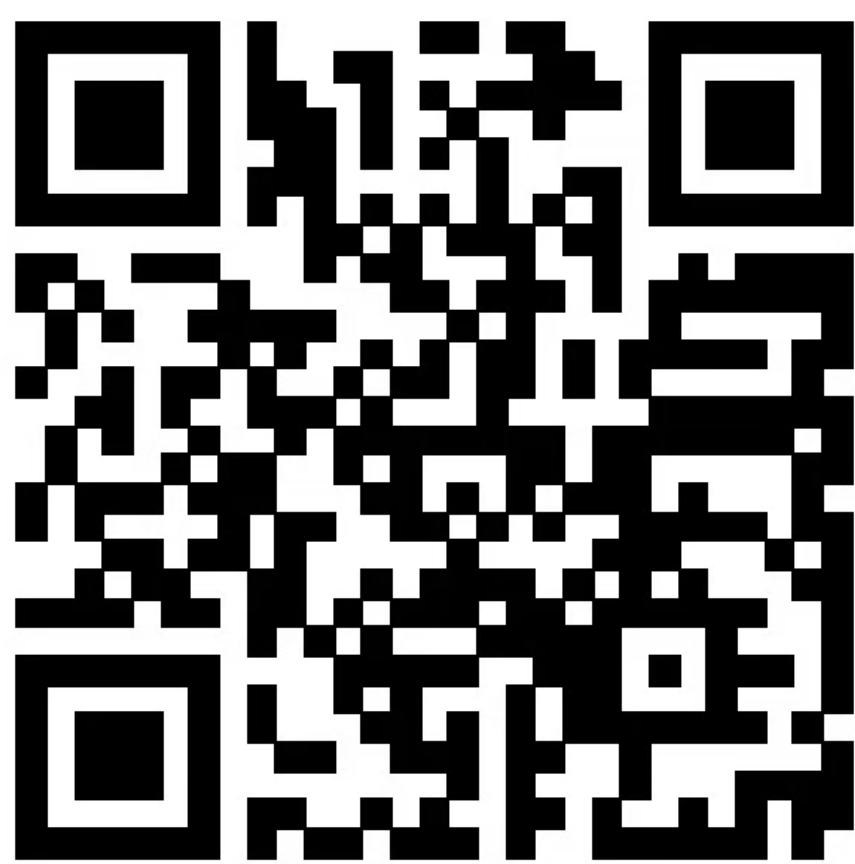




Micro Credential Programming: Reducing Barriers to Post-Secondary Education in a Sample of Diverse Adult Learners

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BACKGROUND

- **Adult learners** (above age 25 years) are a diverse group of individuals that **account for 23% of the undergraduate student population** (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022).
- Several **barriers to learning and academic achievement** for adult learners include **financial concerns, technology use concerns, time-management concerns**, and **general feelings of being underprepared for college-level learning** (Bellaire et al., 2023).
- Micro credential programs are **short, credential-based programs** that are designed to provide in-demand skills, training, and experience in an area of community need.
- **Direct Support Professionals (DSPs)** support individuals with **disabilities across several contexts** and within a variety of daily living settings.
- The **State University of New York DSP Program**, in partnership with **New York State’s Office for People with Developmental Disabilities** and the **National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP)**, provides direct support professionals with training that leads to **national certification in the skills and competency areas unique to the field of direct support**.

OBJECTIVE

To assess **student completion rates** of and **employer satisfaction** with the level one Direct Support Professionals Microcredential Program offered by Farmingdale State College.

METHOD

- **Seventy-one** students enrolled in level one of the Direct Support Professionals Microcredential Program offered through Farmingdale State College across the **Spring 2024 (n=32), Summer 2024 (n=14), and Fall 2024 (n=31)** semesters (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).
- Program requirements included completion of the **DSP-I Certification** through the NADSP as well as the completion of **two college credit bearing courses**: Introduction to Psychology and Introduction to Human Services.
- To reduce common barriers reported by adult learners and to support overall student success, **the program provided students with:**

Financial Support

Academic Coaches

Cash Incentive for Completion

Hardship Funding

RESULTS

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics for the Summer 2024 cohort.

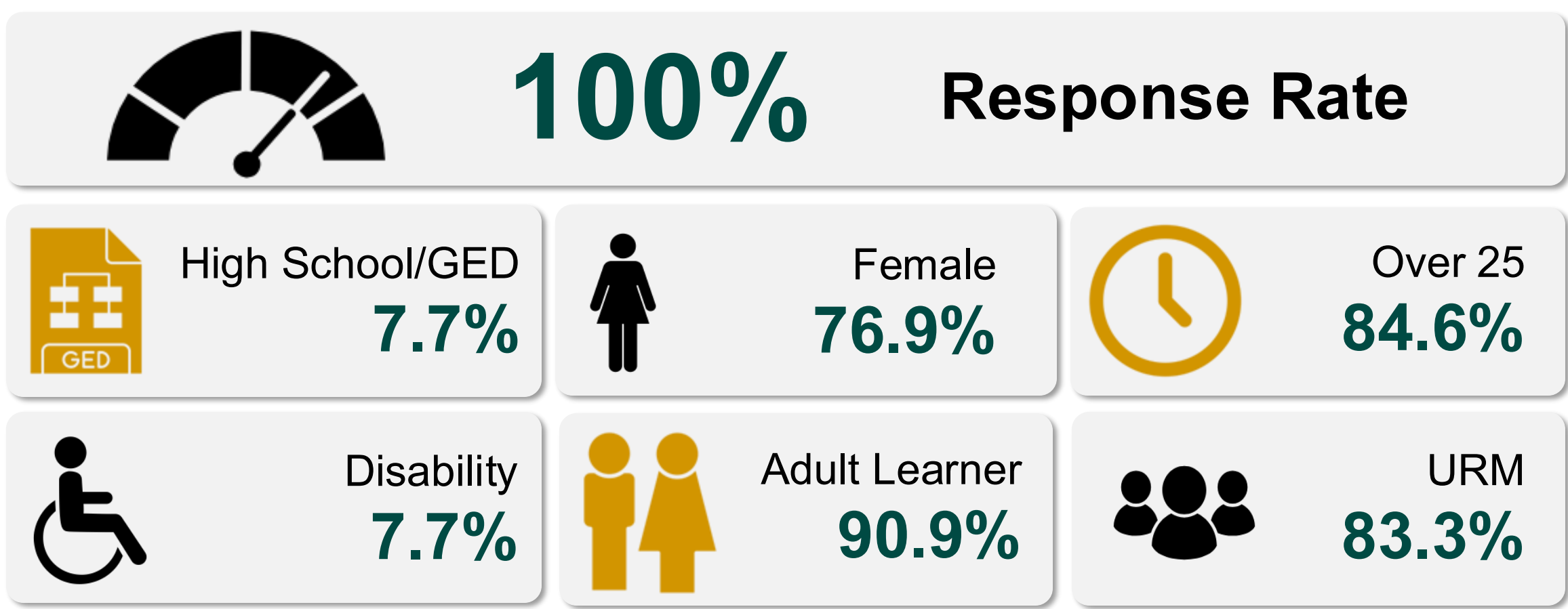
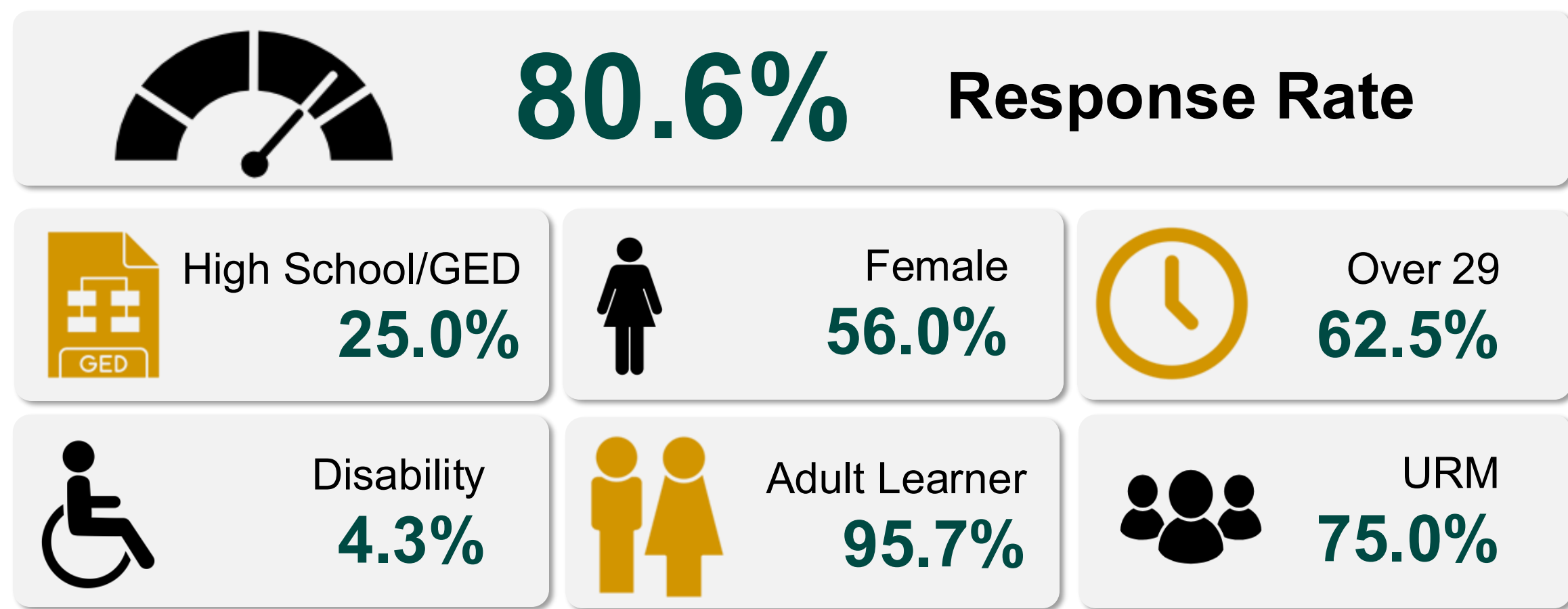
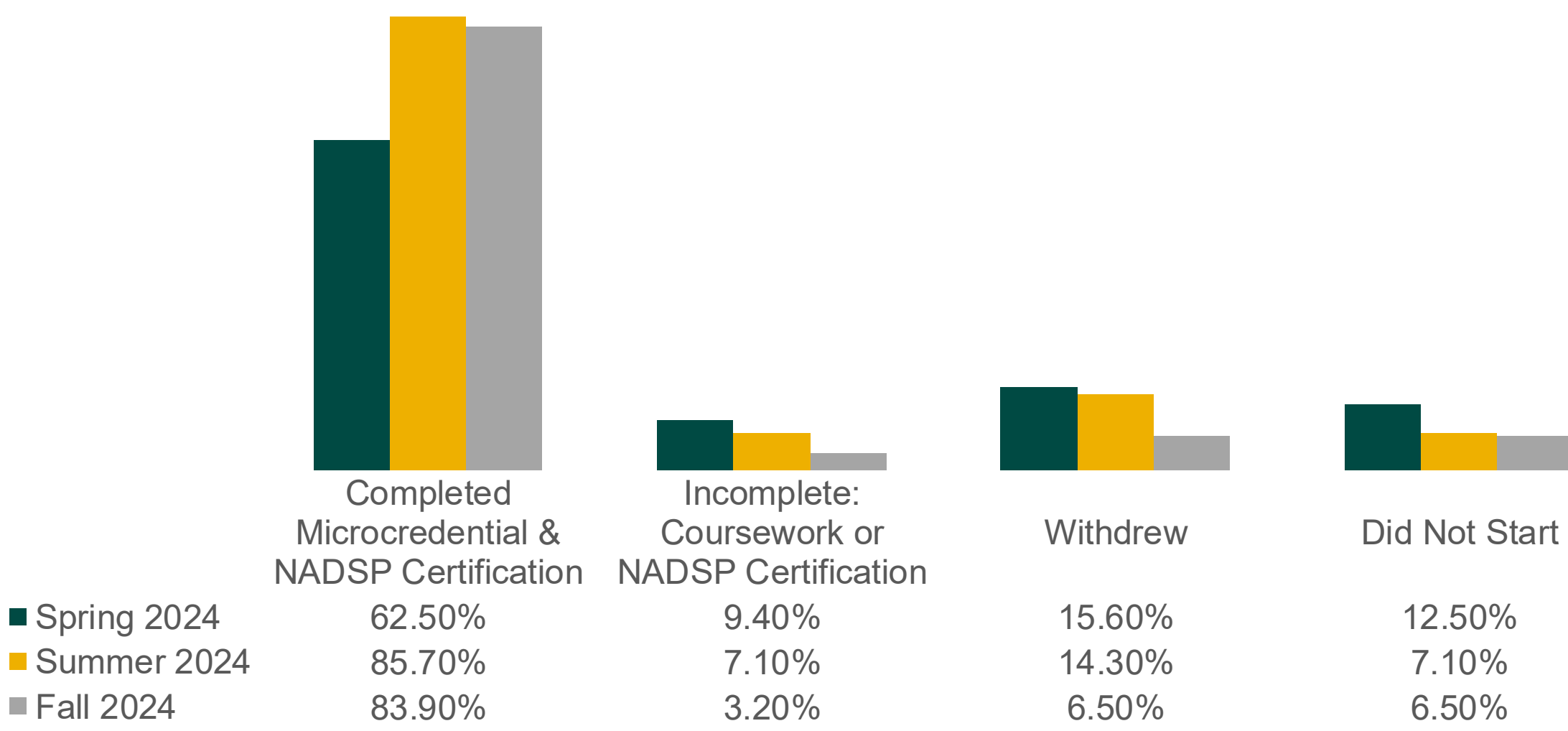


Figure 2. Descriptive statistics for the Fall 2024 cohort.



Note. URM = Underrepresented Minority. Descriptive statistics are not available for the Spring 2024 cohort.

Figure 3. Program completion rates across the three cohorts: Spring 2024, Summer 2024, and Fall 2024.



- Data indicate that the DSP Microcredential Program offered at Farmingdale State College was successful in fostering student success. Overall, 62.5% of the Spring 2024, 85.7% of the Summer 2024, and 83.90% of the Fall 2024 cohorts successfully completed all program requirements.

CONCLUSIONS

- Micro credential programs are a **promising avenue** to promote adult learner success at the college-level.
- These programs have become **particularly beneficial** in fostering pathways **for professional development and career advancement** in high demand but traditionally under supported fields of human services such as direct support.
- These data are a crucial first step in providing instructors and administrators empirically based best practices **for successfully supporting adult learners** in micro credential programs.
- Future work should examine which aspects of the program support model were most effective in reducing barriers to program completion and promoting student success (e.g., **1) financial support** for program tuition, fees, and textbook costs, **2) program-specific academic coaches**, **3) a cash incentive** for program completion, and **4) additional hardship funding** to cover costs associated with childcare, travel, technology, or other prohibitive costs).

Figure 4. Partnering Provider Feedback from Fall 2024



Note. Data represent feedback from eight local partnering organizations that currently employ students enrolled in the program. Provider feedback is not available for the Spring 2024 or Summer 2024 cohorts.

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