

# Five Things You Can Do to Help Students Get to College

by Trish Schneider

## 1. Change the Culture

Create an atmosphere and incorporate strategies into your program that promote the GED as a stepping stone and not a final destination. This will subconsciously plant the seed that there are more educational opportunities available to students after receiving the GED. You can:

- Make a conscious effort to be inclusive in your speech by addressing students' learning goals besides the GED. For example, when reviewing an algebraic principle, let them know that it is relevant not only to the GED exam but also to a college level math course.
- Invite a recruiter to your classroom and take your students on a campus tour.
- Replace GED posters with signs that are broader in scope, including college and career posters and others about the general importance of education.
- In addition to the standard GED texts, utilize realia such as college textbooks, trade manuals, newspapers, and magazines.

## 2. Teach Critical Thinking

Helping students master the academics, especially reading and algebra, they need to pass the GED and get into college, is obviously a critical part of any transition program. Yet, we can't simply teach to the GED test. The best approach to a class of differing goals and needs is to teach critical thinking skills. By creating a community of learners who are presented with relevant material and who are encouraged to discuss, question, and think about what they are learning, students will be better prepared for the GED test and for the learning they will have to do in college. One way to do this is to divide a

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**Poster used by Transitions program at Jefferson County Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education, KY.**

class into groups and present them with a pertinent subject such as time management or career exploration. Assign interdependent roles and encourage them to research and report back to the larger group. In doing so, they are taking responsibility for their own learning by practicing reading, research skills, social skills, and problem-solving. For more information on teaching critical thinking, [www.criticalthinking.org](http://www.criticalthinking.org) is a good place to start.

## 3. Make It Seamless

Become knowledgeable about post-GED opportunities. Meet with nearby community colleges, trade schools, and other academic institutions that are attainable to transitioning students. Find out what their courses are like, what the prerequisites are, and incorporate what

you learn into the ABE classroom. Bring in college text books, and plan reading comprehension and note-taking lessons. This is also the time to teach students to be responsible for their own learning. Conduct ABE classes on a schedule so that the students learn the valuable skills of being on time and accountable for the work they do. Quizzes, homework, small group work, and taking attendance in the non-punitive setting of the ABE classroom will give the transitioning student a safe introduction to the structure of higher education.

#### 4. Cross Two Hurdles with One Leap

College readiness can and should be part of the preparation for the GED exam. For instance, when discussing the GED essay, introduce ways of researching online or head to the local library and guide the student in locating a source or two. Have students compose their essays on the computer to gain valuable technology experience. Additionally, you could ask them to write about possible future academic and career goals so you have a sense of what their interests are and can help steer them in that direction.

#### 5. It's More than Academics

If a student is to transition successfully into postsecondary education from ABE, you must help them navigate the often overwhelming bureaucratic hurdles they will face. Why not assist students in filling out college applications and financial aid forms? Encourage students to do so even if they seem uninterested. They may believe they have no chance of admission or that they cannot afford it. Hand-hold them through this process, and their obstacles may disappear. Most college Web sites have downloadable forms for students to complete. You can also go to [www.fafsa.org](http://www.fafsa.org) and complete federal financial aid forms online. These efforts in the ABE classroom will help demystify the college experience.

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### Did You Know?

- High School graduates attain associates degrees at almost twice the rate of GED recipients over five years: 54% versus 28% (Reder, 2000).
- Teaching reading strategies matters: Students who have to take remedial reading in college for more than a year have very low persistence rates: 5% (Adelman, 2004).

Go to [www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org) for suggested reading strategies to teach.

### Three More Ways to Change the Culture

#### Teach College Survival Skills

- Study skills such as note-taking and listening
- Academic vocabulary
- College lingo such as syllabus, prerequisite, credits, grades
- Reading strategies
- Self-advocacy skills

#### Expose Students to the College Experience

- Arrange for students to audit one class session.
- Invite former students that have made a successful transition to college to talk to your class.

#### Help Students Change Their Perception of Failure

- View failure as lack of effort.
- Effort and sense of personal responsibility are key to high performance.

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Excerpted from *College Transitions on a Shoestring* by the National College Transition Network, NELRC. To request a copy write to [jspohn@worlded.org](mailto:jspohn@worlded.org).