Persistence Pulse Check

Catching Adult Learner Stopout Risk Early

By the time a withdrawal form reaches someone's desk, the decision is usually weeks old. The signals came earlier, whether from a missed payment, a quiet LMS login, or an email that never got a reply. The institutions that keep adult learners enrolled aren't the ones running the most programs. They're the ones built to notice those signals early and respond as a team.

Retention rarely improves with only a single heroic initiative. It's the product of shared goals, connected data, real listening, and steady follow-through across the whole campus. This self-assessment helps you see where your institution stands today, where the gaps are, and where to focus next.

How to use this toolkit:

- Assess honestly. Check a box only when the practice is genuinely in place, not aspirational.
- Tally your checks across all nine practices.
- Pick two priorities. Use the "what strong practice looks like" cues to target your weakest pillars, then revisit each quarter.

1. Set and share clear goals

Everyone can name what you're working toward and owns a piece of it.

☐ **We set retention goals people across campus can state in their own words.**

Why it matters: A goal that lives only in a strategic plan rarely changes behavior. When staff, faculty, and advisors can name the target themselves, retention becomes shared work rather than one office's problem.

Strong practice looks like:

- A specific, numeric persistence or completion target with a named timeframe.
- The goal shows up in onboarding, team meetings, and leadership updates.
- A quick hallway question gets consistent answers about the target.

☐ **We expect departments across campus to contribute to those goals.**

Why it matters: Learners leave for reasons that span advising, finance, IT, and facilities. Retention improves when every unit, not only student affairs, has a defined role.

Strong practice looks like:

- Each department holds at least one retention-linked objective.
- Cross-functional ownership is written into role expectations or reviews.
- Budget and staffing decisions reference the retention goal.

2. Use data to act early

You see the warning signs before a learner disappears and so do the right people.

- [ ] **We track learner outcomes, behaviors, and communications to find where proactive outreach is needed.**

Why it matters: Most disengagement shows up in the data weeks before a withdrawal. Tracking those signals turns retention from reactive cleanup into early, human outreach.

Strong practice looks like:

- Early-alert indicators like attendance, LMS activity, missed payments are monitored.
- Thresholds flag learners automatically for a real person to follow up.
- Outreach is logged so the next staff member sees the full picture.

- [ ] **We share data across support areas to build a fuller understanding of learner success.**

Why it matters: Siloed data hides the full story. When advising, the registrar, financial aid, and faculty work from one view, support is coordinated instead of duplicated or dropped.

Strong practice looks like:

- A shared dashboard or CRM that every support team can access.
- Data-sharing agreements that respect learner privacy and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements.
- A learner does not have to explain their situation to each new office.

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3. Listen and build belonging

Learners are asked how they're doing and can see that their voice changed something.

- [ ] **We survey learners, run focus groups, and take pulse checks on belonging and satisfaction, then visibly act on what we hear.**

Why it matters: Belonging is one of the strongest predictors of persistence. But listening only moves retention when learners can see that their feedback produced a change.

Strong practice looks like:

- A regular cadence of pulse checks, not one annual survey.
- Results shared back with "you said / we did" messaging.
- Belonging tracked over time, not collected and shelved.

4. Segment and advance equity

You know which groups are underserved and you're actively closing the gaps.

- [ ] **We segment learner feedback by population: adult learners, transfer students, student parents, and others.**

Why it matters: Campus-wide averages mask very different experiences. Segmenting learners surfaces barriers that a single overall number would hide.

Strong practice looks like:

- Feedback and outcomes can be filtered by key learner populations.
- Samples are large enough to act on without exposing individuals.
- Findings reach the people positioned to respond.

- [ ] **We have a retention workgroup that sets segment-level targets, knows where outcome gaps exist, and acts on them.**

Why it matters: Naming a gap isn't the same as closing it. A standing workgroup with targets turns equity from a value statement into measurable progress.

Strong practice looks like:

- A cross-functional group meets on a set schedule with a clear charge.
- Segment-level gap targets exist and are reviewed against actuals.
- Interventions are tied to the groups with the widest gaps.

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5. Review and stay transparent

Progress is checked on a rhythm and shared openly with the whole community.

- [ ] **We review progress on retention goals on a regular cadence and adjust as needed.**

Why it matters: An annual review is too slow to catch a cohort that's slipping. A steady rhythm lets you course-correct while supporting the learners you have now.

Strong practice looks like:

- A scheduled review, monthly or by term, with named owners.
- Decisions and adjustments documented and tracked to completion.

- [ ] **We publish retention outcomes and progress so anyone on campus can find them.**

Why it matters: Transparency builds trust and accountability. When results are visible, ownership spreads beyond leadership.

Strong practice looks like:

- Outcomes live somewhere accessible, not buried in a leadership deck.
- Progress and shortfalls are both shared honestly.

Score your readiness

Add up your checked boxes across all nine practices.

0–3 Emerging: Retention work is happening in pockets but isn't yet shared or coordinated. Start with area 1: set one clear, nameable goal and assign ownership.

4–6 Developing: You have real building blocks, but gaps remain, often in data sharing or closing the loop with learners. Connect your silos and make listening visible.

7–8 Advancing: Retention is a coordinated, data-informed effort. Sharpen the edges: deepen equity targeting and tighten your review cadence.

9 Leading: Shared goals, open data, real listening, and transparency are built into how you operate. Sustain it, mentor peers, and guard against drift.

Turn it into action

Your next 90 days

- Name your two weakest areas from the assessment.
- Assign an owner and one measurable target to each.
- Set a check-in date within the term to review progress.
- Close one loop with learners and share back something you changed.

Questions to bring to your team

- Could a new advisor name our retention goal on day one?
- Where does a learner's story get dropped between offices?
- Which group has the widest outcome gap and who owns closing it?
- When did we last show learners that their feedback mattered?

Retention is shared work

No single office can move persistence alone. The institutions that improve treat retention as a team effort: clear goals, connected data, real listening, and the willingness to act on what they learn. Catching stopout risk early is about building the shared habit of noticing, and the capacity to respond before a learner has already decided to go.

Where ReUp fits

Seeing the signals early is one challenge. Having the people to respond to every one of them is another. ReUp works alongside your team to extend that capacity of sustained, personalized outreach to the learners that your data flags, so your advisors can stay focused on the students already in front of them. You keep the relationship. We help make the follow-through possible.