners who take integrated education and training classes. Learners who make measurable skills gains also enroll in postsecondary institutions and earn credentials at higher rates than average.
- Older learners are less likely to enroll at public postsecondary institutions than younger learners. Postsecondary outcomes vary modestly with other demographic characteristics of the learners.
- Technical college students who attended adult education classes are slightly more likely than other technical college students to be women and Asian and slightly less likely to be Black or Hispanic.
- Technical college students who attended adult education classes attempt and complete fewer credit hours, earn lower grades, and earn fewer credentials than other technical college students, but the differences between the two groups are modest.
- USG undergraduate students who attended adult education classes also tend to attempt and complete fewer credit hours and have lower GPAs than other USG students. However, adult learners are more likely to enroll in and complete associate degree programs than other students.

Introduction

The Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) oversees Georgia's public technical colleges, the state's workforce development programs, and the state's adult literacy program. Within TCSG, the Georgia Office of Adult Education (GOAE) provides grants to Service Delivery Areas to deliver adult basic skills classes across the state. The classes focus on helping adult learners improve their literacy, numeracy, and communications skills, which lay the foundation for obtaining better employment, continuing with and succeeding in additional education and training, and accomplishing other personal objectives.¹

Learners come to Georgia's adult education system with a wide variety of goals. One goal for some learners and for TCSG is to develop the skills needed for enrollment and success in a two- or four-year postsecondary institution. Postsecondary education is important because it adds to higher-level skills that directly benefit the well-being of people and their families, open job opportunities, and fill workforce gaps. The federal law that supports adult education—Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)—emphasizes the role of postsecondary education by including the percentages of learners from the adult education system who enroll in postsecondary credential programs or obtain recognized credentials as key performance measures. Increased postsecondary enrollment and credential attainment among adult learners also directly align with TCSG's strategic goals to increase technical college enrollments and improve retention and graduation rates (TCSG, 2022).

Annual reports from Georgia and other states indicate that few adult learners continue to postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Among the subset of Georgia adult learners in state fiscal year (FY) 2021 who met the qualifications for postsecondary schooling, only 18% subsequently enrolled in postsecondary education or training.² Nationally, the corresponding enrollment rate is lower at 10%. Although these overall rates are low, they are higher for some groups of learners and in some situations and types of programs.

Reder (2014) found that among people who dropped out of high school, those who took adult basic skills classes enrolled in postsecondary education at double the rate of those who did not take classes and that postsecondary enrollments increased with their hours of adult education attendance. Yin et al. (2022) investigated postsecondary enrollment rates among students in a midwestern state's adult education system. They found that postsecondary

enrollments were higher for Black and Asian learners, learners with higher initial adult education test scores, and learners with more hours of program attendance. Enrollments were lower for Hispanic learners, learners with part-time teachers, and non-working learners. With respect to program features, Rutschow (2019) summarized research that found positive enrollment effects of bridge programs, which combine adult education and college academic classes, and integrated education and training (IET) programs, which combine adult education and occupational classes. Georgia is increasingly incorporating these innovations into its adult education system (Rio & Overby, 2020).

While previous studies have generated findings for other states, a better understanding is needed of postsecondary outcomes for Georgia's adult learners and adult education system. There is also relatively little research on adult learners' academic success after enrolling in a postsecondary institution, such as the credits, grades, and credentials they earn.

This report analyzes postsecondary enrollment and postsecondary academic outcomes for Georgia's adult learners, using linked administrative records from TCSG's adult education system, TCSG's technical colleges, and the University System of Georgia (USG). The report conducts cross-tabulation analyses of these data to answer three research questions:

1. What are the subsequent public technical college, college, and university outcomes for TCSG adult learners? How many adult learners enroll in postsecondary programs, and what are their academic trajectories?
2. How do postsecondary enrollments and outcomes differ with adult learners' characteristics, including the type of adult education course/activity and their performance in their adult education courses?
3. How do adult education, technical college, and public college and university outcomes differ between adult learners who completed adult education courses and other enrollees?

This report has several notable features. First, its data describe the universe of adult learners in Georgia's public adult education system. The data provide us with a large number of learners to study and include learners across many different demographic groups and contexts. Second, the adult education data come from administrative records that have a wealth of information on learners' program experiences, such as their enrollment dates, attendance hours, and skills tests outcomes. Third, the underlying data have information that allow us to link records across Georgia's adult education and public

postsecondary education systems. The linkages to data from TCSG's technical colleges and USG's institutions provide us with detailed, comprehensive, and accurate information on adult learners' academic outcomes, including the postsecondary academic programs they enroll in, the credit hours they attempt and pass, the grades that they earn, and the credentials they complete. This greatly expands the number of academic outcomes to consider. Finally, our data on postsecondary outcomes extend through academic year (AY) 2020–21 and therefore include observations during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period that impacted postsecondary education and outcomes around the world.

Data

Our analyses examine administrative records from three data systems:

1. the Georgia Adult Learners Information System (GALIS), which describes learners in adult education programs operated by TCSG from FY 2018 to FY 2021;
2. technical education data, which describe postsecondary students in TCSG institutions from AY 2007–08 to AY 2020–21; and
3. USG data, which describe postsecondary students in USG institutions from AY 2007–08 to AY 2020–21.

Adult Education Data

From the GALIS data, we examine learners who ever scheduled or attended an adult basic education (ABE), adult secondary education (ASE), or English as a Second Language (ESL) class outside of a correctional or institutional setting between FY 2018 and FY 2021. We exclude students who only enrolled in Integrated English Language and Civics Education classes and family literacy classes. For adult learners who attended classes, we record their adult education information starting with the first class they attended. For adult learners who only scheduled classes but never attended any, we record information starting with the first class they scheduled.

For each adult learner, we calculate the total hours that they attended adult education classes, and we distinguish among adult learners who attended no hours (adult learners who only scheduled classes), attended fewer than 12 hours, attended 12 or more hours but fewer than 60 hours, and attended 60 or more hours. The 12-hour threshold corresponds to the level at which TCSG

requires adult learners to complete skills pre-testing and the level at which the federal government requires adult education agencies to report adult learner outcomes. The 60-hour threshold corresponds to the level of hours where all learners would have been subject to post-testing.³

We additionally use measures of adult learners' educational functioning levels (EFLs) in ABE/ASE outcomes or ESL outcomes at entry into their programs and their highest EFLs obtained in post-tests (if post-tests were taken). We also measure many demographic, economic, and programmatic characteristics of adult learners, including their gender, race and ethnicity, age at the time of their first class, highest reported level of schooling, enrollment in an IET class, completion of a high school equivalency credential, reported identified disabilities and special educational needs, and entry year. In addition, we measure characteristics of their teachers (including whether they teach full- or part-time and their years of experience) and of their provider organizations (including the number of learners they serve and whether the provider is a technical college, public school, or community-based organization).

Technical Education Data

From the TCSG technical education records, we create term-by-term measures of the type of credential program students enroll in (technical certificate of credit, diploma, or associate degree); whether they are a beginning, returning, or transfer student; the course hours they attempt and complete; their grade-point average (GPA); and the credentials that they earn. We also obtain demographic data, including students' gender, race and ethnicity, and age at initial enrollment. We restrict our analyses of enrollment and course outcomes to terms in which students attempt a positive number of course hours.

USG Data

From the USG records, we create similar term-by-term measures of public college and university outcomes, including program enrollments (certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree), course hours attempted and completed, GPAs, and credentials earned. We also obtain demographic information from these data and restrict our analyses to terms with positive attempted course hours.

Linking

We link data across these three data sets using internal cross-system identifiers developed by data analysts at the Georgia Policy Labs that utilize information on students' names, dates of birth, and Social Security numbers while meeting all privacy and security laws and best practices. To provide a consistent time window for postsecondary outcomes to occur, we only consider adult learners who are first observed in the GALIS data in FY 2018 or FY 2019, and we link the GALIS observations to TCSG or USG term data that occur within three years of the start of the students' first adult education enrollments (students who begin adult education classes in FY 2018 are linked to AY 2018 through AY 2020 postsecondary outcomes, and students who begin adult education classes in FY 2019 are linked to AY 2019 through AY 2021 postsecondary outcomes).

We describe our data and measures in more detail in Appendix A.

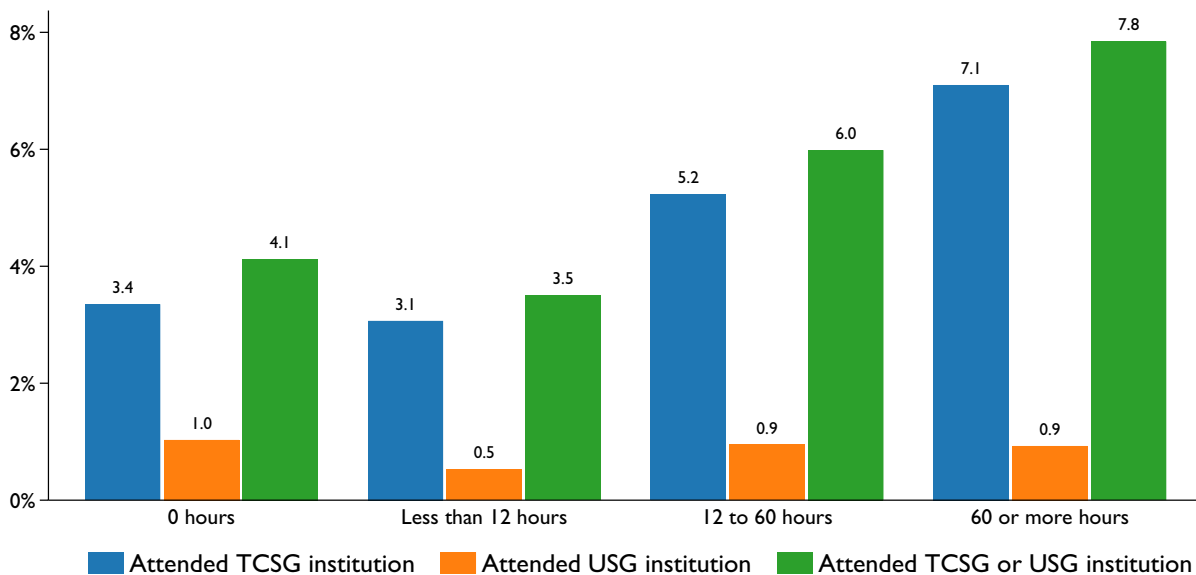
Postsecondary Outcomes among Learners with Different Levels of Adult Education Attendance

To answer our first research question regarding public technical college, college, and university outcomes for TCSG adult learners, we initially examine the percentages of adult learners with different hours of adult education attendance who subsequently enroll in a TCSG institution, a USG institution, or either type of institution within three years of their first adult education enrollment. Results are shown in Figure 1, which graphs results for students who

1. did not attend any hours and therefore received no instruction,
2. attended some hours but fewer than 12 hours and were therefore below the thresholds where pre-testing is required or where outcomes are reported to the federal government,
3. attended at least 12 hours but fewer than 60 hours and who were required to take pre-tests but possibly not post-tests, and
4. attended at least 60 hours and met the guidelines for post-testing.

Figure 1 shows that rates of adult learners' subsequent enrollments in Georgia public postsecondary institutions were modest and ranged from 3.5% to 7.8% of adult learners depending on the hours of adult education attendance. Most

Figure 1. Enrollment at TCSG and USG Institutions among Learners with Different Levels of Adult Education Attendance



Notes. Authors’ calculations from administrative records for learners who initially enrolled in TCSG adult education classes in FY 2018 or FY 2019 and who ever attended an ASE, ABE, or ESL class. All the enrollment outcomes are measured within three years of the learners’ first adult education class and are calculated for 1,164 learners who attended zero adult education hours, 12,848 learners who attended fewer than 12 hours, 26,294 learners who attended 12 to 60 hours, and 32,791 learners who attended 60 or more hours.

enrollments occurred in technical colleges, with fewer than 1% of adult learners overall enrolling in USG institutions. Enrollment rates were similar and lowest for adult learners with no attendance and for those with fewer than 12 hours of attendance. Enrollment rates generally increased with attendance beyond 12 hours of attendance, though this mainly occurred for technical college enrollments rather than USG enrollments.

Table 1 considers more postsecondary outcomes conditional on different levels of adult education attendance. The top panel of Table 1 lists the technical college outcomes for adult learners, including their enrollments, cumulative hours attempted and earned, and credentials earned within three years of their initial adult education classes. Because of the modest levels of enrollment, the average number of hours attempted is very low (1.3 hours) as are the numbers of college credits earned (1.0) and the percentage of adult learners earning a credential (1.4%). As with enrollments, these numbers are similar for learners with no adult education attendance and those with fewer than 12 hours of attendance. However, course hours and credentials subsequently rise with the hours of adult education attendance.

The second panel in Table 1 reports technical college outcomes among the 5.7% of adult learners who enroll in public technical colleges. On average, the learners who enroll in a technical college attempt 8.4 credit hours in their first term and pass 5.4 credit hours with a GPA of 2.2 on a four-point scale. Nearly all the learners enroll as either beginning, returning, or transfer students (as opposed to enrolling as adult education students). Cumulatively, the learners attempt 23.3 credit hours and pass 17.0 credit hours with a GPA of 2.2. Just under a quarter earn technical certificates; 5.3% earn diplomas; and 2.1% earn associate degrees. Within the set of adult learners who enroll in technical college, the number of adult education hours is only modestly associated with their academic outcomes. There are almost no statistically distinguishable differences in outcomes between the learners who scheduled but never attended adult education classes and the learners who attended fewer than 12 hours of classes. First-term and cumulative credit hours are modestly higher for students who attended 12 to 60 hours of adult education classes. A higher proportion of these students also earn technical certificates. Compared to students who attended 12 to 60 hours, those who attended 60 or more adult education hours have higher first-term and cumulative GPAs and earn more cumulative credits, but they do not earn credentials at a higher rate.

The third panel of Table 1 lists USG outcomes for adult learners. Rates of enrollment, hours attempted and earned, and credential completion are all very low, particularly for the learners who attended fewer than 12 hours of adult education classes.⁴ In the fourth panel of Table 1, academic outcomes for adult learners who enrolled in USG institutions have little association with hours of adult education attendance. First-term credits earned and first-term and cumulative GPAs are higher for learners who attended 60 or more hours of adult education classes than for other learners. However, there are no associations for other academic outcomes or at other levels of adult education attendance.

Table 1. TCSG and USG Enrollment, Course, and Credential Outcomes among Learners with Different Levels of Adult Education Attendance

	All learners	Adult education hours			
		Scheduled but did not attend	Attended less than 12 hours	Attended 12 to 60 hours	Attended 60 hours or more
TCSG technical education outcomes					
Percent attending a TCSG institution	5.7	3.4	3.1	5.2**	7.1**
Cumulative hours attempted	1.3	0.9	0.6	1.2**	1.7**
Cumulative hours earned	1.0	0.6	0.4	0.9**	1.3**
Percent earning a technical certificate	1.4	0.5	0.6	1.2**	1.8**
Percent earning a diploma	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.3**	0.4**
Percent earning an associate Degree	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1*	0.1
Percent earning a Tech Ed credential	1.4	0.5	0.7	1.3**	1.8**
Observations	73,097	1,164	12,848	26,294	32,791
Technical education outcomes among technical college enrollees					
Hours attempted first term	8.4	7.8	8.2	8.8**	8.2**
Hours earned first term	5.4	3.9	4.8	5.4**	5.5
GPA first term	2.2	2.3	2.0	2.1	2.3**
Percent attending as a beginning, returning, or transfer student	91.4	100.0	89.6**	94.0*	90.0**
Cumulative hours attempted	23.3	27.5	20.3	23.4*	23.7
Cumulative hours earned	17.0	17.8	13.7	16.4*	17.9*
Cumulative GPA	2.2	2.3	2.0	2.0	2.3**
Percent earning a technical certificate	23.8	15.4	19.3	23.4*	24.9
Percent earning a diploma	5.3	5.1	3.8	5.2	5.7
Percent earning an associate Degree	2.1	5.1	2.0	2.6	1.7
Percent earning a Tech Ed credential	24.7	15.4	21.1	24.2	25.7

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Observations	4,135	39	394	1,374	2,328
USG outcomes					
Percent attending a USG institution	0.9	1.0	0.5	0.9**	0.9
Cumulative hours attempted	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3**	0.3
Cumulative hours earned	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2**	0.2
Percent earning a certificate	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00
Percent earning an associate degree	0.03	0.09	0.00	0.05*	0.03
Percent earning a USG credential	0.05	0.17	0.02	0.06	0.04
Observations	73,097	1,164	12,848	26,294	32,791
USG outcomes among USG enrollees					
Percent in a bachelor's program first term	36.8	33.3	33.8	40.6	34.5
Percent in an associate program first term	57.8	58.3	58.8	55.0	59.9
Percent in a certificate program first term	0.8	8.3	0.0	1.2	0.3
Hours attempted first term	10.4	11.7	10.3	10.5	10.2
Hours earned first term	6.7	6.8	6.6	6.2	7.2*
GPA first term	2.3	1.9	2.1	2.1	2.5**
Cumulative hours attempted	30.4	30.8	32.8	29.9	30.3
Cumulative hours earned	22.6	21.3	22.1	21.6	23.6
Cumulative GPA	2.3	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.5**
Percent earning a certificate	0.32	0.00	0.00	0.80	0.00
Percent earning an associate degree	3.63	8.33	0.00	4.82	3.29
Percent earning a USG credential	5.21	16.67	2.94	6.83	3.95
Observations	633	12	68	249	304

Notes. Authors' calculations from administrative records for learners who initially enrolled in TCSG adult education classes in FY 2018 or FY 2019 and who ever attended an ASE, ABE, or ESL class. All the enrollment outcomes are measured within three years of the learners' first adult education class. The first and third panels report outcomes for all adult learners. The second and fourth panels report outcomes only among adult learners who enrolled in a technical college or USG institution, respectively.

* Significantly different from the figure in the preceding column at the 0.05 level.

** Significantly different from the figure in the preceding column at the 0.01 level

Our analyses of learners' postsecondary outcomes consider outcomes that occur after we first observe learners attending an adult education class (or after their first scheduled class if they never attended any classes). This means that learners' participation in adult education classes may overlap with their postsecondary education enrollments. We examine the outcomes for learners with these overlaps in attendance in Appendix B, Table B.1. Few learners overlap in this way: Only 12.7% of learners who enroll in TCSG technical colleges and 2.5% of learners who enroll in USG institutions have overlaps in their adult education and postsecondary education experiences. The TCSG students with overlaps attempt and complete fewer credit hours in their first terms and cumulatively than learners without overlaps. However, they have slightly higher GPAs and are more likely to earn a technical certificate than other students. The handful of USG students with overlaps have higher GPAs and are less likely to enroll in or complete associate degree programs than other learners, though these results should be interpreted cautiously because they apply to so few learners.

Postsecondary Outcomes for Adult Learners with Different Characteristics

To answer our second research question regarding how postsecondary outcomes differ with adult learners' characteristics, we calculate statistics for several of the outcomes from Table 1 for learners with different characteristics and report the results in Table 2. Specifically, we calculate the percentages of adult learners enrolling in a TCSG or USG institution, the average number of credit hours learners cumulatively attempt and earn, the learners' average GPAs, and the percentages of learners who earn credentials. The statistics for postsecondary enrollments, credits attempted and earned, and credentials earned are calculated for all learners, while the average GPAs are only calculated for learners who enroll in a TCSG or USG institution. Each row reports the statistics for learners with a different characteristic. To make comparisons easier, the first row lists the statistics for all learners, reproducing the relevant numbers from Table 1. The later rows calculate statistics conditional on sex, race and ethnicity, age, identified and reported disabilities and special educational needs, previous schooling, initial EFL, whether the learner took an IET class, whether the learner made a measurable skills gain, whether the learner earned a high school equivalency credential, the full-time/part-time status and years of experience of the first teacher they had in an

adult education class, the size and type of their adult education provider, and the year they took their first adult education class.

Many characteristics of adult learners and their experiences appear to be associated with technical college outcomes. The figures from Table 2 indicate that adult learners who are women, are White, begin adult education before age 22, completed at least some high school education, have higher initial EFLs, take IET classes, make measurable skills gains, earn high school equivalency credentials while in their program, have full-time teachers or teachers with four to 10 years of experience in their first adult education class, attend smaller programs, attend a program at a technical college, or began adult education classes in FY 2018 enroll in technical colleges at higher rates than the average. They also attempt and complete more credit hours on average. In contrast, adult learners who are men, Black, Asian, Native American, or Hispanic; begin adult education when they are 22 or older; have identified disabilities or special educational needs; did not complete any amount of high school; have low initial EFLs; enter as an ESL learner; do not earn a high school equivalency credential; have a part-time teacher or one with more than 10 years of experience in their first adult education class; attend a program at a public school or community-based organization; or began adult education classes in FY 2019 enroll in technical colleges at lower rates than average and attempt and complete fewer credit hours.

Most of the same relationships appear when we consider GPAs and credentials earned at technical colleges, but there are exceptions. Learners who are Asian or Native American, are Hispanic, begin adult education classes when they are 22 to 50 years old, enter as ESL learners, or attend a program at a public school or community-based provider have above-average GPAs. Additionally, learners who are men, begin adult education classes when they are 22 to 35, or have an identified learning disability or special educational needs earn credentials at higher rates than other learners.

For learners of all characteristics and experiences, USG outcomes are much lower than technical college outcomes, except for learners' GPAs. However, the directions of the relationships between learners' characteristics and the USG outcomes are similar to those for technical college outcomes, with only a few exceptions. Learners who are Asian, have initial EFLs of ESL5 and ESL6, attend large programs, or attend programs at public schools enroll at USG institutions at higher rates than other learners. All these groups, aside from learners who attend programs at public schools, also earn credentials at higher rates than other learners.

Table 2. Postsecondary Education Outcomes for Adult Learners with Different Characteristics

	Learners	Technical college outcomes					USG outcomes				
		Attended TCSG institution	Cumulative hours attempted	Cumulative hours earned	Cumulative GPA	Earned a credential	Attended USG institution	Cumulative hours attempted	Cumulative hours earned	Cumulative GPA	Earned a credential
All learners	73,097	5.7	1.3	1.0	2.2	1.4	0.9	0.3	0.2	2.3	0.05
Women	43,081	5.9	1.4	1.1	2.3	1.3	0.9	0.3	0.2	2.4	0.05
Men	29,940	5.3	1.1	0.8	2.0	1.6	0.8	0.3	0.2	2.0	0.04
Black	29,670	5.5	1.2	0.9	2.0	1.3	0.8	0.2	0.2	2.1	0.05
Asian	5,619	3.7	1.0	0.9	3.0	1.1	1.6	0.6	0.5	3.1	0.12
Native Amer.	2,866	2.7	0.7	0.5	2.4	0.8	0.3	0.1	0.1	2.0	0.03
White	31,318	6.4	1.5	1.1	2.2	1.6	0.8	0.2	0.2	2.3	0.04
Other race or multiple races	3,041	5.7	1.2	0.8	2.2	1.4	0.7	0.2	0.1	2.2	0.00
Hispanic	14,096	2.6	0.7	0.5	2.3	0.8	0.6	0.2	0.1	2.5	0.02
17-21 years old	21,080	8.6	1.9	1.3	2.0	1.7	1.6	0.5	0.3	2.0	0.06
22-35 years old	26,766	5.0	1.2	0.9	2.3	1.5	0.7	0.2	0.2	2.8	0.04
36-50 years old	15,437	3.3	0.8	0.7	2.6	1.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	2.7	0.03
51+ years old	6,686	1.4	0.3	0.3	2.4	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.0	2.5	0.03
No disability or special needs	66,208	5.7	1.3	1.0	2.2	1.4	0.9	0.3	0.2	2.3	0.05
Physical disab.	1,767	5.0	1.1	0.7	1.9	1.2	0.5	0.2	0.1	2.2	0.00
Learning disab.	3,221	4.9	1.1	0.8	2.2	1.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	2.2	0.00
Special needs	6,158	5.2	1.1	0.8	2.1	1.5	0.6	0.2	0.1	2.2	0.00
No high school	9,575	3.5	0.9	0.6	2.2	1.0	0.3	0.1	0.0	2.0	0.00
Completed 9th-11th grade	41,008	6.0	1.4	0.9	2.0	1.4	0.8	0.2	0.2	2.0	0.03
Completed 12th grade	19,127	6.3	1.6	1.3	2.5	1.8	1.3	0.4	0.4	2.8	0.12
Initially ABE1	3,315	1.7	0.3	0.2	1.9	0.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.9	0.00
Initially ABE2	18,362	3.0	0.6	0.4	2.1	0.8	0.4	0.1	0.1	2.1	0.02
Initially ABE3	19,173	6.2	1.3	0.9	2.1	1.4	0.9	0.2	0.2	2.2	0.04
Initially ABE4	11,500	11.5	2.9	2.1	2.2	2.8	1.5	0.5	0.3	2.2	0.06
Initially ASE1	2,760	16.2	4.0	2.8	2.1	4.3	2.5	0.8	0.6	2.1	0.07

Post-Secondary Outcomes of Georgia's Adult Education Students

Initially ASE2	1,630	20.4	5.3	3.9	2.2	5.6	5.0	1.7	1.2	2.2	0.37
Initially ESL1	4,242	0.4	0.1	0.1	3.4	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0	3.7	0.02
Initially ESL2	4,793	0.9	0.2	0.2	3.3	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.0	2.9	0.02
Initially ESL3	2,215	2.0	0.6	0.5	3.0	0.5	0.5	0.1	0.1	2.8	0.00
Initially ESL4	1,767	2.4	0.6	0.5	3.0	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.2	3.2	0.06
Initially ESL5	2,232	3.2	1.0	0.8	3.3	1.1	1.4	0.7	0.6	3.1	0.13
Initially ESL6	631	4.8	1.3	1.1	3.2	1.1	1.3	0.2	0.1	2.8	0.00
Took IET class	601	15.1	1.8	1.2	1.5	2.3	1.2	0.3	0.2	3.3	0.00
Made skills gain	44,141	7.6	1.8	1.3	2.2	1.8	1.1	0.3	0.2	2.2	0.05
Earned HSE credential	8,467	29.2	7.4	5.4	2.1	6.8	4.4	1.4	1.0	2.2	0.17
Did not earn HSE credential	64,630	2.6	0.5	0.4	2.2	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.1	2.5	0.03
FT teacher	36,097	6.8	1.6	1.2	2.2	1.7	1.0	0.3	0.2	2.3	0.06
PT teacher	36,817	4.6	1.0	0.8	2.2	1.1	0.8	0.2	0.2	2.3	0.04
Teacher <1 year exp.	9,155	5.3	1.2	0.9	2.2	1.3	0.5	0.1	0.1	2.3	0.02
Teacher 1-3 years exp.	14,686	5.6	1.4	1.0	2.1	1.5	0.8	0.2	0.1	2.0	0.04
Teacher 4-10 years exp.	21,974	6.6	1.5	1.1	2.1	1.6	1.1	0.3	0.3	2.4	0.05
Teacher >10 years exp.	21,980	5.3	1.2	0.9	2.2	1.3	0.8	0.3	0.2	2.2	0.04
Small org.	7,095	6.9	1.7	1.2	2.2	2.1	0.7	0.2	0.1	1.9	0.03
Medium org.	22,666	5.5	1.3	0.9	2.1	1.4	0.6	0.2	0.1	2.1	0.02
Large org.	43,336	5.5	1.3	0.9	2.2	1.3	1.0	0.3	0.2	2.4	0.06
Community-based org.	3,494	0.6	0.1	0.1	2.4	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	2.8	0.06
Public school	7,207	2.4	0.6	0.4	2.3	0.5	1.0	0.3	0.2	2.1	0.03
Tech. college	62,396	6.3	1.5	1.1	2.2	1.6	0.9	0.3	0.2	2.3	0.05
FY 2018	45,201	6.0	1.5	1.1	2.2	1.5	0.9	0.3	0.2	2.3	0.05
FY 2019	27,896	5.1	1.1	0.8	2.1	1.2	0.8	0.2	0.1	2.2	0.04

Notes. Authors' calculations from administrative records for learners who initially enrolled in TCSG adult education classes in FY 2018 or FY 2019 and who ever attended an ASE, ABE, or ESL class. All the enrollment outcomes are measured within three years of the learners' first adult education class.

One reason why the overall rates of postsecondary enrollments and outcomes are low is that many learners enter adult education with very low levels of skills. Learners who begin with high intermediate (ABE4), low adult secondary (ASE1), and high adult secondary (ASE2) EFLs are several times more likely to enroll in public postsecondary institutions than students with lower skills. Among students with an initial EFL of ASE2, 20.4% enroll in technical colleges, 5.0% enroll in USG institutions, and 24.4% enroll in either type of institution (figure not shown in Table 2). Similarly, students who earn a high school credential enroll at high rates, as do learners who take IET classes. The average hours attempted and earned for these groups follow a pattern similar to their rates of enrollment. The rates of credential attainment for learners with initial EFLs of ABE4, ASE1, and ASE2 and learners who earn high school equivalency credentials also follow a similar pattern to their rates of enrollment, while learners who take IET classes earn credentials at a rate of about one and a half times the average.

Lastly, we note that while technical college and USG enrollment rates are very low among learners who do not obtain a high school equivalency credential, the rates are not zero. Because learners who do not earn a high school equivalency credential are such a large proportion of all adult learners, they account for a moderate proportion (approximately 40%) of the learners who enroll in postsecondary education.

Differences between Postsecondary Students with and without Adult Education Backgrounds

To answer our third research question about how public technical college, college, and university outcomes differ between students with and without adult education backgrounds, we examine different students than our previous analyses. Table 3 compares demographic and academic outcomes for students who enrolled at TCSG technical colleges as beginning, returning, or transfer students in AY 2018 or later. Thus, the table is limited to students who enrolled in a TCSG technical college.

The first two columns of Table 3 list statistics for students who had or had not attended an adult education class prior to their first technical college class. The statistics show that students with adult education backgrounds are slightly less likely than students without adult education backgrounds to be Black or Hispanic and slightly more likely to be women and Asian. Students with adult

Table 3. Characteristics of TCSG Technical College Students with and without Adult Education Backgrounds

	All students		Enrolled in a technical certificate program		Enrolled in a diploma program		Enrolled in an associate degree program	
	Adult learners	Non-adult learners	Adult learners	Non-adult learners	Adult learners	Non-adult learners	Adult learners	Non-adult learners
Percent women	60.5	57.9	64.1	61.8	53.0	47.9	65.3	61.5
Percent Black	37.1	39.6	41.2	41.6	36.3	42.1	34.3	37.2
Percent Asian	5.3	2.0	3.5	1.6	3.6	1.3	8.4	2.5
Percent Native American	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.3
Percent White	44.5	44.4	43.7	44.5	48.4	43.7	41.7	44.6
Percent Hispanic	8.9	10.0	7.8	8.7	8.3	9.1	10.3	11.2
Percent other or unknown race/ethnicity	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.2	2.8	3.3	4.7	4.2
Age	26.0	25.7	27.9	28.3	25.3	25.1	25.1	24.5
Hours attempted first term	8.7	9.1	8.0	8.6	9.3	9.8	8.7	9.0
Hours earned first term	5.7	6.5	5.4	6.5	6.4	7.2	5.2	6.0
GPA first term	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.3	2.4	2.2	2.3
Cumulative hours attempted	24.7	26.5	18.2	20.8	28.5	30.3	26.6	27.7
Cumulative hours earned	18.2	20.5	13.3	16.4	21.9	24.1	18.7	20.8
Cumulative GPA	2.2	2.4	2.3	2.6	2.2	2.4	2.2	2.3
Percent earned a TCC	24.9	28.4	31.5	39.1	31.8	35.7	14.0	18.3
Percent earned a diploma	5.8	6.8	2.5	3.1	12.1	15.5	2.6	4.0
Percent earned an associate degree	2.9	5.4	0.7	2.0	2.7	3.4	4.8	8.6
Observations	4,691	149,987	1,330	39,634	1,612	40,628	1,709	68,201

Notes. Authors’ calculations from administrative records for TCSG technical college students who first enrolled as beginning, returning, or transferring students in AY 2017–18 through AY 2020–21. Adult learners are students who attended or scheduled a TCSG adult education class prior to their technical college enrollment. Students are in a program category if they ever enrolled in program, so students could appear in multiple columns. Students who attended a technical college but did not enroll in a program are included in the “all students” column.

education backgrounds attempt and earn fewer hours, have lower GPAs, and earn fewer credentials, on average, than students without adult education backgrounds. However, the absolute differences in academic outcomes between the two groups are modest.

The next six columns of Table 3 report similar statistics for subsets of technical college students who enroll in technical certificate of credit (TCC), diploma, or associate degree programs. We note that students can appear in multiple program-specific columns. Also, there are some students in the first two columns who did not enroll in credential programs and who therefore do not appear in the program-specific columns. As Bloem et al. (2021) have previously shown, the demographic characteristics of students in each TCSG credential program differ. Women, Black students, and older students are more likely than other students to enroll in TCC programs, while Hispanic students are less likely to enroll. White students are more likely than other students to enroll in diploma programs, but older students are less likely to enroll. Women, Asian students, and Hispanic students are more likely than other students to enroll in associate degree programs, while Black students, White students, and older students are less likely to enroll.

Despite these differences *across programs*, we see similar patterns of differences in the characteristics and outcomes of students with and without adult education backgrounds *within each program*, with only a few exceptions. For example, among TCC students, adult learners are younger than non-adult learners, and among diploma students, adult learners are more likely to be White than non-adult learners.

Table 4 examines students who entered USG institutions in or after AY 2018 and compares characteristics and outcomes for students with and without adult education backgrounds. The first two columns of Table 4 list outcomes among all USG undergraduate students, and the remaining four columns list outcomes for students who initially enrolled in either an associate degree program or a bachelor's degree program.

Statistics from the first two columns of Table 4 indicate that USG undergraduates with adult education backgrounds are more likely to be women, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and older than USG undergraduates without adult education backgrounds. USG undergraduates with adult education backgrounds also attempt and complete fewer credit hours and have lower GPAs; however, they are more likely than other USG undergraduates to earn associate degrees.

Table 4. Characteristics USG Undergraduate Students with and without Adult Education Backgrounds

	All students		Initially enrolled in an associate degree program		Initially enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program	
	Adult learners	Non-adult learners	Adult learners	Non-adult learners	Adult learners	Non-adult learners
Percent women	62.1	57.6	62.1	60.0	62.6	56.8
Percent Black	35.6	30.3	38.1	37.7	32.5	27.7
Percent Asian	12.0	7.2	11.3	4.1	13.2	8.3
Percent native American	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.2
Percent White	32.3	45.3	32.0	39.9	32.1	47.1
Percent Hispanic	14.1	11.3	10.4	12.8	19.2	10.8
Percent other or unknown race/ethnicity	5.8	5.7	7.7	5.3	3.0	5.9
Age	24.2	20.9	23.9	21.2	24.7	20.7
Hours attempted first term	10.7	12.3	10.6	11.2	10.9	12.8
Hours earned first term	6.8	10.0	6.7	7.9	7.0	10.8
GPA first term	2.3	2.7	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.8
Cumulative hours attempted	28.2	46.2	29.1	35.7	26.9	50.0
Cumulative hours earned	20.4	38.9	20.9	27.1	19.5	43.2
Cumulative GPA	2.2	2.7	2.2	2.2	2.3	2.8
Percent earning a certificate	0.1	0.4	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.4
Percent earning an associate degree	4.0	2.4	6.6	7.6	0.3	0.5
Observations	747	301,873	449	84,780	350	239,356

Notes. Authors’ calculations from administrative records for USG students who first enrolled in an undergraduate program in AY 2017–18 through AY 2020–21. Adult learners are students who attended or scheduled a TCSG adult education class prior to their USG enrollment. A small number of USG students initially enroll in two or more programs in their first term, so students could be included in multiple columns. Students who initially enrolled in certificate programs or on a non-degree basis are included in the “all students” column

The remaining four columns in Table 4 show the differences between students with and without adult education backgrounds who initially enrolled in associate and bachelor’s degree programs. A small number of USG students initially enroll in two or more programs, so the last four columns are not mutually exclusive. There are differences between the students in each type of program. Students who initially enroll in associate degree programs are more likely to be Black and less likely to be White or Asian than students who initially enroll in bachelor’s degree programs. Students who initially enroll in associate degree programs complete slightly fewer hours in their first terms, attempt and complete fewer cumulative hours, and are more likely to earn associate degrees. Most of the

differences between the overall sets of USG undergraduate students with and without adult education backgrounds continue to appear when we consider students within degree programs. The exception is that adult education students' higher rates of associate degree completion disappear when we condition on initial program enrollment.

Conclusions and Implications

In the United States, one of the objectives of WIOA-funded adult education programs is to provide adults with limited foundational academic skills the instruction that will enable them to attend and succeed in postsecondary education (Bransberger, 2015). This report examines the number and characteristics of adult learners in Georgia who subsequently enroll in the state's public technical colleges, colleges, and universities. It also examines the postsecondary academic outcomes for these adult learners.

The data for this report are drawn from detailed administrative records for all the students in Georgia's public adult education system and public postsecondary institutions. Nevertheless, the data and analyses have limitations and are subject to qualifications. First, the data on postsecondary education are limited to Georgia's public technical colleges, colleges, and universities and therefore miss adult learners who go to private, for-profit, or out-of-state postsecondary institutions. Second, the last 16 months of our data describe outcomes that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our results need to be considered in terms of the upheaval that occurred during the pandemic, including school closures, the sudden pivot to remote learning, and the lack of technology access and skill for many adult learners. Third, the report's analyses consist of descriptive cross-tabulations that indicate levels and general associations between outcomes but that do not condition on other relevant characteristics or support causal interpretations.

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Endnotes

1. Throughout this report, we refer to the programs and classes supported by GOAE as “adult education” and the participants in those programs and classes as “adult learners.” Both terms should be viewed as being distinct from classes and students in TCSG’s technical college and workforce training programs.
2. The U.S. Department of Education (2022) defines the qualifications as (a) obtaining a high school equivalency credential, (b) enrolling in an adult education program that includes the opportunity to obtain college credits, or (c) having previously obtained college credits. This report uses different methods to calculate its enrollment rates and only examines enrollments at Georgia’s public postsecondary institutions.
3. TCSG (2021) has minimum-hour guidelines before administering post-tests that range from 30 hours for ASE learners taking TABE 11 & 12 tests to 60 hours for learners taking BEST Literacy or BEST Plus Version 2.0 tests.
4. We include attainment of a bachelor’s degree in our “any credential” measure but do not examine this outcome separately because these degrees typically take at least four years to complete, and we only follow learners’ postsecondary outcomes for three years.

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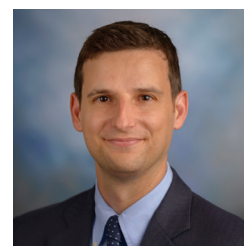
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The Georgia Policy Labs is an interdisciplinary research center that drives policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities. We produce evidence and actionable insights to realize the safety, capability, and economic security of every child, young adult, and family in Georgia by leveraging the power of data. We work alongside our school district and state agency partners to magnify their research capabilities and focus on their greatest areas of need. Our work reveals how policies and programs can be modified so that every child, student, and family can thrive.

Housed in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University, we have three components: the Metro Atlanta Policy Lab for Education (metro-Atlanta K–12 public education), the Child & Family Policy Lab (supporting children, families, and students through a cross-agency approach), and the Career & Technical Education Policy Exchange (a multi-state consortium exploring high-school based career and technical education).

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The center's research focus is broad and includes programmatic interventions and service-based research in areas including reading, health, civics, family, and financial literacies. Research affiliates come from a variety of academic backgrounds such as psychology, nursing, learning sciences, communication science and disorders, applied linguistics, evaluation, educational policy, educational psychology, public health, and economics. The ALRC is home to the Georgia Partnership for Adult Education Research.

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