

PROGRESS

A publication of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center

Bridging the Vision

by Joanne Huebner



What Lies Beneath the Surface

To respect something is to understand that there is something there to see, that it is not all surface, that something lies beneath the surface, something that has the power to change the way we think or feel, something that may prove so profound a revelation as to change not only how we look at our lives but how we live them. — Ken Gire, author

I don't know about you, but I was feeling strong about a month ago, certain that the pandemic year was coming to an end, certain that we learned so much for the good, and certain that I felt ready for what lay ahead. Then, certainty changed once again to the familiar feeling of uncertainty and "what if's" became part of almost every conversation. Re-emerging brings both hope and anguish.

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That's when I heard the voice of my neighbor, a pharmacist, in my head saying, "Trust the vaccine." This mantra is my new metaphor for how I look at my life and how I approach our work. Trust it will all work. Trust that all of the support we've provided for one another over the past year will remain to guide us and enable success. How do I know I can trust? I know because of what lies beneath the surface of adult education's transformative year. I created a word cloud with all of the articles in this issue and guess what 3 words were big and bold? **EDUCATORS—EXPERIENCE—LEARNING**

In his book, *QBQ! The Question Behind the Question*, John Miller states, "Our first reactions are often negative, bringing to mind incorrect questions. But if in each moment of decision we can instead discipline our thoughts to look behind those initial questions and ask better ones, the questions themselves will lead us to better results." What lies beneath the surface? Katherine Hansen (p. 4) shares that the VALRC team's first reaction to a virtual conference was pretty negative, but when we asked "how can we offer a supportive opportunity provided in a variety of ways that could help (the field) with something they were already facing?," the AE&L ReMix was born.

You will find many more examples in this issue's articles from teams who took on the AE&L ReMix challenge and ultimately solved for a different X than when they started. Team Shine Virtually (p. 10) began with a goal to improve online learning and discovered the interconnectedness of quality online practices and improved program data by increasing student retention. Team CBLO Remix (p. 16) found solutions to diversifying a volunteer base in order to reflect the diversity of students, and, as importantly to the team, "shared resources, struggles, concerns ... and used each other as sounding boards for new ideas and best practices." They are committed to staying connected and to ongoing support. Team TJACE@PVCC (p. 40) took a historically significant community event, the Charlottesville Festival of Cultures, virtual and in doing so found that the "format offered them a surprisingly intimate individual connection to students. Student Cultural Exhibits are now part of a permanent collection that can be expanded in the future and used for educational and promotional purposes, true to the mission of the Festival since its inception." Personal accountability is not about changing others. It's about making a difference by changing ourselves.



As we move forward, armed with new thinking, new behaviors, and new support systems can we also remember to ask ourselves what lies beneath the surface? In what ways can adult learners feel supported by our work? How will they benefit and grow? Miller provides three guidelines for creating a better question behind the question to help get us started:

1. Begin with 'what or how' not 'why, when, or who.'
2. Contain an 'I' not 'they, them, we, or you.'
3. Focus on action—what can I do to contribute; how can I make a difference?

Thank you all for trusting the VALRC this year. 📍

Joanne Huebner is the manager of the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). She leads the team of educational specialists in carrying out the VALRC mission of equipping the field of adult education and literacy with essential skills and resources.



How to Ask Better Questions

The AE&L Conference ReMix Challenge Teams used the [Question Formulation Technique \(QFT\) from the Right Question Institute \(RQI\)](#) to stimulate inquiry. Utilizing this proven method allowed them to make meaning together and organize their project work. Questions formulated and prioritized by the team members were used to find resources, gather data, and apply information in order to answer their guiding question(s) or solve the problem(s) they identified. As you read through their project work highlighted in the articles throughout this **PROGRESS** issue, you will be able to see how important it was to ask the right questions to move them forward throughout the project process.

QFT "[helps all people create, work with, and use their own questions—building skills for lifelong learning, self-advocacy, and democratic action](#)". Take a look at the RQI website for [free educational tools](#) designed to help you ask the right questions in order to move into action, even in a virtual environment.

Also, hear from Region 10 ESL Specialist, Debbie Tuler, in her [2019 PROGRESS article \(p. 12\)](#) where she demonstrates how she successfully uses the QFT in both her ESL classes and with instructional staff for professional development. Using this technique has transformed her practice and it can help guide your future efforts as well.



Re-Envisioning the Conference Experience

by Katherine Hansen

Not more than a month after wrapping up the 2020 Adult Education and Literacy Conference in Harrisonburg, the pandemic hit. We had already done some pre-planning for 2021 and had reserved the same venue, The Hotel Madison, for the following spring. It quickly became very clear that conferences were most likely not going to take place in person for the foreseeable future so we at the VALRC started putting our heads together about what could be a meaningful alternative professional learning experience and networking opportunity for adult educators in Virginia. While we knew that we would have to work within a virtual environment, we pushed ourselves to innovate beyond trying to take the typical conference experience and place it online. What we came up with was the 2021 Adult Education and Literacy Conference ReMix—an innovative spin on a longstanding classic.

Design

The first thing that was important to us was to offer an experience that would be meaningful. We recognized very quickly that tacking on more virtual webinars to our educators' calendars could be counterproductive to our mission as Zoom fatigue was already starting to become a reality. We were also cognizant that we needed to focus our efforts

on the most pressing issues affecting our programs at this particular point in time. We determined that digital literacy and diversity were areas that most likely needed support as our programs and educators would have to move operations online and address the ever-increasing equity divide that was brought even more to the forefront by the pandemic. It was paramount in our decision-making that what we offered was not an “add” to our educators' already full plates, but a supportive opportunity provided in a variety of ways that could help them with something that they were already facing.

We also wanted to model best practices as much as possible. We sought to demonstrate [adult learning theories](#) through [action learning](#), [self-directed learning](#), [peer-to-peer experience](#), [in-depth exploration](#), [evidence-based practices](#), [culturally responsive teaching](#), and [transformational learning](#). We also strived to create an engaging online learning experience for participants by [utilizing multi-modal approaches and a variety of tools](#) that we hoped would be utilized in each individual's own instructional context after having been introduced through the ReMix.



We took inspiration from the idea of a flipped classroom and decided to flip our conference. Instead of conference attendees being presented to, we thought that we could “flip the script” and give participants the chance to impact their program(s) through a project-based learning community. Instead of three days like our in-person conference, we spread the components out over six months. We kept some parts of our standard conference format like keynote speaker plenary sessions and Think Tanks and mixed them with a statewide project-based team challenge where teams would instead do the presenting at a culminating finale showcase. The 2021 AE&L Conference ReMix was born.

Implementation

We began the Conference ReMix by issuing a challenge to our educators. We challenged them to form teams and work together to take on a shared adult education problem that they were trying to solve, a question that they wanted to answer, or an idea that they wanted to try. We urged them to incorporate one or both of the following into a learner-

centered practice or work setting—respecting difference and diversity and integrating digital literacy/blended learning. Programs could bring their own team and designate their content area or propose a problem, question, or idea and seek members to join their team. Alternatively, individuals could sign up for a content area of interest and be assigned to a team. While this variety of choices took some planning and coordination by conference staff, the results were well worth the efforts. Cross-regional and cross-functional teams formed around common interests in tackling real issues that they shared.

To structure the team challenge, we adapted [project-based learning \(PBL\) methodology](#) so that educators could go through the project process themselves within a professional development context and become familiar with its components, terms, and practices. We hoped that this immersive exercise would encourage programs and instructors to offer PBL to their adult learners. We set up a timeline with periodic milestones—team formation; project setup; sustained inquiry;

testing, application, and feedback; reflect, critique, and advise; showcase preparation; and evaluation. We [provided guiding questions](#) for each milestone and created a team website which allowed for communication among team members, between teams, and with conference support staff.

A key component of the team challenge success was the incorporation of peer coaches culled from our statewide teacher leader professional learning community (PLC). Participation in the teacher leader PLC is an ongoing opportunity for Virginia adult education practitioners to work with other teacher leaders from across the state to learn about coaching styles and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) methods in order to integrate those skills into practice and enhance opportunities for collaboration and mentorship within their programs (see [p. 44](#)). As a Conference ReMix peer coach, select teacher leaders were able to directly apply the coaching and CRT principles from their PLC while working with teams to guide members through the PBL process. The peer coaches were instrumental in keeping teams motivated and on task throughout their projects. They provided crucial support not only to their teams, but also to conference staff.

As previously mentioned, we wanted to try and keep some of the tried and true components that conference participants have grown to love in our AE&L Conference. We also recognized that not everyone would be able to participate in the team challenge so we wanted to have some offerings that anyone could attend yet still be related to the overall ReMix design. We planned for four periodic virtual plenary sessions with keynote speakers who could offer their expertise in some of the primary learning objectives we were aiming to achieve. Alicia Bolton with the [Institute for Educational Leadership](#) was our plenary kickoff keynote speaker in early October. From her experience leading the [Minds that Move Us Initiative Adult Career Pathway Design Challenge](#), she set the stage and demonstrated what amazing things can be accomplished when teams work together and innovate in her keynote address [Collaborate to Innovate](#).

A few months later, our next plenary session speaker was Daquanna Harrison of [Elevation Educational Consulting Group](#). In her keynote address, [Bringing Your 'Whole Self', Discussions on Diversity in Adult Education](#), she led participants through a powerful interactive examination of personal cultural development, organizational practices, and tools to support diversity in ideas, personnel, and teaching strategies. Together, participants expanded on ways to bring their 'whole selves' to the classroom while better serving diverse students.

The next plenary session presenter was Jorge Valenzuela of [Lifelong Learning Defined](#). In his keynote address, [Make Remote Learning Engaging for Students by Focusing on Project-Based Learning](#), he demonstrated how to make remote learning engaging for students by focusing on project-based learning. He provided pro tips, resources, and actionable steps to help educators level up both virtual and face-to-face PBL units by focusing on blended learning, career skills, and equity and social and emotional learning in tandem with academics.

Finally, the culminating event took place virtually over two days in mid-April. The AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge Showcase presented the work of ten teams providing actionable solutions for Virginia's adult educators. Their presentations which are highlighted in this issue of **PROGRESS** were both educational and inspirational. In addition to a session about teacher leaders and peer coaches, the finale keynote address was brought by DJ Enferno of [Mix Major Electronic Music School](#) entitled [Connecting to Create Emotion & Inspire Action](#). He engaged with attendees and led adult educators in a practice of identifying core values and articulating a unified mission through music using technology in an online environment.

Throughout the plenary sessions, multiple online tools and virtual methods to engage participants were modeled. As participants entered the online environment, staff used engagement strategies like playing music, posing questions in the online chat, and

“Let us take the relationships that we have strengthened, the new cross-regional initiatives we have started, the successful projects we have formed and presented on, the energy and synergy that we experienced, the challenges that we have accepted—and conquered—through this Conference ReMix and use them to guide our collective mission moving forward.”

leading interactive activities to help make people comfortable communicating with each other. Multiple tools were used throughout sessions to offer a variety of modes to learn. Videos were created with [Doodly](#), audience polls were conducted with [Mentimeter](#), and collaborative discussion and feedback was encouraged with [Padlet](#)—to name just a few. Each session also offered time for Think Tanks where participants broke into randomized groups facilitated by the peer coaches. It was a time dedicated for reflection so that what was presented could be built upon with dialog among colleagues from across the state. It was our hope that this opportunity would stimulate ideas for application and generate mutual understanding and collaboration.

Result

Overall, response to this alternative conference format was positive. “I liked it better than in-person. It’s much more convenient,” said one conference-goer. “I liked the virtual conference due to the ability to stay home but still meet plenty of people around Virginia that volunteer, support, advocate, coordinate, manage, and teach in adult education” said another. From the team perspective, one member shared, “As a team, we were able to use the conference to motivate and direct our work, resulting in a product that had impact for our organization. Truly, ideas to concrete action through this process”. While some participants shared that they preferred meeting in person, one person pointed out that “This format made the best use of virtual learning. Going forward, it would be good to have a blended approach”.

This suggestion is certainly worth consideration moving forward and we welcome hearing more about what our adult educators want and need for professional development in the coming months and new program year. For example, we would like to continue the work we started this year with Daquanna and Jorge. Learn about what is being considered and let us know your thoughts in this [2021 AE&L Conference ReMix Evaluation and Future Interest Survey](#).

They say that necessity is the mother of invention. This past year has thrown us all some curve balls and we in adult education have adapted and created new and exciting paths forward. Let us take the relationships that we have strengthened, the new cross-regional initiatives we have started, the successful projects we have formed and presented on, the energy and synergy that we experienced, the challenges that we have accepted—and conquered—through this Conference ReMix and use them to guide our collective mission moving forward. As many of our teams recognized in their project work, Virginia will be looking to adult educators to help get people back to work. We have come through this challenging year, stronger and more connected than ever before. I, for one, can’t wait to see what we adult educators in Virginia will accomplish next! 📍



Katherine Hansen, M.Ed., serves as the Communications & Community Engagement Specialist for the VALRC. In her role, she leads the planning and coordination efforts for the AE&L Conference. She is a certified TESOL instructor and Project Management Professional (PMP®). Katherine's career experience bridges the academic, nonprofit, and corporate worlds in global intercultural communications, teaching/training, and program/organization development.

Virginia Moving Forward with Project-Based Learning

[Project-based learning](#) can be done at any level of your organization—at the program level, teacher level, and student level. Virginia has opportunities for each context. Here are a few examples.

Program Level

The 2021 Inaugural Cohort of the Leadership Excellence and Development Institute: Project-Based Learning for Programmatic Change

Beginning in March and running through October 2021, thirty-one of Virginia's adult education program administrators have come together from across the state through the [Leadership Excellence and Development \(LEAD\) Institute](#). LEAD is an opportunity for leadership development customized for adult education through the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC) in partnership with the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education (NASDAE) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR).

LEAD is an eight-month, state cohort professional development opportunity for current, new, and aspiring adult education administrators seeking to develop and strengthen their leadership skills. Developed by nationally recognized experts and practitioner-leaders in adult education programming and research, this interactive, practice-based leadership development training focuses on developing participants' skills and



knowledge across four key domains: (1) transformational organizational leadership, (2) learner-centered leadership; (3) data- and research-based decision making; and (4) workforce alignment.

Through a blended, project-based learning approach, we engage in synchronous and asynchronous content and collaborate across programs to develop a Leadership-in-Action project plan for our programs. VALRC will support participants in the implementation of their plans beyond the Institute. These project plans are framed around the central inquiry: "What program design and community engagement changes can be made to positively impact enrollment, completion, and outcomes?" Stay tuned for more details on each region's plans!

Teacher Level

The [Virginia Association for Adult and Continuing Education \(VAACE\)](#) is planning on continuing their Instructor Network Study Circles in the 2021-22 program year. These study circles provide an opportunity for members to collaborate across the state with other practitioners to identify best practices and proven strategies that can be incorporated into adult education programs across the Commonwealth. Stay tuned for more information about these opportunities which will be shared at the 2021 Virtual VAACE Conference in October. For more information or to express interest, contact [Rachel Ambrose](#).

Student Level

In 2019 before the pandemic, the VALRC and several regional programs participated in [VALUEUSA's Leadership Training for Adult Learners](#) pilot program. The two-day training for select students and staff has been developed by VALUEUSA Executive Director and adult learner leader Marty Finsterbusch. It is based on an [award-winning research project](#) by [Dr. Margaret Patterson](#) on student involvement in program improvement. Full of workforce readiness skills training and practice, the adult learner team (with support of program staff) identifies a priority improvement need and creates a viable project plan using critical thinking and organizational skills which is then implemented over the following months. Programs that have implemented what they learned through this Leadership Training report that there is a level of energy in the program not present beforehand. They also share that by working in partnership with learners for a more consumer-driven operation, learner involvement has enhanced recruitment, retention, resources, and reform. As soon as programs are comfortably back to a face-to-face routine, the VALRC and VALUEUSA hope to revisit the Virginia projects that have been put on hold and offer the training to other interested programs. For more information or to express interest, contact [Katherine Hansen](#).

Team Shine Virtually



Using the AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge online support process provided by the VALRC (Google site, milestones, on track, and stay organized, PBL site, & focus question techniques); we identified the best practices, resolutions, and outcomes our students and teachers could implement to reduce the challenges associated with online learning and an online platform to “shine” in the virtual community.

Best Virtual Practices

by Dr. Corlis Webb & Sherry Grantham

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sherry Grantham, Rappahannock Community College Adult Education Program• Dr. Corlis Webb, Loudon County Public Schools Adult Literacy Program• Alexandra Douglas, Virginia Beach City Public Schools ISAEP Program• Marjorie Lampkin, Rappahannock Community College Adult Education Program• Peer Coach: Bill Creighton, Virginia Department of Corrections	<p>After much in-depth research and study, the Shine Virtually team is excited to share their findings to help others become stellar online instructors. From their project, they have put together useful information, references, tips, and tricks on the best techniques to serve virtual adult education students. They provide tools to develop digital technology skills and methods to keep students motivated in a virtual class. They also present effective teacher-student interactions that will increase student on-line persistence and digital efficacy.</p>

Project explanation and description

We are Shine Virtually. Our goal, as a team, was to determine best practices for adult learners and teachers in the virtual classroom. We met regularly using the Zoom platform to discuss ideas, practices, and areas that had been of concern to us as teachers, managers, and administrators that may have also been a challenge for our students. We found that because the online platform was new to students and teachers, we sought to differentiate the challenges in the classroom between face-to-face interactions and the online environment. Through our meetings and research, we narrowed down the importance of online learning for students and teachers through various resources and tools.

Using the AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge online support process provided by the VALRC (Google site, milestones, on track, and stay organized, PBL site, & focus question techniques); we identified the best practices, resolutions, and outcomes our students and teachers could implement to reduce the challenges associated with online learning and an online platform to “shine” in the virtual community.

Project outcomes and takeaways

Although there were many facets to online learning and so much to learn from this experience, we identified the top three needs/areas where students and teachers could *shine virtually*—digital literacy, motivation, and persistence.

We realize that these challenges may continue to be challenges in the adult education and literacy space but we hope that what we have found as obstacles can become benefits to the adult education and literacy community in order to maintain our presence in research, status, and history as a result of COVID-19.

We have been able to personally implement some of the tools and techniques that we discovered into our classroom experiences, such as taking time to learn some of the functions and features of the online technology (Zoom or Google Meets) and implementing

the Canva Greeting Card tool to make students feel more welcomed. These efforts have improved program data by increasing student retention and program goals.

Other adult education programs can benefit from what we have learned from our project. Our advice? Don’t be afraid of the online community. Embrace it and relax throughout the process. Use the greeting card app as a way to maintain contact with students before, during, after, and between sessions to support classroom community.

We also gained insights through our experience with project-based learning (PBL). We learned more about adult education through this process using collaboration, teamwork, and creativity. PBL provides a more organized approach to teaching and learning. Instead of the teacher as the sage on the stage, the student becomes the sage on the stage. Including PBL in classrooms promotes a more focused and structured learning environment that can enhance a deeper level of learning.

Take a look for yourself at [Team Shine Virtually’s Showcase presentation along with their recommended tips, tools, and resources.](#)



Corlis Webb, Ed.D. has been working part-time in adult education as both a volunteer tutor and a substitute teacher for the past eight years teaching Pre-GED®, citizenship, and ESL classes. She is an instructional designer by day developing and creating course material in three different sectors—social services, transportation, and the government. Corlis enjoys student “aha moments” and finding interactive and motivating ways to teach her students. Participating in the AE&L Conference as part of the Shine Virtually team has allowed her to meet new people while developing new ways to support, encourage, and transform students in the adult education arena.



Sherry Grantham is the Regional Specialist for Region 17 Rappahannock Community College Adult Education Program. She has been working in adult education serving as an instructor as well as the Regional Specialist for the past seven years.



We are including some of the comments received for each showcase team. View more of the showcase discussion in the [2021 AE&L Conference ReMix Team Showcase Padlet](#).

Something that made me think was how to make my students feel like they are an important part of my classroom - whether they attend or not.

I was inspired by ways to engage learners in the virtual environment.

I plan to use the resources shared by Shine Virtually.

Something that I plan to put into practice is exploring canva.com to create engaging virtual backgrounds and the life experiences and the connect with students to build rapport to increase the sense of community.

Something that made me think was how we can figure out what motivates our learners. Everyone is different so it may take several tries.

Connecting Students & Employers



by Jacqueline Scolpini

When creating IETs that could be used across our region, we wanted to make sure that they met the needs and/or wants of our clientele (students and employers).



Caesars Entertainment is bringing more than 2,000 jobs to the region with the construction of their new casino in Danville.

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nadara Rust Kingery, Danville Public Schools Adult & Career Education Center • Jacqueline Scolpini, Pittsylvania County Technical Center • Lealice Hagwood, Martinsville City Adult Education and Career Services • Robin Gravely, Henry County Public Schools Adult Education • Chris Ezell, Danville Public Schools Adult & Career Education Center • Peer Coach: Amy Davis, Virginia Department of Corrections 	<p>With new industry coming to our region (12), team members wanted to connect more students with jobs & internships using technology but still be able to provide the same quality instruction when delivering curriculum. Merging technology and face-to-face instruction was the solution. We have created a way to reach more students and provide more opportunities for them to receive certifications without sacrificing a top-notch educational experience.</p>

When challenged with finding a topic that would be both useful and new, we had one leading question that started our search. How can we help students connect with jobs and internships? Although there is not a definite answer to a broad-based question as to what connects participants to programs/credentials, we realized that at the base of the goal it deals with students having credentials. Brainstorming commenced and questions such as “In what format does this credentialing need to be?”, “Can distance learning be incorporated?” and lastly, “Can we create something that can be duplicated across the region?” Although there were other questions and thoughts, we now had a focus. We wanted to create a way for students to have better access to beneficial integrated education and training (IET) programs.

When creating IETs that could be used across our region, we wanted to make sure that they met the needs and/or wants of our clientele (students and employers). We wanted to make sure in picking IETs on which to focus resources that obtaining the credential would actually help them acquire jobs or opportunities available in our area. Making sure the industry certification programs chosen were portable, asynchronous, simple, and had distance options was the focus when developing the IETs.

These certifications needed to have the credibility to be used across the United States. Having a nationally recognized certification that students can take with them wherever life may lead is important. Being able to build on these certifications is also beneficial for [stackable credentialing](#). Once the initial certification is obtained, it will open opportunities to obtain other related certification that can help employability.

Simple formatting and being asynchronous in nature are qualities that are vital to our students’ success. A lot of our adults have families and responsibilities that are also competing for their attention. Having a simple, less stressful format is what will help the students be able to function in their lives and

complete their educational goals at the same time. Not all of our students can meet for a class at the same time so being asynchronous is vital to the usefulness of these training sessions.

Lastly, the option of distance learning in today’s world is vital and non-negotiable. Having just been through (and continuing to go through) a pandemic, people are still very apprehensive about doing in-person activities. Not only are people nervous, but they also have very busy lives. Being able to complete these training sessions when each individual has a “free moment”, is very appealing and functional for anyone. Having the ability to attend in person and then knowing you do not have to quit due to life happening gives people the ability and confidence to complete these programs.

With all of these necessary qualities established for the programs, we started creating Integrated Education Training Programs for CDL Learners Permit, Customer Sales and Service, and ServSafe Food Handler. After these are 100 percent completed and implemented, we have a few other programs that we will be looking into to be able to create training programs for. OSHA 10, CNA, and Hospitality are on our docket due to the needs in our area.

To learn more about how Team Southside Solutions developed their project, [check out their AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge Showcase presentation](#). 



Jacqueline Scolpini is the Lead Instructor for Pittsylvania County Public Schools Adult and Career Education Center. She started her career as a high school special education teacher and continued in that field for 10 years. She then worked at a private school and started an academic learning center to help students receive differentiated instruction and attention. All of her experiences then led her to the rewarding world of adult education where she continues to grow and learn.

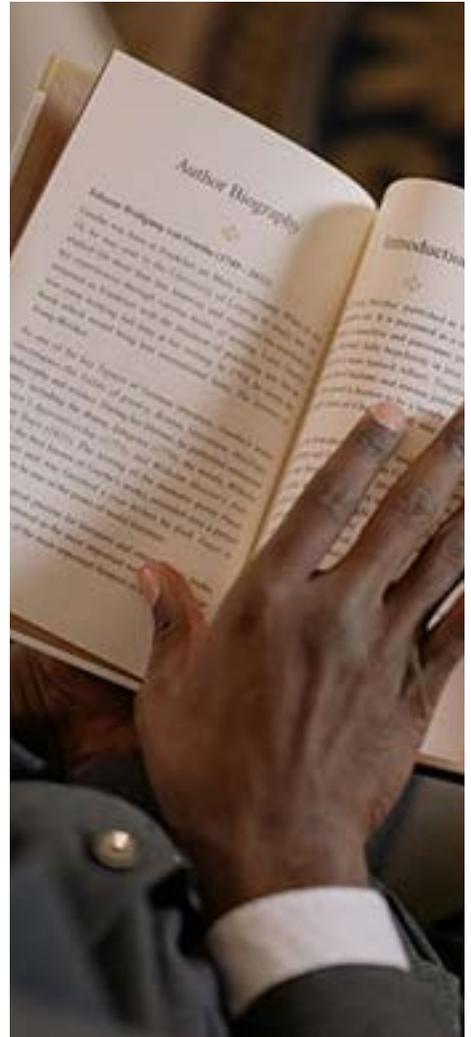
I was excited when I heard the Governor had approved for 5 locations to welcome a casino. My first thought was all about the employment opportunities for the chosen areas. It is such a great time for Adult Education to partner with those certifications. Seriously, I cannot wait to hear about outcomes and solidifying an ongoing partnership.

I was inspired by thinking about which certifications will meet regional demands.

I was inspired by putting all the materials for a certification course on a flash drive or shared Google drive.

Building Diversity Among Volunteers in Community-Based Literacy Organizations

by Steven Reid



We have shared resources, struggles, concerns, and over the past six months, we have used each other as sounding boards for new ideas and best practices.

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steven Reid, Literacy Volunteers Charlottesville/Albemarle • Aho Salem, Blue Ridge Literacy • Andy Gail, Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area • Linda Jilk, Literacy Volunteers of the New River Valley • Nausha Brown Chavez, The READ Center • Casey Guditus, Peninsula READS • Peer Coach: Keira Zirkle, Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington 	<p>Community-Based Literacy Organizations (CBLOs) thrive through the hard work of our volunteers. The CBLO Remix team explored the need for increased diversity within the volunteer base in order to reflect the diversity among their students.</p>

Community-Based Literacy Organizations (CBLOs) face unique challenges in the world of adult education.

Because so much of the instruction centers around volunteers instead of professional educators, our organizations must continually recruit and train new volunteers to meet the demands of incoming students. One of the concerns we face is finding volunteers who match the diversity of our students. This was the incentive that brought together six CBLOs from across the Commonwealth to address the problem of diversity among volunteers within our organizations.

Our group consisted of Nausha Brown Chavez, Program Manager, The READ Center in Richmond; Andy Gail, Executive Director, Literacy Volunteers Winchester Area; Casey Guditus, Program Specialist, Peninsula READS in Newport News; Linda Jilk, Executive Director, Literacy Volunteers of the New River Valley in Christiansburg; Steven Reid, Program Manager, Literacy Volunteers Charlottesville/Albemarle; and Ahoo Salem, Executive Director, Blue Ridge Literacy in Roanoke.

The plan was to find a pathway to engage a more diverse group of volunteers while not alienating the current demographic who is most likely to volunteer with our organizations. We discovered that transitioning our training sessions online (which was precipitated more by the COVID-19 pandemic than as an instrument to expand our reach) attracted a broader range of volunteers. Notably, the people who signed up for online trainings tended to be younger and more racially diverse than what we had experienced in traditional face-to-face trainings. However, while this did increase the participation with younger volunteers, it also served to discourage the participation of older, less tech-savvy potential volunteers.

Moving forward, the team will continue to explore ways to continue to connect virtually as well as reintroduce some in-person training, either using a hybrid model or offering some trainings in-person while others are fully online. Another important factor to highlight (and reflect upon) is that our attempts for

diversifying our volunteer base should not result in undermining the value of our current volunteer forces, many of whom have years of teaching experience. Perhaps as time goes by, we will need to find new strategies for peer-to-peer mentoring among our volunteers who each bring different skills and expertise. This project was also an important opportunity to evaluate our program based on demographics and discuss who is missing from the table and whose voices need to be heard for our program to be equitable and effective.

While volunteers join literacy organizations for many reasons, increased activism has played a role in getting younger volunteers to engage more in their communities. One of Literacy Volunteers Charlottesville/Albemarle's new recruits, LaKayla, said, "Now is a better time than ever because with the increase of violence we see on social media, it is refreshing to know you are actively trying to make a positive difference. Not just standing on the sidelines. We are capable of doing more than we think we can." The ease of training and working online has made it more appealing as well. Another LVCA tutor, Jason said, "During the time of COVID-19, my plans for all in-person volunteering and other opportunities fell apart. I tried to find anything I could in order to help the community during this hard time and when I came across this opportunity, I immediately signed up because as a son of two immigrant parents, my goal was to help out other immigrants or non-English speakers to help overcome their language barriers that makes it hard for some to do daily and mundane activities. Also, to be able to help out others during a time like this through technology is just amazing and I think it brings online volunteering and studies to another level."

While the outcome related to the identified problem was great, the larger impact was the connections and collaboration we made between our organizations. We all do very similar work and serve similar clients in our own areas of the state. We have shared resources, struggles, concerns, and over the past six months, we have used each other as sounding boards for new ideas and best prac-



tices. We plan on continuing to meet monthly to touch base and see how each organization is growing and progressing. We feel staying connected will allow us to continue working to improve our organizations by maintaining the team we've built. We're also looking to invite other CBLOs from across Virginia to join us. 📍

Something that made me think was rethinking how we recruit staff for programs, how to diversify, and how we train and onboard staff.

I was inspired by CBLO Remix - a cross-state group who tackled the issue of building diversity among volunteers and created models for others moving forward!



Are you part of a CBLO and would like to join this team of leaders in advancing literacy initiatives? Contact Steven Reid at sreid@literacyforall.org.

Interested in learning more about the work of Team CBLO Remix? [Check out their AE&L ReMix Team Challenge Showcase presentation and examples of resources that they have produced.](#)



Steven Reid has been the Program Manager for the past six years for Literacy Volunteers Charlottesville/Albemarle, a community-based literacy organization serving students from around the world, located in Charlottesville, Virginia. Prior to this, Steven was the Adult Basic Education Coordinator, teaching high school equivalency preparation, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and college transition for the Nashua Adult Learning Center in Nashua, New Hampshire. He was also College Transitions Mentor for the New Hampshire Department of Adult Education. However, the event that started his path in adult education was teaching English in Slovakia, where he developed a passion for English language acquisition by adult learners. He is a 2001 graduate of Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas.

Strategies for Improving Student Retention

by Alonzo Ricks

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Debbie Elliott, Cornerstone Learning Center, Campbell County Public Schools• Dr. Marie Shepherd, Portsmouth Public Schools• Karen Bynum, Portsmouth Public Schools• Tawana Ford, Isle of Wright County Schools• Ginger Hilleary, Piedmont Regional Adult and Career Education Programs (PRACEP)• Katie Irby, Southside Virginia Community College Adult Education• Pat Johnson, Petersburg City Public Schools• Marisa Parker, Portsmouth Public Schools, ISAEP, Adult Education• Alonzo Ricks, Portsmouth Public Schools, ISAEP• Windell Roquemore, Richmond Public Schools, ISAEP• Robin Rose, Suffolk Public Schools, The College & Career Academy at Pruden• Peer Coach: Megan Pugh, Thomas Jefferson Adult Career Education at Piedmont Virginia Community College (TJACE@PVCC)	<p>Learner retention is a problem for programs no matter the size. We can often get learners “in the door,” but keeping them is an issue programs regularly grapple with. The Retention Remix team created a comprehensive survey and sought feedback from the field looking for new and creative ideas. The survey will be available to programs who can use it to help determine and address issues.</p>

Team Retention Remix is a cross-regional team comprised of 12 members from a variety of perspectives—experienced teachers and program managers/coordinators representing adult education and Individual Student Alternative Education Plan (ISAEP) programs. We set out to identify ways to improve student retention and develop a resource tool for programs so that we are better suited to make sure that students finish up and not lose their focus to graduate.

As a team, it was important to us for our project to speak to both learner and program interests, concerns, and issues. Student retention issues include feeling disconnected from their program, lack of interest in pursuing goals or not knowing what their goals are, obstacles preventing students from reaching their goals, and social/emotional situations. Program retention issues that we identified consist of funding impacts, reaching Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gains, and graduation rates. We set out together to address these issues by working as a team and collaborating on strategies to keep students engaged in the educational process and improve student retention in our programs.

How we decided to begin was to find



As a team, it was important to us for our project to speak to both learner and program interests, concerns, and issues.

ways through surveys sent out to different programs across the state to see what problems they might have been experiencing with their students. We met virtually at least once a month and together, we developed an electronic survey for distribution to adult education and ISAEP programs across the state. We then began compiling the survey results in order to develop a resource document of suggested strategies for improving student retention.

Thanks to the project-based learning model, we engaged in sustained inquiry. We asked and answered questions to help us make meaning of and organize our project work.

- How does our project involve real-world context?
 - Retention and commitment to attend is reflected in all aspects of life (professional and personal).
- How will our project make an impact?
 - Provide strategies to assist programs in retaining students.
 - Determine whether the issues are COVID-19 related or not.
- How will we incorporate digital literacy/blended learning?
 - Provide a digital tool for programs to utilize.
- How will we ensure quality of our project?
 - Conduct a follow-up survey to see if the resource tool is helpful to the various programs.

The bulk of our time was spent developing a comprehensive survey instrument and getting feedback on it. We went through several iterations of the survey in order to condense it down while still being able to get the most information out of it and determine what was working and what was not across the state.

As we did not receive as many responses to the survey that we would like, we hope to take feedback received from the AE&L ReMix

Showcase attendees, revise the instrument, and collect more responses in order to inform our next steps.

From this experience with project-based learning, our team learned that we all were really in the same boat as far as keeping students engaged and wanting to be a part of the programs with so much going on in the world and in their lives. We hope that other adult education programs and staff can take from our experience that you are not alone in your (sometimes) frustrations about enrollment or even with people starting and not finishing your program(s). We hope that you will engage with us and complete our survey so that we can take the information given from programs across the state, compile and list the greatest areas of concern regarding retention, and fully implement a tool to help everyone keep students staying in our programs.

[Take a look at Retention Remix's survey.](#)

Provide them answers about your program or give them your feedback. 🟢



Alonzo Ricks has been an educator for the past 15 years with Portsmouth Public Schools. Throughout this time, he has worked at Churchland High School, New Directions Center, and I.C. Norcom High School. He is currently teaching business and ISAEP classes at I.C. Norcom High School. When he is not in the classroom, he can be found on the football field having recently been named head coach at Nansmond River High School.

I have similar challenges as Retention Remix. Retention is a challenge for so many programs.

I was inspired by the survey. Kudos to the Retention Team! Understanding what the programs feel affects retention is important. I would love to see a survey that is learner focused.

We are always searching for ways to retain our learners. We know how important it is to keep them engaged and create community. I loved that the focus wrapped up key ideas into one lovely package. Thank you.

by Dr. Barbara Brown



INCORPORATING WORKFORCE SKILLS IN GED® & ELA CLASSES

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Barbara Brown• Autumn Bedwell• Frances Ferebee• Melissa Gates• Pinkie Hall• Patricia Jiles• Dr. Adrienne Thomas• Kathy Anderson• Tonya Humphrey• Leo Akujuobi• Bettie Nickerson• Cheryl Perkins• Dr. Marion Wilkins• Peer Coach: Ruth Vest	<p>Three groups comprised of new & veteran instructors from Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education were formed to develop lesson plans based on College & Career Readiness Standards related to workforce skills. The lessons developed focused on three topics: Digital Literacy, Financial Literacy, and Job Skills. Led by an instructional coach, each group created their lesson plans and presented to each other in order to evaluate their lessons using a rubric.</p>

The AE&L Conference ReMix Challenge provided a great opportunity for Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education (S.P.A.C.E.) to focus on integrating workforce skills into the GED® and English language arts (ELA) classrooms. The ReMix Challenge provided the opportunity for our instructors to create lesson plans using the workforce skills identified by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). Our instructors are tasked with providing instruction for learners that want to earn their GED® certificate, as well as providing instruction on workforce skills.

It was determined that a professional learning community (PLC) would be the ideal format for the instructors to create lesson plans on some of the workforce skills and share the results with their peers. The ReMix Challenge concept presented several challenges. These challenges included identifying teams for the professional learning community (PLC), determining whether to meet virtually or in-person, and figuring out how the teams would present their lesson plans. The name selected for the team was S.P.A.C.E. Matters. The acronym S.P.A.C.E. represents the name of our regional program and what we do with our learners matters.

After viewing the [21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills for the Commonwealth](#) developed by VDOE, it was determined that the three teams would consist of 2-3 instructors and an instructional coach. The instructional coaches were Cheryl Perkins, PIVA Coordinator, and three veteran instructors—Dr. Marion Wilkins, Leo Akujuobi, and Bettie Nickerson. The instructional coaches also served as members of the Planning Team for the project. The Planning Team began meeting in October to collaborate on the areas of focus, presentation format, and how often the teams would meet. It was determined that the areas of focus would be Digital Literacy, Financial Literacy, and Pre-Employment/Employment Skills and all would include Reading, Writing, and Mathematics. The lesson plans had to include the content area, College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards, central skills of focus,

technology/websites, vocabulary, materials, accommodations (if needed), instructional objectives, guided practice, and an assessment.

Each team was expected to present their results in a 50-minute virtual presentation during the month of March. The presentation had to demonstrate the incorporation of digital literacy and blended learning into a learner-center practice or work setting. The instructional teams consisted of new and veteran instructors. Team One members were Dr. Adrainne Thomas and Patricia Jiles. Team Two members included Autumn Bedwell, Francis Ferebee, and Missy Gates. Team Three members were Pinkie Hall and Tonya Humphrey.

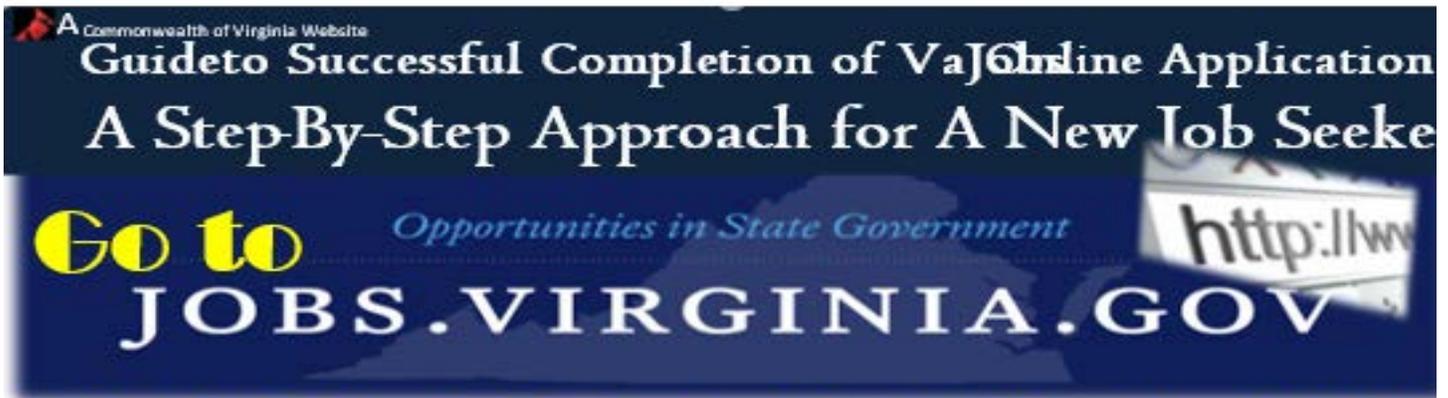
The team leader met via Zoom with the teams and the program manager, Kathy Anderson, in November. Each team member was given a book on the workforce skill selected for the group and a notebook that included the following: an introduction to the project, names and contact information for each team, the [21st Century Workplace Readiness Skills for the Commonwealth](#), [articles on workforce skills from *The Skills That Matter in Adult Education*](#), [copies of the CCR Standards in Literacy/Language Arts, Mathematics, and English Language Acquisition](#), sample lesson plans from *The Skills that Matter in Adult Education*, a lesson plan rubric, and resources. [Teaching the Skills that Matter from LINC](#)s was used as a guide for writing the lesson plan.



Using the ReMix Challenge as a PLC allowed new and veteran teachers to interact as well as present in a virtual format to their peers.

1 TEAM

Team One presented a PowerPoint and lesson plan on “Finding a Job Online.” Their lesson plan included the steps students needed to follow to apply for a job online and an online assessment to determine if the student followed the steps correctly. The team utilized Jobs.Virginia.Gov as a major component of their lesson plan. The lesson also included a Career Cluster Survey and focused on the following skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, reading, writing, making inferences, summarizing, and identifying the main idea and supporting details.



2 TEAM

Team Two presented a lesson plan on Financial Literacy—“Completing a W2 Form.” As an introduction, the team used a [Kahoot](https://www.kahoot.com/) activity on tax trivia. They also used a [YouTube video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) to assist students. The students would be required to complete a W2 form. An online assessment was incorporated so that the instructor could determine if the students had mastered the skill of completing the W2 form.

Independent practice:

After learning vocabulary and discussion of the forms used, students will be given the opportunity to practice what they have learned utilizing these practice forms:

<https://econedlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/W2-Form-Group-Activity.pdf>

<https://www.econedlink.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/1040-Form-Group-Activity-.pdf>

Filling out a 1040 form

Video is utilized to help students understand how to fill out the tax form.

A video thumbnail showing a man in a white shirt pointing to a large tax form (1040) displayed on a screen. The man is looking at the camera.

Team Three stressed the importance of incorporating online programs such as Essential Education's Work Essentials. This program provides a wealth of lessons on finding jobs online, guided practice exercises, and assessments. It includes links to resources, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, a transcript of the lessons, and job sites.

Work Essentials Lesson:

Finding Jobs Online

<https://app.essentialcom/homeroom>

During the virtual meetings, the teams that were not presenting used the lesson plan rubric to comment on the team presenting. The feedback was very helpful in assisting the teams if corrections or additional information was needed in the lesson plan. The teams gained valuable experience presenting virtually to their peers. One team was selected to present their lesson plan during the ReMix Challenge Showcase.

The teams learned to overcome several challenges. Since most of the instructors met virtually with their students, it was difficult scheduling times to meet on the project. The team members were also tasked with finding resources to incorporate into their plans. The plans also had to adhere to the lesson plan rubric. Each team had to submit their plan to the Team Leader five days prior to their presentation for review. After reviewing the

lesson plan and making revisions if needed, the plan was emailed to the other teams prior to the team's presentation.

There are lessons to be learned from this project. As adult educators, we can adapt to almost any situation. Meeting virtually proved a challenge, but the teams were able to overcome this challenge. Using the ReMix Challenge as a PLC allowed new and veteran teachers to interact as well as present in a virtual format to their peers. The teams also had to use a blended learning approach to the project. Too often when incorporating workforce skills in the classroom our ELA students are omitted. One team had an ELA instructor as a member. The teams also presented their projects during our in-person staff meeting in May. One team gained valuable experience when they presented at the state conference in April.

Since we were only able to target three of the workforce skills, a PLC will be utilized in the fall utilizing three different workforce skills. The teams will be comprised of an instructional coach and 2-3 team members made up of new, veteran, and ELA instructors. They will have the option of meeting virtually and/or in person. In addition to presenting their plans to their peers, they will also present their lesson plans during our winter staff meeting.

To learn more about the work accomplished by the S.P.A.C.E Matters team, [take a look at their showcase presentation and supportive resources](#). 



Barbara H. Brown, Ed.D., is the Regional Specialist for Southside Programs for Adult Continuing Education (Region 19). Dr. Brown is a retired educator with over 40 years in public education. She has worked as a special education teacher, Gifted Coordinator, 504 Coordinator, Educational Diagnostician, and adult education instructor. She has over 30 years' experience in adult education.

We also use Essential Ed, and I have used computer essentials, but was not tuned in to Workplace or Financial Essentials. You've inspired me to take a look at them!

“

The project-based learning (PBL) approach was really helpful in setting some concrete goals and stopping to evaluate along the way. Projects never go according to plan so having the time to think through and pivot when needed was essential.



Science-Based Stories & Hands-On Experiments to Engage Families & Advance Literacy Skills

by Vici Garber & Vicky Routson

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vici Garber• Debi Fitzgerald• Peer Coach: Vicky Routson, Loudoun County Public School Adult education	<p>The SHINE Super Scientist Literacy team from Region 6 tackled two major issues. The first, creating a family literacy curriculum that would engage both kids and parents with fun but meaningful content. The second, finding and establishing a working relationship with an elementary school partner for the program. With the added complications caused by COVID-19, the team navigated to find solutions to these challenges.</p>

In this article, we present “A Tale of Two Vics”. Vici Garber describes her perspective of the AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge as the team leader while Vicky Routson gives her view from the eyes of a peer coach.

Vici’s Point of View: The seeds of the SHINE Super Scientist Family Literacy program were first planted in 2019 when Katy Parrish, our Program Manager, wanted a family literacy program started for Region 6. Katy assigned the project to me, the Regional Specialist and Debi Fitzgerald, the English language arts (ELA) instructor at [Building Blocks](#). The project was to be in partnership with a local elementary school in Waynesboro that was located next to Building Blocks. They would provide the cafeteria, snacks, an instructor to help create the curriculum and co-teach with Debi, and recruitment assistance.

After a request for training in November 2019, Katy, Debi and I went to Kentucky to gather knowledge at the [National Center for Families Learning \(NCFL\) Conference](#). Armed with new information and more resources than we imagined, Debi and I embarked on narrowing down our scope. Katy’s main requirement was that the family literacy program include interactive activities like those included in our Logistics PluggedInVA cohort. With that in mind, we chose the umbrella topic of science. We chose topics for 24 lessons for a 12-week, twice-a-week program that included Geology, Chemistry, Astronomy, and Botany. Our template for each lesson would include an ice-breaker, vocabulary, video clips, a movement exercise, reading a book, topic instruction, and the hands-on experiment. With the overwhelming amount of resources and after going down many “rabbit holes” (Debi’s favorite term), we found our go-to sites and preferred materials.

Debi and I joined the AE&L ReMix and Vicky Routson joined our team! She brought with her knowledge of the K-5 classroom and a fresh perspective. Our program was set to run from March–April, 2021.

Vicky’s Point of View: I joined the group as a

peer coach mid-way through the project. Vici and Debi already had a clear vision for the program and the parameters under which it needed to run. They had researched, come up with materials and had the framework all set. The challenge in front of them when I joined the group was how to engage with a new partner and stakeholder in order to garner interest and obtain enough enrollment to run the program.

Although they had partnered with an elementary school, there seemed to be a lack of communication. While there was initial excitement about the program, with COVID-19 and all of the changes the school faced, the family literacy program didn’t seem to be a priority. The teacher that first signed on to be part of the program and be the liaison for the school also unfortunately backed out of the role.

During our first team meeting, we talked about ways to engage the school community and different contact points at the school that might be able to help get information into the right hands. There were some stumbling blocks along the way, again with COVID-19 restrictions making it more difficult, but eventually this led to a renewed commitment from the principal and another teacher from the school who took interest in joining the group.

Vici’s Point of View: For me, the biggest lesson was that working with the K-12 is nothing like working with a business partner. Though I have a lot of experience creating programs and solid partnerships, K-12 required a different approach. Debi and I had to learn to revert our focus from what was supposed to happen to just that which we had control over. We also realized that it would have been better to pick a more specific subject and look for the materials. We spent too much time sorting through resources and picking things that caught our attention and then trying to create around that one activity or lesson. Reflection also made me consider new recruitment ideas, such as a kick-off orientation to spur interest with RSVP invitations sent to current and previous adult education learners. We can also create more videos that can be put on the Facebook page, website, and shared with partners.

Lastly, we learned the value of having a peer with an outside perspective. What a great resource and much appreciated.

Vicky's Point of View: Our team had to get creative with recruitment in the digital world, something that none of us had done before. We also had to really learn about the elementary school and how they communicated with parents. We looked at their website, brainstormed about possible contacts at the school, and started reaching out to school staff who might be informed and interested in helping recruit for a family literacy program aimed at helping both students and parents. Vici and Debi created materials, including a promotional video, that were eventually added to the school website as part of the recruitment process.

Forming relationships takes time, so the process wasn't always smooth or easy. There were hiccups along the way, but through it all the team was able to pivot, adjust the plan, and keep pushing forward.

Vici's Point of View: Other adult education programs may want to consider investing in training opportunities when requesting staff to create something outside of their wheelhouse. We would not have created such a quality program if not for Katy allowing us to go to the NCFL conference. She also allowed us the time to do research and dig into the materials. Also, have a Plan B for if and when something doesn't work out with partners. Being prepared to cover all responsibilities can certainly help with morale and keeping the ball rolling.

Vicky's Point of View: The project-based learning (PBL) approach was really helpful in setting some concrete goals and stopping to evaluate along the way. Projects never go according to plan so having the time to think through and pivot when needed was essential.

Creating a new program and engaging a new community partner was a huge undertaking. Using the PBL model allowed our team to stay on track as we worked through milestones. The communication between the team was great, as everyone took on roles they

felt comfortable doing and came together to debrief and collaborate on next steps. I especially enjoyed how organized the process was and think that is a huge benefit of a PBL approach.

Vici's Point of View: Our plan is to run the program in 2021/22. We now have an elementary teacher who has confirmed her interest and will participate in the program. With her inside the K-5 system and her connections to the families, we are sure to have a better experience. As the state continues to lift COVID-19 restrictions, our hope is to have the ability to meet in person. That will allow Debi and the K-5 teacher to enjoy the experiments in the elementary school cafeteria, and we will also get more books into the hands of the participants. With everything opening again, this will also allow for in-person recruitment opportunities, which work much better for us than virtual recruitment. We are sure to present our success at one of our conferences in the future.

Gain some more insight into this project and see the great resources that were curated to create literacy lessons for families by taking a look at the [Team SHINE: Super Scientists Family Literacy Program's showcase presentation](#). Or, [watch the commercial the team created to explain their program](#). 



Debi Fitzgerald teaching an online family literacy lesson on robots for Engineering Week.



Vici Garber is the Region 6 Regional Specialist and PluggedInVA Coordinator. She started her career in adult education in 2001 with a focus on employment services. She has previously worked as an independent GED® tutor, an employment specialist, and an ESOL instructor. Through the Shenandoah Initiative for Adult Education (SHINE), she has served as an instructor for GED® classes, Job Readiness, and PluggedInVA. She has created successful programs that run at Middle River Regional Jail and Shenandoah Valley Social Services. Vici was the 2018 recipient of the VAACE Teacher of the Year award.



Vicky Routson is an English language (EL) instructor with more than 15 years of experience in adult education. She has taught all levels from Low-Literacy to Advanced including multi-level classes with a focus on implementing the CCR & ELP standards. Since moving to Virginia, she has been working for the Loudoun County Public School Adult Education department as both an EL instructor and office administrator alongside the lead teacher to ensure that adult education teachers get the support that they need to create quality, standards-based lessons. She received her bachelor's degree as well as her adult education teaching credential at California State University

I was inspired by SHINE Family Literacy and their persistence even in the face of challenges! I really liked hearing how you all tackled one challenge at a time and how you have not given up and plan to keep moving forward!

by Trista Mason

Multi-Tiered System of Support 2020 Style

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trista Mason • Danielle Van Vlack • Mary Mikulski • Meaghan Rustia • Peer Coach: Millicent Tyler, Chesapeake Public Schools Adult & Continuing Education 	<p>What is a Multi-Tiered System of Support and why do we need one for our learners? Our project consisted of designing, building, and implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support for our Fairfax County adult learners in a virtual setting.</p>

Where we started...

Fairfax County Adult High School (FCAHS), the only adult high school in the state of Virginia and one of only a handful in the country, offers two pathways to a credential. The first is the diploma program which models K-12 best practices and earning a traditional diploma. The second is the high school equivalency (HSE) pathway where if someone needs more than eight credits to graduate from a traditional program, they are diverted to the HSE pathway. Three years ago, our school and programs were restructured and

we have been building (or rebuilding) the HSE pathway since that time. We have been working on our program and instructional design while building an amazing staff of professionals to elevate our program and our students' success. Nearing the end of the 2019-2020 school year (pre-pandemic), we finally were in a place where we could dig deep into our program and really evaluate what was working and what was not. Then COVID-19 hit and we didn't finish our school year in person. There was no end of the year CASAS and GED® testing and our very robust program, which had

grown exponentially over the past two school years, had a dramatic drop in enrollment for the fall semester as the pandemic took over our daily lives and brought such uncertainty to our learners.

In figuring out how to deal with our new reality, our first focus was on instruction. We knew we needed a way to make class time, which was now virtual, impactful. Our diploma side has an embedded Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) that guides staff work and interventions. It has very specific features and components that help the Student Services Team support all diploma students on a tiered scale. Unfortunately, the HSE pathway is not a part of the MTSS at FCAHS for a variety of reasons and factors. We knew as a professional learning community (PLC) that we needed an MTSS system of our own but didn't know where to start or how to make it work in an adult education setting. This is our journey in developing a Multi-

Tiered System of Support for Fairfax County's HSE program. We hope by sharing our successes and challenges along the way, we can help guide other programs through a similar process.

Our team consisted of myself, Trista Mason, Administrator of the HSE Pathway; Meghean Rustia, Instructional Specialist; Danielle Van Vlack, Assessment Specialist; and Mary Mikulski, Resource Teacher. As a collaborative learning team (CLT), we decided that we would need a three-prong approach to



Working on this project was very powerful for our team. It helped us to look at our program with a fresh perspective, improve our instructional delivery and design for our specific learners, and gave us a focus during a very challenging and truthfully difficult school year.

Multi-Tiered System of Support

Our Multi-Tiered System of Support focused primarily in SY20-21 on delivering quality Tier 1 and Tier 2 interventions to HSE pathway students.

- Tier 1 support is actions that we take for all students at all levels in all classes.
- Tier 2 is targeted interventions supported by DATA.

What did this look like?

- Creation of a database that can securely house learner information, testing information, and attendance tracking.
- Creation of a referral form for teachers to refer students about whom they are concerned.
- Track attendance, GED® Ready scores, CASAS testing, and record in MTSS database for data-driven instruction, outreach, and retention efforts.
- Weekly CLT meetings to look at data and make informed decisions about the program or individual learners in real time.
- Meet bi-weekly with resource teachers to align instruction between day and evening programming.
- Hiring of a resource teacher for evening program in mathematics.
- Hiring of a Career Coach.
- Provide Vertical Articulation professional development for staff and establish collaborative learning team(s).

Where do we go from here?

Working on this project was very powerful for our team. It helped us to look at our program with a fresh perspective, improve our instructional delivery and design for our specific learners, and gave us a focus during a very challenging and truthfully difficult school year. As we are moving forward, our Assessment Specialist has accepted a promotion outside of our district and we are currently looking for someone for this critical position. As a program, we decided that literacy will be our focus across the levels next year and two of our resource teachers are putting together a pacing guide for us to use in the fall. This will guide our work next year as we implement our Tier 3 interventions and the next phase of our MTSS journey.

Learn more about Team Fairfax HSE Pathway's strategy and [see the questions that guided their AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge project.](#) 

What is MTSS?

[Video from the Massachusetts Department of Education, What is MTSS?](#)

[What is Multi-Tiered System of Support? A Comprehensive Guide to MTSS](#)



Trista Houghton Mason, M.A., M.Ed., is a lifelong resident of Virginia and a product of Fairfax County Public Schools K-12. She is currently the Assistant Administrator at Fairfax County Adult High School in Springfield, Virginia primarily overseeing the High School Equivalency Grants Program as well as serving as Assistant Principal for the school as a whole. Her instructional experience spans Pre-K to postsecondary and she has leadership experience in managing departments, pathways, and programs both inside FCPS and out. She also serves as an adjunct professor at Northern Virginia Community College in Alexandria, Virginia.



How Can Registration & Intake Processes be Streamlined in an Equitable Manner?

by Jasmine Galloway

Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jasmine Galloway, Portsmouth Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education Program • Eileen Rakshys, Prince William County Schools • Donna Motsek, Prince William County Schools • Melissa Rea, Literacy Council of Northern Virginia • Eugene Mensah, Prince William County Schools • Peer Coach: Bill Creighton, Virginia Department of Corrections 	<p>Team Registration Remix analyzed how different localities in the state of Virginia conducted their registration process during a pandemic and developed strategies to improve the intake process. During this pandemic, many localities have had a variety of new challenges, and as a result, student enrollment became inconsistent. To help us identify areas that can be improved in the registration process, our team created a survey that was completed by 20 different Virginia localities. Our project presents the findings from our research along with suggested next steps to improve the intake process for adult education in Virginia.</p>

Team Members



Jasmine
Galloway



William 'Bill'
Creighton
(Peer Coach)



Eileen M.
Rakshys



Melissa Rea



Eugene Mensch



Donna Mostek

In March 2020, the world was forever changed by COVID-19 and its impact on people's lives. "The unemployment rate increased by 0.9 percentage point to 4.4 percent. This is the largest over-the-month increase in the rate since January 1975, when the increase was also 0.9 percentage point. The number of unemployed persons' rose by 1.4 million to 7.1 million in March" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020, p. 2). With so many people out of work for various reasons during the pandemic, educators have been tasked with providing equitable instruction to their students whose households may have been affected by unemployment. Many of these learners are parents who found it difficult to balance work and the demands of monitoring their school-aged children virtually attending school. Others lost their job because they lacked childcare. During these unprecedented times, it was imperative to keep adult and continuing education programs open and running to provide resources to the affected population. Our team asked ourselves, "Where do we begin"? We decided that we wanted to identify how different localities in Virginia conducted their new/returning student

registration process during a pandemic. To analyze this problem, we had to determine how registration and intake processes could be streamlined to make them accessible to all adult student populations and programs across Virginia.

Many localities have faced a variety of new challenges during this pandemic, which has resulted in student enrollment becoming inconsistent or worse, declining. In order to develop a series of solutions to address this problem, Team Registration Remix with distribution assistance from Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center staff, first collected data using a survey to address this issue**.

The next step of our journey was to meet bi-weekly at a specific time using a virtual platform beginning in October 2020. We discussed and voted on intended outcomes to improve virtual registration based on program location: rural, urban, or suburban. The best way to complete a large task with a group is to divide and conquer—and that's exactly what we did! Our peer coach, William (Bill) Creighton, was instrumental in providing guidance to use the milestones provided by AE&L to set goals/objectives and remain on a

Our peer coach, William (Bill) Creighton, was instrumental in providing guidance to use the milestones provided by AE&L to set goals/objectives and remain on a timeline.

timeline. “Teamwork makes the dream work!” Everyone in our group had an equal voice in the decision-making process of setting the objectives for our project.

Objectives:

- Use existing registration and intake processes as a basis to create a common and accessible system.
- Survey programs and use challenges facing them to inform registration and intake system solutions.
- Adapt current Adult Student Profile Document (ASPD) to make it online accessible to meet stakeholder needs.
- Present the data analysis at the AE&L ReMix Conference so that other programs can adapt their registration and intake needs.

As we continued our process of collaboration, we used the [Buick Institute for Education PBLWorks’s Gold Standard Essential Project Design Elements](#) and the [Question Formulation Technique](#) to guide our survey questions regarding the intake process for various adult education programs. We wanted to gain insight from adult education leaders about their intake process and concerns as well as their feedback on how to effectively streamline registration. We were able to receive feedback from 20 different localities across Virginia. We reviewed their responses and ascertained where the areas of concern lie that affect their intake process. Overall, the data from the survey showed concerns in the areas of transportation, access to technology, childcare, cost, staffing, and language limitations.

Upon reflection of this project experience, we can conclude that education nationwide has gone virtual and many adult programs have needed to adapt to in-person and hybrid registration and intake systems in order to meet the needs of students and community partnerships. Creating an online registration process that is efficient, secure, and accessible is essential to being able to serve diverse populations of adult learners. Moreover, when trying to strategically identify and analyze problems using project-based learning, goal setting is a must. As we look to the future, the next steps for Team Registration Remix’s project would be the continuation of data analysis from various localities and identifying strategies on how to improve registration processes based on this expanded collection of data. We welcome and invite more programs to get involved and join us.

Learn more about Team Registration Remix’s project process, research, analysis, and next steps from their [AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge Showcase dynamic presentation](#). 

Reference:

Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020, March). The Employment Situation—March 2020. https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/empisit_04032020.pdf



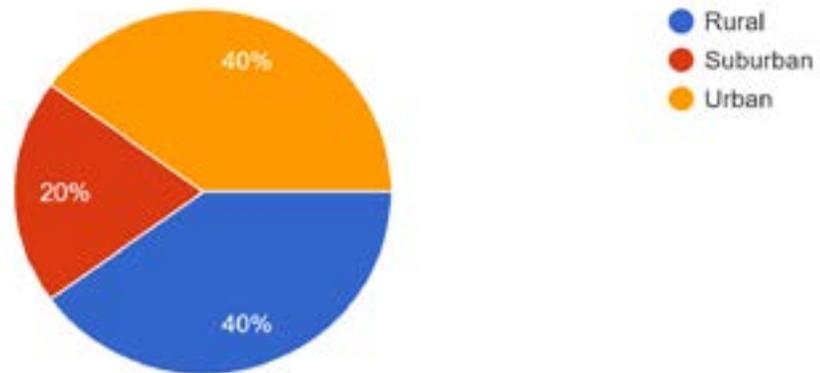
Jasmine Galloway is a native of Wilmington, North Carolina with 11 years of experience in education. She is a proud graduate of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University with a B.A. in music, University of North Carolina Greensboro with a B.S. in elementary education, and Old Dominion University with an M.S. Ed. in educational leadership. She currently is the Site Manager for Portsmouth Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education Program.

Data

**Data collected from a statewide survey of adult education programs in Virginia.

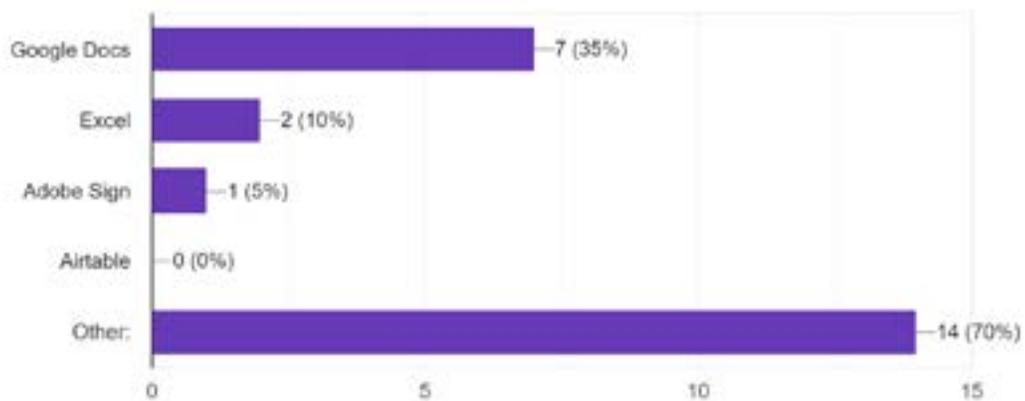
Which of these best describes your locality?

20 responses



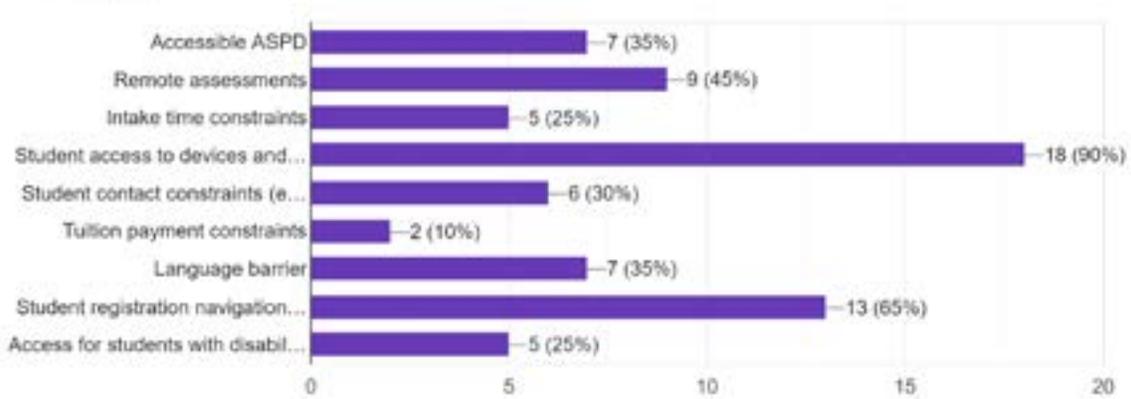
What tools/platforms do you use for your registration? Select all that apply

20 responses



What aspects of virtual registration do you need help with? (Select all that apply)

20 responses



Yes, it is time to re-do this one! we do need to work on simplifying registration.

My program has similar challenges with registration. I hope that based off the project, this could turn into an advocacy campaign to VA DOE to help all the counties and school boards collaborate and agree to at least one form of intake that may or may not be enforced guidelines.

by Natalie Detert

Making Festival of Cultures a Virtual Event



The AE&L ReMix Team Challenge provided us the perfect structure to help us meet the challenge and stay true to the heart of the Festival.

Team Members

- Natalie Detert
- Becky Payton
- Carol Coffey
- Debbie Tuler
- Heidi Gordon
- Peer Coach: Michelle Ford, Virginia Department of Corrections

Project Summary

For 16 years, [TJACE@PVCC](#) has coordinated the Charlottesville Festival of Cultures, an in-person celebration of the cultural diversity of their community to build bridges and showcase the contributions of their students. In 2021, the pandemic challenged them to go virtual and completely rethink the mission and design of the Festival. Their project addressed how to use Project Based Learning to engage their planning team, instructors, and students to produce a completely new design, refocused on student and community learning and engagement.

17TH ANNUAL CHARLOTTESVILLE FESTIVAL OF CULTURES

••• *Many Cultures, Many Gifts, One Home* •••

May 7-13, 2021



- Cultural Exhibits
- Live Events
- Community Collaborations

Virtual, free and open
to the public



Sponsored by



<https://sites.google.com/email.vccs.edu/festival-of-cultures>

For 16 years, the mission of the Charlottesville Festival of Cultures has remained steadfast: to cultivate unity within our diversity by building bridges of understanding and respect. The Festival grew out of a desire at Thomas Jefferson Adult & Career Education at Piedmont Virginia Community College (TJACE@PVCC) to offer our students, particularly our immigrant and refugee students, a platform in the community to highlight their contributions. Each year on a Saturday in May, the Festival took place in a city park, offering performances, food, artisans, activities, and cultural exhibits—and growing to an attendance of about 3,000 by 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic shut down the Festival of Cultures in 2020, leaving a hole in the community and depriving TJACE of its signature event. Despite the uncertainty ahead, we formed a planning team in that fall to explore the possibility of offering a virtual event, a

daunting task that took us out of our comfort zone and into brand new territory. From the beginning, our goal was to return to our roots by keeping the focus on our students and our educational mission. The AE&L ReMix Team Challenge provided us the perfect structure to help us meet the challenge and stay true to the heart of the Festival.

Once we had the TJACE planning team in place and committed to AE&L's project-based learning milestones, we gathered key stakeholders and partners which included the TJACE instructors and students for content creation, PVCC IT for website design and creation, PVCC Marketing and Media Relations for promotion, and key volunteers both longstanding and new. Most importantly, we used focus groups and surveys to engage our students in the creation of a virtual festival, asking them what a virtual festival might look

like, what components were essential from their viewpoint, and what theme resonated with them.

As a result, our theme became *Many Cultures, Many Gifts, One Home* and we created a virtual Festival of Cultures with three components. First, we offered a handful of “**Live Events**” via Zoom that would allow participants to engage in a cultural topic or activity along with others. Second, we organized **Community Collaborations** to connect key community partners and organizations, many with an enduring relationship with the Festival, to our students and residents. Finally, we engaged our students in the creation of **Cultural Exhibits**.

Cultural Exhibits have always been the heart of the Festival. In order to successfully go virtual, the creation of exhibits depended on the engagement of our instructors and students in a project-based design process of their own. First and foremost, we knew we had to meet students where they were, recognizing they were stretched thin by the pandemic and consequently resource challenged. Since their language and computer skills varied greatly, they requested additional support outside the classroom from their instructors as well as from a key volunteer with video editing experience, taking great pride in their work and wanting to put their best foot forward.

We visited classrooms and began the project-based design process by asking, “What does Culture/culture mean to you?” and “What is an important piece of your culture you would like to share?” We offered examples of flexible formats such as videos, slide presentations with or without narration, and photos with text, ranging from a few sentences to multi-paragraph essays. Participation was voluntary, but our goal was to offer the support and flexibility to ensure that anyone with an interest could submit an exhibit while also meeting educational objectives in the development of language and technology skills.

As a result, the Charlottesville Festival of Cultures went virtual in 2021 and set a new

benchmark. TJACE instructors and students and the Charlottesville community accepted the challenge and exceeded our expectations. We offered 50+ student **Cultural Exhibits** and 20+ **Community Collaborations** and “**Live Events**.” 30+ countries were represented and participants explained that the format offered them a surprisingly intimate individual connection to students.

The TJACE Team learned that a virtual festival does resonate with well with some of our students, community partners, and participants. It meets our educational objectives and engages students in project-based learning. Of course, the community misses an in-person event and the “**Live Event**” attendance was lower than anticipated due to Zoom fatigue late in the academic year, spring weather, and the easing of pandemic restrictions. However, we are adopting a long-term mindset, convinced that a virtual component to the Charlottesville Festival of Cultures will be modified but is here to stay. We built a website with staying power, a foundation on which to build. Student **Cultural Exhibits** are now part of a permanent collection that can be expanded in the future and used for educational and promotional purposes, true to the mission of the Festival since its inception.

Take a look for yourself at the cultural exhibits, community collaborations, and live events on the [2021 Festival of Cultures Charlottesville website](#). 



Natalie Detert is currently an instructor at TJACE@PVCC where she teaches the core skills component of 4Work and coordinates the Charlottesville Festival of Cultures. She has been an educator in a variety of roles for thirty years and has taught both high school students and undergraduates as well as having worked as a high school principal and an administrator in both higher education and the nonprofit sector. Natalie specializes in curriculum and teacher development and remains committed to advising students on college admissions in addition to tutoring students in academic reading and writing and English language learning.



Participant making baklava during a Charlottesville Festival of Cultures "Live Event," a Cooking Demonstration with Khadija Hemmati of Khadija's Kitchen, presented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

I expect no less from this amazing team. You are an inspiration! I cannot wait to hear about the outcomes!

I was inspired by the Festival of Cultures and having the whole community come together with student created materials!

New Marketing Strategies to Access Vulnerable Populations

by Geri Hayden



I found that by conducting a Google search on “GED® programs in my area” that it took some time to find what I was looking for. Based on this, I established that we, as adult education leaders, need to look at how to better market our programs for learners who are unfamiliar with adult education services.



Team Members	Project Summary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geri Hayden, Virginia Department of Corrections • Peer Coach: Michelle Ford, Virginia Department of Corrections 	<p>2020 was a challenging year that forced adult education to rethink and revamp practices, including how to reach vulnerable populations. Team Reach Out looked at important considerations to keep in mind when trying to reach vulnerable populations within adult education by providing an overview of a specific marketing initiative within the correctional education context and by looking at marketing strategies from across the adult education field in Virginia.</p>

Reaching out to our target learners is an essential part of adult basic education. This past year, 2020, was a challenging one that forced adult education to rethink and revamp practices. As the “Reach Out” team, our challenge was to think about how to conduct effective outreach to the adult learner populations in order to market our programs and services to new learners and to retain our current ones. To better understand this challenge, we looked at several areas—our target demographics; program options such as in-person, online, group instruction, and one-to-one tutoring instruction; and the most effective marketing and retention strategies for adult education. The populations that we decided to focus our project on were those in rural areas having sparse internet services, returning citizens (previously incarcerated) with low literacy, older adults, non-English or limited English speakers, and those who have none or limited experience with technology. For the marketing and retention strategies, we had the plan to put together a survey to send out to the Virginia adult education field to get an idea of what strategies programs have tried and found to be successful at reaching out to potential and current learners, especially those who belong to the identified vulnerable populations. We recognized that adult education programs vary on numerous factors that impact how to “reach out” to these vulnerable populations. We also acknowledged that our demographics, technology, transportation needs, instructors’ training needs, and marketing and retention strategies are impacted by funding and other resources.

The Reach Out team met virtually several times, beginning in January, to set up the framework of this project. Our first goal was to identify vulnerable populations. The original team consisted of four members. Although the team was unable to continue working on the project, I felt it was important to continue conversation and encourage continued work to meet the original goal. The objective was to design a specific marketing initiative within the correctional education context and look at

marketing strategies across the adult education field in Virginia.

Once I took this challenge on as an individual, I decided to research how other adult education programs across the state were reaching their populations. As a starting point, I reached out to other adult education practitioners within my network but that worked for different programs as well as searched for the current marketing practices that are being used for adult education in Virginia. My goal was to look at marketing materials from the student perspective. I found that by conducting a Google search on “GED® programs in my area” that it took some time to find what I was looking for. Based on this, I established that we, as adult education leaders, need to look at how to better market our programs for learners who are unfamiliar with adult education services.

I looked specifically at Region 6 and discussed the website with Vici Garber, the Regional Specialist and PluggedIn VA Coordinator at the Shenandoah Initiative for Adult Education (SHINE) from the perspective of a learner from the region. We discussed the issue of making the website accessible on mobile devices. This coincided with the larger focus that we saw over the last year in needing to make information accessible on phones and mobile applications. I also talked to Jessica Chenoweth, the Program Manager at the Staunton-Augusta Adult Learning Center, which is also in the Adult Education Region 6. My interest in this program was regarding how they use Facebook to reach out to current students. I posed the question of how we could use this strategy to reach out to new, potential learners within our targeted populations. While this is only a small overview of the collaborative conversations that were had, it exemplifies how this collaborative strategy can bring new outreach methods to light. Finally, I was able to present my experience with this team challenge at the AE&L Conference ReMix Team Challenge Showcase where my hope was to gain additional collaborators and inspire other adult education practi-

tioners to take on this challenge of revamping our outreach and marketing strategies.

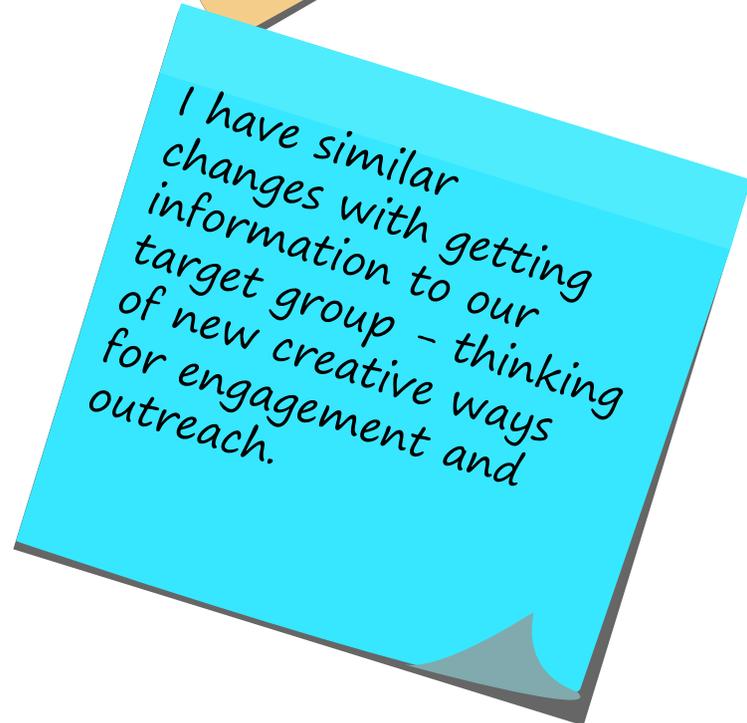
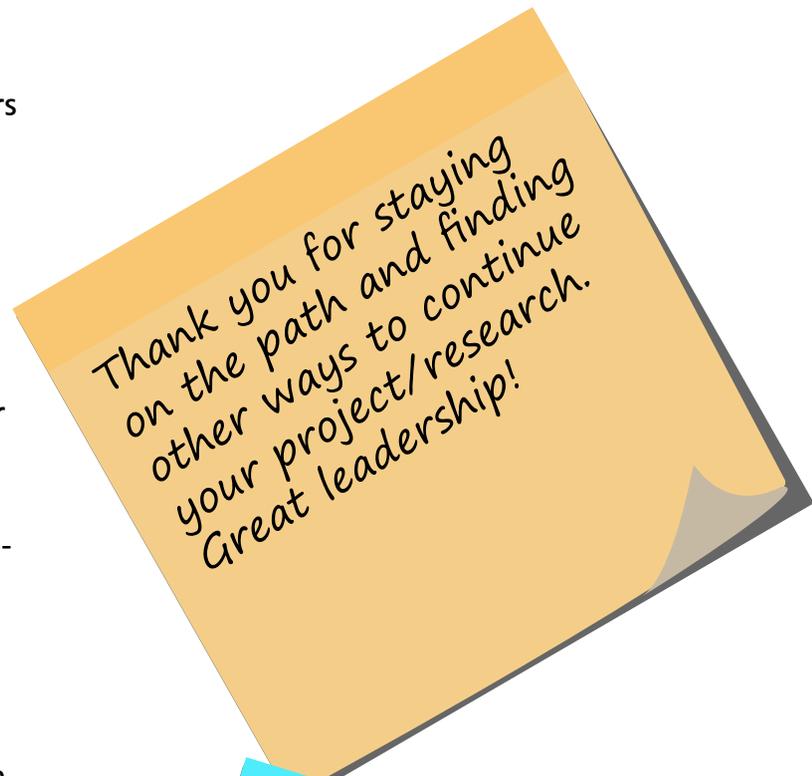
Since this project is still ongoing, the solutions to more effective learner outreach are continually being researched and identified. For example, one outreach activity that I have conducted at Fluvanna Correctional Center for Women as a result of the project presents a model for designing effective outreach. I designed a flyer for our population to address possible questions and concerns that learners might have in such a way as to advertise the benefits of obtaining a GED® credential. I wanted learners to understand that our adult education programs are not only mandatory, but also beneficial. The flyer addresses some of the common barriers that these students face and lets them know that they drive their own learning. This small example reflects the tenets laid out by the Reach Out team because this resource was developed with our learners, their barriers, and their perspectives in mind.

As I have learned from this project, collaboration across adult education programs is the best strategy for identifying and testing new, innovative strategies for reaching the vulnerable populations that our team identified. Moving forward as a project will require a team to explore marketing strategies throughout Virginia. We originally discussed devising a survey to assess what seems to be working, reflecting on areas for improvement and evaluating the successes of other programs, and gauging if these practices can work for other programs. The key to bringing these project goals to fruition requires a collaborative spirit and a team. Will you join us? We value your opinion and expertise.

To express your interest in helping Geri take this important outreach initiative further, contact her at geriteaches@me.com. 



Geri Hayden is currently a GED® instructor and special education Individualized Education Program (IEP) coordinator with the Virginia Department of Correctional Education. As an avid learner, Geri has continued her education specifically in the areas of curriculum development, mathematics, and professional development as a trainer. Geri holds a B.A. in psychology and an M.S. in education with a focus on learning disabilities in special education.



VALRC's Teacher Leader PLC & the AE&L Peer Coaching Experience

by Hali Massey & Elizabeth Severson-Irby,
with contributions from the AE&L Conference
ReMix Peer Coaches



I absolutely loved the peer support. What a fabulous concept. I found great value from having someone with a different perspective who was willing to jump in and “claim” the project.

During the 2020-2021 program year, the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center, (VALRC) offered several opportunities for teachers across Virginia to work together. One such opportunity was the Teacher Leader Professional Learning Community (PLC). This PLC was an opportunity for adult education practitioners to work with other teacher leaders in Virginia to learn about coaching styles and culturally responsive teaching practices (CRT). For culturally responsive teaching practices, the PLC reviewed Zaretta Hammond's [*Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*](#). The PLC discussions around this topic focused on how to use learners' culture and background as an asset to learning and to practically apply CRT principles and frameworks to adult education instructional practices. The other focus of this PLC was on coaching and feedback skills, based on Jim Knight's coaching principles in [*Better Conversations*](#). Using Knight's principles, we studied and discussed questioning and feedback techniques as well as how to best leverage coaching principles and strategies when working with adult learners. The goals of the PLC included: applying the partnership principles, recognizing how growth mindset impacts learning, applying culturally responsive frameworks for learning and teaching, using feedback models to foster constructive changes in learning and teaching, and applying universal design for learning principles to instructional design and delivery.

Within the Teacher Leader PLC, practitioners had an additional opportunity to put CRT and coaching principles into immediate action by becoming a Peer Coach for an AE&L Conference ReMix team. The coaches worked with a team of adult educators from programs around the state as they developed and carried out projects specific to the needs of their programs and/or learners. This opportunity involved participating in their team meetings, facilitating discussions regarding the team project, and helping teams stay on track to meet project milestones. Coaches used the questioning, feedback,

and coaching strategies they learned from the Teacher Leader PLC to help their team as they worked through their project. Below some of the coaches explain why they wanted to become a Peer Coach and what they learned throughout the process.

Motivation for Becoming a Peer Coach

In their own words, several coaches describe why they wanted to participate in this opportunity:

Keira Zirkle, the Off-Site ESOL Coordinator at Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington, wanted to focus on the opportunity to learn from others. *I was motivated to join both the fall and spring sessions of the AE&L Conference as a Peer Coach to further develop my own professional development. I have been participating and working in an Adult ESOL program for little more than 2 years, but I still have much to learn from experts and fellow teachers, volunteers, and administrators in the field. I wanted the opportunity to listen, learn, and grow.*

Vicky Routson, Adult ESL Instructor at Loudon County Public Schools, expressed interest in learning a new framework for collaboration. *I was really excited for the opportunity to take on a peer coaching role and collaborate with a group of teachers outside my program. I always feel like I learn so much in a collaborative environment and going through the steps of the PBL process provides a great framework for effective collaboration and communication.*

Amy Davis Turner, an Academic Instructor at Greensville Correctional Center, emphasized the opportunity to benefit her own adult education program. *I hoped to gain, as a peer coach, additional knowledge in adult education to share with colleagues and implement in our program to better support students.*

Ruth Vest, systems analysis administrator, stressed the opportunity to participate in critical conversations. *I looked forward to an opportunity to have authentic conversations about current issues adults are facing, like: the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual classrooms,*

racism, police brutality, joblessness, fear and all the other pre-2020 issues in order to facilitate a project-based learning experience for adult educators in my community. I anticipated working with a team to effectively address these pervasive concerns, of staff as well as learners in adult educational settings, by co-creating innovative curriculums and/or programming initiatives.

Benefits of Peer Coaching

Some of the coaches describe what they learned or gained from this experience.

Vicky Routson, an Adult ESL Instructor at Loudon County Public Schools, exemplified how peer coaches were able to apply the principles from the PLC to their work as peer coaches. *I have had a great experience as a peer coach. I was very lucky to be partnered with an awesome team of ladies who were not afraid to take on challenge after challenge and pivot their thinking when needed. The biggest thing I came away with and have put into practice is the art of asking questions. As we dove deeper into the PBL process our group always came back to asking more questions in order to find better solutions. This ongoing inquiry led to some amazing results that can be put into practice and shared out with other programs. I learned so much from this experience. I met some great, creative, motivated people who inspired me through their hard work. I also got insight into an area of adult education that I have not personally had a lot of experience with. Thinking through and following the steps of the PBL was a great way to shift my mindset about the PBL process and gave me an opportunity to reflect on how I can use this process in my professional life in the future.*

Megan Pugh, an Adult ESL instructor from Region 10, highlighted the role that coaching played in the project-based learning experience. *I joined after the group was midway and had lost their coach, and I was nervous that I wouldn't be helpful, or knowledgeable enough, since I missed the group formation and the first four milestones that they have been through. I was pleasantly surprised when*

they needed someone to direct them to the outcome and streamline what needed to be done to feel like they had made it to the place where they could feel accomplished. I hope that they feel the same, and I learned that my work was to help them to focus their goals, since they had really accomplished so much—more than they could see.

Michelle Ford, a trainer and instructor with the Virginia Department of Corrections, conveyed the journey that can happen when reflecting on culturally responsive teaching practices. *I think I learned to view inclusion and diversity in a different perspective. I was not a fan of inclusion in all cases because I saw it as a distraction in the classroom. However, when you learn to use the experiences that come from inclusion and diversity as learning tools, it aids in learning experiences.*

Keira Zirkle, the Off-Site ESOL Coordinator at Catholic Charities Diocese of Arlington, saw immediate ways to apply what she learned to classroom and program improvement. *I learned a lot of teaching techniques for digital and in-person adult classrooms. I learned more practical ways to approach administrative work for Adult ESOL programs. I listened to the struggles and successes of other people involved in adult learning programs. I have been able to draw up plans for trainings and program development (to be implemented in FY2022) for my volunteers and staff members.*

Amy Davis Turner, an Academic Instructor at Greensville Correctional Center, explained reasons for collaboration. *I learned many new ideas to incorporate with adult education students and I gained a wealth of resources and networking connections around the state.*

Not only did Peer Coaches benefit from this experience, but AE&L ReMix team members did as well. One team member said. *I absolutely loved the peer support. What a fabulous concept. I found great value from having someone with a different perspective who was willing to jump in and “claim” the project.*

The Peer Coaching opportunity was a unique experience brought on by the shift in the AE&L Conference. However, we hope to continue to provide opportunities like this for adult education practitioners to develop leadership skills. Over the past few years, the VALRC has offered the Teacher Leader PLC as an opportunity to promote collaboration and empowerment through the highly interactive PLC model. The VALRC is excited to see how this opportunity moves forward and how this group of teacher leaders can be used to create more opportunities, like the AE&L Peer Coach, for collaboration and learning. Stay tuned for more information on the upcoming Teacher Leader PLC Fall 2021 opportunities. 



Hali Massey, MA TESOL, is the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). In this role, she coordinates teacher professional development that aligns with state and federal initiatives, as well as local interests and needs. This work includes the design and delivery of online courses, face-to-face workshops, and virtual meetings, all with a focus on the practice of teaching English to adult learners.



Elizabeth Severson-Irby is the Literacy Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC). In her role, she provides leadership for instruction and program management in Virginia's adult education and literacy programs, working with both public and private agencies and educational programs to ensure that adults have access to the educational resources they need.

Peer Coaches

Keira Finkle

Team Assignment:

CBLO Remix: Building diversity among volunteers in community-based literacy organizations



Keira is employed with the Education and Workforce Development program of Catholic Charities, Diocese of Arlington as an ESOL and Civics Coordinator. She was a teacher with the program from January 2020 to November 2020 before moving to the position she currently serves. While teaching as an ESOL and Workforce Instructor, she taught different workforce development courses for ESOL learners including GED® Science, Child Care Workforce Preparation, Basic Computer Literacy, Introduction to Spanish, and Spanish Intermediate classes. During her time in both positions, she created lesson plans for various classes in her program including Basic Computer Literacy, Computer and Internet Literacy, GED® Math Preparation, Introduction to Spanish, and Intermediate Spanish. Now as coordinator, Keira manages the civics program, including classes and citizenship preparation tutoring, along with Adult ESOL classes. She has recently received her bachelor's degree from George Mason University in global affairs: global governance, foreign language Spanish, and Latin American studies. She has also trained and earned her TEFL certificate. She completed both of these credentials during COVID-19 through distance learning.

Dr. Mary Palmer Legare

Team Assignments:

- S.P.A.C.E. Matters: Incorporating workforce preparation skills in GED® and ELA classes
- Retention Remix: Strategies for improving student retention



Having started teaching in 1980, Mary Palmer has taught in almost every imaginable K-12 environment. She holds a B.A. in educational studies from Emory University, an M.Ed. from Columbus State University in Georgia, and a Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction from Mercer University. Shortly after moving from Georgia to the rural Northern Neck of Virginia, she stepped away from K-12 into adult education and is in her fourth year of teaching in the ABE program at Rappahannock Community College. Mary Palmer has strong commitments to both educational equity and integrating technology into classrooms.

Michelle Ford

Team Assignments:

- TJACE@PVCC: Making Festival of Cultures a virtual event
- Reach Out: New marketing strategies to access vulnerable populations



Employed with the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) as an educational tester for the Central Region, Michelle has worked for 22 years at VADOC in multiple roles. She has been a correctional officer, juvenile corrections sergeant, counselor, and offender workforce development specialist. In her career, she has also spent three years as a Head

Start teacher and several years in residential mental health programs. In addition, Michelle served eight years in the United States Army Reserves as an operating room specialist.

Vicky Routson

Team Assignment:

SHINE Super Scientist Family Literacy: Science-based stories & hands-on experiments to engage families & advance literacy skills



After earning her degree in English literature and her adult education certification from California State University, Vicky entered the adult education world to explore her passion for teaching and adult literacy. She spent 10 years at the Redondo Beach Unified Adult School in California teaching all levels of ESOL classes and being part of the EL Civics development team. After moving to Virginia, she has continued teaching through Loudoun

County Public Schools Adult Education Department where she is also part of the administrative team and works closely with the ELL lead teacher to ensure program success for both teachers and students.

William Creighton

Team Assignments:

- Shine Virtually: Best virtual practices
- Registration Remix: Reinventing virtual registration



William (Bill) Creighton has worked in education and counseling with adjudicated populations since 1984. He has been with the Virginia Department of Corrections since 2000, with a brief stint at the Florida Department of Corrections from 2005 to 2008.

Millicent Tyler

Team Assignment:

Fairfax HSE Pathway:
Multi-Tiered System of
Support 2020 style



Millicent has served in her current role as Coordinator of Adult and Continuing Education for Chesapeake Public Schools since 2014. During her 20 years in the field of education, Millicent has served as a special education teacher in a variety of classroom settings in the Tidewater area and in Singapore. In addition to her classroom educator role, she served as a Case Study Chair for a Department of Defense Dependents School in

Japan. Millicent holds an undergraduate degree in social work from Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical University, an M.A. in special education for the severely and profoundly handicapped from Norfolk State University, an Ed. S. in educational leadership from Old Dominion University, and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Amy Davis Turner

Team Assignment:

Southside Solutions:
Connecting Students &
Employers



Amy Davis Turner is currently employed by the Virginia Department of Corrections as a special education ABE/GED® teacher. She has a B.A. in early childhood psychology from Christopher Newport University, an M.Ed. in special education from Virginia Commonwealth University, a certificate in autism spectrum disorders from Virginia Commonwealth University, and an M.Ed.

in administration and supervision from Averett University. In addition to teaching special education in Henrico and Southampton counties, she has served as a department chair, autism coach, transition coordinator, Key Club advisor, Challenge Day Committee member, Head Varsity Softball Coach, Head Varsity Volleyball Coach, and created a community work-based instruction program. She received the Christie Award nomination from Varina High School for the 2011-2012 school year and she was Teacher-of-the-Year in 2019-2020 for Southampton High School. She has extensive experience in positive behavior support and special education at all levels. She believes in building relationships with stakeholders and is dedicated to working with all learning styles and learning abilities in an inclusive positive environment that supports the needs of all students and staff.

Megan Pugh

Team Assignment:

Retention Remix:
Strategies for improving
student retention



Megan Pugh has been teaching and traveling since 2002. She began her adventure in South Korea teaching children in an after school program and shifted to developing a curriculum for teaching conversation skills at the university in Seoul. In her toolbox over the years, she has taught non/pre-literate students workplace skills, academic study skills, and pre-college writing classes. She has also taught onsite workplace English for housekeepers in hospitals and hotels in addition to international graduate engineers who need to be able to articulate their field of study. While the types of students vary, I have tried to keep the important student centered objectives—their hopes and dreams—to remain the focus for each and every class. Megan has been a highly valued ESL teacher with Thomas Jefferson Adult Career Education (TJACE) for eight years and has also worked as an ESL teacher/tutor at both Piedmont Virginia Community College and the University of Virginia.

Ruth Vest

Team Assignment:

S.P.A.C.E. Matters:
Incorporating workforce
preparation skills in GED®
and ELA classes



Ruth Vest is a native New Yorker, learning and working throughout Central Virginia most of her adult life. In addition to her personal commitment to family and community, as a systems analyst, Ruth has coordinated projects with private businesses, non-profits, municipal agencies, as well as local, state, and federal ones. She holds a wealth of professional experience in project management, productivity assessment, technical writing, and training. She has substantial experience with educational programs for a range of audiences and capacities engaging people of all ages, ethnicities, and professions from pre-K to post-secondary in areas from parenting to workplace education.

New Solutions in New Times



We are so appreciative of everyone who said yes to participating in the AE&L ReMix challenge teams and investing their time and effort during this remarkably busy year. We heard in your reflections that you found the experience to be a way to stay connected with established or new colleagues, a way to be creative and solutions-oriented in a year of great disruption, and a growth experience nudged on by the peer coaches. This is an excellent testimonial to the power of collaborative teams—even when time is so precious.

Teams examined and shared new solutions to familiar challenges: recruitment, retention, registration, student support, instructor and tutor support, and quality instruction. These challenges to effective programming are perennial in adult education.

Two of the challenges often faced by students, transportation and childcare, were

experienced in a different light during the pandemic. For some students, remote instruction removed those barriers and allowed them to participate without having to make arrangements for transportation and child care. For other students, internet and computer device access became a more immediate barrier and prevented them from participating in remote instruction.

The pandemic-related disruptions forced all of us to think about doing our jobs differently and providing services in different ways, including offering a wider, more flexible variety of options for participation. We encourage all of us to consider how to keep innovating and iterating on what we've learned and tried over the past year. We don't need to go "back" to anything—let's go forward!

What ideas, practices, and mindsets should

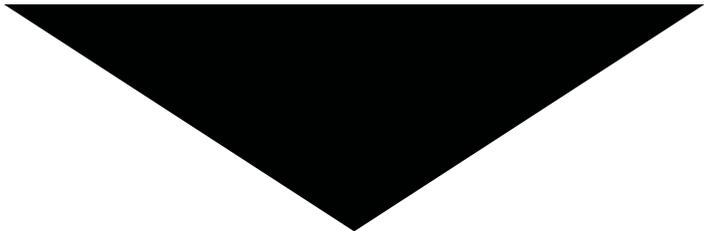
we take forward? A few questions sparked by the teams' presentations are:

- How might programs' schedules build in flexibility and still deliver the intensity and quality students need to achieve their goals?
- How can instructional staff remain available to students outside of "class" time, and what does that mean for instructional time?
- How can programs be creative in the incorporation of learners' use of varied technology in the classroom and with loaner libraries?
- What new partnerships have been forged that can grow and assist programs with community engagement?
- How can we...? How might we...? These are the question starters of human-centered design thinking. The future of effective programming relies on our willingness to design new solutions to emerging as well as familiar challenges.

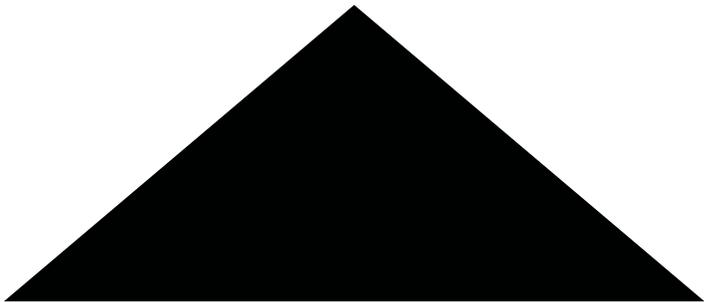
We listened with great interest to the teams that shared their findings. We heard solutions that can be adopted statewide and supported with new practices from the VDOE and or from VALRC:

- Make the student page of the Adult Student Profile Document (ASPD) compliant with Section 508 web accessibility standards so that it can be posted on public websites.
- Support programs' use of data to examine equity issues such as the diversity of student and teacher populations.
- Assist programs to design integrated education and training (IET) pipelines that incorporate a wider array of credentialing options to support career switchers and those who want to advance in their field.

Thank you to the team members, the peer coaches, and the VALRC team. And thank you to our students who were there experimenting and learning with us all along the way. 📍



Virginia is a member of the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education (NASDAE) and Dr. Silver-Pacuilla serves as a member of the board of directors. NASDAE has recently published an [Equity Policy Consideration paper](#) that may be of interest to instructors and program administrators. This paper is available to use for outreach to partners and stakeholders.



2021

PROGRESS CALENDAR

JUL

27-29 [iCEV CTE Inspired Conference, Option 1](#)
Virtual



AUG

9-11 [iCEV CTE Inspired Conference, Option 2](#)
Virtual

11-12 [Literacy Education and Second Language Learning for Adults \(LESLLA\) Annual Symposia](#)
Now Virtual

22-25 [Correction Education Association \(CEA\) Conference](#)
Austin, TX

SEP

20-22 [ProLiteracy Conference on Adult Education](#)
San Antonio, TX

24-25 [VATESOL Conference: Next Steps for Multilingual Learners](#)
Virtual

OCT

5-8 [American Association for Adult and Continuing Education \(AAACE\)](#)
Mirimar Beach, FL

8-9 [Virginia Association of Teachers of English \(VATE\) Annual Conference](#)
Charlottesville, VA

6-7 [National Council for Workforce Education Conference](#)
Tucson, AZ

22 [Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium \(MERC\) Conference](#)
Richmond, VA

25-27 [National Center for Families Learning \(NCFL\) Conference](#)
Dallas, TX

25-28 [Virginia Association for Adult and Continuing Education \(VAACE\) Conference](#)
Virtual

NOV

18-21 [National Council of Teachers of English \(NCTE\) Annual Convention](#)
Louisville, KY



POSTPONED

SETESOL
Richmond, VA
Moved to fall 2022

GED® Annual Conference
Atlanta, GA
Moved to July 2022 (awaiting date)

[National College Transition Network Conference](#)
Paused until further notice

[National Career Pathways Network Conference](#)
No information