

CONSORTIUM

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

A New Option for High School Equivalency:

The MN State Diploma

Then & Now

An Adult Learner Reflects
on Changing Technology

Metro North
ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

– Sponsored by Community Education –

Building on What We're Doing...

Preparing to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

As we prepare to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), we can be thankful that we are an ABE program in Minnesota that has partnerships with local workforce centers, post-secondary, community programs, and employers. (Note: Not all ABE programs in Minnesota have partnerships.) Metro North ABE sites additionally have relationships with local Workforce Service Areas (WSA). This puts us in a great position to fully participate in WIOA, supporting the integration of core programs to improve job and career options for workers and jobseekers.

Implementation of WIOA now requires each state to submit a unified plan to the Department of Labor; the first plan is due in March 2016. New to the WIOA is a requirement that identifies economic development regions within the state—which may include multiple workforce areas. Minnesota has 16 WSAs and has identified 6 Workforce Development Regions (WDR). Under WIOA, Adult Basic Education representation is required within the local workforce development board and will be included in the development of local plans. ABE will also need to submit their own plan annually to the local Workforce Board for review. There are huge changes in the collaboration and partnerships required in WIOA, and we will now share new and existing performance standards.

Many of the requirements and recommendations of WIOA have been practiced by Metro North ABE programs in partnership with the four core partners identified in WIOA. There are still many questions yet to be answered; ABE managers, coordinators, supervisors, and ABE Regional Transition Coordinators are participating in workshops, discussions, meetings, and webinars to stay current with new information and stay aware of how this process of change is progressing.

The changes in WIOA will influence our collaborations, but it will not change the essence of our work with students.



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 our 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: Community Education Asst. Manager, Anoka-Hennepin
- 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
- Cori Sendl: Director of Community Education, Centennial
- Molly Stewart: Supervisor, Blaine
- Emily Watts: Supervisor, Anoka Technical College and Supervisor, Anoka-Ramsey Community College

ABE 101

Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA)

With broad bipartisan support, the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), was signed into law on July 22, 2014. It is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in 15 years, superseding the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998. WIOA took effect July 1, 2015.

The WIOA will help job seekers and workers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and will match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.

WIOA presents an extraordinary opportunity to improve job and career options for our nation's workers and jobseekers through an integrated system that seeks to improve coordination between the four core or primary federal programs that support employment services, workforce development, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation activities.

At the state level, WIOA establishes unified strategic planning across the four core programs to ensure and support local- and state-led workforce development boards; engages employers to align training with needed skills; develops and aligns performance indicators for the core programs; coordinates the needs of regional economics; targets services to better serve job seekers, including Career Pathway training; improves access to high-quality services to individuals with disabilities; and supports easier access to services.

Citizenship Grant

Helping legal permanent residents with instruction, workshops, tutoring, preparation, and legal representation to become U.S. citizens

Metro North ABE is pleased to be partnering with Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid and Minneapolis Adult Education on a grant from the Office of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to provide citizenship preparation classes to learners across Minneapolis and the north metro area. The \$200,000 grant award, made to Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, was developed to provide underserved legal permanent residents with citizenship instruction, workshops, tutoring, naturalization preparation, and legal representation in naturalization applications. Over the two years of the grant, Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid and its partners will assist 200 legal permanent residents in becoming U.S. citizens.

In order to become a U.S. citizen after birth, an individual goes through the naturalization process, which includes completing an application, being fingerprinted, completing an oral interview, taking civics and English tests, and taking the Oath of Allegiance to the United States.

The English test has three parts; reading, writing, and speaking. Additionally, applicants will be asked a number of oral civics questions that test their understanding of U.S. history and government.



In order to help learners prepare to be successful applicants, Metro North ABE is offering a series of citizenship preparation classes. During the 27-36 hour class, learners will work on learning and understanding the 100 questions that may be asked during the civics interview, completing mock interviews, practice asking and answering the questions on the English and reading tests, and more.

Learners in the classes will also have the opportunity to meet with attorneys from Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid who are specifically assigned to work on this project to assist them with their application and sort out any legal issues that they may face as they apply for naturalization.

If you would be interested in helping learners prepare for their citizenship interview, please contact Sarah Berres. She will have current class schedules, locations, and more information on how you can help.

Three Different Pathways: One End Goal

In the 2014 MN legislative session, a third pathway was approved for adults seeking their high school credential. Metro North ABE-Blaine Learning Lab had the honor of being selected as one of thirteen ABE sites across the state to pilot this new innovative program.



Prior to this new legislation, our adult learners only had two pathways approved by the Minnesota Department of Education and the state of Minnesota to complete their high school equivalency: a test-based credential and K-12 diploma completion.

Test-Based Secondary Credential: The GED® (General Education Development) exams provide adults with an opportunity to complete a series of subject-based exams designed to measure the skills and knowledge a learner would be demonstrating after a traditional high school experience. This program is widely available throughout the

state and learners who successfully complete this pathway earn an equivalency diploma from the Minnesota Department of Education.

K-12 Diploma Completion: Also known as “credit recovery” or “credit completion,” this diploma program offers adults a no-cost opportunity to complete the credits required by a sponsoring Minnesota school district (typically, the high school/school district where the learner previously attended) to earn their diploma. Learners who participate in this pathway work through the various credits needed for graduation and are granted a local school dis-

trict diploma. Unfortunately, due to the intensive time commitment and costs associated with running this type of program, this model is not available in many ABE programs.

In November 2014, the Minnesota Department of Education put a call out for ABE programs to pilot the new Minnesota State Diploma option. The Blaine Learning Lab was selected, and after a series of specialized trainings, began offering classes in early February 2015.

The MN State Diploma: This third option is a free program that is based on

mastery of competencies opposed to completion of credits. Learners are required to show mastery in five different educational areas in order to earn this diploma. The first four are traditional areas of study: Science (nature of science and engineering, life science, earth and space science, physical science), Language Arts (reading, speaking and listening, writing, language), Social Studies (U.S. government, economics, history, geography), and Math (algebra, geometry, data, statistics, and probability).

The fifth area, which is unique to this program, is Career Development and Employability Skills, which includes Digital Literacy Skills. With help from the Anoka County Workforce Center, we have been able to successfully integrate ACES (Academic, Career, and Employability Skills), which includes the Transitions Integration Framework areas of self-management, developing a future pathway, and navigating systems. Learners have also been able to work on resumes and Northstar Digital Literacy assessment completion.

Previously earned high school credits, completion of training programs, prior

GED® test scores, as well as college credits may be applied to competency completion.

Students who graduate from this program will receive a Minnesota State diploma as well as a Northstar Digital Literacy Certificate in the areas of basic computer, World Wide Web, e-mail, MS Word, and Windows/Mac. There is also a future possibility to earn a local school district diploma with this option.

During the pilot phase, February to June 2015, fifteen students were served at the Blaine Learning Lab with three students graduating. Classes were taught two mornings a week and the learners had access to and support from: a teacher, a diploma advisor, the placement specialist, the computer lab (and its staff), and the Anoka County Workforce Center staff and classes.

More Metro North ABE sites hope to apply to become additional pilot sites. If selected, they would begin offering the MN State Diploma program beginning in winter 2015/2016. Stay tuned for more locations and information!

Current requirements for the MN State Diploma program include:

- Be 21 years of age or older
- Available to attend class Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday mornings, 9:00am to 1:00pm at the Blaine Learning Lab location
 - An 80% attendance requirement will be enforced with this class
- Assess at the approved reading and math levels
 - 6.0 on TABE D Reading & 4.0 on TABE M Total Math
- Students will be responsible for gathering their own:
 - Official high school transcripts
 - Scores for formal assessments including GED®, ACCUPLACER, ACT, etc.
 - Certificates of completion for specialized training programs
 - A resume including professional and volunteer experiences
 - Other supporting documents

College and Career Readiness Standards

Minnesota is moving forward with adopting the College & Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) in response to the need from our ABE field, but also from changes made in WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act). During this past year, staff at ATLAS and the MN Department of Education have put together an advisory team to help plan professional development opportunities in the state. The advisory team has been busy working to bring a selection of informational sessions to Summer Institute and regional trainings taking place around the state. Many ABE teachers were introduced to CCRS last year, but this year teachers are being expected to dive deeper

into the specific standards that are relevant to their classrooms and their learners. Minnesota ABE teachers should continue to think of standards-based instruction as a three-pronged approach to teaching. Lessons in our ABE classrooms should reflect the outcomes designated in the CCRS, the Transitions Integration Framework (TIF), and the Northstar Digital Literacy Standards. Keeping these documents on the forefront when planning lessons will help to create classrooms that provide learners with the skills necessary to help them transition successfully to the next stage in life.

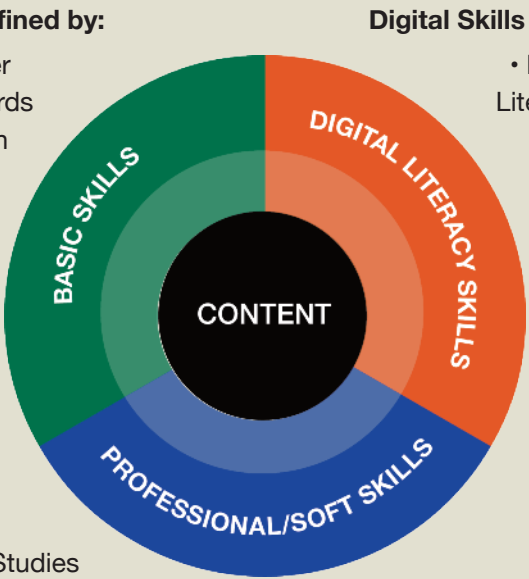
Skills Adult Learners Need for Successful Transitions:

Basic Skills are defined by:

- College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education
- Transitions Integrations Framework

Content for teaching and learning:

- Life Skills
- Occupational
- Civics/Citizenship
- Science & Social Studies
- Other



Digital Skills are defined by:

- Northstar Digital Literacy Standards

Pioneer Training

Metro North ABE was asked to participate in two state-sponsored pilot projects in connection with the Minnesota CCRS: Standards in Action Implementation and the Adult Diploma Pilot.

This “CCRS Pioneers” pilot involves several instructors from Metro North ABE, primarily from the Blaine Adult Diploma Pilot team. The team will learn the basics of evaluating and creating a gap analysis of materials and lessons that apply the standards in CCRS. Our team, along with a small team from Robbinsdale, will provide feedback to the state trainers who will then adapt the materials before the large Adult Diploma Working Group slated to receive the same training in the fall. There are plans to provide a statewide roll out of this training in Spring/Summer 2016.

Then and Now: An Adult Learner Reflects on Changing Technology

Almaz Kowal, a student at the Adult Education Center in Columbia Heights/Fridley, is tasked with using technology on a regular basis to practice listening, writing, and speaking on the popular English language learning website, “USA Learns.”

Almaz voices some of her frustrations: “I feel like I didn’t [use computers] when I was young, so it creates more problems.” Growing up in Eritrea, a small country bordering Sudan, she thinks technology education is something that many take for granted. “I didn’t even have school in my country,” she says. “It’s hard when you don’t have that foundation from the start.”

When comparing the way she uses technology to her children, she doesn’t know whether to smile or frown. “I don’t have anything close to them,” she says. “I’m lost. It’s really hard to use the computer at all.”

When she mentions her inability to use computers, I point out that she owns and uses a smartphone. “Yes, I text and call but that’s it!” She then remembers an old flip phone she used before buying her latest device. “I liked that. Why did I want to pay for something more expensive when I liked keeping things simple?” Despite how comfortable she was with this phone, she recalls being the brunt of one particular joke within her family. “They asked me why I used such an old phone! They said I came off the boat with Columbus. But you know what? That’s okay. Columbus was smart enough! He did many things!”

Almaz fears that simplicity is lost among many of those who are younger than she. “It feels like nobody has time to sit and relax and talk to you. They are on their phone. They are texting.

They are on Facebook.” She finds the distractions startling.

She says, “Things are tough in life for people like us.” When asked who “us” is, she says it refers to many people: the elderly, those who grew up in her home country, and anyone who struggles with understanding new technology. It makes her happy when she has the opportunity to connect with others who struggle. “I don’t feel like I’m lost by myself...like I’m an alien.”

Sitting down to have this conversation with Almaz allows me to step back and reevaluate the connections myself and others have with technology. For myself, growing up in an environment where the glow of a computer screen was no stranger, it can be difficult for me to pinpoint the “complications” of technology.

“ Learning English is what I want to do most... There are many things I can do on the computer to help [with] that. ”

Maybe if I seldom touched a computer or a smartphone, it would—as Almaz states—make it easier for me to sit down, relax, and connect with another human being. But could I clock in on a computer at work? With paper appli-



cations disappearing, could I apply for a position that I wanted or needed? Could I type this right now and would you be reading it?

Reflecting on what keeps her coming back to the computer, Almaz states that it is her desire to learn. “Some don’t care to learn. They like the simplicity,” she says. Almaz isn’t concerned so much with doing anything “too difficult” on the computer, but longs for the tools that allow her to live her daily life more easily. “Learning English is what I want to do most. I want to help myself to improve my spelling, my writing, and my reading.” Pausing, Almaz leans forward and gently touches the computer monitor in front of us. “There are many things I can do on the computer to help that.”

— Josh Katzenmeyer, CTEP Americorp member (Article first published on the CTEP Blog)

Student Stats with Linda

From May 1, 2014–April 30, 2015, Metro North ABE staff, with the help of 249 volunteers, has provided information and instruction to 4,754 potential students and learners.

- Over 2,600 learners enrolled in ABE programming to improve basic reading, writing, and math skills, or work on conversational English.
- Skills gained during ABE classes have assisted these learners to gain employment, earn their high school diploma, take the GED® 2014 test, gain U.S. citizenship skills, and enroll in specialized training and/or college, among other successes.

The learners in our program represent a large part of the world and come with cultural and life experiences that offer our classrooms diverse perspectives and greatly add to the conversations between staff, learners, and volunteers.

- Our learners came from 105 different countries, not including the U.S.
- Altogether, they speak 83 different languages, not including English.

- 21% are between the ages of 17-24
- 53% are between the ages of 25-44
- 20% are between the ages of 45-59
- 6% are older than 60

Our learners, wherever they come from, bring with them their personal and educational goals.

- 91 learners met their goal of gaining employment
- 147 learners met their goal of keeping current employment
- 168 learners met their goal of entering post-secondary training/education/college
- 48 learners met their goal of completing GED® 2014 testing
- 35 learners met their goal of completing their remaining credits and earning their High School Diploma



MNABE 2015 Graduation

Metro North Adult Basic Education (MNABE) honored 49 students who attended graduation on June 11 at Anoka High School. Anoka-Hennepin Schools' Superintendent David Law was the ceremony's keynote speaker, personally recognizing students who have earned their GED® or Adult Diploma. Beginning in 2014, the GED® test became more rigorous to align with National High School Graduation standards. The changes in GED® testing resulted in fewer tests being taken and passed statewide (789 in 2014, as opposed to 5,562 in 2012). Although the number of GED® test takers went down by almost 85 percent statewide, Metro North ABE locations can boast that students' attendance hours have increased by 10 percent. This means that Metro North ABE is maintaining participant numbers and retaining students longer over time. Congratulations to all Metro North ABE 2015 graduates!

Volunteer Appreciation

Metro North ABE Volunteer Services had a total of 249 volunteers by the end of the 2014-2015 data year. These volunteers offered their time in our classrooms, computer labs, offices, and leading special classes and projects. Our volunteers donated a total of 17,649 hours of service to our learners. Without them, we cannot offer the individual support our learners deserve.

Thank you, volunteers, for sharing your giving hearts and willing minds. Together we are making the difference in the lives of our learners.

For more information about volunteering at Metro North ABE, please contact Volunteer Services at 763-783-4920.



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Postal Area

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: P1 IMPLEMENTING WIOA | P2 CITIZENSHIP GRANT | P4 CCRS | P7 MNABE 2015 GRADUATION

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

