



To: Interested Parties
From: Dee Alsop, Co-Founder, Heart + Mind Strategies
Date: January 2022
Re: California Adult Learner Pathways to Opportunity Results of a Quantitative Survey Executive Summary

Background and Research Objectives

There are five million Californians who have had some college experience but never finished a degree. Additionally, there are millions more who never started, but want and need to attend a college or higher educational program. Research shows that underserved populations disproportionately face greater barriers to successful entry and completion. This research seeks to understand the obstacles and barriers that these adult learners face.

Executive Summary

Much is written about “some college, no degree” Californians — rightly so because this group makes up 64% of California’s adult learners. Nevertheless, despite having a strong desire to pursue some kind of adult or career education, about a third (36%) of California adult learners never even got the chance to start.

The gap between desire and ability to pursue adult education is massive. **Half (50%) of all adult learners would be interested in taking some kind of college or adult career education if their concerns and barriers were removed. Yet, less than one in ten (9%) are “definitely” planning to do so.**

- Underserved groups most likely to take college or adults career education if barriers removed include:
 - Covid impacted (71%)
 - Foster care (64%)
 - Single fathers (64%)
 - Age 20-24 (60%)
 - Veterans (58%)

The “Started, but had to stop” group make up 64% of all California adult learners.

- This group is more likely to include:
 - Non-Black/Hispanic ethnic minorities (75%)
 - \$100K+ (74%)
 - 45-60 (73%)
 - Veterans (72%)
 - Asian (71%)
 - 25-44 (70%)
 - 2nd Gen Immigrant (70%)

The “Want(ed), but can’t (couldn’t)” make up about a third (36%) of California adult learners.

- This underserved group of adult learners is more likely to be:
 - 20-24 (54%)
 - Single fathers (51%)
 - No family with degree (46%)
 - Not registered to vote (44%)
 - 25-34 (41%)
 - Hispanic (41%)
 - Black (41%)
- This group of adult learners is eager to get into adult education within the next year or so (45% compared to 37% of all adult learners).

The pandemic has been a major force in driving this group to consider more adult education:

- More than half (57%) of potential adult learners have been negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic forced 57% of those negatively impacted to consider going back to college or some kind of adult career education. Groups significantly impacted in a negative way by Covid to consider adult education include:
 - Ages 35-44 (67%)
 - \$55K-\$100K (66%)
 - Veterans (65%)

Money, time, and emotional stress are key barriers to pursue and continue adult education:

- “Started, but had to stop” top 5 barriers:
 1. Had to start working to make money (39% mention)
 2. Couldn’t balance with other responsibilities (34%)
 3. Too expensive (31%)
 4. Not enough time (25%)
 5. Personal anxiety/fears (23%)
- “Want(ed), but can’t (couldn’t)” have more barriers, including top 5 barriers:
 1. Had to start working to make money (47% mention)
 2. Too expensive (40%)
 3. Couldn’t balance with other responsibilities (31%)
 4. Not enough time (29%)
 5. Personal anxiety/fears (27%)
- A “100% online” option solves other barriers such as inflexible class schedules (mentioned by 15% all adult learners) and being “too far away” (9%).

A scholarship/grant (18%), more affordable program (18%), and financial aid (15%) make the biggest difference in overcoming barriers these adult learners face. In total, financial support overcomes the barriers for the majority of these Californians (53%).

Significantly, a “100% online program” would help to overcome the barriers for nearly one-fourth (24%) of California’s adult learners.

- Flexible course schedule (13%)
- Online program (no travel) 11%

In fact, nearly two-thirds of these adult learners (62%) report they would be “definitely/very” likely to take a “100% online [program], where you can do your class work from home any day of the week or hour of the day and move at your own pace.”

Two-thirds of these adult learners (66%) support any initiative to “make financial aid available to California residents in need who want to attend a regionally accredited nonprofit college or university that is 100% online even if it does not have a campus or buildings in the state.”

Methodology

Heart + Mind Strategies was commissioned by a member of the California Adult Learner Network in July 2021 to conduct an online survey of 1,065 California residents ages 20-60 years old who took some college courses after high school but did not finish or who wanted to go to college but did not begin. A representative sample of Californians with some or no college were recruited into this study according age, gender, and ethnicity of the US Census. Then, respondents identified as “started but didn’t finish” or “wanted, but couldn’t”. There is a margin of error of +/-4% at the 95% confidence level.

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