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12/01/2012

Adult Learner - the K-12 Connection

By Marc A. Bertrand

The “elephant in the room” originates from the lack of active acknowledgement of the growing immigration census in the United States. In the state of New York, Nassau and Suffolk counties are dealing with dual economic social obstacles that are inseparable of each other; Improve the adult workforce development; and the quality of adult education programs in K-12 school districts.

Adult Education - the K-12 Connection

Adult Education is a critical component within K-12 school districts that supplement student achievement. If schools effectively support their community adult literacy centers, it may provide adult learners with the academic tools to better assist their K-12 children at home, which should ultimately correlate to improved district performance. However, part of the challenge is correlated to adult

learners' language barrier, perceived lack of social endorsement, and limited resources. Despite these obstacles, many adult language learners have continued to persevere but have also realized that education is the key in America. A quality education can position citizens for opportunities but for adult learners, a quality education in the U.S. is like stumbling upon a pot of gold. If adult learners acquire necessary skill sets, they may be considered for better paying jobs, and be able to advocate for themselves and their children. Additionally, New York State Education Department (NYSED) continues to reinforce its adult education benchmarks similarly to English Language Arts (ELA) assessments, which is further compounded by the limited funding adult education programs receive.

Therefore, in an effort to maximize our school's performance which primarily consists of adult language learners, we closely aligned the program's curriculum with NYSED Common Core Learning Standards. Similar to elementary and secondary education programs, the Adult Learning Center (ALC) identifies the special talents of students from diverse backgrounds to help them achieve their maximum learning potential. With high expectations for all students, ALC develops programs and/or modifies its curriculum to reflect and respect the various cultures and learning styles of all students.

A Quality Control Initiative

During the 2008-09 school year, ALC received an "unacceptable" rating from the NYSED due to a passing rate of 39% for adult language learners compared to the required 41% benchmark. Our adult learners were concentrated in impoverished communities but were still expected to perform at a high frequency. Most of the students were given formal exams to determine their functioning ability/class placements. This was also the first year that the new administration inherited a challenging school that was under a non-state approved data management system; and surplus of instructional personnel that were experiencing a difficult transition due to new leadership's enforced accountability.

Moreover, the school leadership took initiative to create a new system to ensure longevity and to become a premier learning establishment. They introduced a Total Quality Management Operational System (TQMOS), which is a management philosophy geared toward continuously enhancing the quality of products (instructional methodologies) and processes (student learning) to maximize an organization's working potential, which may also be implemented in a K-12 school program.

TQMOS (abridged) implementation steps:

1. ***A coordinated plan for raising literacy and English Language proficiency.*** School partnerships provide a continuum for educational programs and outreach to meet the needs of a disadvantaged population. The initiative begins with a series of trust/team-building meetings conducted with partners and collaborating staff. Next, use a "Resource Mapping" tool to assist in charting where literacy and other related programs are happening in the community to

identify and bridge service gaps and provide a comprehensive schedule of services/programs for all learners. A committee of varying educators should be formed to review progress and challenges as students move from one level of literacy education (grade level) to another.

2. Learning in real-life contexts: Classroom instructors communicate expectations similar to that of an employer in a workplace environment, such as adaptability, productivity, social skills and responsibility. These skills are encouraged at the district level down to the classroom level to focus on developing life and career skills in preparation for workforce development. Instructors bring awareness of local issues to students, where they are encouraged to take an active role by expressing and writing about some political issue, researching aspects of government including citizenship practices such as town meetings, community activism and reflective experiences in the classroom. If the initial process is applied effectively, any adult education program is likely to develop literacy classes in workplaces tailored to adult students improving their employment status.

3. Data Management. Performance targets should always be an on-going discussion amongst staff, students, and parents because this gives all stakeholders a sense of ownership. Effectiveness of program planning and instruction should be reviewed by the program improvement committee referencing student data on a monthly basis to analyze performance outcome measures and/or improve quality of instruction (i.e., assessment methods, curriculum, student retention (+/-); and appropriate class placements.

Data showed that ALC made significant gains in Year 2 with nearly a 20% improvement ratio (58%, compared to 39.2% in Year 1), which was even better in Year 3 (61%).

School Year

Source

	<u>2008-09</u>	<u>2009-10</u>	<u>2010-11</u>
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
NYSED (Adult Ed.) Benchmarks	41%	46%	46%
Adult Learning Center	39.2%	58%	61%
NYSED Rubric	Unacceptable	Proficient	Highly Proficient

A Positive Affect

Last, despite limited fiscal resources, our school continues to work relentlessly at continuous improvement despite the recent successes. We realize the better we prepare our adult language learners, the better their own children may perform in their home districts, thus having a positive affect within their communities at various levels. This reaffirms that as educational practitioners; we can no longer 'subconsciously' and/or consciously neglect "the elephant in the room" as we must acknowledge and address the K-12 connection, and by educating adult learners with the same vigor as we would educate K-12, no matter what!



Dr. Marc A. Bertrand *is a proven leader in the education field both as a teacher, administrator (certified in New York and New Jersey), and Adjunct Professor. With over 14 years experience teaching K-12 from 1997 until 2004 and serving in high level administrative capacities since, Dr. Bertrand has a keen understanding of learning and how it relates to leadership. Dr. Bertrand transcended a diverse group of disadvantaged students to one of the most elite unit of critical thinkers and problem solvers. This was based on a three-year looping experiment inspired by Dr. Bertrand's former supervisor and friend, Dr. Sharon Banks-Williams. Looping involves remaining with the same group of students to maximize familiarity which should correlate to improved performance if the core values are implemented effectively. Given the prelude, Dr. Bertrand takes a similar strategic approach with staff, students and clients, providing them with the tools to becoming successful at multiple levels over time. His leadership methodologies are now facilitated through his subsidiary; The Bertrand Education Group (www.thebertrandeducationgroup.com). He can be reached at info@thebertrandeducationgroup.com*

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4 Comments

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David McCuistion on Saturday 12/01/2012 at 09:08 PM

Dr. Bertrand:

I think you hit upon a subject seldom recognized in the K-12 environment. I taught in high schools for 14 years and worked in educational services for six year. Adult education was rarely mentioned in relation to improving student education.

Great prospective. Thank you.

David McCuiston

www.vol-training.com

www.vanguardldrship.wordpress.com

Dr Stephen Jones on Tuesday 02/10/2015 at 02:23 PM

You make a valuable point. The diversity that exists in America is not going to disappear. We need to maximize every citizens potential to contribute to the success of this country. An educated adult population equals and educated youth. We need to put systems in place that support the adult learners and encourage them to pursue post secondary opportunities. We are missing out on an opportunity if we are not willing to in vest in the critical educational services that are needed for adult learners.

Kira Holt on Tuesday 02/10/2015 at 04:11 PM

I can't think of a better motivation to students than having parents working on their education.

Students with involved parents, no matter income or background, are more likely to—

- earn high grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs;
- pass their classes, earn credits, and be promoted;
- attend school regularly; and
- graduate and go on to postsecondary education.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 10) Guidance Document (Parent and Community Involvement in a College/Career-Ready Culture, SEDL, 2010)

Michelle Delgado on Monday 09/28/2015 at 10:34 PM

Solid read on implications of English language learners.

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