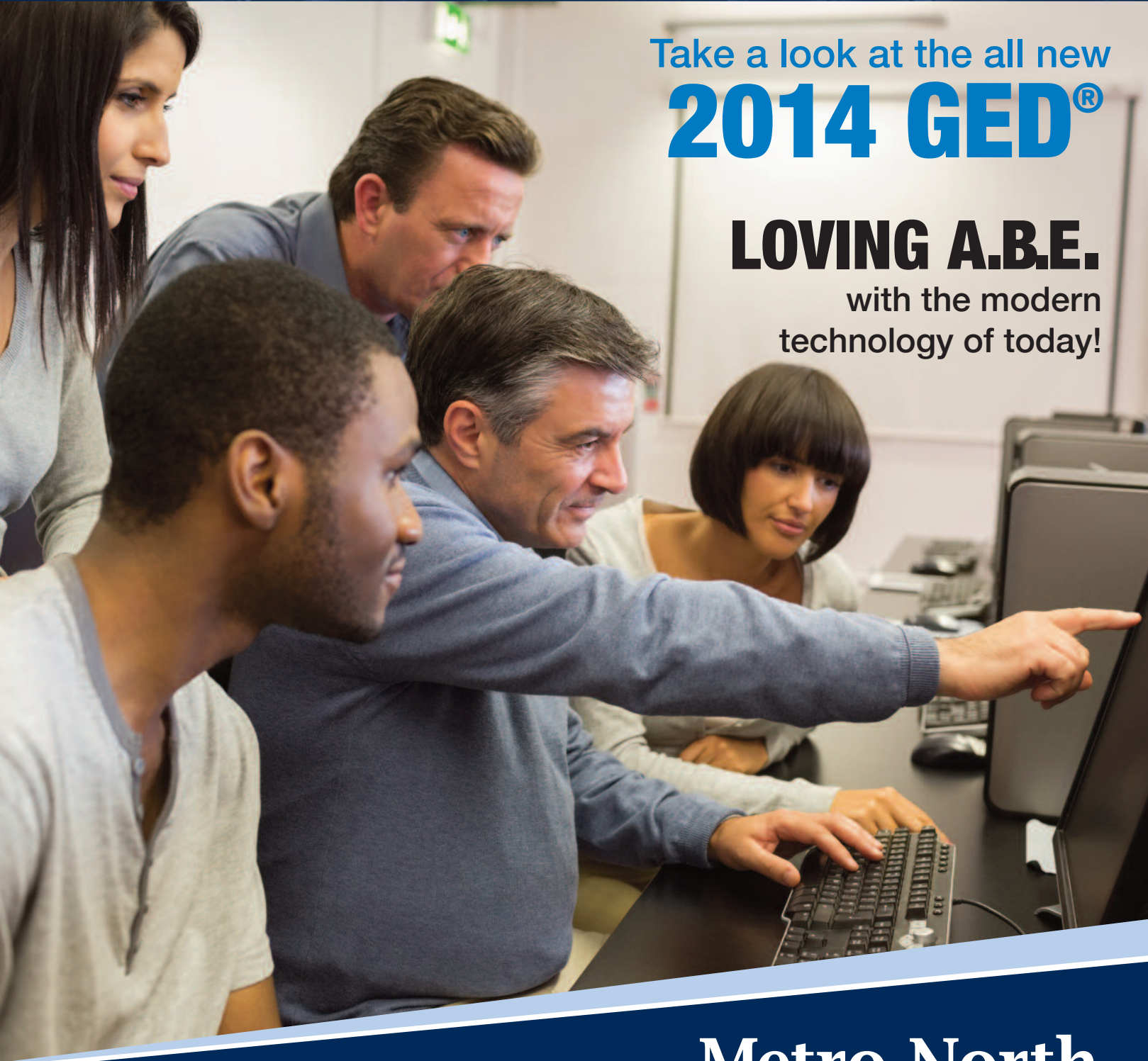


CONSORTIUM

Providing free basic education and English classes for adults from all backgrounds.

Take a look at the all new
2014 GED®

LOVING A.B.E.
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technology of today!



Metro North
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

– Sponsored by Community Education –

Welcome to the new Consortium Newsletter!

For many reasons, I am excited to be writing this introduction to our first Metro North ABE Consortium Newsletter. If you are receiving this newsletter, it means you have some connection to, and likely contribute to, the success of our consortium work.

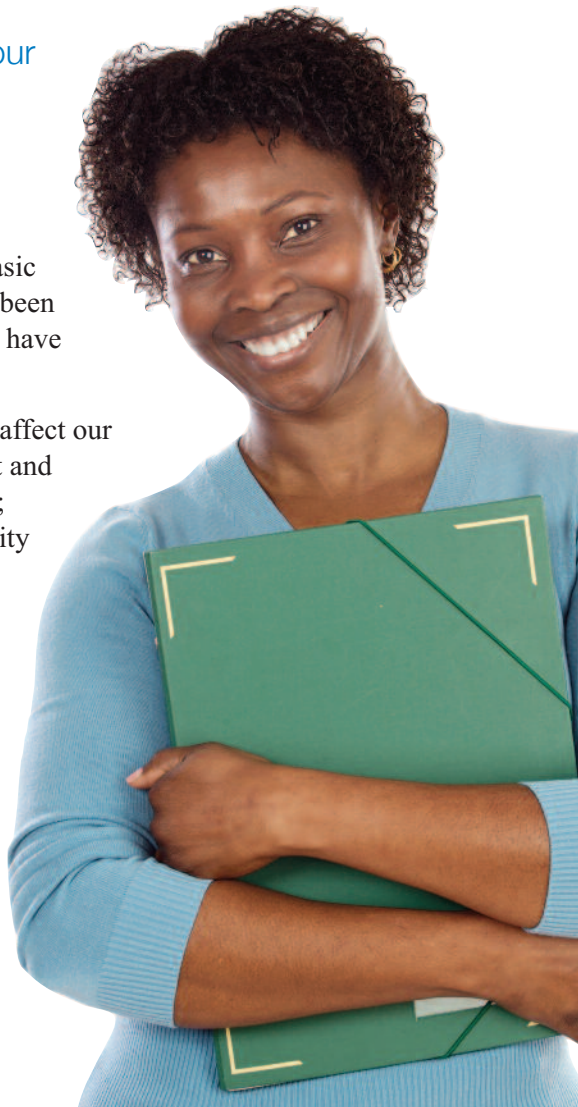
Metro North ABE has been providing broad and ever-changing responsive adult basic education services to the northwestern metro area for over 35 years. We have long been the third largest community-based ABE program in Minnesota. In recent years, we have served about 6,000 adult students each year.

We have so many resources that support our ABE consortium, and they ultimately affect our students’ success. We have supportive leadership at the state and local level; robust and responsive programs, projects, and grants; multiple easily-accessible learning sites; well-trained dedicated staff and volunteers; vigorous connections to local community organizations and agencies; and partnerships with employers, workforce centers, and colleges. All these assets promote student success, which is evident with our consistent students’ achievements. Our students gain academic skills, plus transition into post-secondary training and employment.

In this first newsletter, and in future newsletters, you will hear more about our assets and our student achievements. Within our newsletters, you may see that your contribution to Metro North ABE is featured, you may find an opportunity to contribute, or you may discover a new service or resource for learners. You will surely be inspired by the hard work of all our students, volunteers, staff, and partners.

I’m excited that this newsletter will strengthen the connection we have with you.

— Pat Adams, Anoka-Hennepin Community Education Assistant Manager



About Metro North ABE

Our mission is to inspire and challenge all learners to reach their full potential. We will teach the skills needed to succeed as responsible citizens in out changing world.

Our vision is to provide programs that effectively develop the skills needed by individuals to achieve their goals.

Location Supervisors & Site Coordinators

- Pat Adams: Anoka-Hennepin Community Education Asst. Manager
- Kathleen Moriarty: Supervisor, Columbia Heights & Brooklyn Center
- Pam Moriarity: Site Coordinator, Elk River
- Melody Panek: Site Coordinator, St. Francis
- Kara Rotramel: Site Coordinator, Forest Lake
- Molly Stewart: Supervisor, Blaine
- Emily Watts: Supervisor, Anoka Technical College & Anoka-Ramsey Community College
- Dr. Cathy Wyland: Centennial Community Education Director

ACES 101

What is ACES?

ACES stands for Academic, Career & Employability Skills initiative. According to the ATLAS homepage for ACES, “The goal of ACES is to ensure that ABE programs are able to provide effective contextualized instruction integrating post-secondary education and training readiness, employability skills, and career readiness at all levels.” ACES provides professional development and tools/resources to assist teachers in integrating these skills across all levels. For more information: <http://atlasabe.org/professional/transitions>

How is Metro North ABE involved?

Metro North ABE had several staff participate early in the development process for ACES, as pilot teachers. In addition, Kara Rotramel, Forest Lake’s site coordinator, was on the state project team. Once the plan for ACES and TIF (Transitions Integration Framework) were in place, study circle facilitators were trained to offer three sessions for teachers. Kara Rotramel and Melody Chalmers were trained as facilitators. Melody trained in three teachers during the pilot in FY14. This year, with funding through our West Metro Regional Transitions grants, Metro North ABE is training all teachers through a three-part study circle. The sessions are offered during the full staff development events. Part one took place on Sept. 24, 2014, part two will take place on Jan. 27, 2015, and part three on May 5, 2015. As part of the study circle, teachers will be implementing integration of the first three TIF categories: effective communication, self-management, and critical thinking.

Acing It

How often during your work day do you do any of the following:

Engage positively and actively with individuals in both one-on-one, as well as team settings to accomplish goals; manage time effectively to complete tasks; solve problems; use information to draw conclusions and make decisions; and navigate a system? You’re using soft skills on a daily basis!

The ability to use these “soft skills” or “transition skills” effectively is often what makes a positive difference for an individual in school or work. ACES (Academic, Career, and Employability Skills Initiative) is a state-led project that provides professional development for ABE teachers on how to integrate soft skills and transitions skills into instruction at all levels. A Transitions Integration Framework (TIF) was created as a tool for teachers to assess how they are currently addressing transitions skills in their classes, and how they can enhance their incorporation of these skills into their lessons. Two of the TIF categories, Academic Language and Skills & Numeracy, are aligned with the new College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) for adult basic education. There are also several skills within other TIF categories that also align with these standards. Academic, career, and employability skill development doesn’t wait until learners are in a GED or college prep class. ACES supports instruction at all levels, starting with beginning ESL

Metro North Adult Basic Education staff Kara Rotramel and Melody Chalmers facilitate study circles as



the professional development offering for ACES. During the study circle sessions, staff are becoming familiar with how to use the TIF. This year, the focus is on the first three TIF categories: Effective Communication, Critical Thinking, and Self-Management. Teachers will learn how to “TIF their lesson plans” through the following steps outlined by ATLAS ACES training: Assess how their lesson plan already meets transition skills, look for ways to complement what they already have in place to meet additional skills and sub-skills, evaluate the lesson for evidence of student learning, and study and reflect on what was effective and what needs to be adjusted.

Actively involved since the beginning of the ACES initiative, Kara Rotramel, Forest Lake site coordinator, has found the professional development and tools provided very beneficial. According to Kara, “The TIF gave me permission to discuss and work on things that we don’t see in many of our books (like soft skills or navigating systems). It was really enlightening (and a little discouraging) to see the statistics on how often our learners struggle after they leave us. I think using the TIF, and teaching from the categories listed there, really help our learners transition more successfully after they leave us.”

Introducing the 2014 GED

The new 2014 GED® exam undergoes its 4th revision since its development in 1942; the last update occurred back in 2002.

An opportunity initially created to assist soldiers returning from World War II to secure employment and enter postsecondary without the traditional high school diploma, the General Education Development (GED) exams have been in existence for more than 70 years. Developed by the American Council of Education (ACE), the GED test is a series of standardized subject-based exams designed to measure the skills and knowledge of a learner that would be demonstrated in a typical high school experience.

Since 1942, the GED has gone through four revisions, each in response to the changing expectations of the American high school experience. In 1988, in the third revision of the exam series, the essay portion was introduced, requiring test takers to provide a writing sample. In 2002, the exam was updated to reflect current high school standards; it

was a paper and pencil test using multiple-choice questions, with a personal opinion essay in the writing section. There were five exams that combined to create the full test battery; learners needed to score passing marks in math, reading, science, social studies, and writing.

In 2014, the exam underwent what many people see as its most major revision to date. In addition to moving away from the paper and pencil version to a computer-based model, ACE combined the reading and writing portions of the exam to reduce the overall number of exams in the battery to four, added in math and writing components to nearly every topic area, and developed questions that required higher-level thinking skills.

The shift from a paper-and-pencil exam to a computer-based model, administered by Pearson Vue, has been contro-



versial for many ABE programs across the country, including Minnesota. Many people argued that adult learners returning to complete their education might not have the required skills to successfully navigate a computer-based test, which requires test takers to be able to navigate between viewing panes, use a mouse, and type in an essay. ABE programs have responded by increasing computer access for learners, setting up exam question simulations, and working on general keyboarding skills to help reduce learner anxiety. Since the release of the exam series in January 2014, Pearson Vue adjusted some of its initial

expectations, allowing test takers to use a handheld calculator, reducing the need for an additional application to be open on the screen during testing.

The new exam also attempts to create a standard more similar to that of today’s graduating high school senior by co-mingling the topic areas across the individual exam topics. Similar to a high school class, the exam questions may ask learners to look at a bar graph in the social studies section of the exam and compute change over time, or to interpret data from a science experiment. An essay, or extended response, has been introduced into the social studies exam,

asking test takers to be able to make connections and inferences from two related events and to use prior knowledge to support their argument. The reading level of the exam has also increased, as has the content knowledge required. ABE instructors have responded to these changes by brushing up on their knowledge base through professional development and changing their instructional delivery methods. Pearson Vue has developed the GED Ready to allow test takers the opportunity to take a practice exam that is intended to predict success on the official exam.

In addition to co-mingling the content

areas of the exam, the types of questions which learners need to be able to reason has grown. Besides just multiple choice options, today’s test takers are asked to type in short answers, “click and drag” content to the correct location within a chart and fill in the blank. Testing learners with these sorts of higher-level thinking aligns with the current high school model, and is also a significant change from the previous exam. Learners are now asked to not just provide a writing sample, but also to demonstrate how they can connect one event to another using prior knowledge. Metro North ABE has responded to the changes in the GED by ensuring that instructors, support staff, and volunteers understand the changes to the exam, providing professional development to adapt instructional techniques and communicating with the community about how they can meet their educational goals.

To become a volunteer in a GED classroom, or to refer someone to our program, please call Metro North ABE at 762-783-4920.

Spotlight on Metro North ABE’s Blaine Learning Lab

The past year has brought many changes to the Blaine Learning Lab (BLL), including the launch of the 2014 GED®. Before the new test was released, Blaine staff realized that this was a very different and more rigorous test than the previous one. They decided to take a proactive approach by adapting programming to help learners find success on the new GED®.

Blaine staff started by making math and technology a priority in their program. Two ESL teachers were selected to attend MNI (Minnesota Math Initiative) training to help ensure that students, even at the ESL level,

were getting access to quality math instruction. The use of online learning also became an expectation for all levels of learners throughout the program. Evening ABE programming was separated into individually placed reading and math classes and began requiring an additional six distance learning lessons each week. To support these changes, Blaine created a Distance Learning Team, doubled its open computer lab hours, and updated its technology, including the purchase of 48 Chromebooks!

BLL has also continued its collaboration with the Anoka County Workforce Center

by offering Jump Start Your Success, a fast-paced program designed to meet the needs of the new GED® tests. The course began in July and utilizes a 12-week rotating curriculum. Blaine’s partners at the Workforce Center provide financial support (daycare assistance, transportation, and testing fees) to shared clients to help them overcome barriers to their success. To date, there is an 83% success rate for learners who complete the program. In addition to Jump Start, BLL has developed a team teaching approach for the higher ABE daytime learners that creates an opportunity for large group and specialized small group instruction. Learners now have access to weekly Job Skills

classes offered by the Workforce Center.

Finally, BLL continues to have staff actively learning the most up-to-date information on the new GED® tests by participating in statewide GED®, MNI, and CCRS (College and Career Readiness Standards) Committees. They share their work at the state, local and national levels, providing professional development for ABE educators on the new tests. A couple of BLL staff have even presented about the new Jump Start program at a state conference in Georgia and now help support curriculum pilots in that state.

Congratulations on all of your hard work, Blaine Learning Lab staff and learners!

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING...

“All the teachers and volunteers make learning fun, even for a guy who hasn’t been in school for 34 years. After I get my GED, I will come and volunteer to help others like I’ve been helped.” —Bob

“Getting a GED is important to me because I will have a better education AND feel better about myself.” —Kim

“I decided to get my GED so my kid would be proud of his mom and think she’s smart.” —Wynetta

“If there was any advice I could give to anyone doing the GED class, it’d be to persevere.” —Becca

Technology in ABE

The year—1977. Early PCs like the Apple II, the Commodore PET, and Radio Shack's TRS-80 were newly on the market. The cost of these technological dandies was \$1,200-\$3,000, but they went on to sell millions. The Apple II was the only one with a full-color graphics-capable display, and eventually became the best-seller among the trinity, with more than 4 million units sold.

Today's Adult Basic Education classroom is a far cry from those early days. The use of modern technology as a tool for learning enhances the education of adult learners, opens up new methods of teaching, and extends alternative learning opportunities to new groups of students. The thoughtful integration of technology into the traditional classroom is necessary to ensure students have the necessary tools needed to thrive in a complex and rapidly changing technological society. Since the new GED® 2014 is a computerized test, adult learners must be proficient in word processing and using techniques like a drop down menu or drag-and-drop test items.

“Digital technologies for learning, such as self-paced learning modules, multimedia case studies, simulations, video tutorials, and communications and assessment tools, can increase the array of learning opportunities for adult students and their teachers” (US Dept of Ed, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education).

The Minnesota Literacy Council offers a wide variety of free technology training and distance learning opportunities for staff, volunteers, and learners. The Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment is a tool ABE teachers use to help assess the technology needs of students.

Metro North ABE teachers strive to engage all learners in the use of technology. Computer labs at all sites are

available for students to access to learn basic digital literacy skills or to apply for jobs and create resumes. Some sites offer specific classes in the computer labs, while others offer individualized instruction during independent study. Distance learning programs like Plato, Skills Tutor, Mindquest, I-Pathways, and USA Learns are platforms that teachers use to encourage learners to continue their studies in the classroom or from the privacy of their homes. Some Metro North ABE sites like Blaine and Elk River will also be implementing the use of Google Chromebooks in the classroom as soon as they can be purchased and properly established.

Register for a wide variety of free technology training courses on the MN Literacy Council's website at:
<http://online.themlc.org>.

In the spring of 2014, the Metro North ABE site at Columbia Heights/Fridley received funding from the AmeriCorps Community Technology Empowerment Project (CTEP) for a volunteer to serve in their Adult Education Center. AmeriCorps CTEP bridges the digital divide for new immigrants and low-income communities in Minneapolis and



St. Paul. AmeriCorps CTEP members make the Information Age accessible to all. CTEP partner organizations include: St. Paul Neighborhood Network (SPNN), the Community Computer Access Network (CCAN), the City of Minneapolis, and the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR).

Josh Katzenmeyer officially began his role as the CTEP volunteer working at CHF site on September 4, 2014, and will serve Metro North until September 2015. Josh is currently providing technology training for interested ABE learners that include basic computer skills, introduction to e-mailing, and an introduction to the Internet.

For further information about CTEP volunteering or class offerings, please contact the Columbia Heights/Fridley ABE Supervisor Kathleen Moriarty Kathleen.moriarty@anoka.k12.mn.us, or CTEP volunteer Josh Katzenmeyer josh.katzenmeyer@anoka.k12.mn.us.

Student Stats with Linda

From May 1–October 31, 2014, Metro North ABE staff, with the help of over 196 volunteers, has provided information and instruction to over 3,000 potential learners.

Over 1,700 of those 3,000 learners have enrolled in ABE programs to build their skills and improve basic reading, writing, and math, or to learn to speak conversational English. Skills gained during ABE classes have also assisted these learners to gain employment, earn their high school diploma, take the GED 2014 test, acquire U.S. citizenship, and enroll in specialized training, and/or college.

The following information can be used for sharing in your communities about the learners served in ABE:

- They came from 100 different countries, not including the U.S.
- They speak 75 different languages, not including English.

- 20 learners who had the goal of gaining employment, met that goal.
- 12 learners who had the goal of keeping their employment, met their goal.
- 48 learners who had the goal of entering post-secondary training or post-secondary education/college, met their goal.
- 6 learners who had the goal of completing their remaining Diploma credits and earning their HS Diploma, met their goal.
- 55% of learners are between the ages of 25-44 years old, 20% are between the ages of 19-24, 19% are between the ages of 45-59, and 4% of our learners are older than 60.
- 55% of learners indicated they were “low income,” which is a family income of \$21,257 or less.
- 28% of learners have at least 1 child between the ages of 0-5, 23% have at least 1 child between the ages of 6-11, and 15% have at least 1 child between the ages of 13-18.
- 41% of our learners heard about ABE from their family/friends.

Volunteers in Metro North

Volunteers support Metro North ABE learners in classrooms across the consortium. Some of these volunteers come to us as part of service-learning projects at metro area colleges. In order to earn full course credits, some students are expected to complete volunteer hours of service in their community. This year, our Saint Francis site has two service-learning volunteers, Ka Thao and Michal Glover. Both women bring a new and fresh perspective to the program. We love their new ideas and their willingness to provide the best assistance they can to our diverse group of adult learners.

Our program benefits them, as university students, because they can put into real practice the learning theories they have been studying. As Michal, an ESL Teaching program student stated, “I am grateful to have the opportunity to learn in a real classroom setting because it brings the concepts I have been studying at college down to earth. It makes it all have a deeper meaning and is more practical.”

We appreciate our volunteers who show so much energy and enthusiasm for our classroom and students.



CCRS Implementation is Coming to Minnesota...

While MN ABE practitioners have been hard at work navigating the use of the ACES TIF in their classrooms, the CCRS Implementation Team has been working hard to bring teachers the next phase of “Standards Based Instruction.” The CCRS (Career and College Readiness Standards) can be thought of as part of a three-pronged approach to content standards in MN ABE, together with the TIF and the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards. What makes the CCRS standards different from the other two sets of benchmarks is that they focus on English Language Arts/Literacy, Math, and Foundational Reading Skills in order to better prepare our adult learners for success in post-secondary education. Please watch for development opportunities through ATLAS in the near future or visit their website at <http://atlasabe.org/professional/content-standards>



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Postal Area

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: P1 WELCOME | P2 ACES 101 | P4 SPOTLIGHT ON BLAINE LEARNING LAB | P5 STUDENT STATS

CONSORTIUM

Providing free basic education and English classes for adults from all backgrounds.

- Anoka Technical College Student Success Center
- Anoka Community College Academic Support Center
- Blaine Learning Lab
- Brooklyn Center Community Corner
- Brooklyn Center Lutheran Church of the Master
- Centennial Adult Continuing Education
- Columbia Heights Adult Education Center
- Elk River Community Education Center
- Forest Lake Adult Learning Center
- St. Francis Lifelong Learning Center

