Key findings shared from the CAEL and WICHE data and our panelists show that PLA benefits students and institutions alike.

- **PLA boosts credential completion rates for adult students, and has the potential to affect equity in education attainment.** When controlling for other factors, the PLA boost for adult student completion is 17% for all PLA methods. This includes a boost of 14% for Black adults, 24% for Hispanic adults, 33% for Pell Grant recipients, and 25% for adult students at community colleges.

- **PLA saves adult students both time and money.** Average adult student savings through PLA can amount to between $1,500 and $10,200, depending on the sector. And, students can save between nine and 14 months in earning their degrees when they have 12 or more PLA credits.

- **Contrary to assumptions, there is a strong business case for PLA.** On average, adult students that received PLA took 17.6 more credits at their institution than those who did not receive PLA, according to the data. As panelist Matt Bergman from the University of Louisville put it, “Logic suggests that when you offer PLA, you're taking away revenue. But if we just offer PLA we have a net tuition gain.” And, according to panelist Cristy Sugarman from North Shore Community College. “Credit for PLA can attract students who otherwise would not enroll. It’s a selling point for the school: we’re the #1 in serving adult students.”

- **However, uptake remains relatively low.** Only about 1 in 10 adult students received credit through PLA, according to the research. And, the rates at which students receive credit through PLA were lowest among Black students, Pell recipients, and those at community colleges.

How do we get to the goal of 70 percent of all adult students earning credit for prior learning? Students who have benefited from PLA and panelists offered advice, and participants echoed this in polls during the convening.

1) **Be intentional in outreach and in streamlining processes.** 27 percent of participants polled during the convening feel that improving communication is the most important area to focus on improving access to PLA. This was second only to ensuring the process is streamlined and easy to use. “Each institution needs to have a dedicated office to serve as a liaison and advocate to students,” noted panelist Philip Giarraffa of Miami Dade College. “Coming back to college will no longer be intimidating if you have a system that meets their unique needs.” Panelists offered several success approaches, including:
- Make information about PLA easily accessible, including a process map for the steps students need to take.
- Offer individualized holistic advising regarding PLA. Connect students to individual academic advisors who would take the time to learn about the education and work history of each student.
- Provide proactive communications with current and prospective students at every touchpoint, including enrollment, career fairs, and orientation. Integrate PLA into every advising discussion, including during pre-enrollment.

2) **Encourage faculty to champion PLA.** Make sure everyone at the institution -- especially faculty -- understands PLA and its benefits. This can include formal trainings, cheat sheets, job aids, or other tactics. As panelist Matt Bergman noted, “Faculty are excited and happy to accept AP credit for 18-year-olds. Why can’t we replicate that for adult students? PLA is AP for adults. We need to get this into faculty mindsets as part of the fabric of how our institutions operate going forward.” Panelist Carla Hamaty from Miami Dade College echoed the importance of providing training for faculty and staff. “We need to provide training to faculty and staff,” she noted, “so that everyone knows that we’re moving from A to B and the steps they need to follow.”

3) **Engage with partners outside your institution to strengthen your PLA program.** “We’re trying to find ways to connect with partners in industry,” said panelist Matt Bergman. “These are short term credentials that create entry points and quick exit points. We’re expanding these in specific ways, like health care and human resources leadership. We use these as a conduit to evaluate their entire learning catalogue, as professional development that translates to credit.” It’s also important to invest in relationships between community colleges and with 4-year institutions to ensure seamless transfer of PLA credits. “Collaborate with other institutions,” recommended panelist Carla Hamaty. “There’s no shame in asking others what they’re doing.”

4) **Invest in gathering more data.** In a poll during the convening, 64% of participants noted that providing national data that shows students who receive PLA credits take more, not fewer, credits overall would be most helpful in changing perceptions that PLA is a detractor for institutional revenue. “Data is a good place to start,” said panelist Cristy Sugarman. “How do you know where you need to improve without looking at the data to see who is being served vs. underserved? To convey benefits, we need to find where our gaps are and market to those folks who are being underserved by PLA.” Carla Hamaty underscored the need for data. “We need to keep track of PLA students and encourage other institutions to do the same,” she said. “To show leadership and organizations outside of higher education that PLA is positive and must be strengthened.”

What can you do next?

- Share this recap and data with others at your institution and initiate conversations on improving your own strategies and approaches to implementing PLA.
- Access more data and research at [https://wiche.edu/recognition-of-learning](https://wiche.edu/recognition-of-learning)
- Follow Lumina to keep up on the latest updates and future convenings on this topic: [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org) and [@LuminaFound](https://twitter.com/LuminaFound)