

High Impact Practices that Improve Performance

Illinois AE
Administrator VLC
July 22nd, 2026



Practices that Improve Performance



Metrics used to Measure High Performance:

MSGs – Educational Functioning Level Gains

MSGs – IETs, Credentials, Workplace Literacy

Post-test Rate

High School Equivalency Completions

Student Persistence

Employment

Thanks to the following programs for their exceptional data and for sharing with us today:

Dustyn Fatheree, Lake Land Community College

Lisa Johnson, Mundelein High School AE

Elvina Hargrave, St. Augustine/Lewis University

Abraham Celio, Universidad Popular

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March 18, 2026

LAKE LAND
COLLEGE

LAKE LAND COLLEGE '25-'26 METRICS

Current Enrollment: 328 students

ABE: 119

ASE: 89

ESL: 120

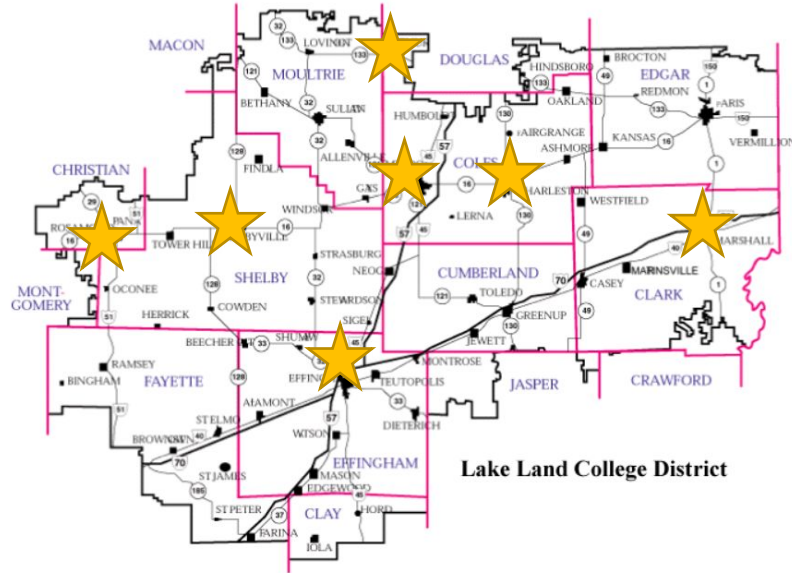
GED Graduates:

- 44 so far this year
- 69 in FY25
- 99 in 2024
- 52 in 2023

Current MSG Rate: 51.16%

SITES

CHRISTIAN, CLARK, CLAY, COLES, CRAWFORD, CUMBERLAND, DOUGLAS, EFFINGHAM, FAYETTE, JASPER, MACON, MONTGOMERY, MOULTRIE AND SHELBY



- GED: Charleston, Effingham, Marshall, Mattoon, Pana, Shelbyville, and Online
- ESL: Arthur (1 community and 1 business), Charleston, Effingham, Mattoon, Online

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WEEKLY WRAP EMAIL

- To be more communicative with all AE staff, I compose a “Weekly Wrap” most weeks to share updates, reminders and deadlines with the team.
- With our district spanning from central Illinois to the Indiana border, it is difficult to regularly touch base with teaching staff regularly.
- What has been covered in the Weekly Wrap:
 - Vouchers updates
 - New personnel
 - Student Testimonials
 - Additional grants
 - ICAPS recruitment
 - Recruitment and Retention measures
 - Scholarship opportunities
 - Upcoming deadlines
 - Survey opportunities
 - Process updates
 - Orientation dates and locations
 - Internal and External partnerships
 - Policy updates
 - General reminders



Dustyn Fatheree

To: Kimberly Spanhook; Kendra Myers; Janet Hasten; Teresa Metzger; Teresa Plummer; Beth Einhorn; Diana Hammond;
 Susan Vandenbergh; Deborah Flavin; John Bickford; Maria Skidmore; Aleyda Munoz; Patricia Butler
Cc: Jani Merryman; Lisa Bennett; Mariah White-Landrus; Crystal Watkins; Christine Strohl

Retention and Motivation Efforts for Orientations.docx
22 KBGED and ESL Half Page Flyer Feb 26.pdf
637 KB

Reply



Reply All



Forward



Thu 2/12/2026 4:16 PM

Hi team,

March orientations are right around the corner!! I am excited to be in the classrooms and meeting our new students.

It's finally time to programmatically implement some exciting new retention efforts into the orientation process! I have some orientation retention measures I wanted to share for our GED and ESL locations:

- Attached, you will find the document titled "Retention and Motivation Efforts for Orientation." This outlines short exercises and activities myself and the office staff will be implementing into orientations.
- These focus on motivation, positive mindset, test taking skills and short-term goal setting. Usually only one of these will be implemented into an orientation and they are meant to be short.
- These exercises were developed from observations while interacting with students and common themes when hearing students talk about themselves around others. Doing something like this is kind of unconventional from a state-standpoint but I think it's worth it to be unique and try creative ways to engage students early.
- Please take a look at this document to see what some of these activities entail and how you'd like to involve yourself in the implementation! If you have other ideas for day-one activities, please let me know. I am open to more suggestions or edits to these exercises!!
- Disclaimer: We are excited to see how these are received in class! Some of these may work and some of these may miss, but that's the point. By doing these and tracking efficacy, we are gathering information to tweak, add or remove exercises going forward.

Recruitment updates:

- Attached, you will also find the GED and ESL Digital Flyer. Please share this with anyone or any organization you think may have potential students.
- This flyer is tailored more toward ESL since we are still seeing a heavy decrease in students in this area.
- I also have physical print outs in my office, please expect myself or another staff member to run by ESL classrooms soon to drop off flyers to students (they are our best messengers!).
- We will also be stopping by local entities to drop these off like grocery stores, churches, etc.

Thank you, all!

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RETENTION MEASURES FOCUSED ON MOTIVATION

- As I've continued to interact with students and partake in the Orientation process, I kept hearing a lot of doubt from students.
- Orientation can be overwhelming! Paperwork, strangers, testing... I decided to start thinking of ways to break up this process and focus on student motivation at the front end of their time with us.
- These activities are quick and don't take too much time during orientation!

- These activities include:
 - "Why" and Positive Traits
 - Simple icebreaker, if comfortable
 - Ask students to give their name, why they decided to attend class and one positive trait about themselves.
 - This gets students to put their "why" into perspective as a reminder that they are there for a specific reason.
 - This also gets students, who are often very hard on themselves, to shift their mindset and think about themselves differently.
 - It also provides AE staff insight on students and it builds rapport with other attendees.
 - Short term goal-setting
 - The finish line is far away for students (especially GED).
 - I give them a notecard and have them fill out a goal they can accomplish between now and next class.
 - They write down their goal and share with the class, if comfortable.
 - This helps focus on more manageable goals and gives them a more realistic perspective.

RETENTION MEASURES FOCUSED ON MOTIVATION CONTINUED

- Test Taking Tips
 - Sometimes the four tests, new classroom, strangers, etc. aren't the overwhelming obstacle. It's test taking!
 - Taking some time in Orientation (or early on in their time with us) to share some test-taking tips helps students know what to expect.
 - Some I've found and shared: Start with the easiest test first.
 - Out of the 4, think about what you want to start with.
 - Read the questions first, then read the passage.
 - Eliminate options that are not related to the question. If you eliminate 2 answers, for example, it's a 50/50 chance of getting it correct.
- Learning Style Quiz (5-10 minutes)
 - <https://www.learningstylequiz.com/>
 - Students answer basic questions to receive a brief breakdown of their personality and learning styles.
 - Provides a summary about how that personality type learns, memorizes and recalls information .
 - Optimal learning situations and where they may struggle.
 - Lists the best way for a student to learn (kinesthetic, audio, visual).
 - Used for self awareness of how a student can learn. Can be valuable going forward in the class.
- Student Testimonials (In-Progress)
 - Short videos to share in class from alum and current students.
 - Text testimonials to read in class or write on the board.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

- These retention efforts also were developed from looking at data of when and why students left our program in the Fall semester.
- I combed through our attendance sheets to mark students on a separate Excel sheet to identify when a student left our program and the Exit code reason why.
- From this information, I identified common “exit points” from our program.
- It also helped me identify that a lot of the more “generic” exit codes were used which made it hard to understand some of the “whys.”

Exit Code	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10	Week 11	Week 12	Week 13	Week 14	Week 15	Week 16	Reasons Total
1 (Employment)			X			X								X			3
2 (Met Goals)															X		1
3 (Lack of instruction)					X												1
4 (Illness)							X	XX			X		X				5
5 (Transportation)						X					XX	XXX	X				7
6 (Child care)						X							X				2
7 (Family probs)				X	X	XX	X	XX						XX			
8 (Time/location)											XXX	XXX		XX			8
9 (Moved)														XX			
10 (For other known reasons)			XX	X	XX	XXXXX	XXX		XX	XX	X	X	XXX		X		23
11 (Cannot locate or contact)			X		X	XXXXX	XX	X	XX			X	X	X	XX		17
?										X		XX	XX				5
Total Dropped:	0	0	4	2	5	15	7	5	4	3	7	10	9	8	4	0	83
GED = Green																	
ESL = Black																	

CONTACT US!

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Practice 1: Workplace Connections at Intake

Start with the Student's Workplace:

“Where do you work?”

Employment: ☐ Employed **Employer:** _____

From this data:

- Identify clusters of students working at the same business
- Approach employers to explore partnerships
- Create opportunities for:
 - a. Workplace classes
 - b. Employer-supported learning
 - c. Flexible scheduling

Practice 2: Off-Site Partnership Expectations

All partner locations agree to provide:

IT / technology support

Staff collaboration and discussion regarding:

- Visitor policies
- Student safety procedures
- “Know Your Rights” information

Why it matters:

- Ensures a safe and supportive learning environment
- Reduces disruptions for instructors and students

Practice 3: Visible Data Culture

Program Data Board: Located in main office and accessible to staff

Includes updates on:

- Enrollment Numbers
- Post-Test Rates
- Measurable Skill Gains
- Attendance

Purpose:

- Keeps goals visible
- Encourages staff ownership of outcomes
- Promotes continuous improvement

Practice 4: Supportive Assessment Messaging

How we talk about testing:

We tell students:

“The test gives information for the teachers.”

“It’s not about you - it’s about us.”

“It helps us place you in the perfect class and understand what you need to learn.”

Results:

- Reduces testing anxiety
- Builds trust in the process
- Improves student engagement

Practice 5: Clear Messaging About Persistence

Setting Expectations Early:

Students often ask: *“These classes are free?”*

Our response:

“Yes, and here are the conditions.”

We explain:

- Regular attendance matters
- Participation helps everyone learn
- Persistence leads to real progress

Outcome:

Students understand commitment and take ownership of their learning.



IWe

**INSTITUTE FOR
WORKFORCE EDUCATION**

Adding Value Through Quality Training

Adult Education Department

Class Offerings

- All classes are virtual and synchronous via Zoom and Blackboard
- GED classes are offered in Spanish or English
- Offer AM and PM classes Mon-Fri , 4 hours per day for 10 weeks
- Offer 3 day 16 week PM class English only
- All classes are offered 4 times per year
- Three day class offered twice per year
- Total of 30 classes per year
- CASAS Pre-Test is required before entering classes
- Multiple times and dates are offered for CASAS Remote testing

Digital Literacy Classes

- Digital Literacy Classes are offered two weeks before classes begin at multiple times in English and Spanish
- Digital Literacy class includes basics of the class such as internet exploration, switching screens, setting up GED.Com, Blackboard, and Zoom usage.
- Noticed a large disparity with our Spanish speaking GED students and older students who were not tech savvy
- Diminishes time instructor has to spend teaching these skills during class
- Increases retention due to ease of technology skills and easy access to class and materials
- Students who already have the skills may leave the class while others work on these particular skills.
- Those who need extra help make appointments with the Digital Literacy Class instructor for one on one help.

Course Schedule and Testing Expectations

- Science with basic math weeks 1-2
- Language Arts with basic math weeks 3-4
- CASAS Post Test (1st round week 4)
- Social Studies/Constitution /Basic Math weeks 5-6
- Math- weeks 7-10
- CASAS Post Test (2nd round for those who didn't make a level gain week 8)
- Practice test for specific subject taken at the end of the second week
- Students register to take official test for that specific subject as soon as possible (the next week)

Barriers Scheduling Official Tests

- Majority of students live on the south side of Chicago and the testing centers were very far from their communities.
- We are opening a Pearson Vue testing center to close the gap for students who would like to test in-person along with offering other tests mandatory for the University
- Give vouchers to students to schedule official tests after passing score on practice test
- Transition Specialist keeps record of testing and vouchers as well as mentors students to keep testing and test on time along with the instructor and coordinators.



to reach community empowerment through participatory learning. Universidad Popular works in partnership with neighborhood residents to transform their lives and ultimately, the community. Through participatory learning, the community empowers itself to transform its reality through partnership with the state and the private sector. Universidad Popular works in partnership with the state and the private sector to transform its reality through partnership with the state and the private sector.



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Best Practices

Instructional practices and class structure

Using the following instructional practices our team draws rich learning content through engagement and participatory learning.

- Differentiated Instruction: Adapt the teaching to meet the diverse needs of the students.
- Participatory class structure: including collaborative learning, active and direct participant participation, critical thinking, debate, and application of knowledge,
- Encourage participants to generate other topics based on their interests or needs

Post-testing procedures

- Follow publisher recommendations. (Best Literacy 2.0)
- Track instructional hours and test participants after completing 40 hours of instruction
- Students are informed about the purpose of the pre-test/post-test, explaining that it is to serve as a tool for observing progress in learning the English language
- Create personalized plans from test results to target specific areas for improvement via one-on-one

Challenges

- For FY2026 one of our greatest challenges has been dealing with the immigration enforcement that are impacting our participants' mental health and financial well-being.
- Due to fear of leaving their homes, our program started offering hybrid classes where participants had the option to connect from home or come and interact in person.
- Our program also began to offer different mental health workshops on how to cope with anxiety, fear and stress.
- Anything that impacts quality of life or cultural competency

**learning is significantly declined when people are under distress.*

Systems to improve Instructional skills

- Weekly meetings every Friday in which facilitators share what they are doing in their classes, exchanging ideas and teaching techniques to provide wrap around services to participants' learning struggles.
- All facilitators participate in Illinois Adult Education Professional Development Network, continuing to learn best practices for andragogy.
- Each facilitator creates a PD plan at the beginning of the year and seeks training opportunities in those training topics

Engagement through post-testing - WhatsApp

- We use rapid response strategies in which facilitators reach out to appropriate in-house resources and/or community resources to assist the participant with their needs. Finding solutions helps them stay engaged and connected to their classes
- Reinforce reading and writing comprehension
- Address diverse needs of participants
- Conduct frequent opportunity for reflections, goal updating, highlighting successes and challenges while creating new student engagement strategies

What questions do you have?

How might you incorporate some of the practices shared today?



Thanks to our presenters and their entire teams at:

Lake Land Community College

Mundelein High School Adult Education

St. Augustine/Lewis University

Universidad Popular

August 5th Admin VLC

Strong Starts: Setting Students Up for Persistence from Day One

