Racing Around the State

Program managers from around the state share some of their strategies for success.

For this issue of Progress, we asked programs to report to us how their Race to GED campaigns are going. We received updates from 10 programs from around the state. Each of these reflects the creative thinking and hard work that are making the Race to GED a success. Several of the pilot sites from the first two rounds of Fast Track implementation provided excellent overviews of their efforts. Now that Fast Track is a responsibility for all programs, we hope these insights will help newer Fast Trackers get into top gear. Our thanks to all of the programs who provided stories for this issue.

• Hampton Adult Education
• Dayton Learning Center
• Prince William County Schools Adult Education
• Russell County Schools Adult Education
• Page County
• Northern Neck Adult Education
• Regional Adult Education Program: Lee, Scott, Wise, & Norton Public Schools
• Spotsylvania Regional Adult Education Program
• Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center
• Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education

We’re moving!
In early June 2005, we will close for a week while we move. Following Memorial Day, we will be closed from Tuesday, May 31, through Monday, June 6. When we reopen, we’ll have a new address:

Our new address:
Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center
817 West Franklin Street Room 221
P.O. Box 842037
Richmond, VA 23284-2037
A Few Words on Progress

Sharing knowledge, skills, and experiences with colleagues is one of the great benefits of our field. Adult educators always seem to be willing to take the time to help each other with information about promising practices or new projects. We learn much from one another about what works and what could be improved.

I just returned from the VAACE Conference, which always provides a good opportunity to catch up with colleagues I see rarely and to attend sessions on subjects that I may not encounter in my routine work. I attend conferences to learn informally in impromptu conversations and formally in conference sessions. Sometimes I challenge myself and attend a session totally unrelated to my usual job. Then I try to find ways to use what I learned in my own work. Conferences are a good choice for professional development, because they offer a variety of sessions on different topics, and they attract a lot more participants than workshops. So this provides many more choices of sessions to attend and people to meet and learn from.

In this issue of Progress we include the programs for the summer institutes at Radford, James Madison University, and the College of William and Mary. If you have never attended a summer institute, you will find that they not only provide good value for the cost, but they also offer interesting and diverse programs. The institute at Radford will cover the wide range of topics in adult education and literacy, while the institutes at JMU and W&M will focus on different aspects of ESOL.

Take a break from the routine and plan to attend a summer institute. You are guaranteed to have a great learning experience!

Sincerely,

Barbara E. Gibson
The Problem With Copyright

As I discussed in the last column, basic copyright law provides protection for the author(s) or creator(s) of any original material whether or not it is officially registered with the Library of Congress. Copyright secures the following exclusive rights for the copyright owner:

- reproduction,
- derivative,
- distribution,
- public performance,
- and public display.

The problem with copyright lies in its restrictive nature. Because the rights are inherently owned by the creators, others who might want to modify or redistribute copyrighted materials can be uncertain about what freedoms they are allowed. What can creators do, then, to allow others more creative freedom with their work?

Copyright on the Web

In the last issue, I discussed fair use and how copyrighted materials can be used in the classroom. Since then, I’ve had several questions about how material from the Web falls under fair use guidelines.

The answer is that material on the Web falls under the same general rules of fair use. An article from a website has the same guidelines as an article from a magazine. On the Web, though, it is often easier to request permission simply by using the contact info on the website.

How Does Creative Commons Help?

Creative Commons is a nonprofit group focused on copyright reform. They have created an easy-to-use licensing system allowing anyone to specify what restrictions or provisions they want to apply to their creative work. Their website, www.creativecommons.org, makes it easy for people to apply a custom copyright license to their work or find works available for reuse.

With Creative Commons, you can specify more detailed license freedoms and restrictions so that people who use your materials can know exactly what is allowed and what isn’t. License options include

- **Allowing commercial use** of your work,
- **Allowing modifications** of your work,
- and **requesting that others share your work with the same license** if they redistribute it.

To make it even simpler, every licensing option comes with three different versions:

1. **A human-readable license** that explains the rights and protections in simple, understandable English.
2. **A lawyer-readable license** that explains the rights and protections in the necessary legal contract.
3. **A machine-readable license** that can be embedded into digital documents to make searching for content by the licensing options easier.

Using the Creative Commons website, you can find other material that has been released under a Creative Commons license. To do this, you can click on the Find Image at the top center of the Creative Commons homepage. On the resulting search page, you can enter the keywords you’re searching for (as you would for a search engine such as Google), and then you can select how you plan to use the materials you find, such as works that you are allowed to modify, or works you’re allowed to use commercially. Finally, you can select what format you want those works in: audio, video, text, interactive multimedia, or images.

License Options

- **Attribution**: You must give the original author credit.
- **Non-commercial**: You may not use this work for commercial purposes.
- **No Derivative Works**: You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.
- **Share Alike**: If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under a license identical to this one.

Want An Example?

We publish an article in the Progress newsletter about a new copyright system called Creative Commons, and a program manager in Williamsburg wants to create a mini-training for her teachers on how to use the Creative Commons website from that article.

Because we now have a Creative Commons license for Progress, we allow derivative work as long as there is attribution for the original version. Thus, as long as the program manager credited us for the original article, he or she could republish and distribute the modified version knowing that it was legal to do so.

Got a question or suggestion for a future topic? Email sgrainer@vcu.edu with the subject “Click on this.”
The Governor’s Race to GED Initiative is moving into new territory in a way that promises to deliver more GED candidates. Local broadcaster and literacy advocate, Angie Miles, is working with the Department of Education and Richmond’s faith-based community to create new partnerships: alliances that will strategically work to draw more candidates to the GED.

The group is also planning a major GED Awareness Day for the fall, soon after school-aged children return to the classroom. This will likely consist of various satellite events at churches throughout the city and one culminating event at a central location, to which all will be invited. Planning for this event is about to expand to include not just the anchor group of church leaders, but also representatives of various ministerial groups who can help deliver the message to their members.

The response from the faith-based community has been remarkable ... They have been outspoken about their desire to help edify individual members and their families by putting the GED within their reach.

In the city of Richmond, a core group of church leaders have committed to supporting the Race to GED effort in the following ways:

- Participating in a community-wide GED Sunday, during which the GED message will be incorporated in the sermon. GED, college, and career representatives will be available to answer questions and sign up interested individuals.
- Following the GED Sunday with motivational reminders for several weeks.
- Signing on to ask all houses of worship in the city to participate in the GED Sunday event.
- Actively recruiting within the congregation, with members’ friends and relatives, and within the neighborhoods surrounding the churches to recruit potential candidates.

The response from the faith-based community has been remarkable. These leaders understand the scope of the problem we face; within their sanctuaries, they often see the sad results of school failure and the tragic ripple effect throughout communities. They have been outspoken about their desire to help edify individual members and their families by putting the GED within their reach. And they clearly wish to usher these potential candidates to a place of greater prosperity and personal fulfillment. We are on the verge of important new work.

Books are the Bridge

In addition to the faith-based partnerships, Angie Miles is also piloting a new effort within our GED classrooms. Students in Hopewell, Petersburg, and Richmond have been exposed to children’s literature in a whole new way. "Books are the Bridge" is a family literacy workshop that shows GED students how reading aloud to children will:

- Strengthen their relationships
- Improve youth literacy and interest in books
- Increase background knowledge for both child and adult - key for reading comprehension
- Improve other basic reading skills for the adult, including vocabulary and fluency
- Help them make specific strides in their pursuit of their GED and in their life-long education beyond the GED
- Create a whole new appreciation for books for students who may have had negative experiences with them in the past.

Ms. Miles has taught the workshop in a limited number of classrooms, with a strategy in place to monitor changes in literacy-related behavior of the GED students and their families over a period of months. The workshop follow-up also allows an opportunity for continued encouragement in the new behaviors. With a fresh approach to literacy and learning within the homes of our GED students, we have a brighter prospect for ending the cycle of low literacy and underachievement within families and communities. That is, of course, one of the greatest aims of our Race to GED.
Dayton Learning Center (DLC), the home of Massanutten Technical Center’s (MTC) adult education program, provides a full array of learning opportunities to residents of Rockingham County, Harrisonburg City, and surrounding areas.

In the fall of 2004, MTC became one of the second-generation pilot sites for Race to GED and GED Fast Track. A Fast Track class began in October at the Workforce Center with nine students enrolled. Seven received their GED credential in December. Another of the group earned the credential after retesting in February. New Fast Track classes, which began in February, concluded in May.

On February 10, DLC kicked off a three-month campaign to dramatically increase the number of GED tests given in the area, culminating with a weeklong free testing blitz April 11-16. The opening Race to GED exhibit at MTC’s annual open house featured NASCAR giveaways and a retired NASCAR race car owned by a member of the Rockingham County School Board. Of the 400 visitors at the open house, more than 200 registered for prizes and received information concerning an event the following weekend at Harrisonburg’s major shopping mall. The February 18-20 exhibit at Simon Valley Mall’s annual Home and Living Show, sponsored by Verstandig Broadcasting, again drew more than 400 visitors who registered for NASCAR giveaways and received information about free GED Practice Tests to be offered in March, as well as the April GED testing blitz.

DLC implemented a comprehensive media campaign to promote the show and the March practice testing. This campaign included thirteen weeks of ads on the weekly NASCAR page in the Harrisonburg Daily News-Record. Ads in the six weekly newspapers in the area (one of which serves the Latino community), printing and distribution of 15,000 English/Spanish flyers, production of banners, pens, and refrigerator magnets, placement of magnetic signs on school maintenance vehicles, and letting students to more than 400 school custodians, cafeteria workers, and bus drivers.

During March, free Saturday GED practice tests were offered at three satellite locations. The Harrisonburg and Dayton locations provided the practice test in Spanish as well as in English, because of the large Latino population in the area. By the end of March, more than seventy-five individuals had taken a practice test, either at one of the special sessions or by individual arrangement.

The stage was now set for the April 11-16 free GED testing blitz, during which six complete GED tests were scheduled over twelve sessions. DLC offered morning and evening sessions in two-day versions, Monday/Tuesday and Wednesday/Thursday, as well as full-day versions on Friday and Saturday, with the latter given in both English and Spanish. By 8:00 p.m. Saturday, 183 individuals had registered for testing and 159 had been tested.

Although the number of credentials earned as a result of this testing blitz won’t be known for several weeks, the event can only be characterized as an overwhelming success, with as many adults tested in one week as would normally be tested over a period of five months. Our community’s awareness of the value associated with acquisition of the GED credential has increased dramatically, resulting in dividends being paid for many years to come.

To the Next Generation
A poem by AMANDA BEAVER, a student from Russell County

Four months ago I found myself
Searching for my place.
I didn’t know what I would find,
Or just what I would face.

I was a high school drop-out;
I felt so confused
If life was a race, I thought,
Surely I would lose.

Although I ran into obstacles,
And ‘bout gave up once or twice,
My teachers wouldn’t let me;
They said I had to try.

So here I am today my friends.
My story I must share,
‘Cause my teachers really care.

If I could touch just one kid
With the kindness shown to me
It’d be the greatest feat of all.
More words than I could speak.

Take care; be brave;
Never, ever give up.
Thank the ones who help you out;
People grow from love.

Today I walk, my head held high
Stepping toward the future.
All my dreams are coming true;
My broken wings are sutured.
Preface: The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was effected to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind. Before No Child, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act mandated testing and services for all children qualifying as learning disabled. To date there has been no federally mandated requirement to test the adult population. Is it likely that testing requirements will be imposed or funding to serve them will be made available? No, but we have a solution already in place for learning disabled adults, one which provides a much needed alternative to GED testing and traditional classroom learning: The External Diploma Program.

Setting the Stage

In the fall 2003 issue of Progress Don Finn’s article on universal design (UD) stated that three to ten percent of our adult learners are learning disabled. Further, 1999 data from the National Center for Educational Statistics reveals that 45.7 percent of adult students self-report a learning disability. This comes as no surprise to hundreds of adult educators across the Commonwealth who routinely encounter adults with wide disparities between TABE reading and math scores. In our classrooms, we teach many adult learners multi-step math processes only to share their disappointment the next week, because they’ve forgotten them again. These are the students who reverse numbers and letters, misplace decimal points, leave words out of sentences, and can’t remember, despite diligent practice, how to spell commonly used words. Is it any wonder that so many of these students lose confidence in their goal of completing high school?

Adults may not know that they have a learning disability, but they are painfully aware of years of unsuccessful paper-pencil testing that has left them embarrassed and doubting themselves. The legacy of such a history is a series of aborted attempts to attain a secondary credential. The 2001 Task Force on Adult Education and Literacy report revealed 700,000 adults in Virginia without a secondary credential. How many of these adults will not come forward because the only alternative they know involves eight hours of GED testing or a classroom setting that they cannot manage with current life circumstances?

Twin Beacons: The Ford Foundation Project and the UD Movement

In 1972 the Ford Foundation funded Syracuse Research Corporation (SRC) to research why New Yorkers 25 and older who had not graduated from high school were not participating in the existing options to obtain a secondary credential. Among other findings, the research revealed the following about these adults.

• They felt competent in the life skills they had acquired at work and through community participation, but the content of the secondary completion options available to them did not relate enough to these important life experiences.
• They were busy with jobs and home life and felt the need for more flexible scheduling than the existing options offered.
• They were test anxious, and the multiple choice and paper-pencil tests they would have to perform were too limiting for them to show what they knew.

SRC’s Policy Institute then developed the idea of a brokering service that would provide career and educational counseling to adults targeting, among others, adults without a high school diploma. Facilitating career growth and change was a goal of this service. The Regional Learning Service (RLS) saw its first clients in January of 1974. It was the SRC staff at RLS that developed the External Diploma Program (EDP). In 1981, Delegate Ken Plum, then Director of Adult and Community Education for Fairfax County, learned about this innovative adult high school completion program and brought the External Diploma Program to Virginia.

A few years later educators began to recognize the need for universal design (UD) in instruction. UD identifies and provides appropriate accommodations for individuals with hidden disabilities, specifically learning disabilities. UD seeks to remove barriers to access. It promotes designing for divergent needs, increasing usability for everyone, including the learning disabled, by

• Providing multiple, flexible methods of presentation,
• Providing multiple, flexible methods of assessment, and
• Providing multiple, flexible options for engagement to support affective learning.

Woven into EDP tapestry: Educational and Career Objectives and UD Principles

Like the warp and woof of a fine tapestry, the External Diploma Program weaves together assessment of students’ basic academic and occupational skills with the principals of universal design. No one becomes an actual candidate for the high school completion portion of the program until he has demonstrated mastery of basic academic skills. Mastery of high school level skills is measured by integrating and applying content appropriate for adults. By the time he leaves the program, the participant knows the kind
of job he would be good at, has a current resume and cover letter, and knows how to use the newspaper to find a job. If the candidate is currently employed, an employer verification letter goes out to the employer to verify satisfactory standards of work.

All this is accomplished using UD principles embedded in the EDP process. EDP is flexible in approach, varied in methods of presentation and assessment, and engages adults by measuring each participant’s work and life skills using his chosen areas of interest and experience. These principles work together to support student retention.

Flexible approach. EDP participants come in by appointment and stay only as long as needed. After demonstrating basic reading, writing, and math skills in the office, EDP participants work at home on their own time schedule to complete five task booklets. The task booklets contain activities that incorporate seven generic competencies that are required for successful adult employment and community living. The generic areas are communication, computation, self-awareness, social awareness, consumer awareness, scientific awareness, and occupational preparedness.

When work or home life requires extra time, EDP participants can take a break from program activity without penalty. None of their work or time investment is lost; no staff time is lost either. All completed work remains on file in a portfolio. Conversely, when not employed or when on vacation, participants can move ahead quicker, completing more work than expected.

The content and the process of EDP design incorporates all the exemplary principles and practices of what we know as the appropriate approach to working with adults in learning situations. The skills that are assessed in EDP are all relevant to the tasks that an adult must perform in every-day life as workers, parents, and citizens. Assessment often drives the learning, and EDP participants are motivated to learn when they find it relevant to them. They are encouraged to seek out and use community resources whenever they need more information in order to complete an activity. Public libraries, newspapers, internet, family, friends, or local community classes and tutoring services can be used by the participant for as long as it seems appropriate and wherever it is convenient. No need to wait for classes to begin and end or to attend more than is necessary.

Engages adults using their areas of interest. Most EDP participants consider their work situation and career goals of vital importance, perhaps the single largest motivator for returning to school. It is no surprise that most choose their past, present, or proposed work scenarios to complete activities in the second part of the program. For example EDP candidates are required to work through adult life-problem solving. An activity in Task E requires them to consider how groups function. They are to describe an individual’s impact on interpersonal relationships within a group. Life at work is often the rich environment from which participants choose to demonstrate this skill. Later, participants are asked to discuss a current or past conflict at work or, if not working, what they could imagine as a work conflict. Then they must brainstorm positive ways to resolve the conflict.

Varied methods of presentation and assessment. The presenting information in EDP activities may be in the form of spoken, written, or recorded word. Sources used may be radio, television, newspapers, magazines, books, or the internet. Students are often given the option of choosing the kind of media and what time they may retrieve the information needed to complete an activity. During assessment, students are asked to write as well as to speak answers to spot check assessments. All answers are compared against the National External Diploma Program standardized criteria before being accepted. The candidate is given continuous feedback so that learning from mistakes is part of the learning experience. None of the assessments is timed.

Honoring the value of clients’ time, honoring clients’ areas of interest as a means of demonstrating the required competencies, and allowing clients the latitude of multiple assessment modalities all work together to support student retention in the pursuit of a secondary credential.

“Why haven’t I heard about this before?”

I hear this frequently from prospective students and practitioners who are looking for an alternative for those hard to serve students, the ones who have text anxiety, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, or who cannot go to a regular class for a variety of reasons. With funding in short supply and the pressure to graduate more and more adults who come to us in ever-growing numbers, it is good to know that there are nearly twenty EDP sites around the state already.

The task before us is to develop regular start up and staff development training for EDP practitioners and to let the public know that there is an alternative to timed testing and classroom instruction, so that no adult will be left behind.

A Success Story from Russell County

Susie Jones, one of our former Fast Track students, can testify about the success she experienced by attending a Fast Track GED class. Susie completed the program, earned her GED, and got a better job. After getting her GED, Susie was hired by People Incorporated as an office assistant. In addition to reaching that goal, Susie also has attained her goal of entering college. She is currently attending Southside Virginia Community College, enrolled in the Certified Nursing Assistant program. Susie says that because of her experience in the adult education program, she was able to approach the workplace and the college with confidence.
Tell me about you. How did you become a math expert?

By any standard, I’m not an expert in mathematics, but math education has been my passion and life work. I had a few role models – my mother, who wasn’t afraid of numbers and enjoyed taking care of the family finances, and an excellent high school math teacher. Because of them, I wasn’t afraid of choosing math as a major in college and graduate school. That choice was also prompted by the realization that writing papers would be the main requirement in nearly every other choice. I hated writing papers!

But it was while I was teaching math (mostly arithmetic) to those who had trouble learning it that I was forced to look beyond the textbook procedures to the underlying structure. I needed to answer their “Why?” questions with reasons they could understand.

With all the math curricula available, why did you feel it was necessary to write a math workbook and teachers guide?

In 1988, when I left my job as the Mathematics Editor at the GED Testing Service, I was disappointed in the GED-prep mathematics textbooks that were on the market. While the test focused on problem solving, the books focused narrowly on skills and procedures. I felt sorry for the learners who were being subjected to that form of torture. So, even though I still was not fond of writing, I felt that I had to tell teachers what I could about the real nature of the test and how to prepare learners effectively for it.

What suggestions do you have for Fast Track programs?

Learners who qualify for the Fast Track program have shown by their performance on the TABE that their skills with mathematical procedures are at an acceptable level. So, rather than focus on removing any skill gaps that may exist, I would focus on connecting the concepts that form the basis for understanding and on applying the concepts to problems that require reasoning as well as skills.

I know you worked on the 1988 GED math test. What is your relationship with GEDTS now?

I continue to work as a consultant with the GEDTS. I was on the specifications committee for the 2002 mathematics test; I review individual items for the tests, and also review the final forms, both for the practice tests and the tests that are in the field.

What should the focus of ABE math be?

(My answer paraphrases an Adult Numeracy Network (ANN) document that I have been working on lately.)

• It will involve building computational fluency, conceptual understanding, and problem solving strategies.

Who is Myrna Manly?

Myrna Manly has a wide variety of experience in mathematics education, having taught at many levels, from junior high school to college, and in many locations around the world. Using innovative approaches to reasoning about mathematics and its applications, she has succeeded in reaching many at-risk students.

In addition to teaching, Myrna has worked as the Mathematics Test Specialist for the General Education Development Testing Service (GEDTS) and continues to serve as an item and final form reviewer. A charter member of the Adult Numeracy Network, she is a frequent presenter at national and international mathematics education conferences.

Myrna knows Virginia well. She began working with us in 2001 as the specialist for GED as Project: Math. She wrote most of the inquiry activities and the helpful appendices that are in that volume. She has presented the inquiry process approach to math at several summer institutes. Most recently, she was one of the consultants who developed the GED math content standards for Virginia.
It should include the foundations of the content strands of number, data, geometry, and algebra so that learners can develop these mathematical ideas over time.

It should revolve around worthwhile tasks that offer relevance and challenge the learners’ reasoning ability so that they see the value in learning mathematics.

**Is it true that we don’t need to teach fractions?**

I won’t go quite that far! Exploring the nature of fractions is critical to understanding numbers. However, I do recommend some changes in emphasis. In my workshop, we will take an honest look at the way we, as adults, use fractions in our lives and at how fractions are represented in the Official GED Practice Tests. The participants will go away with a different perspective on what aspects of the study of fractions are important.

Your readers will have to come to the workshop to get the full answer to your question.

**I know that you will be the featured guest at the VAIILO conference in July. Can you give me an idea of what you will be focusing on in your presentations?**

I’ll be doing a short keynote address where I’ll talk about adult numeracy and its importance to the nation and to adult education programs. Then I’ll lead a full-day workshop, Making Math Meaningful, for teachers who missed that when I was in Virginia last fall. Finally, I’ll spend time with the teachers who were at those workshops in the fall, discussing the problems and joys of implementing some of the ideas in their classrooms.

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Lauren Ellington is the online training and learning disability specialist for the Resource Center.

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**Southwest Virginia Programs**

by **LINDA ALLEN, REBECCA SCOTT, SUSAN SEYMORE**

Linda Allen, Rebecca Scott, and Susan Seymour, Program Managers in Planning Districts 1, 2, and 3 are joined at the hip – at least in matters that pertain to adult education.

Russell County (Linda Allen) was selected as one of the original pilot sites. Since their first Fast Track class began in January 2004, 54 students have been enrolled. Forty-five have completed and earned a GED. The average number of attendance hours for the 45 who completed was 36 hours. Seven students are currently enrolled in a Fast Track class and are on track to meet their goal of earning a GED by June 2005.

In Scott County (Rebecca Scott), seventeen students were enrolled beginning in October 2004. Eight have obtained a GED. The program held intensive professional development for Fast Track, which is now offered throughout the region, using the Scott County Fast Track Instructor as the regional coordinator. Potential students are identified by high TABE scores and by their declaration of motivation. GED Testing has changed under Fast Track with more frequent, examinee-friendly testing, i.e. individualized scheduling.

Rebecca is implementing an innovative instructional strategy, soon to be in operation, which involves her Distance Learning Program, MHC GED Interactive Online and a partnership with a local Internet service provider and the regional library system. Fast Track participants may access GED Interactive Online from a home computer or a local library. Laptops will be loaned to learners who do not have a home computer or easy access to a library. These individuals will have telephone, on-line messaging and email access to instructors.

In the Mount Rogers Region (Susan Seymour), twenty are enrolled. Six have received their GED. The other students are close to completing. Fast Track classes began in October 2004 after an aggressive marketing campaign. Initial ideas to conduct a closed class quickly faded. The “build it and they will come” philosophy fizzled. A Fast Track in-service designed for a rural area was conducted in April for all adult education teachers to address barriers associated with promoting this program. All teachers are now implementing Fast Track.

Susan is currently working with the local CAP agencies to conduct a modified distance learning program in the homes in which the Family Service Workers serve. Laptop computers, loaded with Steck-Vaughn ACCESS and the OPT, will be provided to individuals who cannot attend a traditional class. The Family Service Workers will assess the students using TABE Online. Teachers will be available to address any questions the students may have. All paperwork will be completed and submitted by the Family Service Workers.

All classes in the three programs are multilevel (GED prep and Fast Track) with open enrollment. Although this is challenging at times, this format works for us.

Linda, Rebecca, and Susan have collaborated to conduct a variety of marketing strategies: weekly articles in the local newspapers, ads on cable TV, billboards, manned displays, newspaper, radio, and banners. Local corporate sponsors have provided incentives and free advertising – the value of which now exceeds $500,000.

Even though Fast Track in Southwest Virginia is still a work in progress, we have learned much during our pilot experience. We are ready to venture out with the confidence that what we are doing works and the willingness to adapt our program and modify our approach as needed.
Hampton Adult Education
By Cynthia Cooper

Hampton Adult Education joined the Race to GED at its inception in the spring of 2004 as one of the original five pilot sites. The Race has proven to be an amazing impetus for organizational growth both in service delivery and outreach efforts. What seemed like a daunting task at first has recharged the batteries of the staff here, fostered creativity in marketing and policy development, spurred improvements in data management and analysis, and has been the catalyst for the formation of a regional marketing effort for programs serving Workforce Investment Areas XIV and XVI.

Our first-year marketing efforts centered on print media in local papers and on public transportation. Despite our impression that the effort might not have been as effective as it could have been, we ended last program year with 420 participants—up nearly 25% from 328 the previous year! Since then, we have expanded the print marketing effort to include everything from water bill inserts to church bulletins on Easter Sunday. Our most creative endeavor has been the production of two 30-second TV commercials which will be broadcast on both cable and network TV as part of a region-wide marketing campaign reaching full swing this fall.

Hampton starts a new Fast Track class about every eight weeks and fills the class each time. The success rate of this closed-enrollment model is extremely high, so we feel confident that our instructional practices are sound. We have two major challenges: the first is the continuation of our efforts to recruit more potential graduates, and the second is building our program capacity to meet the needs of those potential graduates, particularly in light of reduced funding for our program next year. Still, we look forward to the challenge.

Since joining this initiative, we have truly adopted a model of continuous improvement and a “can do” attitude about meeting new challenges. So far, that new attitude is paying off. In just three quarters this year, we have already produced more GED earners than we did during the entire 2003-2004 year, and we feel as though we’re just getting started. We’re in the race, and we’re happy to be here!

Spotsylvania Regional Adult Education
By Betsy Mathias

Our program entered the Race to GED as a second-round pilot site last August. Although we have been steadily concentrating on strategies to increase the number of GED graduates, this new concept was presented to our GED teachers at our fall in-service in September. The NASCAR theme wasn’t necessarily applicable to our region, but the challenge to strongly increase our numbers was.

Two Fast Track classes were established in late September, based on TABE scores during registration. The evening class was held in Stafford, with 12 students, and a morning class was held in Spotsylvania for five students. The math cut-off kept numerous adults out of the Fast Track range. Seven of the 12 evening students passed, and 4 of the morning students passed. Math was the barrier for all those who didn’t pass. In addition to the Fast Track classes, all GED teachers added new teaching strategies to ready the higher skilled students at a quicker pace.

Instruction was reviewed and several teacher workshops were held to focus on math and test-taking strategies:
1. TABE Certification training
2. Math instruction – with Myrna Manly
3. GED Fast Track training
4. GED test-taking strategies with the GED examiner

Additionally, five math teachers were hired to support the evening GED classes. Their role was to work with those students close to taking the math test, to provide any last minute strategies. I call them my “math closers.”

The key to our program success has been the administration of the GED test. Since January, split testing has been offered monthly. Students take writing and reading the first week, science and social studies the second week, and math the third week. The ability to spread out the test and focus on one or two subjects at a time has proved quite successful. Prior to taking the test, all first-time test takers are required to attend an orientation session which provides an overview of the test and strategies related to pacing and stress reduction.

Other test administration strategies have been put in place:
1. Higher level ESOL students are encouraged to take the math test to become familiar with the test format and to build their confidence. They are typically strong in their math but need a lot of work on their writing and reading skills.
2. For those test takers who only need to pass one or two tests, single test administration is offered on Wednesday afternoons, from 4 to 6 p.m. They can register for this option by Monday of the week in which they test.

The interest in our split testing has grown this year to the point that we are testing sixty people with this option in April. Half of these people would not have tested if they had to take the entire test on one day, the traditional mode of testing for our area.
Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center
By Ellen Graham, Fast Track Teacher, Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center

Virginia Beach has been busy marketing their GED Fast Track program, which began in January 2004. Many staff members volunteered to distribute information about our Fast Track classes at our local three-day Neptune Festival in September. The word continued to be spread at Pembroke Mall in January. In addition to traditional advertising techniques such as flyers, posters, postcards, and promotional materials, we have advertised with interior and exterior posters for 200 local buses, a pre-show feature in a local movie theater, and magnetic car and truck signs for 250 school board vehicles. Recently there has also been a regional advertising effort including television commercials and ValPak mailings.

Marketing efforts have been successful as evidenced by enrollment figures. Since the inception of our Fast Track day and night classes, 311 students have enrolled. We are currently experiencing a 95% pass rate for the GED test. We attribute the success rate to a variety of factors.

Longer class sessions have helped students concentrate on their studies and prepare for the GED test in a shorter period of time. All sessions are three hours long, with day students meeting five days per week and night students meeting three nights per week. Computerized Official Practice Tests and prescriptions have enabled students and teachers to identify weaknesses and pursue the necessary course of study for a speedier preparation for the test. More frequent GED Test dates have enabled students to conveniently test at a time when they feel prepared.

The GED Fast Track continues to be a learning experience for the Virginia Beach Adult Learning Center staff. With continued input from students and staff, we look forward to more successful years with the GED Fast Track program.

Prince William County Schools
By Bette Sneed and Sue Garlock

Prince William County Schools (PWCS) Adult Education proudly participated in the Race to GED as one of the five pilot sites. Successful strategies have included an aggressive marketing campaign, the implementation of Fast Track GED classes, and an in-depth analysis of our GED Test results. Although many other program areas were addressed, these three have had the greatest effect on our Race to GED efforts.

An aggressive marketing campaign uses a creative approach to build community awareness. In collaboration with PWCS Media Department, a video was produced illustrating adult education students participating in the Race to GED. The video stresses that the Race does not end with a GED. The pursuit continues as additional educational and professional opportunities become available after achieving the credential. We also created an ad for the big screen at movie theaters. For one month, eighteen theaters at Potomac Mills Mall ran this advertisement prior to the main feature.

In May 2004, 71 area adults participated in a free Official Practice Test (OPT) offer. Thirty-six examinees passed and were ready to take the GED Test. To encourage people to follow through with testing, a modification to the free event was made in April 2004. Upon successful completion of the OPT, registration for free GED testing was conducted. Those participants not ready for GED testing were given access codes to GED 21st Century and referred to a class. Incredibly, 107 people attended this event and 44 registered for the GED test. All qualified participants were given the opportunity to test within one week of the event. The extensive marketing campaign at the movies, in local newspapers, on community marquees, on cable TV, in electric bills, on fliers, and on magnetic decals for cars raised the community awareness needed to make this event supportive in providing necessary training workshops in a timely manner.

In analyzing GED testing data for program improvement, we identified one trend. Often examinees successful on part of the test were not returning to retest. Many examinees were experiencing difficulty passing math and/or writing, which led to our offering of math only and writing only classes. If an examinee passes everything but does not accrue enough points, a letter recommending Fast Track classes is sent. When extensive preparation is required, the examinee receives a letter recommending ABE/PreGED classes. Those successful on the GED Test receive a congratulatory letter. One of these personalized letters accompanies each transcript. When registered test takers do not attend their scheduled test day, a letter is sent encouraging them to reregister, and demographic forms, along with answer sheets, are kept on file for three months.

As our racing experience continues, we look forward to additional marketing opportunities and student successes. PWCS Adult Education welcomes the opportunity to serve the adult community by providing a more educated workforce as Virginia Races Optimistically On Marketing GED. VROOM!
Page County
By Cherye Estep

This has been an exciting and innovative year for the GED program in Page County. Enrollment at the beginning of the year was typical of years past. However, after some new methods of recruitment were employed, our numbers began to grow. This year a GED class was held for the first time at the Workforce Job Placement One Stop located in the town of Luray. In January, we offered a Saturday clinic at that location that allowed adults to walk in and participate in a GED practice test. Eight students attended the clinic. As a result of the clinic, five students enrolled in our GED classes.

We have also placed banners throughout the county advertising our free classes. Four banners measuring three feet by eight feet emblazoned with the Race to GED logo were placed at three of our elementary schools and one high school. A weekly ad also runs in the local paper with the same information. Television advertisements providing information about the GED and offering free practice tests have been running on the local community channel.

We are also really excited about the GED test being given for the first time here in the county. In the past, our students have had to drive to neighboring areas to test. With the help of Chief Examiner, Jim Orndoff, of Massanutten Technical Center, the GED test was given at the county seat on January 18th and 19th. The turnout was great: all nine spots available were filled. And all adult students who participated received their diplomas! It was a great success. Thanks to the Regional Literacy Coordinating Committee, all adult participants were able to take the test free of charge. Many students commented on how comfortable they felt taking the test in a familiar surrounding. It was so successful that we are planning to offer the test again in May. That testing session will also be free of charge, and enrollment for that session is already full.

Our recruitment activities, including the large banners in the community, the Saturday practice test session, and the television advertisements have led to an increase in the spring enrollment. We have achieved a 35% increase over last year’s enrollment. Given the success we have had with these new recruitment methods, we plan to start the fall session of classes by offering another Saturday practice test clinic prior to class registration. The race to GED is on in Page County, and we won’t rest until everyone crosses the finish line!