

**A Summary of Suggested Strategies for Improving Learner Persistence:  
(Revised October 2005)**

**CALPRO's Study Circles on Learner Persistence:**

Participants in CALPRO-sponsored study circles on learner persistence suggested the following strategies for improving learner persistence. Listing a strategy does not imply endorsement by CALPRO staff or by study circle participants as a whole.

***Attitudes***

**Teachers should**

- Create a welcome, fun and supportive learning environment that respects students' individuality;
- Be accepting, compassionate, and nonjudgmental;
- Be positive role models to inspire students to achieve their goals and develop positive attitudes toward work and life;
- Demonstrate a sense of humor in the classroom;
- Acknowledge that students' lives are complicated;
- Strive to understand students' need to stop attending while trying to convince them to stay in class;
- Resist applying their personal values to a learner's experience or needs;
- Avoid assuming that students had a bad experience during their K–12 education; and
- Make a firm commitment to learner persistence (walk the talk).

***The Student-Teacher Relationship***

**Teachers should**

- Provide instruction that is mostly student-centered rather than teacher-centered;
- Listen actively;
- Humanize themselves (e.g., communicate to students that they have had similar learning experiences);
- Remember students' names;
- Be available to students; and
- Show sincere interest in students.

### *Communicating with Students*

#### **Administrators, faculty and staff should**

- Hold monthly “dine with the dean” events;
- Foster more one-on-one communication with students;
- Take time for more in-depth student interviews; and
- Ask students why they attend classes and why others don’t.

### *Intake*

#### **The school/agency should**

- Post complete, accurate information on the agency’s Web site so students know what to expect in classes;
- Use a buddy system during orientation to pair students who speak the same first language; and
- Provide statistics during intake presentations to demonstrate how education is related to success.

### *Planning and Goal Setting*

#### **Teachers should**

- Ask students more often what they want to learn;
- Survey students more often (including using both checklists and open-ended questions);
- Teach lessons on setting goals;
- Help students establish clear and attainable learning goals that are divided into specific tasks; and
- Have higher expectations for students.

### *Class Structure*

#### **Teachers and programs should**

- Support student-directed learning;
- Provide opportunities for students to select their curricula;
- Allow and enable students to help establish classroom procedures and rules;
- Focus on increasing interaction among students;
- Support learner-to-learner interviews;

- Provide lessons on building communities;
- Vary grouping strategies and activities within the classroom (including pairs, groups, and peer tutoring);
- Create closer classes through the use of a buddy system;
- Vary instructional strategies by including games, field trips, enactments, guest speakers, and kinesthetic or visual activities;
- Plan activities that focus on making students feel personally invested, such as keeping journals, or writing personal histories;
- Plan modular or “chunked” lessons that build toward a final product; and
- Emphasize SCANS.

### ***Organizational Strategies***

#### **Teachers should**

- Support planning through the use of student calendars, timelines, and time sheets;
- Teach other organizational and time management strategies;
- Describe the focus of the class and its relevance; and
- Focus on clarity of purpose.

### ***Recognizing/Providing for Success***

#### **Teachers and programs should**

- Identify and reward successes—even small ones;
- Use portfolios, folders, certificates, and charts to recognize success;
- Create opportunities to celebrate student success;
- Reward achievement of short-term goals (e.g., Post-it notes for staying in class for 20 hours or tote bags for staying in class for 60 hours); and
- Encourage students to write about their strengths and successes in journals.

## *Support*

### **Students should**

- Identify and create plans to address the forces that affect their persistence.

### **Teachers should**

- Respond to students' need to establish and maintain trust (Administrators should join in these efforts);
- Identify students' barriers to learner persistence and help them develop individualized plans to address the barriers;
- Encourage students;
- Try to contact students who drop the class (e.g., by calling or sending post cards); and
- Consider asking students if they want to add their names and telephone numbers to a class phone tree (Teachers need to stress that this is only a voluntary activity).

### **Programs should**

- Develop lists of motivational speakers, including former students and community members, who can visit classes;
- Provide one-on-one counseling to all students;
- Promote intermediate sponsorship\* and acknowledge personal sponsorships;
- Set up a table at local neighborhood events to provide information and answer questions about the program; and
- Develop more community partnerships.

\* See Comings, John and Sandra Cuban. (2002) "*Sponsors and Sponsorship*" in *Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Education* (Appendix D).

<http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp.pdf>, 13–16.

## *Program Structure*

### **Programs should**

- Support managed enrollment to decrease classroom turbulence, which has a negative effect on learner persistence;
- Consider changing the duration of class sessions (e.g., introducing 2-hour classes) to meet students' needs;

- Encourage events that involve students' families and communities (e.g., job fairs, family readathons); and
- Create student councils and facilitate the creation of other student groups.

### *Assessment*

#### **Teachers should**

- Encourage students to monitor their own academic progress;
- Provide students with charts that can be used to monitor progress;
- Distribute test scores and offer strategies to help students improve their performance on future tests;
- Test students weekly and at midterm; and
- Present certificates of achievement.

### *The Classroom Environment*

#### **The school or agency should**

- Create a safe and secure facility.
- Post pictures of graduates and photos and cards from current and former students on a wall in the classroom; and

### *Teachers' Reflective Practices*

#### **Teachers should**

- Discuss how to balance relevant education with the use of textbooks;
- Engage in reflective observation;
- Define the characteristics of teachers who achieve high retention;
- Examine the intersection of persistence and high quality teaching;
- Recognize students' cultural differences;
- Focus on what they can control; and
- Resist reacting personally if students stop coming to class.