

Technical College System of Georgia

Accelerating Opportunity Initiative

Evaluation Report



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EVALUATION REPORT

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Background

As state and federal governments strategize methods for producing a more college- and career-ready citizenry, the effectiveness of Adult Basic Education programs becomes an issue of paramount importance. The development of quality Adult Basic Education programs that produce robust student outcomes are necessary in order to enable learners to become productive participants in the labor market and earn sustainable wages. To achieve these ends, it is necessary to change the ways institutions service adult learners.

Research shows that both the level of support learners receive and length of time required to complete programs can impact rates of student success. Additionally, students' participation in supportive programs offered by their institutions can encourage positive self-development. This kind of intensive support can help students persist despite challenges they face outside of the classroom.

One of the most pronounced challenges non-traditional students (who predominantly fill adult education programs) must navigate relates to educational financing. Financial support can be exceptionally impactful, potentially making it feasible for students to acquire the education they need to make additional positive contributions to society as a whole.

Accelerating Opportunity, a collaborative effort of the Technical College System of Georgia, partnered with Jobs for the Future and selected technical colleges to implement an evidence-based, integrated career pathways model. This model was specifically designed to assist adult education students to acquire both their high school equivalency (GED) and Technical college certifications in a reduced time frame. The model also encourages the removal of arduous enrollment processes, which were intended to facilitate academic persistence, but ultimately were de-motivating to adult students and encouraged application abandonment.

Glymph and Associates, along with Creative Research Solutions, conducted an external evaluation of Accelerating Opportunity to assess the outcomes of the hundreds of adult students it served, as well as the impact on the state of Georgia as a whole. A secondary purpose of this evaluation was to expand the understanding of the ways in which Accelerating Opportunity improved the culture on college campuses. With this enhanced understanding, the lessons learned through the study could more effectively inform the Technical College System of Georgia and other adult education programs nationally.

Evaluation Objectives

Accelerating Opportunity aimed for selected institutions to establish integrated college and career pathways, shift the culture (attitudes and behavior) concerning Adult Basic Education students, and achieve scale and sustainability of pathways through policy changes. This report describes the Accelerating Opportunity program, followed by the methodology, results of the analyses of data, and conclusions about Accelerating Opportunity's impact.

Introduction

The Accelerating Opportunity (AO) initiative is a collaborative effort led by the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG). The initiative's approach is based on the belief that postsecondary credentials are a necessary gateway to earning family-supporting wages and that citizens' abilities to accomplish this feat are critical to ensuring greater equity in America.

The Accelerating Opportunity program described hereunto was funded by Jobs for the Future (JFF) and was developed and implemented collectively by Technical College institutions and community partners from a variety of subsectors. Each worked together collaboratively to address educational and employment disparities.

Based on Washington State's Integrating Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model, Accelerating Opportunity is based on three tenets: 1) dual enrollment, 2) team-teaching, and 3) wrap-around support services.

Accelerating Opportunity's vision was to allow students to accelerate education by changing the way Adult Basic Education is structured and delivered. Its main objective was to increase the number of individuals who obtained a GED, gained vocational credentials and, as a result, attained sustainable wages. Under this model, students were dually-enrolled and were instructed by both a Technical Education and Adult Basic Education faculty member simultaneously. This method enables students to benefit from the proficiencies of both teachers as they collaboratively deliver instruction.

To support the selected Technical Colleges' implementation of Accelerating Opportunity, the Technical College System of Georgia joined forces with Jobs for the Future and its partners. Over two and a half years (2013-2015), eight institutions participated in this initiative. These institutions include: Albany Technical College, Athens Technical College, Atlanta Technical College, Central Georgia Technical College, Georgia Piedmont Technical College, Gwinnett Technical College, Lanier Technical College, and Savannah Technical College. Two of the institutions, Albany Technical College and Atlanta Technical College, were suspended from the program, as a result, their data were not included in the evaluation.

The program's Theory of Change has three core elements:

1. The establishment of integrated college and career pathways
2. The fostering of shifts in the culture (attitudes and behavior) within states and colleges concerning ABE students
3. The movement toward scale and sustainability of pathways through policy changes, innovative financing models, the use of data to support continuous improvement, and other means.

On many technical college campuses, Adult Education and Technical Education programs are not well-aligned to students' needs and produce poor continuation rates. In addition, adult

returning learners traditionally face a lack of support from staff. Accelerating Opportunity worked to overcome these known challenges by creating systems to foster much needed support and also create a dual-enrollment opportunity that combined adult and technical education as an effective conduit to more family-sustaining employment.

The Accelerating Opportunity program's participating technical colleges targeted innovative career pathways in an effort to lead students from adult education to career-technical programs and credentials. To ensure that chosen pathways were advantageous to both students and colleges, colleges' economic development and industry leaders participated in pathway selection. These quantitatively-minded participants also forecasted future economic development opportunities to counteract outdated labor data.

The Accelerating Opportunity Initiative had labor market parameters for the pathways. To be eligible for consideration, pathways were required to lead to jobs paying at least \$14/hour. Additionally, the end job must be considered to be high-demand. Thus, Accelerating Opportunity sites began with pathways based on compensation and job demand in their respective geographical locations.

Pathways were gradually added as success was demonstrated with initial pathways. Institutions that implemented Accelerating Opportunity offered adult education students a pathway to self-sustaining and more family-sustaining employment by offering dual enrollment with team-taught classes. Additionally, they utilized a comprehensive system of "wrap-around" economic, social, and academic support. This model sought to produce marketable, stackable, college-level certificates, as well as produce changes in elements of campus culture that previously negatively impacted adult education students.

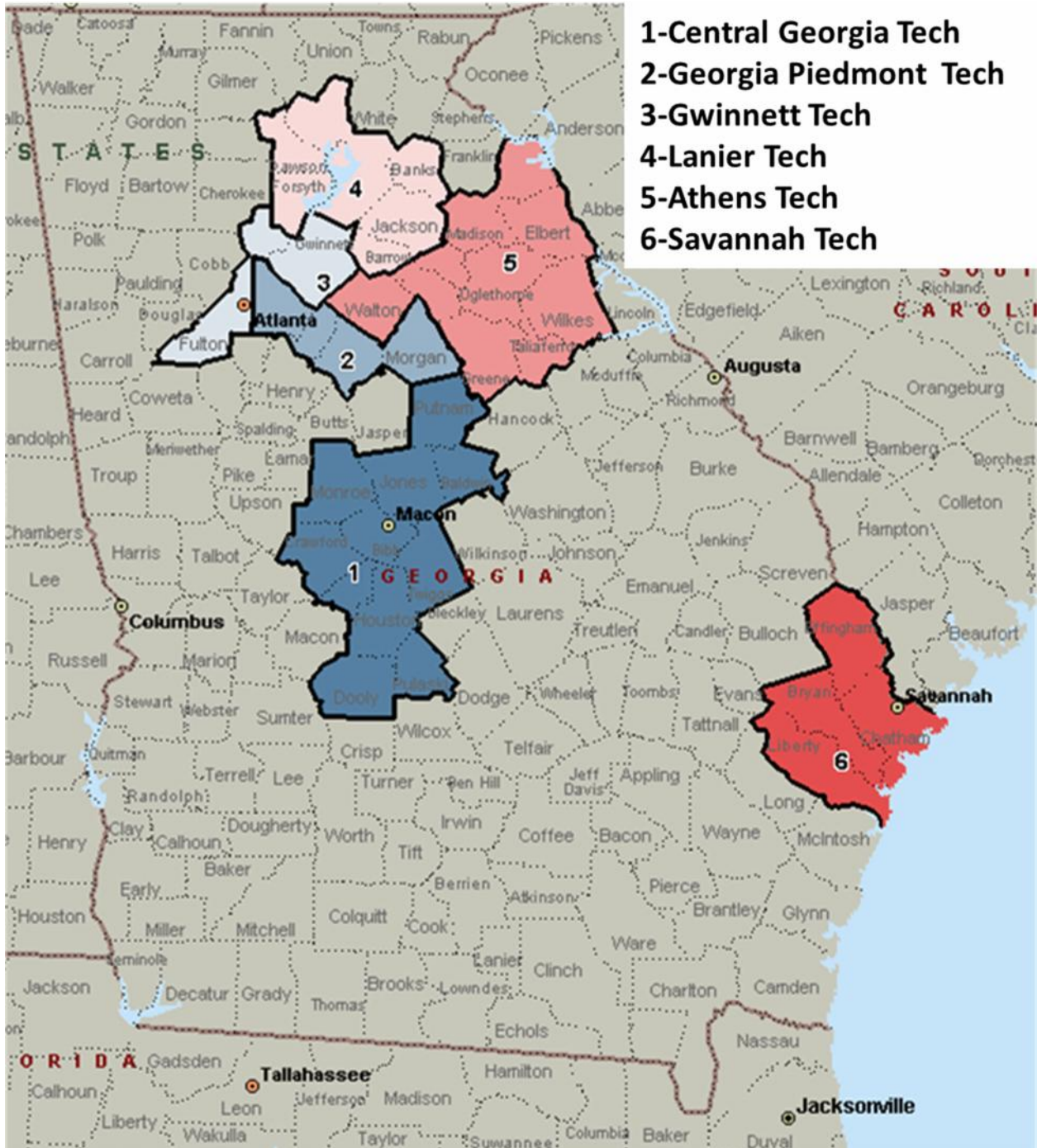
This independent evaluation, conducted by Glymph and Associates in partnership with Creative Research Solutions, will outline the progress, challenges, and successes of the Accelerating Opportunity initiative. Through qualitative and quantitative analysis of program elements, including the implementation process, overall outcomes, and cost-benefit analysis, we discuss the evaluation methodology for this grant project. Instruments used in this evaluation include surveys, site visits, and observations of grant activities. We conclude with program recommendations.

Evaluation tools can be found in the Appendix.

Figure 1: Institutional Enrollment, Service Areas, and Career Pathways

<p>Athens Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Number Enrolled: 53 •Counties Served: Clarke, Elbert, Greene, Hart, Madison, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Taliaferro, Walton and Wilkes •Career Pathways: Air Conditioning System Maintenance Technician, Early Childhood, Hotel/Restaurant/Tourism Management, Manufacturing Operations Specialist
<p>Central Georgia Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Number Enrolled: 295 •Counties Served: Baldwin, Bibb, Crawford, Dooly, Houston, Jones, Monroe, Peach, Pulaski, Putnam and Twiggs •Career Pathways: Air Conditioning, Early Childhood, Nurse Aide, Welding
<p>Georgia Piedmont Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Number Enrolled: 131 •Counties Served: DeKalb, Morgan, Newton and Rockdale •Career Pathways: Early Childhood, Welding
<p>Gwinnett Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Number Enrolled: 116 •Counties Served: Gwinnett and North Fulton •Career Pathways: Accounting, Air Conditioning, Early Childhood, Health Care, Logistics Management
<p>Lanier Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Number Enrolled: 79 •Counties Served: Banks, Barrow, Dawson, Forsyth, Hall, Jackson and Lumpkin •Career Pathways: Automotive Refinishing Assistant, Criminal Justice, Industrial Electrician, Microsoft Excel Application User, Nurse Aide, Welding
<p>Savannah Tech</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Number Enrolled: 160 •Counties Served: Bryan, Chatham, Effingham and Liberty •Career Pathways: Air Conditioning, Aviation, Early Childhood, Patient Care Tech, Welding

Figure 2: Coverage Map



The image above illustrates the counties served by participating Accelerating Opportunity Technical Colleges.

Evaluation Methods

This evaluation plan was designed to examine student and institutional level outcomes as a result of taking part in Accelerating Opportunity. While randomized designs provide the strongest evidence of program effectiveness, it was not feasible for this project. Therefore, we employed a qualitative and quantitative retrospective process evaluation to identify factors associated with successful implementation at the institutions and related implementation challenges.



A critical element of any evaluation is the development of appropriate evaluation questions. In our consideration of the Accelerating Opportunity Initiative's impact on the state of Georgia, the evaluation team established the following evaluation questions:

- What did the Accelerating Opportunity Initiative accomplish?
- Did Accelerating Opportunity reach its goals and objectives?
- What impact did Accelerating Opportunity have? What were the outcomes?
- Who benefited from Accelerating Opportunity? What were the benefits?
- What should be improved and/or changed in the program?
- Do the benefits of the program warrant the cost?