



CONNECTING LITERACY AND WORK

LITERACY NETWORK SITES AND LITERACY PROVIDERS

CONNECTING LITERACY AND WORK JOINS TWO TYPES OF LITERACY PARTNERS IN A PEER LEARNING NETWORK:

- > Communities that have strong adult literacy networks interested in connecting with local affiliates of the *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*;
- > Mature and strong local workforce partnerships in three national initiatives, *Breaking Through*, *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*; and *Jobs to Careers*.

LITERACY NETWORK SITES

Literacy Coalition of Southeastern Wisconsin

The Literacy Coalition of Southeastern Wisconsin is a diverse group of 30 literacy service providers and practitioners coming together to create public awareness of the educational challenges facing adults in the Milwaukee region, promote literacy, and create professional development opportunities for teachers and tutors. The coalition hosts conferences, workshops, and trainings on topics such as cultural sensitivity and how best to teach an adult with learning disabilities. It also connects members to each other and with available resources to support their work.

Formed in 1986, the Literacy Coalition grew out of a Project Literacy US (PLUS) taskforce in southeastern Wisconsin as part of a national outreach campaign spearheaded by the PBS and ABC television networks. The taskforce created public awareness of the alarming number of adults in need of basic adult literacy services in the region. For instance, nearly one-fifth of the population in Milwaukee County lacks a high school diploma, yet only 2.9 percent of those without a high school diploma tested for a GED. According to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, almost one-quarter of individuals in the county function at or below basic proficiency. In addition, a growing immigrant population has increased the need for English language services in the region. Altogether, the low literacy and English language proficiency rates present formidable challenges for low-skilled adults seeking employment, re-employment, or advancement opportunities.

The Literacy Coalition of Southeastern Wisconsin will work with JFF to help its affiliate providers better understand the role they can play in helping adults connect to employment, deepen knowledge of and connections to the public workforce

development system, enhance engagement with employers and sector-based workforce development efforts, and promote stronger transitions to employment and postsecondary career pathways.

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Philadelphia Workforce Solutions Collaborative

The Workforce Solutions Collaborative is a partnership among Philadelphia workforce-focused literacy providers, workforce education providers, employers, labor, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, and other organizations that have a stake in the quality of the region's workforce. In March 2007, it grew out of the Pennsylvania ABLE Administrators Group, a coalition of state-funded adult literacy providers in Philadelphia, formed in response to new research that showed the significant literacy challenges Philadelphia's workers face.

This research found that over 50 percent of adults in Philadelphia—about 550,000 individuals—lack the basic skills necessary to effectively compete in the knowledge-based economy or to complete a postsecondary degree. Philadelphia ranks 97th out of 100 of the nation's largest cities in adult workforce participation rates. More than 70 percent of the jobs located in the city require intermediate literacy skills or higher. This means that over 50 percent of Philadelphians compete for 30 percent of the available jobs for their skill levels.

The Workforce Solutions Collaborative's mission is a response to this grave situation: "to create a unified, universally accessible workforce literacy system in the greater Philadelphia area that prepares adults to enter and advance in the workforce." The literacy providers in this group are the leaders in providing workforce-focused adult literacy education and training. At present, this collaborative has approximately 25 members and has developed a business plan to formalize its partnership and grow its membership.

The Workforce Solutions Collaborative will work with JFF to develop a workshop and associated training materials to assist its members and other adult literacy providers in the city better connect their programming for lower-skilled workers and job seekers with workforce education, training, and resources. Initially, the group will target the training to literacy providers in the coalition of state-funded providers. This project will be closely coordinated with other professional development opportunities in the state and city for literacy providers.

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LITERACY PROVIDERS

Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, NE

Metropolitan Community College serves over 40,000 students annually, with approximately 30,000 in credit programs and 13,000 in noncredit programs. It is the second largest postsecondary education institution in the state. The college is the primary provider of occupational training programs and adult education in Omaha. It also is a partner in the Omaha Workforce Funding Collaborative, a grantee of the *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*, whose mission is to align local resources and services to develop workforce solutions that respond to the needs of both lower-income, lower-skilled workers and employers in Omaha's high-growth, high-demand industries.

Even in a recession, Omaha has a relatively low unemployment rate. Jobs are available in financial services, information technology, and health care. Yet many of these jobs are unfilled due to the lack of qualified workers. In the North Omaha neighborhood, however, there are high unemployment and poverty rates—12 percent in summer 2008, and 63 percent of families with incomes below the poverty threshold. The Omaha Workforce Funding Collaborative focuses on helping North Omaha residents gain the education and skills they need to enter good jobs in high-demand industries and, at the same time, help employers fill those jobs. Metropolitan Community College is an important part of the project because many North Omaha residents have low basic skills.

JFF will work with Metropolitan Community College to provide professional development for faculty members who teach basic skills education. This work will center on helping them contextualize their curricula for the workplace and better understand and address the challenges and needs of their low-income students who are balancing school, work, and family responsibilities.

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Durham Technical Community College, Durham, NC

Located in the state's Research Triangle, Durham Technical Community College has a large number of non-traditional students among its 5,000 students. Its *Breaking Through* project focuses on moving students from adult basic education, through the adult high school or GED program, and into a college-level program in either health technology or industrial technology. The goal is to build on the success of students transitioning from developmental education to career pathway programs while serving a lower-skilled population with more barriers to success. Durham Tech uses an incentive system to increase student retention and advancements: students can earn cash rewards or certificates for meeting a series of benchmarks. The *Breaking Through* program includes a dedicated case manager/counselor, as well as student mentors from the college who successfully transitioned out of the Basics Skills program.

JFF will work with Durham Tech to strengthen the contextualization and integration of basic skills, with an emphasis on the industrial technology sector. There is strong demand for employment in this industry sector. Collaboration among deans, department heads, and instructors within these areas has resulted in the development of a defined career pathway for *Breaking Through* students beginning at the ABE level (8th grade and below).

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MS Office of Nursing Workforce and Hinds Community College, Jackson, MS

The Mississippi *Jobs to Careers* initiative is a partnership of MS Office of Nursing Workforce (which manages the effort), Hinds Community College (the education and training partner), Central MS Medical Center, and the MS Hospital Association Health, Research & Educational Foundation. The initiative provides frontline medical center workers (e.g., food services staff, building services staff) with opportunities to increase their skills, thereby reducing high turnover rates and vacancies among ancillary staff and improving the quality of care provided to consumers.

The medical center, in partnership with the college, has developed a training curriculum; revised human resource policies to include a career ladder for frontline workers with wage increases, recognition, and rewards; and established the work ethic needed to sustain a continual work-based learning model. Hinds Community College has developed courses, policies, and processes for providing instruction at the medical center. The

curriculum includes short-term, challenging instruction blocks that apply immediately in the health care setting and lead to certificates and academic credits for learning accomplishments. Remediation activities included many of the available college resources, in addition to individual tutoring with a college resource instructor.

Low literacy levels have been a major barrier to progress for the frontline health care workers that *Jobs to Careers* seeks to advance along administrative and nursing career pathways. In this project, JFF will provide targeted technical assistance to help Hinds Community College and its partners develop a more comprehensive approach to remediating and accelerating its students by contextualizing this basic-skills development within their health care occupational pathways.

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CONNECTING LITERACY AND WORK

With funding from the Dollar General Literacy Foundation, Connecting Literacy and Work encompasses three strands of JFF work that are strengthening the connections between adult literacy and workforce development:

- > Connecting adult literacy to employment;
- > Building the capacity of literacy networks to partner with sector-based workforce development initiatives; and
- > Technical assistance and documentation.

Together, these activities will deepen and disseminate strategies that advance low-skilled adults in their careers through tighter linkages between adult literacy and workforce initiatives at the community level.

For more information on Connecting Literacy and Work, please contact: Gloria Cross Mwase, gmwase@jff.org, 617.728.4446



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

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