



ADULT LEARNER 360™

## Enhancing the Exceptional: CUNY SPS, Adult Learner 360, and Responsive Student Resources

CUNY School of Professional Studies (CUNY SPS) is an institution within the City University of New York (CUNY). One of the system's 26 campuses, CUNY SPS was founded in 2003 for the express purpose of offering agile learning solutions that could meet the city's ever-evolving workforce needs. CUNY SPS prioritizes programs that enable working adult learners to access viable career pathways. Today, it is one of the fastest-growing institutions in the CUNY system.

Although CUNY SPS staff welcome feedback from the working adult learners they serve, they lacked quantitative data that assessed how satisfied students were with their services. But like many smaller institutions, staffing and budget constraints rendered extensive institutional research out-of-scope. To alleviate this gap in institutional knowledge, in 2017 CUNY SPS was one of nine colleges within the CUNY system that adopted the Adult Learner 360™ (AL 360). AL 360 uses parallel surveys to transform diverse stakeholder perspectives into actionable data. One survey elicits feedback from faculty and staff; the other measures the satisfaction of adult students. CAEL then prepares a report that highlights strengths, signals areas for improvement, and recommends actions that help institutions better support their adult learners. In addition, a CAEL expert discusses recommendations, incorporating external drivers and current strategic initiatives to help the institution plan for a strategic change.

As often occurs with institutions that care deeply about the adult learning experience, the parallel surveys revealed that CUNY SPS staff were harder on themselves than students were. Still, the results revealed opportunities to make changes that were certain to improve the adult learning experience, particularly in areas of career preparation, financial aid processes, and employer partnerships. Acting on these insights, CUNY SPS increased financial aid staffing, separated scholarships from financial aid functions, and reorganized its website to clarify financial aid information. The resulting increase in capacity and efficiency has opened the door to more scholarship and debt forgiveness programs. The AL 360 also inspired a renewed focus on education through the lens of adult learners across multiple CUNY schools and an ongoing exchange of best practices that has improved services for traditional and nontraditional students alike.

Learn more at [cael.org](https://cael.org)



**CUNY School of  
Professional Studies** | **CUNY**

### CHALLENGE

Deriving an objective performance assessment amid rapid growth and limited resources in order to remain agile and effective in serving adult learners.

### SOLUTION

Adult Learner 360's parallel data on institution and adult learner perceptions allowed a small, emerging team to access the benefits of robust institutional research. CUNY SPS used AL 360 data to reinforce strengths and meet challenges. Students' high regard for the SPS orientation and onboarding process inspired the creation of Test Flight — a realistic simulation of the online learning experience that immerses students into an online learning experience. This and other enhancements have led to top-20 national rankings for best online bachelor's programs and online bachelor's programs for veterans.

We understand what qualities make a difference for adult learners. AL 360 is backed by CAEL's breakthrough **Ten Principles for Effectively Serving Adults**, which were developed through decades of research and engagement.



UNLOCKING  
THE DATA THAT  
DRIVE RESULTS

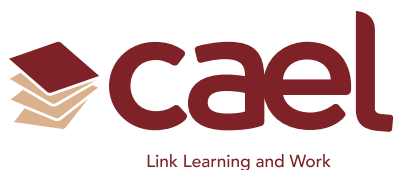


“We were ready to go beyond people reporting their own experiences. We didn’t have the staff to do the kind of institutional research some of the bigger institutions could do. We were looking to be more data-driven than anecdote-driven.”

*Jennifer Sparrow, Ph.D.,  
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs*

**AL 360 helps you define your strategy for serving adult learners.** By pinpointing areas of strength and opportunity, AL 360 facilitates planning that will have the most impact on their experience at your institution. Informed by student and institutional feedback, AL 360 helps you meet the needs critical to the success of both:

- Professional Development and Advancement
- Career Advising
- Strategic Partnerships, Mentorships and Internships
- Prior Learning Assessment
- Enrollment, Persistence, Completion



Recognizing that adult learners are the backbone of the U.S. economy, CAEL helps forge a clear, viable connection between education and career success, providing solutions that promote sustainable and equitable economic growth. CAEL opens doors to opportunity in collaboration with workforce and economic developers, postsecondary educators, and employers, industry groups, foundations, and other mission-aligned organizations. By engaging with these stakeholders, we foster a culture of innovative, lifelong learning that helps individuals and their communities thrive. Established in 1974, CAEL, a Strada Education Network affiliate, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) membership organization.