Introducing the Nebraska Department of Education Adult Education Team

Tate Lauer is the newest addition to the State Adult Education team. His duties as State AE Director and GED® Administrator include administering statewide Adult Education; Title 2 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), General Educational Development (GED®) Testing program, and Adult Basic Education Volunteer Coordination programs. He works closely with NDE staff to implement system updates to the Adult Information Management System for reporting to USDOE. Tate also directs the implementation of providing Career Pathways for AE participants along with extensive contact with the AE programs in the state.

Jan Drbal has worked at NDE in Adult Education for 30 years. She assists with the AE grant process, proposals, grant awards, program claims, and the annual report to USDOE. She processes letter contracts, orders materials/supplies, assists in preparing for meetings/workshops, and processing and tracking all payments made by the AE section of NDE. Jan is married and owns 2 Maltese dogs. She has three children, eight grandchildren as well as two step children and three step grandchildren.

Marisol Birth began working at NDE in January. She is an educator and programs specialist. Her goal is to generate research-based information, solutions and support in the area of AE education. Marisol’s role and duties at NDE include assistance in AE program performance, compliance, assessment, policy and procedures. She holds a background in Math and Physics education and a PhD in educational studies.

Shirley Gruntorad is the state GED® Office Associate. She began working for the state in 1981. Shirley provides verification of GED® testing, determines the eligibility of 16 and 17-year old applicants to take the test, prepares and mails diplomas and transcripts, maintains security of the permanent records dating back to the 1950’s, responds to inquiries pertaining to the GED® program and fulfilling requests for records. Shirley is married; lives on a farm north of Seward and loves spending time with her 1½ year-old twin grandchildren.

Jim Lukesh has been with NDE 34 years. He is the Nebraska AE Consultant and his role and duties at NDE include professional development, BEST Plus, teacher training and visitation, status reports, the coordination of face-to-face/electronic meetings and the Fall Conference each October. Jim is happily married with four children and five wonderful grand-children. He loves all dogs but especially the noble Boxer.
Farewell from Vicki Bauer, Nebraska Adult Education Director & GED® Administrator

By: Vicki L. Bauer, Retired State Adult Education Director

I have thought a lot about this, but decided that it is almost impossible for me to put into words the feelings that I hold close as I retired from the Nebraska Department of Education State Adult Education Director and GED® Administrator position on March 6, 2017, but I will try. Just like most people in the field, I stumbled into Adult Education – I had moved back to Lincoln to work on a Master’s Degree in Home Economics Education (as it was known in the 70’s, but is now known as Family and Consumer Science).

I needed to get a job – to pay rent, tuition, food – those essentials, you know! I had applied for an administrative position at Southeast Community College-Lincoln. Alas, coming in second doesn’t get the job. But, the campus director was nice enough to find a clerical opening in the college for me; telling me that something else would come along later that would be a good fit. The clerical position turned out to be in Adult Academic Studies, which included ABE/ESL/GED and Adult High School programs. I worked right there in the office, seeing and hearing adults come in and register for the various classes, and I also was able to see people as they came to register for classes and heard their stories. I knew then that I wanted to be part of Adult Education. Luckily, the Instructor/Learning Center Coordinator position was open several months later. And, as they say, the rest is history.

After almost eleven years at Southeast Community College, with some great, funny and even sad experiences with students, I applied for the Adult Education Consultant job at the Nebraska Department of Education. Not too many people know this, but during that first month, I seriously considered asking SCC to take me back! I missed the students tremendously, not to mention my colleagues and friends at SCC. However, I adapted and ten years passed quickly; I enjoyed meeting AE staff from across the state as we planned for professional development activities and provided technical assistance to local programs.

I attended some out-of-state meetings where I met some AE colleagues that have become dear friends to me. Then, the state AE Director, Burney Bouslough, retired. With a little nudging from colleagues, I applied and became the State Director of Adult Education for the state of Nebraska! But now, 20+ years later, my bucket list is calling my name! Besides wanting to concentrate on genealogy and finding relatives in Sweden and Germany, getting a new puppy, getting my house and me in shape, etc., etc., it is time for a new person with new ideas and initiatives to lead Adult Education into the future! I have every confidence in Tate Lauer as he assumes the role as the State Director of Adult Education for Nebraska.

I feel truly blessed and fortunate to have spent almost all of my working life in a field that I have truly loved so very much (except for things like budget cuts and limited funding). There is nothing as rewarding as working in a program that helps people improve their lives for the betterment of themselves and their families, communities, and state. Every GED® graduation I have attended brings tears to my eyes; seeing the joy and happiness in our GED® graduates’ faces and that of their families and friends. And, hearing/seeing an ESL student as they improve their English skills in their new country is just as rewarding.

My sincere thanks go out to each and every one of you for your work in and contributions to Nebraska Adult Education. I can’t leave without expressing my deep and heartfelt thanks to Jan Drbal who has worked with me since my first day at NDE, to Shirley Gruntorad who has been the GED® Office Associate since I became State Director/GED® Administrator, and to Jim Lukesh for his contributions the last five years as he ventured into a new area of education for him. It was easy to see during the first few months she’s been at NDE that Marisol Birth is a great addition to the state team and a resource for Nebraska ESL/ELL. Welcome to Tate Lauer, the new AE State Director! Tate brings with him an impressive background of experience and knowledge in Adult Education, as well as a passion for the program and especially for the people we serve. So, here’s to Tate and the State Office and Nebraska AE as a new and exciting venture begins!
Introducing Nebraska Adult Education’s New Program Specialist: Marisol Birth

Marisol (Baquerizo) Birth is the new program specialist for the Nebraska Department of Education. She is working as a coordinator for the Adult Education and Private Postsecondary Career Schools and Veterans Education sections. Marisol believes in the importance of helping instructors to create a safe, stimulating and supportive learning environment to provide assessments and instruction to all participants in every classroom. She is an education and outreach programs specialist interested in educational studies with emphasis on secondary and post-secondary level teachers and students. Her ultimate goal is to generate solutions and research-based information in the areas of ELL, ABE, GED®, and science education.

She initiated her career as a science educator in Lima-Peru (where she was born). In 1999 she moved to Lincoln, Nebraska and attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UN-L) where she completed her Ph.D. program in Education Studies. Because of her educational background and professional interests, she has been active in the field of training and education development for over nineteen years; focusing on teaching K-12 Math and Science, General Education Development, English as a second language and educational research. Marisol has conducted educational programs for institutions such as the ministries of Education in Peru, Union Peruvian University in Peru and Paraguay and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Vicki Bauer Recognized for Her 40 Years of Service to Adult Education and 2017 COABE Administrator of the Year Award at Recent State Board of Education Meeting

A resolution was read aloud and presented to Vicki Bauer at the March 3 State Board of Education meeting. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzuX70Q0cm4&list=PLNK0HhYm1wmx-16iJz4XPgg7H0-YWHT1&index=1 (See the resolution on following page). It was also announced at the meeting that Vicki Bauer has been selected as the 2017 Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) Administrator of the Year. This highly competitive award is given to an adult education administrator who has made an outstanding contribution toward fostering the concept of education as a continuing life-process at the community, state and national levels. COABE exists to provide leadership, communication, professional development, and advocacy for adult education and literacy practitioners in order to advance quality services for all adult learners. Fifteen thousand members strong, one way that they engage in these activities is by spotlighting excellence in the field.

Vicki Bauer has dedicated the last 40 years of her life to adult education. Since 1976, Vicki has worked to assist thousands of adult students in Nebraska meet their potential and realize their dreams. She has also shared her wealth of knowledge and experience by serving and mentoring at the regional and national levels. She has served in many roles from instructor to local program director to state positions such as Adult Education Consultant, and finally Adult Education State Director and GED® Test Administrator.

For the last twenty years, Vicki has been Nebraska’s Adult Education Director and state GED® Test Administrator. She has guided the program through multiple changes in tests, standards, and requirements all the while, gaining the respect of local program directors and colleagues across the nation and building a successful program in Nebraska. This award is particularly timely as Vicki’s last day was Monday March 6, 2017. The State Board of Education recognized her retirement and congratulated her on her award with a Resolution during the March board meeting.

Vicki has definitely made a difference in adult education, but now, she is looking forward to retirement! She is planning to read, travel, join a fitness group, adopt a puppy/dog, continue her genealogy research, travel to Sweden and Germany, volunteer, and take part in other hobbies she enjoys but just hasn’t made the time to pursue. Best wishes for a happy retirement; she’ll be missed by her friends and co-workers at NDE and the local program personnel and colleagues across the country. Thank you, Vicki, from the adult education community of Nebraska!
NEBRASKA STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

RESOLUTION

RECOGNITION OF THE RETIREMENT OF VICKI BAUER

WHEREAS Vicki Bauer has served the Nebraska Department of Education first as a Consultant for Adult Education and then as Nebraska’s State Adult Education Director and State GED® Administrator for the past 29 ½ years.

WHEREAS Vicki Bauer has promoted, contributed, supported and provided guidance and leadership in adult education and literacy services for the past 40 years.

WHEREAS Vicki Bauer has been a maverick when it comes to encouraging adult learners to pursue the GED® credential, implementing innovative approaches to encourage more adult learners to complete the GED® test, resulting in nearly 400,000 students being served in the Nebraska Adult Education classrooms and over 68,000 examinees who have passed the GED® tests in our state since Vicki joined the Nebraska Department of Education.

WHEREAS Vicki Bauer has shared her wealth of knowledge and experience beyond its borders by serving and mentoring at the regional and national levels resulting in the National GED® Distinguished Service Award in 2013, and most recently being named Administrator of the Year for 2017 by the Commission on Adult Basic Education.

WHEREAS Vicki Bauer’s leadership and service will continue to benefit Nebraskans after she retires on March 6, 2017, as Nebraska’s State Adult Education Director for the Nebraska Department of Education.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

THAT, the Nebraska State Board of Education recognizes Vicki Bauer’s contributions and service to the Nebraska Department of Education; and,

THAT, the Nebraska State Board of Education greatly appreciates her leadership and dedication to Nebraskans and to the Nebraska Department of Education.

ON BEHALF OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Patricia Timm, President

Date

John Witzel, Vice President

Date

To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.
New ESL Materials: Side by Side Plus
Reviewed by Carol Leonhardt, Southeast Community College

One of the good things about attending COABE is the opportunity to review new materials and to meet with publishers and authors. At the COABE conference in Dallas last year, I attended a presentation by Bill Bliss, one of the authors of Pearson’s updated Side by Side Plus series. I was already familiar with the author’s introductory level Foundations book for low-beginners and liked the simple conversational models and well-illustrated examples. Another feature which attracted me to the series was the inclusion of new career and academic readiness content and numeracy practice. I was really excited about the availability of an online e-Text version of the student books. In our program, student books are only available for use in class. The Side by Side e-Text is a digital version of the student book and includes full audio of all conversation, listening, pronunciation, and reading activities. It can be accessed by internet so that students have an exact digital and audio version of their text which they can study on a computer both inside and outside of the classroom. In addition, there are FunZone activities for every unit with games, video, vocabulary flashcards, grammar, and music to reinforce and engage students. The whole series builds on real-life communication practice which integrates well with the BEST Plus 2.0 assessment of oral English proficiency.

At the beginning of fiscal year 2017, Southeast Community College’s Basic ESL classes began using Side by Side Plus and its corresponding e-Text plus FunZone online program. Instructors appreciated the practical teaching ideas in the Teacher’s Guide and the supplemental classroom activities available in the multilevel activity and achievement test book. Some instructors have used the online version for whole group teaching using the LCD projector in their classroom. At SCC, we have the capacity for our Basic ESL classes to have scheduled in-class computer time where every student can access the e-Text plus FunZone for self-paced practice. Instructors have noted how focused the students are when using the online program and how easily students can navigate the program. Because the series is ordered by communication tasks, it does not follow the typical grammar progression of other texts. We are making some adjustments after teaching this series for several quarters in regard to how many units can be covered in a quarter and which books fit our leveled classes the best. To learn more about this series, go to: https://www.pearsonelt.com/catalogue/general-english/side-by-side-plus.html

Am I allowed to combine different language versions of the GED® test together?

No, Nebraska residents aren’t allowed to combine language versions to complete the test. This means you must take all four subjects in the same language to earn your GED® test credential. You will not be allowed to combine Spanish tests with English tests or any other language version.

Like Us On Facebook!
(Nebraska Adult Education)
Be notified of Nebraska news as it happens!

How do I receive a notification when news or photos have been added to the Nebraska AE Facebook page?

1. Go to our Page (Nebraska Adult Education)
2. Click “Following”
3. Click ⬇️ next to Notifications
4. Adjust your notification settings; then click Done
Nebraska Department of Education – Adult Education
(Adopted: September 11, 2015 to reflect the purpose and activities of WIOA)

Mission Statement: To provide opportunities for adults to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for high school completion, college and career readiness, employment, and citizenship.

Vision: Partnering for the best education for all ... for life.

Goals:

● Partner with appropriate entities for the best possible outcomes for all adults served;

● Assist adults in preparation to take the General Educational Development (GED®) tests to attain a “State of Nebraska High School Equivalency Diploma”;

● Assist adults to improve literacy skills and obtain the knowledge and skills for employment and economic self-sufficiency;

● Support the educational and skill achievement of parents and family members to participate in the development of their children and improve economic opportunities for families;

● Assist immigrants and English learners in improving their English and math proficiency and understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and

● Assist incarcerated individuals in strengthening their knowledge and skills to promote successful re-entry into society.

Nebraska Department of Education

Mission Statement: To lead and support the preparation of all Nebraskans for learning, earning, and living.

Vision: Partnering for the best education for all...for life.
Twelve Nebraska Educators Certified as BEST Plus Test Administrators

By: Jim Lukesh, Nebraska Department of Education

Twelve Nebraska educators passed the all-day training to become BEST Plus test administrators in their programs. BEST Plus 2.0 is an oral language test with computerized branching questions to ascertain the level of oral English by newcomers to the ABE and ESL programs throughout Nebraska. The test is later given to the students after completing at least 60 hours, but at the time when the teacher thinks the student is ready, to determine if the student has made gains in their Educational Functioning Level. The EFL gains are a major determinant in whether or not the programs meet their goals and the Nebraska program meets its goals as determined by the United States Department of Education. Proper placement through BEST Plus is necessary as a student who is placed in a class that is way above or way below their ability level will, at best, miss gaining an EFL raise and, at worst, become disenchanted and leave the program.

The twelve new Administrators are:

- Tanya Bokma  SCC-Lincoln
- Carrie Knapp  SCC-Lincoln
- Melba Fix-Padilla  Literacy Center of the Midlands
- Layla Younis  Literacy Center of the Midlands
- Christopher Funk  Nebraska Corrections
- Tim Walker  Learning Community
- Margaret Ann Neal  Mid-Plains Community College
- Gavin Owen  Mid-Plains Community College
- Kris Rebentisch  Central Community College
- Kim Rech  Northeast Community College
- Valerie Willers  Northeast Community College
- Robert Thomas  Northeast Community College

The newly certified BEST Plus test administrators will now have to return in 60-75 days for a half-day verification training to answer questions they may have and to make sure they are still following the principles of BEST Plus. Verification is another step to insure accuracy in testing. Nebraska Trainer Carol Leonhardt of SCC-Lincoln presented the training which was graciously hosted by Nancy Schultz and Emily Duncan of Northeast Community College. Jim Lukesh represented the Nebraska Department of Education.

Literacy Center Celebrates Achievement and a New Home

By: Jim Lukesh, Nebraska Department of Education

Material supplied by: Tanya McFarlin, Literacy Center

Investing in yourself is the best investment you will ever make. It will not only improve your life, it will improve the lives of all those around you. This slogan emblazes the wall of one of the many classrooms at the new home of the Literacy Center of the Midlands at 324 South 72nd Street in Omaha. It was in this spirit that the Literacy Center hosted a crowd of students, families and interested supporters at the Student Achievement Celebration and Open House on January 28, 2017. New CEO Linda Butkus, Pierre Sagitteh and members of the staff greeted visitors and conducted tours throughout the afternoon. The tours concluded in the commons area where visitors were treated to food and drink and a chance for casual visits with staff and students.

The second half of the program was devoted to recognition of student and staff achievement. Chinh Doan emceed the affair which honored graduates Jade Schiller, Leslie Persinger-Brand, Richard Moreno, LaToya Lee, Lynette Diaz, Brandon Chrisman, Rochelle Brings Him Back, Numayr Abdar-Raheem, Keith Bolda, and Tracy Burkhardt. Other student award recipients were: Ania Montanez, Pamela Chadwick, Elisabeth Martinez, Blanca Itzepts, Cheryl Schatz, Holly Cordoba, Martin Cordoba, Tracy Koenig, Scott Taylor, Babiya Hassan, Flor Escamilla, Shaquoyia Beaugard, Maria Quiroz, George King, Kristina Allee, Jessica Barrientos, Nicole Fontenont, Kellie Schooler, Elda Solis, and Margarita Avilas. Volunteer Award Recipients were Fred Nesler, Ken Helmick, Dr. April Hopkins-Freeman and Kathy Campagna. Dr. Adrian Petrescu, Ellen Harmer, Jack Donnelly, Matt Egermayer, and Deb Frazier were honored for their work as instructors.

Pierre Sagitteh stated that the new building has been a long time coming but now that it is here, the Literacy Center will be able to offer more and improved services to more students. It was obvious that everyone at the Literacy Center is excited about the new facility and the good things being done by and for the students.
It may be small, but it’s doing big things. The Mid-Plains Community College Imperial Campus has been meeting the educational needs in Southwestern Nebraska and Northeastern Colorado since 2003. Now it’s becoming known for another reason – successfully breaking down language barriers. “Our English as a Second Language class is proving to be extremely popular,” said Brenda Ledall, campus coordinator. “It’s opening up a whole world of possibilities.”

As of the 2010 Census, Imperial’s population was 2,071 and about 15 percent was Hispanic or Latino. In the community’s public schools, which pull students from throughout the county, the percentage is even higher – around 34 percent. Jason Tuller, community development director for the City of Imperial, said much of the original Hispanic and Latino population moved in to work seasonal jobs, such as planting and harvesting potatoes, or hired on at local feedlots, dairy farms and hog farms. Once those immigrants put down roots, they stayed.

“There are actually two groups,” said Tuller. “There’s the group that’s lived here for years, then there’s those moving in now. I think because we have a base of Spanish-speaking residents already, it makes the community more appealing to others who speak Spanish.” The challenge for the newcomers is that they are moving into a region where English is the primary language. The ESL classes are an effort to help the immigrants not only adapt to their new home, but also improve their lives. It seems to be working.

Venedith Vargas, ESL instructor, tells the story of a former student, who took the most basic ESL classes offered in order to move up from a job as a housekeeper. That student then went on to become a nursing assistant through MPCC and was recently named “Employee of the Month” at her workplace. “There are a lot of others just like her,” said Vargas. “Most of our students are stay-at-home moms, but some were professionals in Mexico before they moved here. Right now, I’m teaching an engineer and a former business manager.”

The ESL classes are open to all levels of English-speaking individuals. The only requirement is that students be at least 18 and not in the public school system. Enrollment is open year-round, and classes are offered in three-hour sessions multiple times of the week. There’s typically fewer than 10 students in each session, which allows for one-on-one instruction. It also builds camaraderie.

“The ESL students tend to have a lot of fun,” said Connie Thompson, also an ESL instructor at the college. “They rely on one another for help. Because they are all learning together, they aren’t as embarrassed to practice English in front of each other as they might be in front of a native English speaker.” She’s a firm believer that the message sent by the course offering is just as important as the skills learned. “The classes show the rest of the community that these students are trying to learn English,” said Thompson. “As for the students, themselves, they gain a sense of pride by being able to communicate with doctors, dentists and others without having to take their kids out of school or rely on friends or relatives to translate for them.”

Vargas couldn’t agree more, and she’s grateful that the Imperial Campus provides an opportunity that might not otherwise be available to local Hispanic and Latino residents. “The ESL classes are a gift our students give to themselves,” said Vargas. “It’s personal time, a learning opportunity and a quality of growth subsequently reflected in our community.” More information about the ESL classes is available through the Imperial Campus, 1324 Broadway, in Imperial, by calling (308) 882-5972 or by emailing ledallb@mpcc.edu.

Just 200 Days ‘Til the 2017 Adult Education Conference (Depending on When You Read This)

By: Jim Lukesh, Nebraska Department of Education

It never hurts to plan ahead; so make space on your calendars for the annual Nebraska Adult Education Fall Conference to be held October 19-20, 2017 with possible pre-conference sessions on October 18. The schedule has not yet been finalized but, if past years are any indication, the Conference will be among the premier professional development opportunities of the year. Classes are not to be held these days so you should be free to attend. Do not miss this opportunity to further your career as an educator!
Renee Miller Garners Honor
By: Heather Johnson, Mid-Plains Community College-North Platte

A Mid-Plains Community College (MPCC) instructor has been recognized at the national level for work in the field of adult education. Renee Miller, of Sutherland, was named as a runner-up for the Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award by the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE). Robin Rankin, MPCC area director of Adult Education, submitted the nomination, which was supported by letters from Miller’s colleagues.

“Renee is an inspiration to her students,” said Rankin. “She works tirelessly to make sure they have every opportunity for goal completion and advancement. We are thrilled that Renee made the final round for this prestigious award.” In her letter of support, Vicki Bauer, state director of Nebraska’s ABE program, said it has been refreshing to see Miller learn and grow as an outstanding staff member. “Her energizing and uplifting personality makes her a favorite among her students and colleagues,” the letter reads.

Bauer said Miller’s experience provides the background needed to work with diverse populations - an element crucial to a successful and productive ABE program. She commended Miller for her initiative and strong organizational skills as well as a willingness to try new things to improve both the MPCC and state ABE programs. Miller volunteers for pilot projects, serves as a “sounding board” for the planning and implementation of policies and procedures and presents at state and regional conferences. Over the years, she has also recruited, trained and reported on numerous volunteers for the adult education program.

“Renee is always learning and using what she learns to improve her teaching and her colleagues,” said Andy Long, MPCC area vice president of student affairs. “She is willing to invest herself in the education of our students. Additionally, her enthusiasm, ability and knowledge have helped develop instructors across the state.”

Miller was both excited and humbled by the recognition. “The only way I can do all of the things I do is with the support of my family, my in-laws, the college’s adult education team and God’s guidance,” said Miller. “I’m grateful to Robin and Kristy Volentine (also an ABE instructor). Without their support, encouragement and diligence in putting together this nomination, I would never have had the chance at this award.” The Coalition on Adult Basic Education uses the Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award to highlight excellence and inspire other educators so that adults succeed and communities thrive. More information about the organization can be found online at http://www.coabe.org.

Using Nearpod to Engage Your Students in the Classroom
By: Emily Duncan, Northeast Community College-Norfolk

At Northeast Community College, we continue to use Nearpod as a source of curriculum for our classes. Nearpod is an online tool with interactive PowerPoints. A user is able to create a presentation or choose from the site’s library. This program has allowed our students to be engaged through laptops, tablets, or their own phones. It also allows students the opportunity to take notes and go back and review the presentation at any time. To present a lesson, instructors will give a five letter code to their students. Students do not need to create an account or remember a username and password! If you haven’t heard of Nearpod, go to www.nearpod.com and check it out! Feel free to contact me and I guide you through the site. Nearpod accounts are free. Some presentations do cost, but, they have a large quantity of free ones.

Here’s the link to my presentation on Nearpod from conference: https://share.nearpod.com/vsph/QWkH2HfBAX

Last Fall, our instructors used a Nearpod presentation on stress. The lesson was created to teach students about what stress is, coping techniques, and how the body responds to stress. This presentation fit perfectly in with the holiday season. Every instructor had the lesson and chose to teach it in many different ways. Our ABE/GED® instructors used the presentation and had classroom discussions while our ESL staff focused more on vocabulary and what stress is. Each instructor was able to change the lesson to fit their class’ needs. The instructors feel their students benefited from this presentation as they now all understand what stress is and have at least one technique for coping with it. The video in the lesson is excellent. Here is a link to the presentation: https://share.nearpod.com/vsph/1t2qoRBV6x