

LITERACY PLAN FOR MIDDLESEX COUNTY

"New Jersey has a significant adult literacy problem which deeply impacts both the health of our NJ economy and our citizens who need literacy services," NJALL, Adult Literacy in New Jersey, May 2007.

"By one set of measures, more than 88 million adults have at least one major educational barrier—no high school diploma, no college, or ESL language needs." National Commission on Adult Literacy, June 2008

MIDDLESEX COUNTY WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD LITERACY COMMITTEE

GOAL: To achieve a more literate adult community, who are therefore more productive members of the workforce.

MISSION STATEMENT: To be a resource for the literacy provider community and the business community, so that literacy services are available to county residents and so that employers may have access to a more literate workforce.

In the original Literacy Plan adopted by the MC WIB in July of 2002, the following tasks were outlined. The current status of the task is noted beneath each one.

- Incorporating Literacy and Career Resource rooms at the One Stop Career Centers, to provide comprehensive content specific literacy assessment as well as work readiness skill development.

The Learning Links, operating in New Brunswick since July of 2005 and in Perth Amboy since January of 2008, provide the comprehensive literacy assessment for the Career One-Stops. These centers are used for short term instructional intervention, computer literacy instruction and assessment. Each One-Stop also tests customers on the TABE test if warranted prior to assisting them with employment and/or training.

- Establishing the Middlesex County Community Learning Center at Roosevelt to address the literacy needs of all residents, but especially the needs of a significant population in Woodbridge and Edison that is presently underserved.
 - The Community Learning Center has been serving residents since 2004 and has provided over 500 individuals with ESL skills, computer skills, and work readiness skills.
- Addressing the need for updated assessment tools.
 - The Learning Links use the software supplied by the state of New Jersey.
 - The Community Learning Center has purchased additional software specifically suited for low level ESL learners, such as Ellis and Open Book.
- Increasing professional development opportunities for literacy service providers and One Stop Career Center staff by sponsoring a series of professional development workshops focusing on adult learning.

- Staff is made aware of opportunities offered by NJALL for professional development throughout the year.
- Developing workplace literacy projects linked to the needs of the business community (specifically in growth occupational clusters).
 - Our partner, Middlesex County College offers customized training grants for literacy through a state grant given to the County College Consortium. The NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development also provides grants to companies directly, not through the WIB. For the 06-07 year, these direct grants totaled \$668,675.00 and had an estimated service level of 1,236 incumbent workers. The WIB has no knowledge nor input into these grants nor does it receive any outcomes from these 2 sources.
 - The consortium partners and the County College reach out to community groups and businesses so they will know of the available services in literacy. As all of the programs have a long history within their communities, there is little need for advertising, especially since there is usually a waiting list for the classes.
 - Through a quarterly newsletter sent by the Department of Workforce Development to 7000 companies in Middlesex County, literacy services are highlighted at various times throughout the year.

Since the 2002 adoption of this plan, the Middlesex County WIB adopted family literacy as a priority in the fall of 07 and the first of a planned annual workshop for child care providers regarding family literacy was held in February of 08.

A common referral form (Attachment A) was also adopted by the Literacy Committee in July of 2005 for use by all members of the network at the same time a Memorandum of Understanding (Attachment B) was adopted by the Literacy Partners. After reviewing the referral form again in 2008, the committee expects to ask for permission to place the form on the Internet as a template for statewide use. As can be seen in the MOU and the referral form, all partners work together to make certain individuals receive the assistance they need so waiting lists do not become a barrier to success. Referrals between and among the partners will be even easier once the referral form is placed on the computer.

As can be seen in Attachment C, we have printed the information on basic skills and ESL classes that are available throughout Middlesex County in seven languages besides English: Chinese, Russian, Arabic, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Gujarati. The web site for our department within the Middlesex County website is in both English and Spanish and includes information regarding the Community Learning Center (www.co.middlesex.nj.us/employment).

At least two of our consortium partners use volunteers to assist in their educational programs. This enables them to "spread the word" to even more individuals and groups about the services, as well as to augment their staff to serve more people.

WORKFORCE PREPARATION

The Adult Literacy programs in Middlesex County include job training/employment information within their curriculum offerings. Each program includes workplace readiness skills, job search and some even include specific programs like The New Horizons Transition Program. All the programs connect their participants to

the appropriate One Stop office and notification of all job fairs and positive recruitments are circulated to the adult schools through the consortium or the One-Stop Collaboration.

Currently, the Middlesex County WIB has contracts with the New Brunswick Adult Learning Center and the Perth Amboy Adult Learning Center to assist those customers who test below an 8.9 grade level prior to enrolling them in a training program of their choice. The contracts provide at least 16 weeks of education for at least 150 customers per year.

The Youth Corp of Middlesex County, offered by the New Brunswick Adult Learning Center, incorporates classroom instruction with worksite placement so the workplace readiness skills are practiced in a work experience setting. As with all adult learning programs, graduates are helped to obtain full time employment or to attend postsecondary education.

For the adult learner, individual assessment of their goals is developed into an individual learning plan or individual educational plan. Self-study and classroom instruction are both included in the plan, which is reviewed and updated as necessary over time. Whether the adult program uses EFF, or the NJ DOE Curriculum Guide for English as a Second Language Program, or financial management modules, or other approved tools, the needs of the individual student determine his/her progression through the course work to the goal of a high school diploma or GED and eventually, job placement.

Included in many of the programs is an opportunity to use e-learning tools as a component of the total program, especially learning basic computer skills which serves both as a possible step to employment and also as another avenue for education in basic skills or ESL. We have found that e-learning as a stand alone is not productive for these students. It is always combined with classroom instruction or at least interaction with an instructor so comprehension is thorough and complete. Much of the time e-learning is used as practice for the individual rather than the primary teaching method. Please see Attachment D for a list of e-learning programs used by various partners.

Middlesex County is particularly fortunate to have a Learning Link in the New Brunswick One Stop and another one at the Perth Amboy Adult Learning Center for the Perth Amboy One-Stop as noted previously. When you also include our one of a kind Community Learning Center at Roosevelt, Middlesex residents have numerous opportunities to improve their literacy skills for better employment opportunities.

POINTS FROM THE LITERACY FORUM OF SEPTEMBER 19, 2008

At a community forum held at the Middlesex County Fire Academy on September 19, 2008, all in attendance agreed with the following points.

Learning disabilities complicate service delivery for many customers. While DVR can do assessments, the time lag is too long between referral and development of an IEP within DVR. Many present felt DVR needed to become more efficient in their procedures, but it was noted that staffing is an issue for them as well as for most of the providers.

ACTION: Partnering with NJALL, staff at the various programs will be informed of training opportunities through NJALL. Future training opportunities will be explored with the GSETA Institute and Middlesex County College.

Since transportation to service providers is mentioned frequently as a barrier, all agencies were encouraged to have an ample supply of the Middlesex County Transit Maps for customer use. There is more public transportation available than many realize.

ACTION: Copies of all appropriate transportation guides will continue to be supplied to all providers.

With waiting lists at all programs, doing more outreach to community members of the current programs would not be wise.

ACTION: While more outreach will not necessarily be undertaken, we will continue to make certain all libraries, community agencies, faith-based organizations and educational partners are aware of all the active programs so they can better inform their clients of the services available. (See attachment for the brochures that are circulated at this time.) We will continue to seek additional funds so more classes can be offered throughout the county.

E-Learning was noted as an area for more research.

ACTION: After more discussion within the provider community, it was determined that e-learning is not appropriate, except in situations where an instructor is present for assistance, as in the provider community now. We will continue to share information on new computer programs that will enhance the learning experience for our clients.

Adequate facilities to provide training programs is also a concern. Suggestions were made to use senior centers in the afternoon or evening, libraries, YMCAs and churches in each town. Insurance liability issues would need to be explored.

ACTION: After further discussion within the provider community, it was determined that space is not a factor. The barrier is funding for the faculty. There is space within public schools and other public facilities but there are inadequate funds for more staff.

The provider community needs to illustrate how companies and society benefit by increased literacy skills of the residents. This is an economic development issue for municipalities as well.

ACTION: More attempts will be made to publicize the successes of our students within the employment community and to elected officials so more support can be generated for increased funding and participation by employers for their employees. The state of NJ currently has given money to the County Colleges for basic skills training for incumbent workers, although not through the WIBs, nor the Literacy Consortiums. We will seek to collaborate with the colleges to highlight the success of this program.

Volunteerism should be promoted. Suggestions for sources of volunteers included Rutgers, MCC, Community groups (Rotary, etc.), seniors themselves, RSVP, AARP, Associations such as the National Association of Social Workers, etc.

ACTION: While some organizations use volunteers, many do not due to the skills required for the teachers or due to agency policy. We will seek to define how and where volunteers can play an

enhancement role in literacy education and make those opportunities available to all interested groups.

Funding for adequate staff positions to teach all necessary classes continues as a primary barrier to providing training for all who are interested.

ACTION: As has been stated throughout this plan, we will continue to seek multiple funding sources to increase the availability of services to our residents.

As is true of all plans, as we see opportunities to provide other activities that will benefit the residents, we will try our best to include them as well. Given the need in this area, we will continue to reach out to all agencies and institutions that could partner with us to provide more services.

We would appreciate more communication from the state of New Jersey when any distribution of funds, from any source, are contemplated so the local community has the opportunity to give input prior to the award of funds as well as to the goals, measurements/outcomes and how the entire region will be impacted by such distribution. The only way to improve and expand services is with all entities working together so decisions are made with full, factual knowledge of the current system.