

Part I: Applicant Information and Proposal Summary

Program Name:

Project Success: GED Completers Transitioning to Postsecondary Education to Prepare for Employment in High Growth Industries (Focus on Financial Services and IT)

Start Date: June 1, 2008 **End Date:** December 31, 2009

Project Director: Dr. Peter Balsamo, VP Workforce and Community Development; Chief GED Examiner. Phone: 570-740-0601; pbalsamo@luzerne.edu

Organizational Background:

Luzerne County Community College (LCCC) is Northeastern Pennsylvania's largest college. From its 167-acre Nanticoke campus and branch campuses throughout the region, LCCC serves 16,000 students each year. It offers over one hundred academic, career and technical programs, most on an open admissions basis, to high school and GED program graduates. Over 84% of all LCCC graduates live and work in the region.

The college is recognized as a leading resource for workforce development and continuing education. Its programs meet a growing demand for health science, business and information management professionals, with courses and instructional resources that reflect industry standards. In a recent survey, fully 100% of the employers of LCCC alumni expressed an interest in hiring future LCCC graduates. And 95% of graduates rated the preparation they received as "good to excellent."

LCCC is committed to the individual needs of its students by offering opportunities for academic and personal growth with a focus on positive and educational experiences. Individual learning styles are taken into account when planning programs and varied options of instruction are offered.

As part of Luzerne County Community College's strategic planning, the programs and courses at LCCC are designed to enhance student success related to credit and non-credit programs by meeting the changing needs of students, improving transfer and career programs that lead to job placement and by creating new opportunities for credit and non-credit courses and program research, development and implementation.

Partnership Members/Collaborators:

Keystone Job Corps, Drums, PA
CareerLink, Wilkes-Barre, PA
Educational Opportunity Center, Kingston, PA

Proposal Summary:

The Luzerne County Community College's Division of Workforce and Community Development proposes to develop a pilot project for GED completers (principally between the ages of 18-30) who desire to focus on pursuing postsecondary education since the majority of new jobs (90%) will require a degree or some level of college education. In partnership with the aforementioned three agencies, Luzerne County Community College proposes to develop a model comprehensive college preparation program for GED completers called *Project Success* that can easily be replicated by other community colleges.

The goal of the proposed program is for GED completers to pursue an associate's degree (preferably focusing on Financial Services and IT related degree programs) that includes components of targeted case management, ACT/WorkKeys Career Readiness Certificate, two courses of three credits each (i.e., College Readiness and Career Development/Assessment), earning additional college credit through CLEP exams, financial literacy instruction, service learning, and computer applications certification (ICDL). The credit courses would be delivered in a blended learning format with each student having their own computer and tuition/book expenses paid for the initial two 3 sh courses. (The e-learning delivery format is based on research conducted by the *Sloan Center on Innovative Training and Workforce Development* at Rutgers University). Each participating student would be assigned a mentor who will have consistent contact to provide support, encouragement, and advice. In addition, college professional staff members from the Counseling Center and Financial Aid Office will be assigned to work with the participants.

The core component of the program is the provision of the two credit courses, probably the first college credit courses ever taken by these students. **Recent research indicates that academic performance in GED completers' first term has a strong, positive relationship to persistence.** The credit course on college readiness ("Mastering the College Experience") will help the GED completers discover the power of self-responsibility, offer examples that will teach them how to change a habit, and provide methods to manage their time more effectively. The other credit course on career development/assessment ("Career Advantage: Strategies for Success") features organized decision-making, techniques for accessing complicated job markets, and motivation exercises to maintain focus.

A total of at least 40 students would be served by this program starting in June 2008 and concluding in December 2009. There will be two cohorts, one starting in summer 2008 and the other starting in summer 2009. No more than 22 students would be admitted into each cohort-based/learning community program. The minimum program admission criteria would be at least 2550 GED standard score and a score of at least 500 in three subtests out of the five (Math, Reading, Writing, Science and Social Studies). Possible outcomes: no more than 10% of the students are ever enrolled in one developmental course; 75% continue their studies semester to semester (minimum of 6 sh each semester); 50% are studying full time each semester (since full time study correlates with persistence and completion). Expected long-term outcomes (within three years) are that 70% earn their associate's degree; at graduation, 50% transfer to earn their bachelor's degree and 50% obtain a job offering family sustaining wages with full benefits.

Part II: Proposal Narrative

Project Need:

Improving access to and success in completing postsecondary education is crucial for the future economic well-being of the region, Commonwealth, and United States. In his book, *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman stressed the idea of global competition, indicating that businesses will locate to where the talent is. This means that individual lifelong employment has been replaced by life employability. The successful workers in this economy will be the “knowledge workers” who have specialized skills and training. These skills will require some type of postsecondary training. Unfortunately for Northeastern Pennsylvania, current data shows we are behind the curve in meeting employer needs for skilled workers. The 2006 *American Community Survey* of the U.S. Census data indicates about 14% of Luzerne County population (18 years and older) does not have a high school diploma (that translates to approximately 35,000 people out of 250,234 adult population). Most distressing is the fact that about 3,000 of the 18-24 year old population in Luzerne County do not have a high school diploma, which represents almost 10% of that population group. These 18-24 year old individuals are the future workers businesses must rely on for their profitability, productivity, and sustainability.

Northeastern Pennsylvania is also about to enter into a declining period of young people graduating from high school. The Census Bureau also indicates that there will be roughly a 3% decline in the number of high school graduates by the year 2016. At the same time, the high school dropout rate is slowly rising. High school dropouts have seen real earnings decline by about 20%. These trends indicate a greater need to have in place high quality alternative options for young adults who lack the basic credential of a high school diploma which is considered the “*admission ticket*” to higher learning and greater employment options. One possible and viable solution is the GED to college option.

GED completers need to focus on pursuing postsecondary education since more than 90% of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S require at least some postsecondary education. Sixty three percent of the fastest growing jobs require a college degree. (*The Cost of Dropping Out: The Effects of the High School Drop Out Rate on America’s Competitiveness*). During a March 2008 webinar sponsored by the US Dept of Labor and titled “Building a Skilled Educated Workforce: Exploring Multiple Pathways to a Community College for Out-of-School Youth,” one of the presented indicated the following: “We know that 12% of GED recipients complete one year of college. However, only six percent complete two years of college. So the challenge is there. A GED does improve a high school dropout’s opportunities in the labor market. **Over a five year period they can increase their wage earnings by 15% compared to a high school dropout.** GED recipients tend to be ill-equipped to compete in the global market because of the lack of education and lack of computer skills.”

Dr. Stephen Reder, author of *Adult Education and Postsecondary Success* (National Commission on Adult Literacy, Sept. 2007) indicated: “Our high school dropout rates are too high and growing; our postsecondary persistence and completion rates are too low and declining. The limited distribution of functional literacy skills in our current workforce is a drag on our national productivity and economic well-being. Unless we *develop and implement successful educational interventions, projections of our future workforce paint an even grimmer economic future for us.*” GED completers can provide important dividends to the workforce pipeline. This project focuses on preparing an essentially “forgotten” group of individuals to be successful in their academic pursuits and in preparing them to be high quality workers, especially in the financial services and IT fields.

Goals/Objectives:

Goal: To prepare a group of GED completers, principally between the ages of 18-30, to be successful in their pursuit of a college education in order for them to compete in the global marketplace. To give these students the tools, strategies and support necessary to earn an associate’s degree, preferably in a field related to financial services or IT.

Objective One: Students complete the ACT WorkKeys National Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) and the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) Certificate so they know they are successful by earning nationally recognized credentials; provide students the motivation, skills and knowledge necessary for academic success especially in Reading and Math that will keep them away from developmental/remedial coursework that does not count towards a degree; collect research data to determine if there are correlations between the CRC scores, GED scores, and Accuplacer scores.

Objective Two: Provide the students with intensive case management and mentoring (such as professionals in the financial services and IT fields) so their questions are consistently answered correctly and they know exactly what resources to access so they are successful in their academic pursuits, career decisions, and life challenges. Provide intensive and focused counseling/academic advising and financial aid services.

Objective Three: Students complete two 3 sh credit courses (College Readiness and Career Development/Assessment) so they have crucial and essential skills and knowledge to successfully complete their academic studies. Provide students detailed information on career opportunities in the financial services and IT fields. Relate this information to the results of the CRC scores by using the profile database in WorkKeys so they know if they have the requisite, basic and foundational skills and knowledge to successfully complete their studies (heavy focus on Mathematics, Reading and Writing).

Objective Four: Provide metrics that show students' are persisting in their studies after the completion of the CRC, ICDL, and the two 3 sh credit courses.

Objective Five: Deliver the two credit courses using a hybrid delivery format (i.e., combining face-to-face instruction with online instruction) so students understand the importance of technology for learning and to realize this experience with e-learning will have a positive impact on their busy schedules and their future career prospects.

Approach:

By earning the WorkKeys *Career Readiness Certificate* and the *International Computer Driving License (ICDL)* students demonstrate they can be successful by earning nationally recognized credentials and they have the skills and knowledge necessary for academic success especially in reading and math that will hopefully prevent them from enrolling in developmental/remedial coursework that does not count towards a degree. Based on the WorkKeys skills assessment, the student receives a gold, silver or bronze-level certificate stating the exact skill levels he/she has in those areas. Gold means that the person has the assessed skill levels required in **90 percent** of jobs; silver, skills required for **65 percent**; and bronze, **35 percent**. The expectation is that at least 80% of the **Project Success** students will receive a Gold Certificate. The ICDL basic certificate provides skill certification in word processing, file management, and Internet applications.

During the fall semester the students enroll as a cohort (learning community) in 6 credit hours -- **Career and Life Planning** (3 crs) and **College Success** (3 crs). The courses are delivered in a blended learning format, i.e., they meet as a group at least 6-8 times per month and the rest of the work is done on-line/e-learning. Blended learning has proven successful with GED students at the Rutgers University Sloan Center. It provides flexibility in time and space by working around students' schedules. Availability and use of a computer with broadband connection helps alleviate childcare demands, transportation demands, and increases student's confidence and self-esteem. Once these two important foundational courses are offered, students will continue taking academic credit courses that will lead to the associate's degree. Targeted case management and mentoring will be carefully implemented to ensure students persist and are successful in their studies and degree completion.

Students who obtain a certain score on a subtest (eg. 550) will be strongly encouraged to pursue CLEP exams in order to accelerate/accumulate semester hours towards the degree. The following CLEP exams might closely relate to subtests: Freshman Composition, English Composition, Social Sciences and History, Western Civilization I and II, History of the United States I and II, College Mathematics, Natural Sciences, and Foreign Languages such Spanish or French. Students would be strongly encouraged to participate in a structured preparation course (either

independently or in a small group) before registering to sit for a CLEP exam (cf: *Predictability Research Study between GED Writing Skills Test and CLEP General English Composition*, 1993, Anita Turner, North Shore Community College, Davers, MA. ED 366 371)

Each student is assigned a **mentor**, such as a local businessperson from the financial services and IT fields, current matriculated student who has a GED diploma, or an educator who is especially interested and committed to the needs and aspirations of GED completers. The mentor is expected to maintain contact (phone, face to face, and email) at least every two weeks. Based on the success of the GED Scholars Initiative at Kent State University mentors and mentees will “encourage the consideration of unexplored possibilities; plan and implement goals for success; explore potential career opportunities; and develop strategies for efficiently negotiating the higher education system.” Like the GED Scholars Initiative mentoring component, the purpose of the Project Life Success mentoring component is for the student/participants to “receive beneficial, on-going support and guidance by encouraging community building and promoting a positive successful learning experience.”

Impact:

Based on extensive research there are no comprehensive college preparation programs for GED completers currently operating in the United States as detailed and focused as Project Success that include the components of the CRC, ICDL, CLEP, two intensive credit courses, and e-learning delivery. We expect the students who complete this program will experience “life changing” results, the most important being self-efficacy, self-responsibility, teamwork, and the motivation and understanding of the importance of continued learning and educational skills and credentials. If this program would not be available, many of these GED completers would not pursue higher education and never know about the myriad opportunities they can avail themselves.

Partners and Roles:

Dr. Peter Balsamo, Vice President for Workforce and Community Development and Chief GED Examiner at LCCC, will serve as the project director. He will oversee the grant administration and supervise the program coordinator/case manager. He will coordinate the advisory committee of the partners and direct curriculum and program design. Sue Spry, Associate Dean, Workforce Development, will provide back up support and consultation.

The key partners in this proposed project include: **Keystone Job Corps** in Drums (Carmen Feola), **CareerLink** in Wilkes-Barre (Bill Dunn), and the **Educational Opportunity Center** in Kingston (Sharon Bartolini). These organizations, and their respective representatives, are essential partners in identifying and selecting potential students, providing guidance and direction on program design and implementation, and assisting with evaluation and assessment. **Joe Alaimo**, Assistant Director of Financial Aid at LCCC, will provide all support relating to financial aid issues; **Kim Dyszlewski**, Counselor, will provide all services relating to academic advising, personal counseling, and referral to community resources. Other college professional staff will be called up to provide advice and consultation as needed on issues such as program design, student services, and referral to community resources. These staff include **Kim Gavlick**, GED Instructional Program Specialist; **Mary Ghilani**, Director of Career Services, and **Ann Saxton**, Project Director of New Choices/New Options program.

Benchmarks:

1) 80% of students earn the CRC Gold Certificate (Level 5) and the ICDL Basic Certificate by December 2008 for the first cohort and by December 2009 for the second cohort ; 2) 80% of the students in each cohort earn a grade of at least B in the two 3 sh credit courses; 3) No more than 10% of the students in each cohort will enroll in a noncredit developmental course after the completion of the two 3 sh courses; 4) 75% of students in each cohort continue their studies into the second (Spring) semester; and 5) no more than 50% of the students in each cohort are working full time (more than 40 hours) during their enrollment in the two 3 sh courses each (Fall) semester (since full time study correlates with persistence and completion).

