



LITERACY UPDATE

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Literacy Assistance Center

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Literacy for a Stronger Workforce

Why New York's Commission on Higher Education Needs to Hear from You

> **John Twomey** *Executive Director, New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP)*
and **Tom Hilliard** *Senior Policy Associate, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA)*

We all know that teaching people to read opens doors and enriches lives. That's reason enough to be a literacy provider. But it's not enough to win new public investment at the federal or state level. That's why it's so important to make the case that literacy is a cornerstone of a thriving and prosperous economy.

In New York, there's an audience that needs to hear the case for literacy right now: the New York State Commission on Higher Education.

You may reasonably ask: the Commission on what? And I should care?

You should, because the Commission is developing New York State's higher education roadmap for the next several years. And if that roadmap does not include a role for literacy and

for workforce education more broadly, our state could lose its best opportunity to strengthen the skills of the New York workforce.

First, a bit of history. Governor Eliot Spitzer established the Commission on Higher Education by executive order on May 29, 2007. He charged the Commission with conducting a review and analysis of New York's colleges and universities, with particular emphasis on public higher education and the SUNY and CUNY systems. The Commission worked throughout the summer and fall of 2007 and issued a preliminary report on December 17, 2007. The report and an executive summary can be found at www.becommission.state.ny.us.

Our organizations, the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals

(NYATEP) and the Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA), agree that the Commission on Higher Education preliminary report is a good one. Its major recommendations include:

- Rebuilding SUNY's and CUNY's faculty ranks by hiring an additional 2,000 full-time faculty members, including 250 eminent scholars;
- Establishing a \$3 billion fund to support research important to New York's future;
- Passing a College Readiness Act to ensure that high school graduates are well prepared for college.

Regrettably, however, the preliminary report focuses most of its attention on the supply

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How's Work?

> Elyse Barbell *Executive Director*

I am blessed with a large family and have many friends and acquaintances who work outside the literacy field. Rarely does a week go by without someone within this circle asking me, "How's work going?" A simple enough question, but a completely truthful answer would be more complex than the average cousin who poses it was anticipating.

As anyone in the not-for-profit world knows, the best way to gauge how our work is going would be to look at the financial pages. When the economy is tight—or worse, in a downward spiral—things here are tough. It's not even that our income depends heavily on individual donors who give less when they earn less. It's more of a ripple effect. Nonprofits that serve the underserved are often the last domino to fall, but when they do go down, they land with a resounding thunk. So, work is difficult this year, but thanks for asking.

On the other hand, work is great. I love a challenge. The quality and quantity of LAC work have never been better. Lots of people have heard me say that I have the best job in the whole world. On yet another hand (yes, like all nonprofit executive directors, I have been compelled to grow many) I know how lucky I am to have a job that is relatively stable. I also know that the unemployment rate among men of color in this city is 50 percent. And I know that even though our presidential candidates go on endlessly about how they will solve the immigration crisis on their first day in office, members of our immigrant community are making pennies on the dollar of what their native born counterparts earn; for many of them, legitimate employment with health care benefits is a pipe dream. As Barbara Sparks points out on page 9, we know that 138,000 youth in this city are out of school, with no job or any discernable connection to social services that can help them shape a more rewarding and productive life. I also know that as a system we are only serving five percent of the New Yorkers who could benefit from adult literacy services. If we compare what we are able to do now with what needs to be done, work stinks.

This issue of the *Literacy Update* is dedicated to strategies that improve employment and workforce development opportunities. You will see discussions of policy as well as descriptions of several targeted approaches—a key component of successful programs. We look forward to hearing about your workforce development efforts—and what you need to make them more effective. Please feel free to contact me at elyse@lacnyc.org. ●



LITERACY UPDATE

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SPOTlight

Putting Skills to Work

> *Silvana Vasconcelos* Coordinator, *Queens Library Family Literacy Program*

At the beginning of every school year, the Queens Library family literacy program asks the participating immigrant parents/caregivers to fill out a survey indicating what kinds of things they know, do well, and feel that they can teach other parents and staff. This skills inventory is a vital part of our program. We use the responses to guide us on the path to our two major goals for program participants. One is to raise their awareness that they are the first and most important teachers of their children. The other is to give them the skills they need to reach economic self-sufficiency.

These two goals are mutually supportive. While parents in our program acquire English language fluency and other parenting skills, they can also deepen their knowledge of the culture of work in New York and learn the specific vocabulary and requirements of the work or business they want to enter. Conversely, having a reliable source of income can make it easier for them to meet their children's physical, emotional, and intellectual needs.

Immigrant parents who want to promote their children's academic success need a lot of skills. They must learn the language they will need, as well as how to navigate the curriculum and questions to ask at parent-teacher conferences. Mastering all of these skills is difficult, particularly for immigrants who are trying to improve their English language proficiency at the same time. Even so, most program participants are convinced that acquiring this knowledge will be much easier than securing the income they need to sustain and maintain a healthy family, whether by finding a good job working for someone else, opening a wonderful Mexican restaurant, or establishing the perfect home day care

Having a reliable source of income can make it easier for [parents] to meet their children's physical, emotional, and intellectual needs.

business. To help them realize their economic goals, the Queens Public Library family literacy program began developing a new project based on our learner-centered, project-based curriculum. Our strategy is to assist participants in developing new skills that can help them market their expertise.

The project began with a skills survey at the beginning of the previous academic year, which revealed that many parents/caregivers knew how to knit and crochet, and those who did not were interested in learning these skills. Based on this information, we set up a comprehensive curriculum. We scheduled a special class in which parents could teach knitting and crocheting to other parents and staff members. In the ESOL classes, participants learned the English vocabulary for the two crafts. In computer classes, they searched for information on them. In video camera classes,

Many parents/caregivers knew how to knit and crochet, and those who did not were interested in learning these skills.

they viewed videos of themselves knitting and engaged in critical analysis of the project. They also viewed instructional videos on knitting.

After the participants completed their knitting and crocheting curriculum, we began a sewing, pattern, and design class with three sewing machines borrowed from our partner school, PS78Q—the Academic Intervention Leader and parent coordinator there helped arrange this loan. The program participants then went to work on creating outfits that combined elements of their own cultures with New York design. By the end of June, one parent had made a beautiful evening dress and another had sewn her daughter's graduation dress and finished a sari. The participants also produced beautiful scarves, shawls, and belts.

Based on this success, the program purchased five sewing machines later that summer and hired one of the mothers, an expert in designing and sewing, to work with a small group from the program. She is teaching them and a group of children how to design and make stuffed animals. Their goal is to create a "talking" stuffed animal by the end of June. Each will have a device inside that can record favorite stories, lullabies, songs, and other creative work. All of this activity is perfectly aligned with our program's emphasis on learning the skills for telling stories, reading stories, and writing stories as a family.

The Queens Public Library is very pleased with the project's success so far. However, we recognized that even though it is highly ambitious, rich

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A Team Approach to Workplace Literacy

Developing Workforce Skills on Long Island

> Written by Staff to the Long Island Business Services Team

Prior to Title 2 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), local employers and literacy providers on Long Island had informal arrangements to design and offer workplace literacy instruction. Recognizing the critical relationship between education and employment, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) provided funding for these workplace literacy initiatives for many years. Often, however, these projects relied on personal contacts between agencies and employers. WIA Title 2 provided new funding for adult literacy, but raised the bar by requiring adult literacy programs and employment and training services to work together under a one-stop service delivery model.

On Long Island, these partnerships have taken several forms. The Long Island Regional Adult Education Network (LI-RAEN) is funded by NYSED to provide technical assistance to adult literacy programs across Long Island. Since 2000, it has been the NYSED designee to all three of Long Island's Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), which bring together local businesses and state agencies. It also collaborates with other WIA partners and workforce development agencies to address the literacy needs of workers who are new to the workforce, in transition to other jobs, or need additional skills. The primary partnership for meeting these needs is the Long Island Business Services Team (LIBST), which brings together the three local Workforce Investment Boards, the New York State Department of Labor, and the LI-RAEN.

In a 2004 article that appeared in *Review of Adult Learning and Literacy*, "Why Do Companies Provide Workplace Education Programs?" Alec Levenson defines basic workplace literacy skills as the ones required for effective functioning in most jobs. They have become the basis for the core curriculum in a typical workplace education program, which Levenson describes as a "program providing instruction in at least some basic skills that is located on-site at the workplace or . . . sponsored by the employer off-site." The particular skills taught vary widely, based on local employer need. On Long Island, the LIBST has been very successful in developing programs that heighten recognition of workplace literacy services as a solution to local employers' growing need for workers with basic literacy skills that include contextualized workplace math and memo writing.

Although the LIBST has designed and implemented a wide variety of customized workplace literacy programs for employers with workers whose basic skill sets do not meet their needs, approximately two-thirds of its workplace literacy programs have focused on one basic workplace skill: English language proficiency. This reflects the large influx of immigrant workers on Long Island over the past 10 years. Usually, workplace literacy programs designed to meet their needs can be long-term projects; however, sometimes the LIBST has to act with greater urgency.

Dealing with impending unemployment at Sid Harvey Industries Inc. required a rapid turnaround. In 2005, this heating and air conditioning supplier in Valley Stream announced that it was relocating to South Carolina. To help the firm's 95 employees find new jobs as quickly as possible, the LIBST asked the management to discuss the situation with representatives of a Long Island Response Team that it set up—in this case representa-

tives of the New York State Department of Labor Division of Employment Services and HempsteadWorks, the One-Stop system for the Town of Hempstead/City of Long Beach Local Workforce Investment Area. Sid Harvey executives readily agreed. At the meeting, they noted that a majority of the firm's employees performed lower-skilled warehouse occupations, and most of them had only limited English proficiency. Everyone around the table knew that this additional barrier would make the daunting task of finding new employment even more difficult, particularly in a local labor market where lower-skilled occupations are rapidly disappearing and a lack of strong basic workplace literacy skills can present a major barrier to landing a job.

Once their representatives reported back, the agencies on the Rapid Response Team and the LIBST quickly obtained WIA Title 2 funding for a comprehensive workforce education program at the Sid Harvey work site. The LI-RAEN arranged for an instructor from the Nassau Community College Center for Workforce Training and Lifelong Learning to conduct Vocational English-as-a-Second Language (VESL) classes there. Classes concentrated on terminology and operating processes that the workers would need to get new jobs. To ensure that the classes covered the right skills, the Business Services Team, the Town of Hempstead Workforce Investment Board, and the Long Island Regional Labor Market Analyst assessed skills shortages and mapped career ladders at prospective Long Island employers.

As a complement to the VESL classes, the Rapid Response Team arranged for on-site workshops, in English and Spanish, covering the following topics:

- Orientation to the One-Stop System Services
- Career Transitions: Life after Sid Harvey
- How to Complete Employment Applications
- Interviewing Skills
- Resumes and Cover Letters
- Describing One's Skill Sets

After the Sid Harvey employees completed their training, the Department of Employment Services and HempsteadWorks offered them additional reemployment services. Thanks to this comprehensive program, most of the Sid Harvey workers found jobs where they utilized their newly acquired skills.

Building the partnerships essential to a rapid and effective response to the unique needs of individual businesses with customized interventions has been a long journey, and this work is far from over. To meet the intensifying competition of the global economy, the Long Island region will require even more extensive workplace literacy initiatives. Congress has not yet reauthorized WIA. Both its funding level and its provisions could well be changed. Whatever happens with reauthorization, the LIBST and the local workforce development system will continue to evolve and serve all Long Islanders in need of basic skills efficiently and effectively. ●

For additional information, please contact Martin G. Murphy, Director, LI-RAEN.

Call for Student Essays

The Literacy Assistance Center would like personal essays from adult education learners for publication in the LAC *Update*. This is a wonderful opportunity for learners to get their work in print in a publication read throughout the literacy community. Essays on the back page of the *Update* have been used by teachers to generate class discussions and have inspired many students.

Language Barriers at NYC Human Resources Administration

A new report from Legal Services for New York City concludes that most HRA centers are not providing the basic language access services required by city, state, and federal law. *Translation Woes: Language Barriers at New York City's Human Resources Administration* is online at www.lsnyc.org.

CONFERENCES

March

5th Annual WE LEARN Conference on Women & Literacy

March 7–8, 2008, Fordham University at Lincoln Center, Manhattan
www.litwomen.org/conference.html

The daily lives of women in adult basic/literacy education remain especially complex due to inequities based on race, class, gender, and other diversities. This year's conference will explore the differences that divide women and look to ways of building alliances across those differences.

2008 Tri-Library Adult Learning Conference

March 15, 2008, Flushing Library, Queens

This all-day conference offers a series of workshops designed to keep volunteers abreast of new trends in adult literacy and ESOL best practices. Educators from adult literacy programs throughout New York City will present strategies for basic literacy group tutoring, incorporating a balance of

skills across levels, integrating technology, and working with beginning ESOL/literacy students, among other topics. For more information, contact Roberto Cruz, Education Specialist, Queens Library Adult Learner Program, at (718) 480-4234.

Ninth National Black Writers Conference

Black Writers: Reading and Writing to Transform Their Lives and the World
March 28–30, Center for Black Literature, Medgar Evers College, CUNY

This conference is dedicated to the centennial of Richard Wright's birth. Featured authors include Randall Robinson, Cornel West, Julia Wright, and Susan L. Taylor. For program information, call (718) 270-6976.

17th Annual National Conference on Family Literacy

Literacy Grows Families and Communities
March 29–31, 2008, Louisville, KY
www.famlit.org/conference

April

42nd Annual New York State TESOL Convention

Worlds of TESOL: Building Communities of Practice, Inquiry, and Creativity
April 2–5, 2008, New York City
www.nystesol.org

Electronic Student Portfolio Conference

Making Connections: ePortfolio, Integrative Learning, and Assessment
April 11–12, 2008, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY
www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/conference

Addressing issues of teaching, learning, and assessment, as well as ways to link ePortfolio to the new possibilities of Web 2.0, the conference will combine voices of the LaGuardia experience with presentations from international leaders in the field.

Commission on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Conference

Show Me Success: Empowerment through Diversity
April 28–May 1, 2008, Saint Louis, MO
www.coabeconference.org

May

NYC Consortium for Adult Basic Education, 29th Annual Conference

Literacy Across Generations
May 3, 2008, Fashion Industries High School, Manhattan

For more information, contact Carolyn Fernando at (212) 243-5458 or sonofhendrick@yahoo.com.

57th Annual New York Association for Continuing/Community Education (NYACCE) Conference

Promoting People, Programs, and Partnerships
May 4–6, 2008, Albany
www.nyacce.org

This conference offers an opportunity for practitioners to come together for professional development and networking. The focus will be on addressing the needs of a diverse student and community population, improving the quality and capacity of programming, and promoting greater coordination and partnerships within communities and the state at large.

International Reading Association, 53rd Annual Convention

Engaging Learners in Literacy
May 4–8, 2008, Atlanta
www.reading.org/association/meetings/annual_program.html

CALENDAR of events >>

Mar. 4, May 8,
& June 3

Family Literacy Leadership Initiative

Tuesday, March 4, 9:30 am–3:30 pm
Thursday, May 8, 9:30 am–3:30 pm
Tuesday, June 3, 9:30 am–3:30 pm

Facilitators: Barbara Sparks, Be Jensen

The Leadership Initiative is for new family literacy program managers and includes both peer coaching and skill building workshops. This series is by invitation only. Collecting, tracking, and using student data is the focus of the March 4 session.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 6

How We Are Smart, Not How Smart We Are: Multiple Intelligences in Adult Education

Thursday, March 6, 9:30 am–4:30 pm

Facilitators: Silja Kallenbach, Hillary Gardner

Teachers will learn about and participate in practical applications of MI theory for the ESOL, ABE, and GED classroom and begin developing their own MI-based lessons. Each participant will receive a packet of handouts, including sample lessons from the Adult Multiple Intelligences study.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 7

Popular Education

Friday, March 7, 2:00–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Winston Lawrence

Teachers will explore popular education approaches designed to help adult students develop an awareness of the importance of social justice and community issues inside and outside the classroom. Participants will read selected materials and discuss application of theoretical perspectives. Reflective writing is also included.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 11

ASISTS Training

Tuesday, March 11, 9:30 am–4:00 pm

Facilitator: John Lyons

This training introduces users to the Adult Student Information System and Technical Support (ASISTS) web-based data system. Highlights include navigating ASISTS data entry screens; inputting student, class, and instructor information; updating outcomes, tests, and contact hours; and running management and funding reports.

We ask that no more than three people from each program attend any one training. All staff who will need to enter data in ASISTS must attend this training session in order to receive a username and password for the system.

RSVP: ASISTS Support at 212.803.3357 or asistssupport@lacnyc.org

Mar. 13

Instructional Strategies for Building Job Readiness Skills

Thursday, March 13, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Barbara Sparks

This session focuses on teaching job readiness skills through experiential learning, integrative units, and reflective assessment, all research-based patterns of instruction.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 14

Introduction to the GAP (GED Assessment Project)

Friday, March 14, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Khayriyyah Ali, Denise Gordon

Many NYC GED examinees fail the exam due to inadequate preparation. Many others pass the exam only after taking it repeatedly. Check out an interactive best practice that provides exposure, an assessment, and a reality check for prospective GED examinees. We call it "The GAP."

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 14

ESOL Creative Writing Workshop

Friday, March 14, 1:30–4:30 pm

Facilitator: Estella Natal

Participants will explore the use of creative writing as an enjoyable teaching tool. Activities include free writing, composing sentences using figurative language, and writing free verse poems and haiku. These activities can help students improve skills in listening, speaking, reading, and creative writing.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 24

TABE Administrator Training

Monday, March 24, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

This workshop introduces participants to the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Forms 7, 8, 9, and 10—the main test used by adult literacy programs funded by the NY State Education Dept. to place students in ABE classes and to measure educational gain. Participants discuss, among other things, the relationship between TABE test scores and National Reporting System (NRS) levels.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 25 & Apr. 22

Theme-Based Instruction in Critical Content

Tuesday, March 25, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Tuesday, April 22, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitators: Barbara Sparks, Be Jensen, Estella Natal

This course helps family literacy teachers and others gain experience in developing curricula in critical content areas and using a theme-based approach to instruction.

March 25: Health Literacy

Participants will gain a clearer understanding of: a) health literacy as a health care issue; b) the importance of effective health communication (oral and written); c) key concepts of health literacy; and d) how to integrate health literacy into existing curricula.

April 22: Community & Family Economics

Participants will look at the financial and economic skills students need and explore a variety of strategies to help students acquire them. These will include curricula and content resources and forming partnerships with outside agencies and institutions.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

**All LAC events take place
at 32 Broadway, 10th floor.**

**Mar. 27, Apr. 24,
& May 29**

Family Education Network

Thursday, March 27, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Thursday, April 24, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Thursday, May 29, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Each session will provide opportunities for participating family literacy educators and parent coordinators to develop mutually beneficial connections and to consider best practices in family literacy.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Mar. 27

Popular Education & Leadership Development

Thursday, March 27, 3:00–8:00 pm

Facilitators: David Greene, Calvin Miles, Jamel Walton, and Ryan Springer

This workshop, presented by Students of Adult Literacy United, aims to develop student and teacher leadership in the fight for literacy and adult education. We will focus on skills and methods that can help build a movement for adult education in NYC. Students and teachers are invited to attend together.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

**Apr. 8 & 15,
May 6 & 20**

Teaching Reading to Adult English Language Learners (CAL Study Circle)

Tuesday, April 8, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Tuesday, April 15, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Tuesday, May 6, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
Tuesday, May 20, 9:30 am–12:30 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

This series will acquaint participants with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to teach reading effectively to adult nonnative speakers of English. The focus will be on identifying types of native language literacy and different models of reading, and on how to foster the four skills essential to reading.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

**Apr. 9 & 23,
May 14**

Learner Persistence in Adult Basic Ed. (NCSALL Study Circle)

Wednesday, April 9, 1:30–5:00 pm
Wednesday, April 23, 1:30–5:00 pm
Wednesday, May 14, 1:30–5:00 pm

Facilitator: Marilyn J. Rymniak

This 3-session, 9-hour NCSALL study circle addresses learner persistence, motivation, and retention in adult basic education. It is based on the findings of NCSALL's research on learner persistence at Harvard. Participants should plan to attend all sessions.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

**Apr. 11 & 25,
May 30**

Teaching Health Literacy

Friday, April 11, 9:00 am–1:00 pm
Friday, April 25, 9:00 am–1:00 pm
Friday, May 30, 9:00 am–1:00 pm

Facilitators: Winston Lawrence, Estella Natal

Participants in these workshops learn a new approach to teaching health literacy. The focus will be on identifying the skills needed to navigate the health care system. Participants will develop lesson plans and try them out in their classrooms. Must attend all three sessions.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Apr. 17

ASISTS Training

Thursday, April 17, 9:30 am–4:00 pm

Facilitator: John Lyons

Please see description under March 11.

RSVP: ASISTS Support at 212.803.3357 or asistssupport@lacnyc.org

Apr. 18

Health Literacy Curriculum for Adult ESOL Beginners

Friday, April 18, 9:30 am–1:00 pm

Facilitators: Susan Dalmas, Judy Trupin

Health literacy has become an increasingly

important topic for adult ESOL learners, but much of the available material is suited to intermediate and advanced students. This session will focus on how the Queens Library curriculum, designed for beginner learners, can be adapted by other programs.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

Apr. 30

BEST Plus Test Administrator Training

Wednesday, April 30, 9:30 am–4:00 pm

Facilitator: Be Jensen

Become a certified BEST Plus administrator. Practice administering the print- and computer-based versions of the test and familiarize yourself with the scoring rubric. Receive a test administrator guide and practice CDs.

RSVP: LAC reservation Line at 212.803.3323 or rsvp@lacnyc.org

LAC Professional Development Center Open Hours

Every Monday, 1–5 pm

Computer Learning Center

Visit our 16-station Internet-connected computer lab to explore ways to use computers to enhance instruction. Browse the web for sites that lend themselves to your lessons, or build a project that uses common office software to enhance communication skills. For information, contact Mariann Fedele, 212.803.3325 or mariannf@lacnyc.org.

Dan Rabideau Clearinghouse

Explore the city's largest collection of materials for adult literacy education, including books, journals, and audiovisual materials on professional development as well as curricular and reading resources for ESOL, ABE, and GED classes. For information, contact Dr. Winston Lawrence, 212.803.3326 or winstonl@lacnyc.org.

Literacy for a Stronger Workforce *continued*

side—the state’s colleges and universities. Too little attention has been paid to the demand side—the need to welcome a new generation of college students, especially adults already in the workforce who must acquire the skills to succeed in the emerging knowledge-based economy.

The American economy is changing in a fundamental way that rewards postsecondary educational attainment as never before. The accompanying table presenting data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (Table 1) shows that in the 10-year boom period from 1992 to 2002, the nation actually lost 400,000 jobs that high school dropouts could do and gained across all 50 states a paltry 100,000 jobs that could be done with only a high school diploma. The days when a good attitude, a good work ethic, and a strong back were enough to get a high-quality job are rapidly vanishing. In that same ten-year period, we created 22 times as many jobs for people with a two-year A.A. degree as for high-school-only graduates.

Since 70 percent of people who will be in the workforce in 2020 are already working, just solidifying the pathway from high school to higher education won’t solve New York’s problems. We can choose to do nothing for our current adult workers with low skills—and pray for the best—or

Table 1. U.S. Jobs Created, 1992–2002

Educational Attainment	Millions of Jobs Created
less than high school	-0.4
high school	0.1
some college	2.4
2-year academic	2.2
2-year technical	2.6
4-year degree	6.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

we can help these workers gain the skills they need to find a good job. If New York takes the latter path, the return on investment will be tremendous.

Data from the Higher Education Council (Table 2) show the dramatic demographic shifts under way in New York State. In 1980, about one-quarter of all New Yorkers were minorities. By 2020, almost half will be. Our state’s educational system has not effectively served its minority youth, especially those in African-American and Latino communities, so high school graduation rates may fall rather than rise over the next few years. In fact, the New York State Department of Labor has found that from 2003 to 2013, the rate at which our high schools produce new graduates will be declining in every area of the state except the suburbs outside New York City.

It should be crystal clear that we need to improve the high school graduation rate as well as equip our current adult workers with all the literacy and numeracy skills they need to help our businesses successfully compete.

Washington State, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and other states are aggressively building programs designed to increase the skills of their adult workforce. New York lags far behind. The absence of a serious

Table 2. N.Y. State Working-Age Population (ages 25–64) by Race/Ethnicity, 1980–2020

Race/Ethnicity	% of 1980 N.Y. Total	% of 2020 N.Y. Total (projected)
Whites	76	56
All Minorities	24	44
African-Americans	12	15
Hispanics/Latinos	9	20
Asian-Americans	2	10
Native Americans	0.2	0.3

Source: Higher Education Council

workforce component to the Commission on Higher Education’s preliminary report makes clear that the challenge is not merely one of resources or structural reform but one of recognition. Our state’s decision makers must recognize that our undertrained workforce constitutes an emerging crisis. Only then will they allocate the necessary resources and enact the needed reforms.

The American economy is changing in a fundamental way that rewards postsecondary educational attainment as never before.

The Commission on Higher Education’s final report is due in June. NYATEP and SCAA have joined with a wide spectrum of businesses, labor unions, and other organizations in a campaign to urge the Commission to sharpen its focus on the educational needs of adult workers. If your organization would like to add its voice to this important discussion, drop us a line (jtweomey@nyatep.org or thilliard@scaany.org) or visit our websites (www.nyatep.org or www.scaany.org/initiatives/working_to_learn.php). ●

A Commitment to Young Adults

> Barbara Sparks

Youth literacy is about giving 16–21-year-olds multiple opportunities to acquire basic skills and an education credential that will help them move into postsecondary education or the labor market.

Youth literacy is about making sure the educational needs of the 138,000 New York City in- and out-of-school youth are taken into account.

Youth literacy is about involving alienated young adults in the learning process.

Youth literacy is about ensuring the future city has educated workers and community members.

Since it was first established in 1983, the Literacy Assistance Center has supported adult literacy programs that offered adult basic education (ABE), GED preparation, and adult secondary education to adults and out-of-school youth. Four years ago, the LAC made a conscious decision to expand its focus beyond supporting programs for youth who are no longer in school, an involvement that includes a commitment to increasing the proportion of students who earn a high school diploma. In part, this choice was spurred by the overwhelming need: 70,000 high school students in New York City are overage and under-credited, according to the NYC Department of Education (DOE), and another 68,000 have already left. This problem has been a chronic one in New York City and nationally. But recently, DOE has made a public commitment to cut the dropout rate dramatically and introduce new programs with funding to back it up. Some of this unprecedented effort can be traced to No Child Left Behind and other legislative mandates, including the Workforce Investment Act focus on enhancing functional literacy skills that improve chances for success in the labor market. New York City's government also appears to be more aware than ever before that in a highly competitive, global, information-based economy, our future prosperity will be determined by the education level of our workers and citizens.

Those most at risk of leaving NYC schools are those who are overage and under-credited.

In 2005 the DOE established the Office of Multiple Pathways to Graduation (OMPG) to increase graduation rates and college readiness for this population of students by developing model programs. So far these have included 30 transfer high schools, 37 different learning-to-work (LTW) programs that combine with GED preparation, and 22 Young Adult Borough Centers (YABCs). About 13,000 students as of the 2006–2007 school year were enrolled in these programs.

The LAC role in the DOE effort is providing staff development support for these diverse educational efforts. Collaborating with OMPG, the LAC offers professional development for the learning-to-work community partners through workshops, networking, technology training, and career resource fairs. These activities are offered on a monthly basis and cover concepts of learning-to-work, information about the latest labor trends, job readiness resources for youth, and access to employers through resource fairs and employer panels. Organizations such as Good Shepherd, FECS, CAMBA, and others supply the job readiness, counseling, internship and job placement services alongside Department of Education teachers who prepare students for the GED tests.

The LAC is in its third year of providing instructional coaches for GED coaches. This academic year, coaches are working with 24 teachers. Coaching is a tool that the LAC has embraced as a way to facilitate deeper engagement by teachers of educational practices that respond directly to their most pressing classroom challenges. It is an intensive, long-term experience that can stimulate permanent behavior change among GED teachers.

The coaches, all veteran GED instructors, meet with each teacher twice a month using a partnership approach to create and implement effective GED teaching strategies. This approach is built around principles of mutuality, choice, dialogue, reflection, and praxis. Instructional coaches encourage collaborating teachers to consider ideas and use them in the way he or she considers most helpful. Subject matter content, teaching strategies and GED test-taking skills are addressed. It means that coaches and teachers focus their attention on how to implement new ideas in the classroom to engage young people in learning.

"I have learned a lot from my coach," commented one teacher who participated in the program during the last academic year. "I owe it to myself to go implement the strategies he provided throughout the year. I would recommend the program to any teacher, especially those teaching the GED for the first time."

The LAC coaches model the practices teachers are learning about in monthly skill building and pedagogy workshops offered through OMPG. The teachers are encouraged to tweak these practices to fit their individual teaching style and classroom situation. "It is great to see an expert at work," one of last year's participants wrote in an evaluation. "It helps us learn and develop our craft as teachers." When teachers try out a new lesson, their coach observes and gives feedback.

Coaching is equally effective in supporting the development of administrators. Working in the regular high schools and the full-time GED ACCESS Centers, the LAC provides leadership coaching to principals and their teams with special attention to supporting program improvement efforts. Effective communication skills are at the center. LAC coaches work with leaders on goal setting and visioning as well as day-to-day routines that facilitate processes and outcomes for systems improvement. Coaching is an ideal tool for administrators who often lack the time to reflect systemically on their leadership strategies and areas in need of improvement.

The LAC's commitment to working with OMPG means that dedicated teachers and school leaders in programs for at-risk high school students have access to intensive coaching that can help them expand their knowledge and enrich their repertoire of essential skills. Working one-on-one, engaging in dialogue communicating about specific situations and contexts are essential ingredients to successful professional development—the LAC priority in all its DOE efforts. ●

TEACHERS' corner >> Strengthening Student Persistence in a Pre-GED Classroom

> Carolyn Karlin *Pre-GED Teacher and Family Literacy Coordinator at Fifth Avenue Committee*

"I can't do it." "It's too hard." "I don't understand." Every Pre-GED teacher has probably heard these phrases, and seen their power to discourage and defeat students. All too frequently when attendance is voluntary, students who become discouraged simply stop coming to class. The consequences can be severe, not just for the individual who drops out, but for the class as a whole.

When I first began teaching Pre-GED classes six years ago, I had much to learn, including what I might do to boost student persistence. As I worked to develop classroom material, I soon recognized that erratic attendance undercut the best of plans. This recognition spurred me to consider the commitment and confidence of my students. These two traits, I began to see, were the keys to student persistence.

Creating a supportive environment

For many Pre-GED students, the realization that their initial expectation of quickly passing the GED exam is unrealistic can be frustrating and demoralizing. This is a time when a supportive classroom community is particularly vital. More generally, in my experience, students who feel frustrated by a lesson are more likely to persist if they are connected to and nurtured by the classroom community.

For me, developing new ways to maintain a supportive and reassuring community in my classroom is a constant preoccupation. I try to provide regular opportunities for students to respond to one another's doubts, to recognize that they share similar concerns, and to offer their peers words of encouragement and advice on how to overcome obstacles they confront. I often follow these discussions with a writing period in which students are encouraged to discuss their doubts about their ability to learn and highlight the thoughts that inspire them to persevere. I've found that articulating their concerns enables students to prevent their anxiety and frustration from escalating. Composing words of advice inspires them to find hopeful and encouraging voices within. Helping peers gives them an opportunity to experience the pride of seeing themselves as teachers.

Last year, when I asked my students to describe how they would encourage their classmates, Charma Sodji from Benin offered them these words of advice:

Think about what you will get after you've finished. You can't give up now. Think about where you started from. Think about how you will feel proud of yourself after all this time. Think about how much your education will help your children. You have to go to school to get a good job. You have to be strong and have courage. Think of an example of someone you know who has finished her studies. You have to trust yourself and believe you can do it.

Our community building draws upon many sources throughout the year. We celebrate student birthdays together, organize community service projects, exchange inspirational quotes, publish student writings, share thoughts on issues ranging from children's schooling to time management, and, most important, find ways to respect and recognize

each student's strengths and experience. This supportive atmosphere gives students strength to overcome hurdles and develop determination and self-confidence.

Making clear that attendance is expected

When I began teaching Pre-GED, I always mentioned the importance of regular attendance but tended to convey an "understanding" and lenient interpretation of what that might mean in practice. Several years of experience with what could be called "fluid attendance" taught me that many absences resulted from minor colds, oversleeping, and other issues that did not seem to be reasonable excuses. When students returned, they were typically behind in their lessons, causing distractions and confusion in class discussions. This problem could have been avoided by constantly repeating lessons; however, that would have interfered with the progress of the class and been unfair to students who attended regularly. In addition, I myself became discouraged when I designed lessons with particular students in mind and they didn't show up.

My solution was to adopt a more rigorous approach. Now I frequently ask my students to discuss the importance of attendance. The class, I tell

Students who feel frustrated by a lesson are more likely to persist if they are connected to and nurtured by the classroom community.

them, is a two-way street. You depend on me to prepare lessons and I depend on you to attend class.

When students are going to miss a class I require that they call our office. If they don't give advance notice, I call after class, check that they are feeling okay, and add that we look forward to seeing them the next day. At the end of each month, I recognize students who have compiled a perfect or near-perfect attendance record. In a lesson on converting fractions to percentages, I ask students to calculate what percentage of class meetings they have attended. I have found that this percentage figure has a greater impact on a student than simply recalling a few missed classes.

Improving lesson plans

Even the pull of a strong community and a desire to meet a teacher's high attendance expectations will not be sufficient incentive to come to class when students do not connect with the substance of the lessons themselves. For me, the greatest challenge has been how to address a

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Strengthening Student Persistence *continued*

broad range of reading and math levels (at times equivalent to seven years) while keeping all of my students engaged. My first model was the old-fashioned one-room schoolhouse. Unfortunately, the literature on this method of teaching was about 70 years out of date.

My current strategy is to devise lessons that combine common-ground instruction with individualized activities. I introduce thematic units, such as poetry, or specific strategies, such as inferential thinking, with a whole-class discussion of the topic. Students ask questions, clarify definitions, and together analyze initial examples. When they are ready to read about the topic, I offer them several levels of related material. This allows students to select material at their reading level and proceed at a rate appropriate to their needs. To deepen their understanding, I encourage students to work in groups. This medley of methods enables students to progress without feeling overwhelmed or bored. On a regular basis, I take time to highlight what the class has mastered and to offer individual recognition for written work the students produce. Seeing their progress encourages them to persevere.

Setting specific goals

In a 1999 article prepared for The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy, John Comings noted that a great “support to persistence is the establishment of a goal by the student.” On the first day of class, I ask my students to share their primary goal or goals for the pre-GED course. These goals provide an important motivation and incentive for persisting in school. Throughout the year, I ask students to revisit their goals—to stay focused on the purpose of their hard work.

Over the last few years I have expanded this strategy to include frequent short-term goal setting. In a unit on measurement, for example, I work with each student to establish a manageable personal goal, be it mastery of perimeter or of complex word problems. By setting reachable goals, students are able to experience success and to recognize their own progress.

In a lesson on converting fractions to percentages, I ask students to calculate what percentage of class meetings they have attended.

At the beginning of a recent month, I tried out a new exercise designed to encourage my students to take responsibility for their learning and stay engaged in their work. I asked each of them to identify a goal for the next 30 days. The responses varied. “Improve my attendance” was one. “Read at home” was another. At the end of the month, many students were able to say, “I said I would do that and I did.” Relatively small though this success was, it gave them the confidence to begin replacing “I can’t” with “I can.” ●

Putting Skills to Work *continued*

in creativity, and elicits a high level of industry from the participants, it does not meet their basic economic needs. We had to find a more direct way to assist parents in achieving their employment or entrepreneurial goals. Our solution has been to design a coaching project, which we will launch in the near future. One of our teachers will act as a career coach, and meet with each participant individually one half-hour per week. Together, they will write a trimester plan with definite goals and objectives based on the participant’s personal goals. They will then utilize the program’s IT facilities to research information, find job openings, write resumes and letters, and perform any other computer tasks the plan calls for. They will also make phone calls when necessary, and record everything in a weekly log. At the end of the trimester, they will evaluate where they are and if necessary redesign the plan.

If the coach and participant decide that special workshops or seminars on specific topics would be helpful, our program will seek out individuals or agencies in the community that can either host an informational gathering or provide the services for us in our center. We hope to get support for this project from businesses, banks, colleges, churches, and other community based organizations in the area.

If this project is successful, participating parents/caregivers will at-

tain their goals faster, and in the process secure their family’s financial stability and sustainability. Our hope is that as a result they will be less

By the end of June, one parent had made a beautiful evening dress and another had sewn her daughter’s graduation dress and finished a sari. The participants also produced beautiful scarves, shawls, and belts.

stressed and better able to pursue the many other goals of our family literacy program—including acquiring skills they will need to guide and support their children in meeting the many challenges they will face as they grow up. ●

Now I Know Who I Am

> María Mizhquiri

When I joined Queens Library Family Literacy program I needed to read, write, and speak in English to be able to understand my children's homework, to understand the school's notices, and to be able to communicate with the teachers during the parent teacher conferences. I remember practicing writing a letter to the Principal of my children's school, writing stories about my country, my family and my childhood. Every night I wrote what I did during the day in my journal.

The teacher video taped the class and then used the image to discuss with us the lesson. We created stories in English and performed them in front of the camera during class as well. Using video camera helped me to lose my fears of trying to communicate with English speaking people.

The after school Parent and Child Together Time (PACT) helped me and my children to read books together and to write funny stories together. During the Children Education component of the program, my children were exposed to new things and given a chance to develop their talents. The Distance Pact Time practice helped me to meet my whole family at night to work on different projects. Together we have illustrated a story that we made up by looking at 6 drawings from a Navajo story. Then, I learned how to assemble the book together during computer classes. I scanned the pictures my children made to illustrate the book. My family and I also created our own cookbook with my favorite recipes from my country, Ecuador.

Now I know who I am and what I want for my children's future. I know what kind of language I have to use to talk with my fifteen year old daughter or how to ask my husband to help me to guide our children and maintain a peaceful home.



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