# INTRODUCTION

Rhode Island is in the process of implementing WIOA by transforming its adult education system to meet the college and career readiness needs of adult learners using proven Proficiency-Based Teaching, Learning and Assessment (PBTLA) strategies. Traditional approaches in practice and program design need to change for both practitioners and adult students. PBTLA promises to significantly reduce the college remedial rate by focusing ABE and ASE on college and career readiness.

Proficiency-based education is a movement embraced at the national level for all learners PK-20, and there is increased interest in this movement from adult educators, as evidenced at the COABE 2015 and 2016 Conferences in Denver and Dallas.  Learn about this work and join Rhode Island as part of this movement **Click to read more.**

# REACHING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

*Building on Longstanding Methodologies of Competency-Based Education to Meet the Challenges of 21st Century College and Career Readiness.*

*By Donna Chambers, Nancy Labonte, and Kathy Curran*

More than forty-five years ago, the creative base of an adult high school credentialing program, the External Diploma Program (EDP) was built around the concept of competency-based assessment. Through a series of performance assessments associated with real life projects and scenarios, adult students demonstrated mastery of high school level skills. The word at the time was “competency”, but in today’s world of education reform, competency-based has also come to be known as proficiency-based, evidence-based, and mastery. These terms refer to the student’s ability to transfer learning in or across content areas. Proficiency-based, as it is called in Rhode Island, is an instructional paradigm that assumes different forms in different contexts, but always involves ongoing formative assessment of learning. It offers the student many diverse, meaningful, and personal learning opportunities and includes accountability for the learning not only on the part of the teacher, but also the student.

Specifically, in proficiency-based education:

1. Learning opportunities focus on student needs and interests.
2. Learning is student- centered through pathways that are flexible in time and place.
3. Multiple sources of data are used to personalize intervention and/or acceleration opportunities.
4. Student mastery is demonstrated through a variety of assessment measures.

When College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) were first introduced to the field of adult education two years ago, it became clear in Rhode Island that the instructional delivery system for adult education needed to change. With little class time and often many skill gaps, plus all the 21st. Century challenges, it was evident that adult students needed ways to develop metacognitive skills, work at their own pace, cooperatively and independently, under the guidance of a teacher/facilitator in order to meet the standards and proceed to their next step. It was also abundantly clear that technology facilitates extended learning opportunities that can be managed in or out of the classroom. Traditional approaches to teaching and learning in ABE, ASE and beyond needed to change.

As a means of addressing this change, The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) Office of Adult Education, in aligning with it’s K-12 system, has chosen to adopt a Proficiency-Based Teaching, Learning and Assessment (PBTLA) approach as the method for delivering quality instruction that will get all adult learners ready for college, career and life. RIDE’s K12 and district administrators had been involved in proficiency-based instruction for several years, working specifically with the Center for Collaborative Education within its Quality Performance Assessment (QPA) framework. When adult education practitioners began looking at the QPA tools and protocols for K12 through the lens of adult learning, the approach suggested an ideal fit.

As a teaching and learning strategy, proficiency-based is an integrated learning management system that requires evidence of understanding that can be documented and recorded so if students stop out of a program, for example, their learning achievements are archived, making re-entry seamless. Whichever career pathway an adult student wishes to pursue will require acquisition of fundamental literacy and numeracy skills that are defined by the CCRS and these can be learned in a variety of ways and at any time within the context of real life projects, all within the framework of the proficiency-based approach.

Creating this systemof teaching, learning, and assessment requires all levels of the National Reporting System (NRS) moving in the same direction and is not easy, but Rhode Island is doing so by applying consistent instructional methods as well as designing coherent tools to document learning. Making these instructional shifts requires ongoing professional support, and adult learners need to become partners in the learning process by taking ownership of their own level of achievement. Through the blend of cooperative and independent learning methods that this PBLA allows, metacognitive skills and facilitated learning are fostered, which we know are not only crucial to college, career and life readiness but are now mandated by the Workforce Initiative and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Proficiency-based education is a movement embraced at the national level for all learners PK-20, and there is greatly increased interest from adult educators, as evidenced at the COABE 2015 and 2016 Conferences in Denver and Dallas.  Adult learners should benefit from and be a part of this movement.  The promise of the proficiency-based approach has to offer in significantly reducing the college remedial rate alone means that we have an ethical imperative to incorporate it into our work.

We know that shifting instructional strategies to be more efficient and effective for adult learners can be a challenge, and for our field in particular, but we know this change is necessary and required. By reaching back and building on proven methods of competency-based instruction in order to move practitioners and their learners forward, Rhode Island is changing and your state can come along in assessing and designing methods and tools to accomplish this momentous shift.

With competency-based or proficiency –based instruction, we have the opportunity to work smarter in order to make the necessary changes warranted by CCRS and WIOA. Would you like to join us in this important and worthy work? Become part of the proficiency-based education movement for adult education by emailing Donna Chambers, [dchambers464@gmail.com](mailto:dchambers464@gmail.com) or calling 401-677-6401.