

December, 2014

STATE OF NEBRASKA		NOT-NEGOTIABLE		WARRANT NUMBER	
REMITTANCE ADVISE - RETAIN FOR TAX PURPOSES				22342282	
INVOICE NUMBER	DATE	REMARK	GROSS AMT	DISCOUNT	PAYMENT
14TT022	08/22/13	BEST PLUS RECAL - KEARNEY	243.00		243.00

PAYEE: 1383145

STATE OF NEBRASKA
TREASURY WARRANT
22342282
43-01040
DATE: 02/03/14
AMOUNT ALTERATION VOIDS WARRANT
VOID AFTER ONE YEAR

PAY TO THE ORDER OF:

TWO HUNDRED FORTY THREE AND 00/100

MEMO: *Ken A. Drbal*
STATE TREASURER

Ken A. Drbal
DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Letter Contracts

By: Jan Drbal, Nebraska Department of Education

To the left is a copy of a check (warrant) that you receive from the State of Nebraska for stipends and travel expenses after attending an Adult Education conference/workshop/meeting.

The **Payee Number** is highlighted and circled in the lower left corner of the top part. The check is below this. Use this number instead of your Social Security Number on Letter Contracts and Requests for Reimbursements.

This payee number is unique as it is assigned to only one person (you) and it can be used instead any time NDE asks for your Social Security number.

NOTE:

- A letter contract must be signed before any expenses are incurred. (At least 3 participants from each GED® 2014 webinar were not paid because they did not sign their letter contract.) We send it to your e-mail address via EchoSign. If you haven't received a letter contract at least a week in advance of an event, check your junk mail. If you have not received it, let me know.

- FYI: Accounting will pay stipends and expenses only with the following documentation:
 - A completed and signed Request for Reimbursement form.
 - A letter contract that was signed and returned to NDE prior to the conference/workshop/meeting.
 - All required receipts (meals, lodging, airline tickets).
 - Your signature on sign-in sheets.
- Due to time restraints, we will send you one letter contract and one reminder.

If you have questions/concerns, please let me know: 402/471-4830 - jan.drbal@nebraska.gov



Happy Holidays!

From the Nebraska Adult Education Staff
Vicki Bauer, Jim Lukesh, Jan Drbal and Shirley Gruntorad

New Federal Legislation – WIOA

By: Vicki Bauer, AE Director - Nebraska Adult Education

On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed into law the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which replaces the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the federal legislation that guided the administration of our Adult Education program. It had taken almost 10 years for Congress to pass new legislation; many were wondering if and when new legislation would come about! The four core programs contained in WIOA include:

1. Title I: The Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth formula programs administered by the Department of Labor
2. Title II: The Adult Education and Literacy program administered by the Department of Education
3. Title III: The Wagner-Peyser Act employment services program administered by the Department of Labor
4. Title IV: The programs under Title I of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act administered by the Department of Education

Following are some highlights of WIOA reforms that are applicable to Adult Education (AE), as indicated by the United States Department of Education:

The submission of a unified state plan by the four core programs will increase coordination and will contain the vision and goals for the state. This document is due by March 2016.

There will be six primary performance indicators across the four main partners. The common measures increase accountability and transparency through reporting and evaluations. They include:

1. Percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after the exit quarter
2. Percentage of program participants in unsubsidized employment during the 4th quarter after the exit quarter
3. Median earnings of participants employed during the 2nd quarter after the exit quarter
4. Percentage of participants who obtain a postsecondary credential or high school diploma
 - Participants attaining a high school diploma may only be counted if they entered or retained employment within one year after exit, or
 - Are in an education or training program leading to a postsecondary credential within one year after exit
5. Percentage of program participants, who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward a credential or employment.
 - “Measurable skill gains” includes serving the “undereducated, low-level, and underprepared adults” we currently can serve in adult education
6. Effectiveness in serving employers

NOTE: States that fail to meet performance targets are subject to the following:

- 1st year: technical assistance and develop a performance improvement plan
- 2nd year: a 5% reduction in the Governor’s Reserve Fund

Strengthens alignment between adult education, postsecondary education, and employers. The Act expands the purpose of AE to include activities that should increase an individual’s ability to transition to postsecondary education and obtain employment. Use of career pathways programs, workforce preparation activities, and integrated education and training are authorized in WIOA. In mid-January, the federal government will publish the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM); stakeholders are urged to develop and submit comments regarding the proposed guidelines for the rules and regulations developed for the administration of WIOA.

While there are some new challenges in planning for the incorporation of the legislation, the end result is that WIOA will provide new opportunities for Adult Education as we assist adults in acquiring basic academic, critical thinking, digital literacy, and self-management skills.....and for our AE students to use these skills for successful transition into postsecondary education, training, or employment. Our work is as essential to our adult students as it ever was, and one would venture to say, even more!

Look for more information in an upcoming issue of this newsletter which will focus on the 13 considerations for program funding and the new state leadership activities identified in WIOA.

Update on FY 2014 Performance Standards

By: Vicki Bauer, AE Director - Nebraska Adult Education

Nebraska missed meeting its performance standards by less than 1% last program year - so close but yet so far! We need all teachers to monitor students for pre and post testing and EFL movement. We had over 500 students who qualified for post-testing in FY 2014, but were never post tested! Since we are coming up to the half-year point in FY 2015, if you have students who qualify for post testing, it is essential that you do so by the December holiday break. Check the AIMS reports to help you determine who needs post testing or even RE post testing. There's no reason why we can't make 100% and more for this year's performance standards.

Why All the Changes?

Submitted by Nancy Schultz, AE Director - Northeast Community College

As I have once again been asked, "Why all the changes within the field of Adult Education?" I wonder how many of us realize how all of the levels of education must, and continue to, change. Change is necessary in order to remain a competitive and relevant service. Public and private K through 12 settings, post-secondary institutions, pre-K providers and those of us serving our adult education population can easily verify, through published research, that the United States is no longer among the leaders in the world-wide provision of education. This is a tragedy in a nation such as we have come to take for granted for its past excellence.

Adult Education cannot remain as it was thirty years ago; nor can it even be what we offered last year! We must obviously adhere to the requirements of our federal and state funding sources because these are the entities that fund our service delivery system for such things as salaries and instructional supplies. However, that should not be our primary motivation for wanting to serve the changing needs of our society.

As we all know, GED® testing has changed in order to keep pace with the upgraded expectations of anyone earning secondary school credentials. It is our duty, as educators, to help our students achieve the required preparation to earn that GED®. We are now expected to provide a curriculum rich in career and college-ready preparation for our students. The GED® is now a first step for those who may want to upgrade their career opportunities or for enrollment in some type of post-secondary training. Students are expected to make a commitment to attend those classes that they have identified as those they plan to attend. Students need to understand that all students must be assessed upon entry and at intervals throughout their enrollment. Further, it is our responsibility to see that we utilize our reporting mechanisms within the AIMS database to accurately track student progress.

Why do we do all of this? We all have a responsibility to join all of the nation's education providers in fully preparing our students to meet employers' needs. There are jobs waiting for students, but these jobs require certain skills beyond the diploma. We need to form partnerships with other agencies, colleges, and employers to insure the potential for success. It starts with student commitment coupled with our willingness and consistency in providing service to the changing needs of our adult population. It remains our duty to expect changes and to assist our students to adapt and grow with what we have to offer.

COABE Conference

By: Betsy Moeschler, Metropolitan Community College-Omaha

I found the workshop "Effective Strategies to Contextualize Math for Learners with Diverse Career Goals" to be amazingly productive for my role as program facilitator at Metropolitan Community College. The 2014 GED® test has required the need for program facilitators to design a working curriculum allowing instructors to not only teach but to engage active learners with content that is much more rigorous than the previous test. This workshop gave me examples of targeted strategies to clearly focus on needed areas in basic math and spiral toward the increased rigor of the GED® test.

I also attended "Making Algebra More Meaningful: Hands-on Workshop...". Algebraic problems make up over 50% of the questions on the new test and I thought this workshop was invaluable. Beginning with one-variable linear equations, Sally and Donna presented ways to practice skills associated with this introduction to linear equations through tasks involving the audience. Progressing to mathematical sentences equating two expressions, I took away a couple of great ideas for myself, as an instructor, and then presented those to our instructors at a workshop presented on April 12 at Metropolitan Community College.

Password Security

By: Jim Lukesh, Adult Education Consultant - Nebraska Department of Education

Editor's Note: The following excerpt is from an article by Kim Komando which ran in USA Today

"Passwords are a royal pain in our digital lives. If you create one that's simple, it isn't safe. If you create one that's safe, you'll never remember it. On top of that, you really need to have a unique password for every account and Web site in case a hacker gets ahold of one of them. With regular data breaches of millions of usernames and passwords happening at major companies like Target and Michael's, it's a very real worry. That's why it's such a relief your Web browser stores passwords for you. You can create the hardest passwords around and not have to remember any of them. Even better, your browser will fill in passwords automatically for you. Unfortunately, there is a catch that no one likes to talk about. If I got on your computer right now, I bet I could see every one of your super-secret hard-to-guess passwords in no time flat."

Komando goes on to explain how to find the list of saved passwords in all of the popular browsers including Firefox, Chrome, Internet Explorer, and Safari. Komando states that the solution to this problem is to come up with a hard password that you can always remember. (*Editor's note: Yeah, sure!*)

The other solutions Komando mentions are to turn off the password-saving feature on the browser and to keep people off of your account. Set up a guest account for visitors and be sure to lock your computer when you step away from it. Finally Komando suggests a solution that I certainly endorse and that is the use of a password manager such as KeePass, Keeper or any of several others. I have a keeper on my phone. I have over 50 passwords on my keeper and if something did happen to the phone, I would be a lot more upset about losing the keeper than the phone which is why it automatically backs up to a secure site.

Editor's Note: In a similar vein, Jolie Lee of USA TODAY Network wrote an article entitled 6 Ways to Keep Your Passwords Safe. The article appeared on May 22, 2014. The article appeared in the aftermath of a massive cyber breach at Ebay which encouraged all users to change their passwords as soon as possible. Lee lists the following six ways to keep your passwords safe.

1. **Use a different password for every website you visit.** She comments that this sounds like a lot of work but not as much as dealing with getting hacked.
2. **Use a combination of upper case, lower case, numbers and symbols.** Be original. Norton, the makers of the anti-virus software, state that some of the most common passwords are 12345 (remember the spacelock combination on the classic Mel Brooks movie Space Balls), qwerty and 111111. Birthdays, anniversaries and pet names would probably not stop an experienced hacker.
3. **Change your passwords every three months.** Again, a lot of work but not as bad as being hacked. A few years back the State CEO wanted everyone to change all passwords each month. After the outcry, it got changed to every three months and none of us had near as many passwords back then.
4. **Try a password manager.** There are several managers on apps that are free or of little cost. Again some work but not as bad as having to go to 50 or 60 websites and click on "can't remember password" and wait for an email reply and then go into the program and change your profile to add new passwords which would require new security questions and a lot of angst. I will detail some of the password managers in an upcoming issue of this newsletter.
5. **Make sure your computer has an anti-virus program.** Many of us work in offices or on networks where the anti-virus program is part of the whole security package but then we get a home computer and forget to secure it. I will detail some of the anti-virus programs available for your home computers in an upcoming issue.
6. **Set up two-step log-ins.** This is a system where you log in with a password and then are asked for a second sign-in which the website sends to a pre-arranged email address or phone number. It is, in effect, a double password. My bank does this and, while I sometimes take their names in vain as I go through the extra steps, I understand and appreciate what they are doing.

In conclusion, it takes some time to keep your digital files secure, but it can take a lot more time if you do not keep them secure.

Bridge Grant Students Successful in “Bridging The Gap”

Submitted by: Robin Rankin, AE Program Director - Mid-Plains Community College



*Pictured back row: Kyle Budke, Rodney Rawson, Stephanie Fisher, and Jordyn Lindsey
Front row, Robin Rankin and Teresa Piccolo*

When given the opportunity to apply for funds, to bridge the gap from GED® to college, Mid-Plains Community College jumped at the chance! The idea was to aid students in taking that next step, taking college classes, gaining a degree, diploma or certificate and eventually becoming gainfully employed in their field of study.

We are charged with going beyond just obtaining the GED® and making our students college and career ready. While this may sound easy, there are often obstacles that get in the way for our students. Often they have families, jobs, and a history of not being entirely successful in the academic setting. Also, money is almost always an issue. The program that we chose was a one-year diploma program in Information Technology/PC support. This program consisted of 30 credit hours for the diploma. The grant paid for half of the tuition costs for the year long program, and the Department of Labor picked up the

other half, as well as books. This was a great incentive for our students because they could use financial aid to help defray the cost of living while attending school.

In March of 2013, we received funding and hired Teresa Piccolo as the Bridge Grant Coordinator. She was solicited to promote the program, meet with community agencies, send letters to GED® graduates and recruit candidates. In June, six lucky candidates were chosen. In July, after taking a battery of assessments, Teresa assisted the students with registering for classes, meeting with advisors, helping to coordinate financial aid and assisting the department of labor to coordinate WIA funds. The six students attended six credit hours during Session II of summer classes. At this time, one student dropped due to a failing grade.

In August, the remaining 5 students attended 12 credit hours of class, and attended AE study labs for 6 hours per week. At the end of the fall semester, 1 candidate had perfect attendance, two candidates made the Dean's list, another student passed all the classes with a C or better, and one dropped due to excessive absences.

We are now up to January 2014. Students registered for 12 credit hours. During this session, students attended 6 hours of AE study lab per week, classes, and attended 8 hours of job shadowing at local businesses. Teresa is by this time, fondly referred to as “mother Teresa” by her students. Towards the end of the semester, students took a TABE post-test and all showed growth. In May, all remaining candidates received the diploma. Also, all were on the Dean's or President's list; graduating top of the class!

The final assignment that Teresa gave the students was to write a couple of paragraphs giving feedback concerning the Bridge program. All of the feedback was positive and very appreciative of the opportunity. Not only did the students feel they would benefit from receiving the diploma, but all decided to continue on at the college, to receive their Associate of Applied Science in Information Technology. Most expressed that they now have the confidence to do whatever they want in life.

A picture of the Bridge graduates is shown above, along with Teresa and myself. Teresa threw a graduation party for the students at her home. It was quite a deal, and you could just tell that the students were now a close knit family. (They were making plans to visit the Omaha zoo last summer.) I credit the success of this grant to the students, instructors, and Teresa. The students were dedicated, the instructors caring and helpful, and Teresa was firm but kind with the students, and it showed in their success. We need a “mother Teresa” in all of our classes and there would not be a retention problem! We are hopeful that the next year will be as great a success. The emphasis will be a Medical Laboratory Technician Certificate. If the state of Nebraska could see fit to make this funding available for programs to apply for, it is a very worthwhile project!

Fluency: A Critical Component of Reading

Submitted by: Judy Ellingson, Southeast Community College – Lincoln

One of the best sessions I attended at COABE in Pittsburgh was “Fluency: A Critical Component of Reading.” The session was presented by Susan McShane and sponsored by LINCS. “Fluency” gave me information and some practical practice advice. Fluency is required for comprehension. Accurate and efficient word identification allows the reader to pay attention to meaning. Fluent reading is comprehensible because it sounds like speech. Most beginning readers and those with reading problems need to improve fluency. Fluency was defined as the ability to read smoothly and with expression, at an adequate rate, without making errors in pronunciation. The specific aspects discussed were speed (rate), accuracy in word identification, and phrasing and expression (prosody). Improving these factors is motivational because students experience quick success.

Fluency instruction begins with assessment. The first step is assessing oral reading rate. This determines word recognition automaticity. The reading rate is usually measured in words per minute. It can be measured for 10 seconds, 30 seconds, or 1 minute. The next step in assessment is oral reading accuracy (is the student reading correctly?) The student reads a passage and the errors are noted. Reading errors to be noted are mispronunciations (count only the first time the error is made), substitutions (the student substitutes an incorrect word for a word in the passage like apartment for appointment), insertions (student adds a word), omissions, and supplied words (student reads the wrong word). Errors not counted are self-corrections, repetitions, errors in word ending (ing, ed, s) and pronunciation errors in proper nouns.

Finally, prosody is assessed. The student reads a passage and the teacher marks the reader’s chunking of phrases, attention to punctuation and pauses. The score is determined by using the Pause Scale:

- 3 Smooth reading with pauses at appropriate points and few repetitions
- 2 Fairly steady reading, but with pauses occurring sometimes within phrases and/or some repetitions
- 1 Uneven/choppy reading, with frequent repetitions and/or lapses in phrasing and/or sounding out of words
- 0 Labored, word-by-word reading, with continual repetitions, frequent stopping, and/or sounding out of words

Now the class is ready to improve their fluency. One strategy for fluency instruction is guided, repeated oral reading of text to improve accuracy, rate, and rhythm. The student reads a passage several times (at least four times) with guidance; then goes on to another passage of the same or slightly higher level of difficulty. Guided repeated oral reading approaches include: Reading to the teacher or tutor; echo reading; dyad and coral reading; and cross-generational reading. If word identification is part of the problem, phonics instruction and sight-word practice may make a difference. (These techniques can be found on pages 52 and 53 of *Applying Research in Reading Instruction for Adults* by Susan McShane).

Reading to the teacher. The learner reads a brief passage aloud and the teacher helps as needed to identify problem words. The teacher may ask a few recall questions after the reading. The student rereads the passage until he can read it with few errors and can recall facts and details quickly. (This demonstrates that rereading not only increases accuracy, but results in better understanding).

In **echo reading** the teacher reads a sentence aloud and the learner reads the same sentence immediately afterward, imitating the teacher’s phrasing. They go through the text this way. Then they repeat it several times. Echo reading may also be used during other repeated reading procedures with phrases or sentences that were challenging to the learner.

Dyad or choral reading finds the teacher and student or group of students reading the passage or story aloud in unison. The teacher models fluent, expressive reading and provides any words the learner can’t quickly identify. The reading is repeated until the learner is reading accurately and smoothly.

Paired or partner reading involves pairs of learners taking turns reading and re-reading the same passage to each other. With **tape-assisted reading**, the learner can work more independently by reading along while listening to the passage on tape and practicing at least three times. **Performance reading** gives the learners a real reason to re-read text as they prepare to perform a poem, play, or story or to present findings of a project or problem they studied together. **Cross-generational reading** would be great in a family literacy class as a

parent might prepare to read to their children with a teacher's assistance. If the children are very young, the stories may be too easy and not help much with fluency.

Our classroom application: We are using some of these techniques in my classes this quarter. For assessment, we used one of the lists from Fry's assessments and a series of graded level readings. At the end of the quarter, we will reassess and see if there has been improvement. For improving reading speed, we use longer passages in a novel type form and count the number lines read in a minute. This can be done with the whole class at once. They finish the story so we can summarize it and discuss vocabulary or pronunciation issues. The students reread the story. Then we start at the beginning of the story again, and do a timed reading for a minute. They count the lines (most students improve by a line or two). The rates are charted and the students are encouraged by actually seeing their improvement. The second technique we are using is the choral reading. We all read a paragraph slowly. Then vocabulary and phonics are discussed. The passage is reread slowly once again, a little faster the next time, and finally quite fast.

The best result so far comes from the student feedback. They express satisfaction in the fast reading and some are trying it out at home. Their hope is to be able to finish all the questions of the TABE E Reading test.

Literacy Center Celebrates Students' Accomplishments

Submitted by Kirsten Case, Executive Director - Literacy Center for the Midlands

The Literacy Center held its Winter Student Achievement Celebration on Saturday, January 25, 2014 at 3:00 pm at Mammel Hall, University of Nebraska-Omaha. More than 50 students were recognized for their hard work and accomplishments including 31 students who have completed their GED®. Students were recognized in five categories, including perfect attendance, positive attitude and outstanding achievers. Six individual volunteers were also honored at the event. Linda Sladky, Barbara Magner, Nancy Leech, Denise Ives, Al Johnson and Rosemary Lucky were recognized for their dedication and commitment to helping Literacy Center students. "I couldn't be more proud of our students for their hard work and dedication to their education. Their efforts will not only change their own lives but will positively impact their families, neighborhoods and our entire community," stated Kirsten Case, executive director of the Literacy Center.

The Literacy Center empowers adults and families by helping them acquire the literacy skills and practices to be active and contributing members of their communities. The 31 GED® diploma recipients are a testament to the Literacy Center's commitments to its students by encouraging them to complete their GED® exams prior to changes in testing, which occurred at the beginning of 2014. The Literacy Center added more classes, instructors and accelerated programs to meet the needs of the students. The Literacy Center's current and future efforts will focus on preparing students for the current computer-based GED® test. For more information about the Literacy Center, contact Kirsten Case at (402) 342-7323 or visit GiveLiteracy.org.

Academic Literacy

Submitted by: Amy Doty, Central Community College - Hastings Program

We have begun a new class for our intermediate and advanced ESL students in response to their request for college preparation education. This class is available to all Adult Education/ESL students who have an interest in taking credit courses at Central Community College in the future. Academic Literacy is focused on meeting the needs of ESL students as they prepare for the COMPASS/ACT Test required for admission into a degree program. Reading, Writing/Language Arts, and Math are the subjects included in this exam and in particular, we concentrate on improving students' comprehension, reasoning, referring, synthesis, and vocabulary skills.

In addition to preparing learners for the entrance examination, Academic Literacy works with students individually and in small groups to build listening, note-taking, reading, essay-writing, studying, and test-taking skills. These skills are paramount to the success of any college student but can be especially challenging to someone for whom English is a second language. In order to introduce learners to the broad range of technological and social experiences that will be part of their college career, Academic Literacy incorporates the use of email, search engines, blog sites, online educational video and test prep sites, word processing, and cloud computing into our weekly lesson plans. This class is an extension of our ESL class and all of the participants also attend an additional three hours a week of English instruction. The objective of the Academic Literacy course is to enable students to reach their personal, educational, and professional goals by providing them focused lessons that will prepare them to be successful degree-seeking students.

It Won't Be Easy, But It Will Be Worth It

Submitted by Linda Birkes-Lance, Southeast Community College-Beatrice

The new math calculator has so many different buttons on it. The combined reading and language requires more than just answering questions about a poem and writing one basic essay about a random topic. The science actually expects students to know something about science. The social studies – historic dates – does anyone really need that in life?

We all know that the 2014 GED® test is definitively more difficult than the 2002 series. Far beyond knowing how a computer keyboard works, 2014 demands more knowledge, scholarly reasoning and critical thinking.

But this article isn't about the work that is expected of the students. This is, rather, about what is expected of me as a teacher. I am not a full-time GED® teacher. I don't spend every day working with intermediate level reading classes. I teach in Seward County on Monday and Thursday evenings for a total of five hours each week. What do I teach? I teach one student low-level reading, another student algebra, another student geometry, another student grammar and appropriate sentence structure, and another student basic laptop computer usage.

I am the adult learner version of a one-room country school teacher. After seven years of teaching, I was settled into how to teach so my students would pass each test one or two at a time before moving onto the next test. I knew what they needed to pass and only three times did we have a retake.

But 2014 GED® is not about passing a test anymore. No longer is passing good enough. There is a strong need to teach to the student what they will need to survive in our world. Every job requires a computer in some way. Every person, no matter what job they hold, should speak with correct grammar and be capable of writing a clear work log. Every student must be able to enter college and complete course work to assure themselves a higher paying career that they love doing if they choose. These are my expectations as an instructor of 2014 GED®.

I was very fortunate to be able to attend COABE in Pittsburgh. I knew that I needed as much help as possible to prepare me for my two nights each week. Among the varied classes I attended over three days, I gleaned information to assist with:

- evidenced based writing including tools for gathering and organizing information,
- math instruction for multilevel classroom,
- techniques for teaching science and social studies,
- the official practice test,
- money smarts, and
- technology websites that open up a world to students.

After COABE, I feel significantly more confident that I will be able to prepare my students. I am preparing them to enter the workforce. I am preparing them to enter college to achieve a career goal. I am preparing them for a better life for them and their families. I know that it won't be easy, but it will be worth it. And if I can do it, then all of the other GED® one-room country school teachers can do this also.



Would you like to receive news and updates from GED Testing Service? Give them your information and they'll keep you up-to-date on all the latest GED® testing news. Please share the news with colleagues, friends, or anyone you think may have an interest in our program.

Sign up today:

<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/newsletter-educator>

Maria Figueroa's Triumph

Submitted by Ann Chambers, AE Director - Central Community College



Maria Figueroa is a born goal-setter with the stamina, intellect, and perseverance to turn her goals into reality. When she received her GED® certificate July 18, her grown daughter Karina and her 3½ year old son Isaac were there to cheer for her and to learn from her example. They knew how much the degree meant to her.

In January of 2013 Maria set her sites on earning a GED® after she was told that Bimbo Bakery would issue her a job application only if she had it. Her sister-in-law was enrolled in classes with Central Community College's Adult Education program; so, in May of 2013, Maria began taking classes there despite having only a seventh-grade education.

The next month she traveled to Lincoln to take the test to prove reading competency. Test givers there urged her to take the writing test, too, since they assessed her skills in both areas as test-ready. They were right! She passed both tests that day and then returned to Hastings to study for the next segment.

She returned to Lincoln in July, just a month later, to take – and pass – tests in both science and social studies. And in August of 2013 she passed the two-part math exam, qualifying her for that coveted GED® diploma. Though Maria's path sounds like an easy one, achieving her GED® diploma in just four months was anything BUT easy. "I had little income," she explained. "I was waitressing while making time to study and take care of my kids" [she also has a son, Adrian, and helps care for three grandchildren]. "I'd go to school all morning every morning, then eat lunch, and then go to the restaurant for two hours of work. Then I'd go home to study. I was studying English, too, so it took much time. My kids helped me with my assignments so that was good," she said.

Maria has nothing but praise for her classes at Central Community College Adult Education program and those who helped her with them. "The Adult Education program has a good program for everyone," she said. "When we start our studies, they make a test to see what we know. Along the way they help us with specifics. Ben [Hinds] was a good teacher who gave me examples when I didn't understand." She said he was especially helpful in helping her prepare for the math tests.

She also appreciated encouragement offered by Anne Cannon, Adult Education Coordinator. Early in her program, Maria was speaking to someone when Anne overheard her and compared her earlier use of English with her current verbal competency. "She told me how much better I spoke," which helped Maria realize just how quickly she was progressing. "Everyone at the literacy program starts 'little by little,'" Maria explained, so students can achieve and succeed at their own pace. And success for Maria is tangible! Today she has a job at Bimbo Bakery where "the pay is good and I have insurance for my family!"

She is already pursuing new goals, too, explaining that "I will keep building my seniority there. Whenever I see a position open, I sign up for it. Maybe someday I will get the opportunity to work full time." She is working on other goals, too. "I want to speak more fluently," said the already bi-lingual Maria, who also admits that she "likes learning." Maria has lived in Hastings since 2002 and has always worked to express herself well in English. One of her first purchases was a Spanish/English dictionary that she took with her whenever she shopped so she could expand her vocabulary. And she credits her church, too, with helping her improve her English.

The GED® graduation marked a milestone for Maria. Her favorite part of that celebration was "showing everyone that it is never too late to continue studying and preparing better for our dreams."



Merging Technology And Instruction For ESL Student Success

By: *Ryan Hinz, Instructor - Crete Public Schools and USA Learns*

Looking for a fun, exciting, and free way to expose your ESL students to technology while teaching them English at the same time? Then look no further. USA Learns is an amazing website designed to help your students practice English while simultaneously gaining valuable computer skills. With

levels for beginning, intermediate, and advanced skills, USA Learns offers something for students in almost any ESL classroom with access to technology. Want to know what else is exciting? USA Learns is also state approved to use as a distance education solution to allow students to gain extra practice outside of class, while still accumulating program hours. www.facebook.com/usalearns

What makes USA Learns so great is the fact you can use it with any Internet connected computer or laptop. There are even apps to use with your Android phone or iOS device. While they are paid apps (\$0.99 ea.), they again offer students valuable practice either inside or outside of class while making use of technology many students already have (smartphones/tablets). In addition, USA Learns also has an impressive Facebook presence with mini lessons prepared and posted by an ESL teacher to help students practice their English while using a social media site that many are familiar with and enjoy using. As we look to increase students' college and career readiness, combining instruction with the latest technology will bring success to both our students and our programs.

Want more information? Visit the websites listed below. Need assistance or a USA Learns teacher manual? Shoot me an email at ryan.hinz@creteschools.org with your questions or requests and I will get back to you as soon as possible.

www.usalearns.org/teacher (to create a teacher account and make virtual classrooms for your students)

www.usalearns.org/class (website for students to sign up in a teacher's class)

www.usalearns.org (independent learner site)

www.usalearns.org/apps (information about the USA Learns apps for iOS (Apple) and Android devices)

AE Conference Builds Foundation Skills for Life

The Annual Nebraska Adult Education Fall Conference was held in Kearney on October 2-3, 2014. The theme of Conference XXXIII was Foundation Skills: Building a Foundation for Life. Over 170 educators, program directors, vendors and presenters gathered at the Holiday Inn-Kearney for the annual event. Dr. Danna Andrus of TruthLink 2150 keynoted the conference with his presentation, "If You Lose Hope, You've Lost it All." Conferees chose among 28 concurrent sessions on Thursday and four focus sessions on Friday. In addition to Dr. Andrus, national speakers such as Martin Kehe of GED® Testing Service, Marie Cora of LINC/S, and Kathy Tracy of i-Pathways were joined by equally fine in-state talent to present an exceptional learning experience for our educators. The 2015 Nebraska AE Conference is scheduled for October 22-23.

COABE Drawing Winners

The 2015 COABE (Commission on Adult Basic Education) Conference will be held



in Denver, Colorado. Lucia Schultz of Central Community College - Columbus, Kim Parsons of Central Community College - Schuyler, and John Miller of Alliance Public Schools had their names drawn to win a free trip to the COABE Conference in Denver April 21-24 as representatives of their programs and Nebraska.



Yolanda Gomez of SCC-Lincoln was chosen as the alternate in case any of the winners are unable to attend.