Introduction

Charge of the Task Force
The Adult Learning and Community Services (ACLS) unit at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) convened a Counseling Task Force from March through April of 2011 to develop policy recommendations regarding the role of counseling for adult basic education students within the state-wide network of programs (Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, G.E.D, English for Speakers of Other Languages). The charge of the Counseling Task Force builds on recommendations from two key ESE reports: “Adult Basic Education Strategic Plan Task Force Report, Summer 2009”, and “Facing the Future: Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education, April 2010.” The ABE Strategic Plan Task Force recommended that access to counseling be expanded to better meet the needs of ABE students. Then the 2010 “Facing the Future” report identified one of three ABE strategic goals to “Prepare Students for Success in Their Next Steps: In College and Further Training, at Work, and in the Community.” A key objective under this goal was to expand access to counseling.” These two reports set the stage for the Counseling Task Force in naming counseling as a central component of ABE delivery services.

Selection Process
The goal was to select twelve to fourteen people to comprise the Task Force with the majority being experienced counselors in ACLS-funded programs. Other participants could include teachers and program directors or other program staff. The intent was to assemble a group of practitioners from around the state that reflected the diversity of programs by region, program size, population served, and staffing structures for counseling within a program. The Director of Adult Basic Education at ESE issued a call for interested participants through an email to all ABE Directors in ESE-funded programs statewide. The call indicated that potential task force members had to be able to attend all four Task Force meetings through March and April. All interested participants were interviewed by phone in mid-February. Information collected from potential Task Force members included: their role(s) in the program, number of years working in the program, whether they were bilingual, type of ABE/ESOL services provided, number of students served per year, whether urban/suburban/rural, if the program served a particular population (homeless, women, etc.), whether the program offers or is connected to a transition to college program, and why they were interested in participating. A total of seventeen people were interviewed who met the initial criteria of working in an ESE funded program and being able to attend all four meetings. Of these seventeen people, the ESE staff and facilitator vetted the information gathered to identify a group of practitioners that best represented a cross-section of ESE funded programs.

Composition of the Task Force
Eleven people were selected for the Task Force. The composition of the Task Force included:

Staff who:
Directly serve ABE students
Directly serve ESOL students
Have worked in ESE programs from one to twenty-five years
Are part-time and full-time
Work days only, evenings only, and work both day and evening
Are Counselors only, Counselor/ADA Coordinator, and/or Tech Coordinator or Community Planner, Counselor/Teacher, Counselor/Teacher/ADA Coordinator or Tech Coordinator, and Directors (three)

Deliberation Process
The Task Force followed a deliberation process that included attending four three-hour meetings from March through April 2011. In addition, Task Force members provided input and feedback to counseling recommendations in between meetings through email and the use of an online documentation site. During the meetings, the Task Force also identified areas where additional information was needed to inform their discernment process. Based on this, the facilitator solicited additional input from Counselors in underrepresented geographic regions, rural locations, CBO based programs and those that are part-time only.

Additional Background and Reports Referenced
The Task Force reviewed background research on best practices in counseling compiled by the facilitator. Policy documents reviewed that related to the role of Counseling in ABE programs included the following:
- Facing the Future: Massachusetts Strategic Framework for Adult Basic Education, 2010-2015
- ABE Strategic Framework Task Force Report, 2009
- Study on Adult Learner Persistence from the New England Literacy Resource Center
- ESE analysis of SMARTT data on counseling
- Guidelines for Effective Adult Basic Education for Community Adult Learning Centers, ESE
- SABES FY07 Counseling Task Force Report
- Who Helps the Helpers? Supporting Counselors in Adult Basic Education, Focus on Basics, October 2002
- Counseling in ESOL Programs, Focus on Basics, October 2002
- How to See an Advisor, North Seattle Community College
- Promising Practices: Retention & Support Services, Achieving the Dream, December 2010
- Guide to Adult Education for Work: Transforming Adult Education to Grow a Skilled Workforce, National Center on Education and The Economy, 2009
- Summary of Research on Counseling, Bridges to Success: Phase 2, State Policy Task Force on the Transition to Postsecondary Education for Adult Learners, 2010

Framing the Counseling Issue
As noted above, based on the national research on counseling, the work of previous ESE ABE Task Forces and publications, the Counseling Task Force started from the primary tenet that counseling is a central component of the ABE delivery service. The research supports the need for counseling to support student progress toward academic achievement, next steps goal attainment, and retention and persistence in education. The research also emphasizes the need for more intensity of services, including counseling, to further student goal attainment. Two other themes permeated the Task Force discussions: the need to professionalize the field of counseling and the need for flexibility in how policies are implemented in ABE programs. Given the variety of ABE programs and the constraints and supports that vary by region and location (urban/rural or within school districts, CBOs, or community colleges), the Task Force continually emphasized the need for policies to be responsive to those differences. The flexibility of ABE programs is acknowledged to be a source of innovation in the field.
The next section lists the six recommendations for counseling and supporting strategies identified by the Counseling Task Force.

1. The Task Force recommends the term “counselor” be changed to “advisor” to better reflect the role and responsibilities of the position within adult basic education. In addition, the Task Force recommends that the role and responsibilities of an advisor should encompass, but not be limited to, three primary areas: 1) academic guidance and advising; 2) next steps advising; and 3) referral to supplemental services. Of these three areas, the Task Force recommends that ‘next steps’ counseling be the centerpiece of the advising role.

The Task Force acknowledges that there has been extensive discussion over the years as to the term that best describes the responsibilities and qualifications of a staff person providing services typically referred to as “counseling.” The use of the terms “counseling” may be misleading because it can connote someone with a specific degree and licensing qualifications. This concern was also raised by the ABE Strategic Plan Task Force Report, Summer 2009. The term “advisor” is broader and may include responsibilities of academic advising, career advising, educational advising, next steps/transitions advising, as well as referral to supportive services. The term “advisor” is commonly used at community colleges and thus helps better align adult basic education services with those at community colleges for the purposes of next steps advising.

The Task Force recommends that ACLS use the term “advisor” as the identification term when communicating with the field. The Task Force also recommends that programs have flexibility to use other specific job titles in their programs that reflect the environment in which they work and their programming. Other programs may prefer to use “Learner Support Specialist” or “Student Services Provider.” While the titles may vary, the key is that the roles and responsibilities of the advisor position are reflected in the job description.

The three primary responsibilities of the advisor recommended, academic guidance and advising, next steps advising, and referral to supplemental services, are reflective of the description of Core Student Services outlined in the Open Doors demonstration projects. Open Doors was a demonstration project to test different programs to help students succeed in community college funded by the MDRC and others. The list of Core Student Services is also in alignment with ACLS’s focus on next steps. The philosophic underpinning of the responsibilities is that advising is a facilitative process; it is helping someone explore options and helping them decide on what is best for them. Listed below are descriptions of the proposed areas of responsibility.

Academic guidance and advising
This includes:

- Orientation for new students in program
- Monitoring and follow-up of academic progress in program, including:
  - An initial follow-up meeting with students enrolled and in the first six-weeks of a program cycle (because the fall is so busy, members felt the first month was not feasible, so I split the difference and said ‘first six-weeks’ of a program cycle.
  - Monitoring individual plans for success in the program.
  - Monitoring progress on next step goals and providing support to reach goals.
- Planning and assistance for students needing/wanting to change schools/programs for a variety of reasons including moving, readiness for next academic level, etc.
Next steps advising
The Task Force notes that the term “next steps” has often been interpreted by the field to mean transition to a community college. They recommend that “next steps” be more broadly defined to more accurately reflect the options available to the full spectrum of students in ESOL and ABE programs. “Next steps” should include, and not be limited to, entering a skills training program, obtaining a certificate, securing a job, advancing in a job, receiving on-the-job training services, and participating in a job shadow.

This includes:
- Help developing an educational plan that aligns a student’s personal interests, goals, and abilities with a career.
- Outlining educational steps that students need to take to achieve their career goals.
- Career planning and advising for employment and post-secondary education/training opportunities.
- Referral to resources to support steps outlined. This can include referrals to workshops at a career center or other agency providing support for next steps.
- Both individual and group meetings as needed.

Referral to supplemental services
This is for services that cannot be provided in-house by the adult education program. Supplemental support services are critical to student retention/persistence and attendance in the program. Effective referrals necessitate the development of collaborations and connections, building a network with colleges, career centers, employers, state agencies/human services, and community organizations. Building and maintaining effective collaborations takes time and persistence.

It includes but is not limited to:
- Personal guidance and counseling for mental health issues, disability/health services, domestic violence, etc.
- Academic supports such as referrals to study skills courses, educational opportunity centers, basic skills classes and special courses such as introduction to computers.

In addition, it includes referral to supportive services such as:
- Child care
- Speech and hearing
- Housing
- Food
- Fuel assistance
- Transportation
- Books and supply vouchers
- Referral resources

The Task Force strongly recommends that many administrative tasks often delegated to “advisors” be limited and redirected to other staff whenever possible. Proposed tasks recommended to be reduced are recruitment, data entry, attendance management, clerical duties, and assessment. Often these administrative tasks are assigned to advisors with the rationale that they provide an opportunity for the advisor to “get to know the students.” Task Force members believe that these tasks take time away from an advisor truly getting to meet with and know a student’s needs and goals. Simple interactions are not substantive advising opportunities. While the advisor should not be doing these tasks, s/he should have access to...
student data that informs the advising process, but not be required to manage the data. For example, advisors should have access to class participation, but not be responsible for managing absence and lateness. Another example is that advisors need access to students’ academic progress, but do not necessarily have to administer assessments. The Task Force also acknowledges that the size of programs impacts how functions are delegated among staff, such that smaller programs with limited staff may find it both effective and efficient to have the advisor be part of an assessment team. The Task Force believes that programs should be given flexibility in how responsibilities are allocated so long as it is clear they are striving to limit administrative tasks performed by advisors and that a sufficient rationale is provided for doing so by the program.

Examples of program flexibility that reflect the intent of this recommendation include:

- Advisors providing specific academic skill support to a student and then having the teacher follow-up with the student in class.
- In one small/medium sized, the Counselor is responsible for advising duties, as well as ADA and volunteer coordination. Next steps are addressed in the classroom by the teachers and then again during advising meetings with the Counselor. The Counselor facilitates an optional weekly job search clinic. In addition, teachers and the counselor are responsible for testing duties.
- In another smaller program, the teachers integrate next steps concepts into their curriculum and the Counselor provides resume writing and soft skills training to support students’ next steps goals.

Strategies to Support Recommendation #1:

1. The Task Force recommends that the ADA coordination tasks be separate from advising.

The Task Force recommends that the Program Director be responsible for identifying the most appropriate staff person in the program to be responsible for the administrative ADA coordination tasks such as the regular ADA program evaluation (annual checklist, postings, etc.) and that it not be the advisor whenever feasible. The Task Force agrees that advisors need to know about ADA as it pertains to accommodations in the classroom and for testing purposes since advisors may be responsible for identifying students in need of services and accommodations as well as providing referrals for students. The Task Force recommends that ADA information and training relevant to an advisor should be included in a new advisor training. The Task Force also recognizes that smaller-sized programs may need to combine ADA coordination responsibilities with the advisor role in order to develop full-time positions for staff.

2. The Task Force recommends utilization of community collaborations to support referral to supplemental services.

Referrals are instrumental in supporting students in next steps activities and providing resources and expertise that advisors do not possess. The Task Force recognizes that different locales have different configurations of services often reflective of whether a program is urban, suburban, or rural.

Examples of means to develop or support community collaborations include:
1. Directors collaborate with advisors in identifying possible outside referral agencies and mechanisms. Directors may already be extensively involved in local/regional advisory boards and on the community planning board and have a wide knowledge of existing services that can help students.

2. ACLS should consider funding regional specialists focused on broad topics of interest to a wide-range of programs. It may be an efficient and effective strategy to have regional specialists who can provide guidance to all DESE funded programs on targeted areas such as testing for learning disabilities, accommodations for testing, mental health concerns, domestic violence, and reading specialists.

3. Making sure that programs are aware of different hotlines available in their regions.

   This includes checking MASS 211, a United Way hotline, and checking other hotlines listed through the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. It can also include identifying legal aid hotlines.

3. The Task Force recommends that Advisors should have a detailed job description with position summary.

   This reflects the flexibility for implementation of advising responsibilities among programs. Following the position summary should be a list of responsibilities and duties unique to the specific program. It recognizes, for example, that advising duties can be divided among staff along the lines of their interests and strengths. For example, the South Berkshire Educational Collaborative, a larger rural program, has three separate job descriptions for three part-time advisors at two sites. Two are Counselor Advocates and the third is a trained social worker who provides therapeutic counseling and tracks goals. One Counselor Advocate provides referrals for health care and court translation. The second Counselor Advocate does testing, intake, counseling for education, and tracks goals. All advisors monitor attendance, call students after three absences, and keep case notes. In addition, in programs where a position may include both teaching and advising responsibilities, it is essential that the responsibilities for each function of the position be clear and delineated.

2. The Task Force recommends that the goal setting process be germane to the development of students’ skills.

   To this end, the Task Force recommends that goal setting process within ABE programs be designed to allow for authentic goal setting by the students. Programs need to honor and validate student goals as articulated by the students, not driven by what is written on the SMARTT goals sheet. Advisors facilitate authentic goal setting by having one-on-one conversations with students about why they are attending the program and discerning what students want to get out of a program. In this way, goals set can be as many or as few as the student wants. The Task Force recognizes that many students come to ABE programs to learn English and/or get their GED in order to find a job, advance in a job, or attend college or training program so they can improve their own and their family’s well-being. The advisor’s role is to then work with students to achieve those ‘next steps’. This would include: assisting with a job placement, helping with career decision making, providing guidance on education beyond GED or ESOL classes, assisting with college planning, arranging job shadows at a work site, and assisting students in accessing trade or other certificate programs. Advisors must consider that ‘next steps’ are developmental and germane to the classes students are in (ELL, ABE, ASE).
By focusing on next step goals, advisors play a major role in ensuring student retention and success within the ABE program.

To support Recommendation #2, the Task Force proposes the following strategies:

**Strategies for Recommendation #2:**

The Task Force recommends that a separate task force be convened by ACLS to review and revise the SMARTT goal sheets to better reflect the desire for a more authentic goal setting process. The use of the current SMARTT goal sheets frames the goal setting process and does not facilitate authentic goal setting and instead lend themselves to an over-simplified and forced check-off system for goals. As noted by Task Force members, and supported by research, there are usually many small goals that lead a larger goal and that the time frame for goal attainment currently used by SMARTT provide obstacles to illustrating student achievement. For example, it would be useful if the SMARTT goal sheets provided students more credit for achieving interim job attainment goals, just as all of the steps leading up to attainment of citizenship are reflected in the SMARTT goals sheet column A under citizenship.

The Task Force also recommends that advisors not take on a teaching role. Content subject matter needed to assist students in obtaining authentic goals, such as how to develop a resume or interview, should be embedded in the classroom curriculum. The limited time of advisors can be better spent meeting with students one-on-one. To support the integration of this content in the classroom, the Task Force recommends that ACLS support the provision of on-site trainings for teachers and/or support regional collaborations to ensure that teachers receive the knowledge and skills needed to successfully deliver the content.

The Task Force strongly believes that a written goal plan be monitored for progress by an advisor throughout a student’s enrollment in a program. The Task Force believes that by allowing the advisor to focus on next steps goal setting with students it makes better use of often limited advising time available particularly in smaller programs with less staff.

In addition, the Task Force recommends that programs encourage collaboration between the advisor and the teacher in the delivery of advising content. For example, an advisor might come into a classroom to jointly present a lesson on careers with the teacher. Pilot programs implementing the SABES/NCTN “Integrating Career Awareness” curriculum guide have experienced excellent results with student progress toward next steps goals when the teacher and counselor collaborate.

Other examples of flexibility in implementing this recommendation are:

- An advisor participates in the intake presentation and begins a discussion on goals/barriers with new students and sets a foundation for future goal discussions with their teachers.

- An advisor does initial goal setting with students that is followed up by teachers on a monthly basis.

- An advisor briefly discusses goals with students during the intake/orientation. These student goals are then discussed further with the teachers in the classroom. The goals-based lesson plan depends on the SPL level of the students (images for beginners, real
life examples for intermediate and advanced). This information is explored further during one-on-one advising meetings.

- A program has a short, quick intake process for new students. After about three weeks, the advisor meets one-on-one with students to review more specific information (goals, past history etc.) and generally have a conversation allowing them to get to know each other. This person may be a different person than the intake counselor.

3. The Task Force recommends that while it may be preferable for advisors to have a Bachelor’s degree and some level of counseling related credential, it should encouraged but not mandatory.

There are several factors that inform this recommendation. First, while counselors in public schools are required to have a Master’s Degree with counseling related coursework, the public school system pays more than ABE. Some Task Force members believe that until ESE offers the same level of compensation that credentials should not be mandatory. The Task Force noted that without the increased salary for people with post-secondary degrees, ABE programs could not be competitive with what other career sectors can offer. ACLS data indicate that of the current counselors in ESE funded programs, 86% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher. The data does not indicate if the degrees obtained are counseling related.

In addition, while currently there are no ACLS degree requirements for teachers or program directors in ESE funded ABE program about 90-95% of teachers and directors do have a degree. While ACLS has encouraged attainment of the new ABE certification, only about 50 people have done so.

Other Task Force members note that having a credential does not correlate to being a successful ABE advisor. Historically, many advisors have not had counseling degrees or backgrounds and have been effective in their jobs. Others agree that programs should have the ability to decide if credentials are necessary for the position depending on the needs in their programs/communities. As one member noted an advisor does not necessarily need a degree to be an effective advisor in an ABE program. In response to this consideration, the Task Force recommends that current counselors be “grandfathered” in and that ACLS should establish a timeline by which these counselors can obtain a degree and that ACLS should approach community colleges about offering reduced tuition to ABE counselors pursuing degrees.

However, other Task Force members contend that the work of an advisor necessitates a certain skill level for effective delivery of the services to meet student needs. As one member noted, “The Counselor should have a Master’s Degree and the credentials for the field. We can no longer consider entering the field ‘side-ways’ as an acceptable skill level.” Additionally, with the emphasis on next steps counseling and transitioning to post-secondary education and training, some Task Force members state that advisors need to serve as role models for post-secondary educational attainment. Advisors without a Bachelor degree are not in a position to effectively encourage students to pursue that level of education.

Another says, “Counselors in public schools are required to have a Master’s Degree with appropriate coursework. The same should be true in ABE/ESOL, or at least working towards this type of credential.”. Another member indicated that, “If using the name ‘counselor, a
minimum requirement is an AA degree that includes some coursework in counseling. It would be preferred to have a counselor with a BA and a concentration in counseling."

This recommendation mirrors the recommendation made by the ABE Strategic Planning Task Force in 2009. That Task Force recommended that every ABE classroom teacher be required to have a four-year degree and that a waiver be allowed.

4. The Task Force recommends that ACLS support the development of a mandatory “New Advisor Orientation” for all new advisors regardless of their background, and that ACLS should ensure development of ongoing professional development opportunities for advisors to support them in their work.

First and foremost, due to the continual changing needs of students for advising, it is essential that advisors remain current with skills needed in order to be effective in working with students. In addition, a mandatory orientation/training for advisors would be consistent with ACLS mandatory orientations for new directors, new staff and ADA Coordinators. The New Staff Orientation does not meet the needs of advisors. A SABES 2004 evaluation of the New Staff Orientation (NSO) identified the need for more specific orientation for counselors as the NSO content was primarily aimed at teachers. Task Force members indicate that the current NSO has not addressed this discrepancy and that it would benefit advisors to have a separate orientation that is aligned with the proposed roles and responsibilities outlined in Recommendation #1.

In addition, lack of advisor participation in professional development can sometimes be attributed to programmatic issues such as lack of staffing, or programs using paid hours in other ways. Under ESE programmatic guidelines, programs can only allocate a certain amount of professional development hours to each staff person. Staff serving as ADA Coordinators have to attend federally mandated trainings. For advisors serving in these dual roles, it meant their professional development hours were used up for ADA related trainings and they did not have time set aside to participate in other advising related trainings. Often it has meant that if advisors wanted to attend a training directly related to advising that they would have to come on their days off with no pay. The success of a summer institute for counselors held by NE SABES several years ago speaks to the interest and need for additional professional development for counselors. (get more info on this)

Strategies for Recommendation #4:

- A mandatory orientation for new advisors should include: role expectations, review of research on retention and persistence, an overview of learning disabilities services and ADA requirements, training in active listening and advising, accessing resources and next steps advising for post-secondary education and training (such as, connecting with community colleges and career centers, knowledge of college entry requirements, knowledge of services offered at the career centers, etc.).

- Professional development opportunities for advisors should be included in each program’s professional development staff plan. While the Task Force agrees it would be preferable to have each advisor attend a mandatory number of workshops or hours of workshops each year that strengthen advising skills, they understand that directors are obliged to align the staff development plan to the program development plan. If a
program has a number of new staff or a new initiative, the professional development hours may be more heavily weighted to staff other than advisors. While flexibility is needed, the Task Force strongly believes that all staff should be involved in professional development. Even though long-term staff may not always see the need for additional training, the Task Force notes that it is essential for them to keep current with methods and strategies in advising.

- ACLS should ensure the development of a new series of trainings for advisors reflective of the roles and responsibilities outlined in Recommendation #1. Topics may include:
  - How to create an effective next steps plan with a student;
  - Understanding labor markets - where to find and how to use labor market data that relates to job trends, vacancies, projections, etc. in a local area;
  - Understanding job search skills - identifying resources for resume writing, interview skills development, and job search. This would include developing connection with career center, employers, and other community partnerships;
  - Understanding next steps options for post-secondary education and training - learning how to navigate admissions and financial aid requirements and processes, helping students successfully transition to next steps programs, community colleges, or training; and,
  - Building and strengthening community collaborations for leveraging resources for students.

- In addition, we recommend that advisors be surveyed by region as to the best times to offer trainings. This includes identifying the best time of: year, day, and week. For example, do not offer trainings in June as programs are winding down for the summer or in September when programs are in the throes of program enrollment are not convenient times for advisors to attend trainings. In addition, training times and days should be staggered so that not all programs are offered on Fridays or at a particular time of day, thus ensuring more opportunities for advisors to attend. Distance learning options should be explored to increase the accessibility of professional development.

- Support the development of Advisor Sharing Groups throughout the state.
  - The success of Sharing Groups in SABES regions over the past several years has proved to be an invaluable resource for both new and long-time advisors in ABE. Sharing Groups bring together different people and programs to share best practices, identify common challenges, and brainstorm solutions. The advisor position will be different in every program and the group gives people an opportunity to share skills and build new ones.

5. The Task Force recommends that ACLS should encourage an increase in the contact hours for advising and provide additional funding.

In developing this recommendation, the Task Force reviewed the recommendation from the ABE Strategic Planning Task Force in 2009. The ABE Strategic Plan Task Force recommended that the amount of funding allocated for counseling be based on the total number of students, rather than the total number of student instructional hours. In addition, the Counseling Task Force took into consideration estimates that each student should receive between 6-8 hours of next steps advising per semester in order to successfully transition and thrive in a post-
secondary education setting. These estimates were based on the “Summary of Research on Counseling” prepared for the ESE Bridges to Success State Policy Task Force on the transition to postsecondary education for adult learners. The Task Force then estimated that one semester is roughly equivalent to half a year in an ABE program. Thus, based on the research recommendation, it estimated that an ABE student would need 12-16 hours of advising per year. The Task Force then used the recommendation from the 2009 ABE Strategic Plan Task Force to base counseling hours on the total number of students, and combined it with the estimate of students needing 12-16 hours of advising per year to see what the number of counseling hours would be for both small and large ESE funded programs. In examining the numbers, it became apparent that the number of counseling hours potentially allocated would not be financially sustainable with current ESE resources.

Nonetheless, the Task Force clearly sees the primacy of advising in ABE programs for student progress. To that end, the Task Force recommends the following strategies to support Recommendation #5:

- If there is additional money available from ACLS, it should be go toward advising hours.
- ACLS should support the strategy in Recommendation #1 to limit the administrative tasks of the advisor. By doing this, it gives more hours for the advisor to provide direct advising services to the students. This strategy allows advisors to focus on authentic goal setting and thus have more one-on-one time with students.
- ACLS should support the development of workshops for advisors including seeking out providers in the advising field to present research-based workshops.
- More research is needed on what is the optimal number of hours of advising needed by ABE students to successfully reach their goals.
- ACLS conducted a student survey over five years ago to ascertain their needs in ABE programs. The Task Force recommends that ACLS explore the possibility of doing another student survey targeting advising needs.

6. The Task Force recommends that ACLS explore the usefulness and feasibility of capturing advising data through SMARTT to facilitate communication among ABE program staff.

As currently configured, SMARTT does not capture the complete picture of a student’s progress in a program. Missing from SMARTT is recognition of the central role of advising in supporting student persistence and success. In a data driven environment, “what gets counted, is what counts”. Thus, the lack of concrete advising data counted sends the message that advising is not essential, while research consistently shows the contrary.

Strategies to support Recommendation #6:

The Task Force recommends that programs be encouraged to find a data-base or system to capture advising data better in order to understand the services needed by student for planning
purposes and to assist advisors in tracking the advising process over time. In addition, such a system can help to more fully capture the extensive work done by advisors in ABE programs.

- A tracking system/database for advising should include:
  - A field for advisors to keep written case notes and data on individual students.
  - The database could be set-up with class codes and advisors.
  - Such a system allows advisors, program administrators, and ACLS program specialists to see how much contact advisors actually have with students. The amount of advising provided can be quantified.
  - Such a system can be useful to programs, especially if there is more than one advisor as it can eliminate duplication and will provide all relevant info and steps/actions taken

In addition, such a database could lead to a more efficient and effective means for ACLS program specialists to monitor a program. Currently, during an ACLS program monitoring or site visit, ACLS staff spend considerable amounts of time on-site reviewing hard copies of advising files. ACLS staff may be able to view this information prior to a site-visit and, thus, spend more time on substantive issues with program staff. In addition, in this day and age of on-line banking, on-line job applications, and on-line retail, concerns about student confidentiality should be a moot point. Firewalls and other security measures are readily available to protect sensitive student information.
APPENDIX A: Task Force Members

Baker, Leslie, Learner Support Specialist
Webster Adult Basic Education
Webster, MA

Boffi, Angela, Special Programs Coordinator
Taunton Public Schools/Bristol Community College
Adult Education Partnership

Forry, Maryclare, ABE Counselor
Operation Bootstrap
Lynn, MA

Kefallinou, Maria, Program Manager
Adult Community Learning Center
Quinsigamond Community College at CitySquare
Worcester, MA

Loftus, Deirdre, Transitions Counselor/Instructor
Ware Adult Learning Center
Ware, MA

Marquardt, Deborah, Diploma Program Coordinator
WAITT House
Roxbury, MA

Pestana, Patricia, Counselor
Jewish Vocational Service
Boston, MA

Philpot, Janice, Supervisor of Adult and Continuing Education
SCALE
Somerville, MA

Pottle, David, ABE Director
South Berkshire Educational Collaborative
Great Barrington, MA

Prior, Susan, Teacher/Counselor/Tech Coordinator
Dr. Shirley Forrest Callan Methuen Adult Learning Center
Methuen, MA

Rung, Rachel, Counselor/Teacher
YMCA of Greater Boston
International Learning Center
Boston, MA
ACLS Personnel
Andrea Perrault, Program Developer for Workforce Development
   Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
   Adult and Community Learning Services
   Malden, MA

Counseling Task Force Facilitator
Martha Oesch
   Stoneham, MA