

BRIDGING THE VISION



with Dr. Kate Daly Rolander

To innovate is to “make changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods, ideas, or products” (Oxford English Dictionary). Innovation comes out of a need to change the status quo and reimagine what the future can hold. This issue of **PROGRESS** lifts up some of the many innovative ideas that are taking hold in adult education programs around the state and helping to better prepare our learners (and our programs) for an ever-changing future.

Adult educators are, by nature, innovative and creative. We have to be. There is not a standard playbook that works for every learner. In adult education, we meet learners where they are, and we work with each other to design and deliver programming that meets their needs and encourages them to grow and thrive. We build safe spaces for learning and we are embedded in our local communities, connecting with partner organizations and employers who can support pathways beyond the classroom. We are innovative and adaptable—in part because we need to be—but also because learners and their unique lives are at the center of what we do. Each learner brings with them their own stories, needs, goals, and skill sets, and our programs are uniquely set up to adapt and support their individual journeys.

To ensure adult learners have the skills they need to thrive in education, training, and careers; we partner, we are adaptable and responsive, and we think outside of the traditional boxes of education and training. The innovative practices featured in this issue highlight the many examples of transformative practices that go well beyond the standard of uni-directional instruction and integrate new ways of learning that go outside of the classroom and into learners’ authentic lives beyond our walls.

In this issue; instructors, program managers, and community partners contribute examples of innovative thinking to uniquely serve adults across Virginia and throughout diverse sets of populations. The articles describe personalized learning pathways, community partnerships, virtual learning practices, workforce models for all learners, and innovative models of career coaching. The authors in this issue share collaborative fiscal practices and instructional peer mentoring models that help practitioners continually grow and learn from each other. The models and ideas included in these articles

Continued on p. 2>>>

P3.....
An Innovative Growth Mindset: A Model for Adult Education

P9.....
Successful Outcomes from Innovative Instruction

P11.....
Innovative Approaches through Partnerships to Address Disparities

P15.....
The Power of Collaboration in English Language Education

P17.....
A Win-Win Partnership: University Interns Supporting Classroom Instruction

P21.....
Innovative Practices in Finance?!

P24.....
Using Virtual Reality to Build Workforce Skills in Correctional Education

P26.....
From Start to Finish: An Innovative Process for Career Coaching in Adult Education

P28.....
Workforce Preparation Best Practices for IELCE Learners

P30.....
From Rookie to Ready: How Peer Observation Strengthens New Teacher Training

P33.....
The Benefits of Implementing a Peer Observation Practice

P34.....
PROGRESS Calendar

PROGRESS

PROGRESS is published by:
Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center
Virginia Commonwealth University
300 Arboretum Place, #200
Richmond, VA 23236
valrc.org

Permission is granted to reproduce articles from this newsletter. Please credit the author and **PROGRESS**.

Submissions and letters are welcome.
Contact Dr. Katherine Hansen,
PROGRESS editor.
(804) 827-6521
(800) 237-0178
kghansen@vcu.edu

We reserve the right to decline publication.

VDOE Assistant Superintendent of Strategic Innovation
Andrew Armstrong, Ph.D.

VDOE Director, Office of Adult Education
Heidi Silver-Pacuilla, Ph.D.

VALRC Director of Literacy Programming
Kate Daly Rolander, Ph.D.

Editor-In-Chief
Katherine Hansen, Ed.D.


This product was fully created through a cooperative agreement to the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center at the Virginia Commonwealth University from the Virginia Department of Education, grant award numbers V002A190047 and V002A200047 under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The opinions expressed herein, however, do not necessarily represent the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement by the Department should be inferred.

GED® and GED Testing Service® are registered trademarks of the American Council on Education (ACE) and may not be used or reproduced without the express written permission of the American ACE or GED Testing Service®. The GED® and GED Testing Service® brands are administered by GED Testing Service® LLC under license from the American Council on Education.

>>>Continued from p.1

make up a blueprint for designing and implementing innovative programming that meets the needs of learners and their communities.

To further assist in these efforts, VALRC will be hosting a [follow-up webinar](#) dedicated to helping programs, educators, and staff tap into the growth mindset needed for innovation. With tools and strategies to build a program where both staff and students learn and grow together, this event will provide practical ways to make programs meaningful for both staff and students by providing both resources and a space for sharing talents and strengths.

We hope this issue inspires you to let those creative juices flow, take chances, and to connect with others in the field to build the best programs we can imagine. 



Dr. Kate Daly Rolander is the Director of Literacy Programming and Workforce Education Specialist at 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 through an equity mindset. In addition, Kate also supports Virginia's development and implementation of career pathways programs, assists instructors and staff in tailoring instruction for workforce readiness, and coordinates the state's PluggedInVA programs.

An Innovative Growth Mindset: A Model for Adult Education



by Joyce R. Clement Jackson & Melinda M. Dart

In the ever-evolving field of adult education, innovation and a growth mindset are essential for fostering success, particularly in programs that serve diverse communities. The Chesterfield County Public Schools (CCPS) Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) program is a prime example of how to adapt to the needs of adult learners while maintaining a focus on innovation, engagement, and progress. By combining cutting-edge teaching techniques, personalized learning pathways, and a commitment to continuous improvement, the CCPS Adult ESL program offers a model for adult education that not only addresses language barriers, but also promotes holistic growth for students and the community.

We continue to answer this call to serve every person who walks through our doors. Immigrants and refugees come to our program from every nation—from Togo to Thailand—seeking guidance, direction, and opportunities to grow and flourish. Having an innovative mindset is a must in this work we call adult education, as we create ways for students to find their purpose in this country.

Maintaining this mindset with the people in our program and community remains at the forefront throughout every interaction and process that takes place. We welcome all who enter.

[CCPS Adult ESL Welcome Video](#)

A Culture of Innovation. Adaptability. & Community

One of the key components of the CCPS Adult ESL program's success is our commitment to maintaining a growth mindset. This approach encourages both educators and students to view challenges as opportunities for learning and improvement. The program's leadership believes that education should be a dynamic, evolving process and not a one-size-fits-all model. This philosophy ensures that the program remains responsive to the needs of its learners who come from a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, and proficiency levels.

Our staff consists of passionate educators and career switchers that come from every walk of

>>>Continued from p. 3

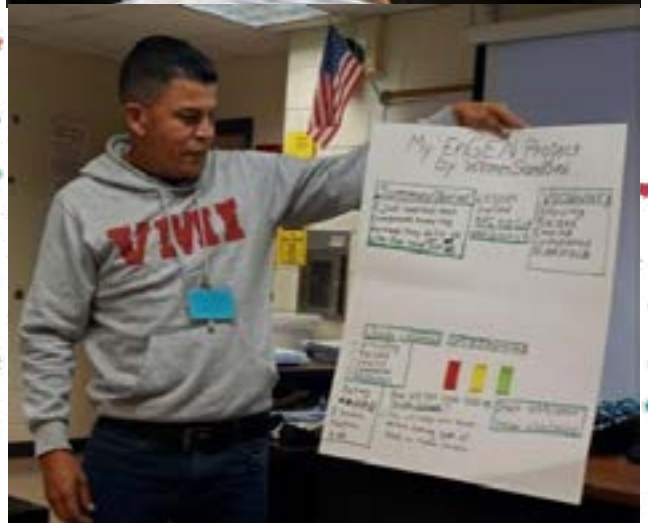
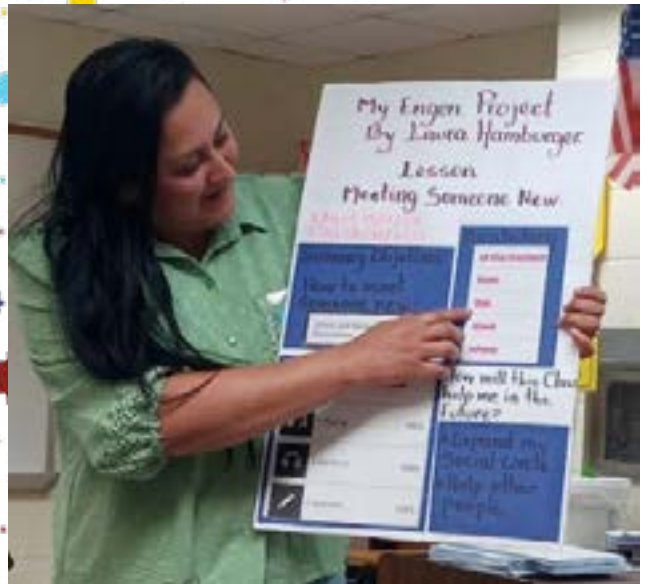
life. They stand ready and willing to provide the guidance, direction, and opportunities our students seek. Our staff members listen without judgment, encourage, and advocate to create a program that serves the whole student.

Our program embraces innovative instructional methods such as blended learning, digital tools, and interactive lesson plans that cater to different learning preferences. Instructors are encouraged to think outside of the box, to bring textbooks to life, and to provide relevant lessons beyond the classroom. For example, mock interviews and job fairs, along with special guest speakers that represent opportunities for growth, are just a few of the norms in our English classes.

Technology also plays a significant role in this innovation, with online platforms and apps integrated into lessons to enhance engagement. For instance, digital language labs and mobile learning tools are incorporated into everyday classes, allowing students to practice outside of the traditional classroom setting and reinforcing their language acquisition in real-life contexts.

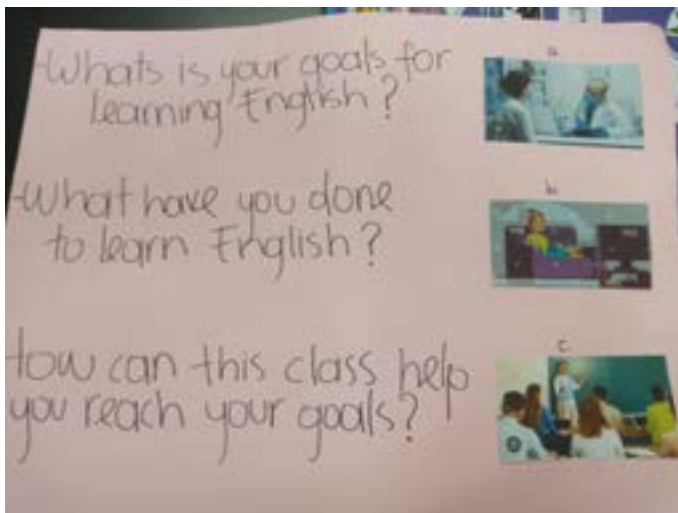
When researching these helpful online tools, innovation was the driving factor in seeking partnerships that could assist us in securing supplemental funding. Our partnership with ProLiteracy New Readers Press opened up the doors to giving our students EnGen access. This tool has proven to be beneficial for all students as the EnGen platform allows them to study English specific to their needs and interests. Because of our [Initial EnGen Impact](#) with a small number of students, we continue to increase EnGen access to help students reach their goals.

One of the ways we highlight these norms in our program is by providing a weekly series called [Adult ESL Did You Know?](#) Teachers share simple slides with students to promote community, connection, and conversation among the people in our program. From a new class project to getting to know staff and students on a personal level, we strive to create a community that grows together.



Offering Personalized Learning Pathways

Another innovative aspect of the CCPS Adult ESL program is its focus on personalized learning. Recognizing that adult learners have varied goals—ranging from improving job prospects to achieving citizenship—the program offers tailored pathways to meet individual needs. Students can choose between different levels of ESL courses, from beginner to advanced, and the curriculum is designed to allow for flexible progression. This personalized approach ensures that learners move at their own pace, gaining the skills and confidence they need without feeling rushed or left behind.



As students progress in our classes from level to level, we provide access to workforce classes and Integrated Education and Training (IETs) offered in our Adult Ed program. Students in upper level classes have opportunities to be co-enrolled in medical, personal services, or trades, such as cosmetology, electrical, or plumbing. We check in with these students as they move along their pathway, making adjustments as needed.

Seeing the growing interest in our students for the healthcare field, we created a stand-alone health-assisting IET. Our innovative instructor, Monika Halligan, describes her experience as we continue to provide this opportunity ([p. 9](#)).

Furthermore, our program actively partners with local businesses, community organizations, and other educational institutions to provide students with real-world learning opportunities. These collaborations ensure that students not only develop English language skills, but also gain knowledge relevant to their professional and personal goals. For example, students are given the chance to participate in workplace literacy programs, which focus on improving language skills specific to certain industries, such as healthcare as previously described.

Our partnership with [Capaz+IT \(p. 11\)](#) reflects this collaboration that created a personalized pathway for students in the medical or social work fields. Partnering with this organization that seeks to train local immigrants and refugees, we piloted a Behavioral Health Interpreter IET in the spring of 2024. This course empowered our student participants with knowledge and confidence. Every student passed the course and is equipped to seek employment or start their own interpreting service. We are continuing to provide this course each school year.

Continued on [p. 6](#)>>>



Expanding Access Through Community Partnerships

An essential component of the CCPS Adult ESL program's success is its robust network of community partnerships. The program recognizes that supporting adult learners goes beyond just teaching language skills—it also involves helping them integrate into the community. Through collaborations with local non-profits, businesses, and government agencies; the program provides students with valuable resources that extend beyond the classroom.

One of the standout programs is the partnership with local employers, where students can participate in *English for the Workplace* workshops. These workshops are designed to enhance communication skills in a professional setting and provide students with a deeper understanding of workplace culture and expectations.

With a growth mindset upon seeing employer needs, we established [Employee Elevation](#). This model is a framework that provides interested employers with three options for their employees learning English: discounted English classes, EnGen access, or a workplace literacy class. We were excited to launch our first workplace literacy class this school year as we partnered with [Old Dominion Group](#), a local construction company that has multiple divisions across the state. We developed a curriculum and a student guide for aspiring foremen based on this employer's needs and requests. As we continue this class into the spring, we are confident that this program will grow into increased opportunities for their employees statewide! Additionally, CCPS Adult ESL works with local libraries to host conversation clubs, where learners can practice their language skills in informal settings. These partnerships not only boost language proficiency but also promote civic engagement, helping students feel more connected to their new communities.





Focus on lifelong learning

The CCPS Adult ESL program also instills the importance of lifelong learning, both for students and instructors. Teachers regularly participate in professional development to stay current with the latest trends in adult education, including new teaching strategies and technologies. This commitment to growth ensures that the program remains at the forefront of adult education innovation. In addition, the program promotes the idea that learning does not stop after a class ends—it is an ongoing process that learners should embrace throughout their lives.

In keeping with the growth mindset, the program also emphasizes the value of persistence. Adults often juggle multiple responsibilities—work, family, and other obligations—which can make learning challenging. However, CCPS Adult ESL encourages students to persevere, offering support structures like tutoring/instructional support services, volunteer opportunities, speaker series, and flexible class schedules. This holistic approach ensures that students remain motivated, involved, and empowered to continue their educational journey.

We witness this commitment in our students and staff as they come into the building for class straight from work. Lesson plans are ready. Homework is complete. Learning takes place. We could tell story after story of a learner or staff member passing a test, getting accepted into a program, or receiving a promotion or award. Many students remain in our program year after year. We learn and grow together.

Progress and Impact

The success of the CCPS Adult ESL program is evident in our ongoing growth and the measurable impact it has on students' lives. Enrollment numbers continue to rise, reflecting the increasing demand for high-quality adult education services in the community. Students report not only significant improvements in their English language skills, but also increased confidence in their ability to navigate everyday tasks such as reading emails, interacting with coworkers, or helping their children with homework.

Moreover, the program's innovative efforts extend to expanding the reach of adult education. By incorporating remote learning options and providing a hybrid model of instruction, CCPS Adult ESL ensures that learners have the tools, opportunity, and support to take ownership of their learning experiences regardless of their personal circumstances.

In addition, our innovative efforts enable us to truly listen to the changing needs of the community and individual students, which has led us to developing [Adult Student Advocacy](#). Although in its beginning stages, we are hearing firsthand what our students are experiencing in the workplace and are making every effort to help improve the work environment for our students by checking in with their employers and building relationships.

Continued on p. 8>>>

Conclusion

The CCPS Adult ESL program stands as a beacon of innovation and growth in adult education. Through our use of technology, personalized learning paths, and strategic community partnerships; we offer students the tools they need to succeed both in the classroom and in life. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and resilience, the program helps adult learners develop the skills and confidence necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world. With our unwavering commitment to innovation and growth, the CCPS Adult ESL program sets the stage for the future of adult education, demonstrating that when both educators and students embrace a growth mindset, remarkable achievements are possible.

Call to Action

Take a deep and serious look at adult education in your community. Reflect on your role and your program. Use everything that you have, seek for what you do not have, and work at it with all your heart to bring nothing but the very best to the people that enter this world called "Adult Education." Too many programs with this title are allowing immigrant and refugee community members to miss the experience and the right to excellent quality instruction, access to a clear pathway forward, and the tools and support necessary to find their purpose in our local communities. It's not too late to begin restructuring your program to be the place it should and can be. 🌍



Join Joyce & Melinda for a follow-up webinar on March, 6, 2025, 12:30–2:00 p.m., where they present, *Structuring Your Program So Students & Staff Want to Stay!*

To watch a recording of this webinar: <https://youtu.be/oXTOJ62sSuw>



Joyce Clement Jackson is the Adult ESL Coordinator for Chesterfield County Public Schools. Within the last 18 years, Joyce has served in various roles within the school division from classroom teacher, curriculum specialist, grant writer, and most recently her current role. Joyce holds an M.A in curriculum and instruction with dual endorsement in ESL and English.



Melinda M. Dart is the Assistant Coordinator for the Adult ESL program in Chesterfield County. As an instructor, she has taught pre-literacy and literacy levels, both in person and virtually. In her current role, she provides training and support to instructors as well as works directly with distance learning students at all proficiency levels. She is on the state team for Digital Resilience in the American Workforce (DRAW). She holds an M.A. in TESOL and is endorsed in ESL.



From The Instructor's Perspective

Successful Outcomes from Innovative Instruction

by Monika Halligan

Health and Medical Career Pathways/ Health Assistant for Adult ESOL Learners

During the fall of 2021, I was approached by the Chesterfield County Public Schools Adult ESOL Program about teaching a class targeting adult ESOL learners who were interested in pursuing a health career. The two-semester course, *Health and Medical Career Pathways/Health Assisting*, introduces students to a variety of health-care careers, and provides a knowledge-based foundation required in all health and medical sciences. ESOL students learn about the United States healthcare system, basic healthcare terminology, anatomy and physiology, diagnostic and clinical procedures, therapeutic interventions, and the fundamentals of basic emergency care. In addition, learners also receive HIPAA, OSHA, and CPR training. Upon completion of the course, the goal is for all students to take and pass the NOCTI Health Assisting certification exam and to enter into the workforce.

Students taking the ESOL *Health and Medical Career Pathways/Health Assisting* course must take either an onsite ESOL English course or be enrolled in the distance learning program. The course is offered to level 3 students and higher because these students know enough English and have the study

skills to understand the curriculum with additional tools and support. The course is free to students enrolled in an ESOL English class, but students are required to have a computer and Internet access. Our program uses Google classroom and Cengage *Introduction to Health Care* curriculum. We provide students with a textbook and the NOCTI Health Assistant Study Guide. The program also covers the cost of their HIPAA, OSHA, and CPR training. We assign English/Spanish Medical dictionaries to students to use for the duration of the course.

The success of the program the first year it was offered was due to the overall support of the program and the various strategies implemented by myself and my teacher assistant (TA). Of the four students who completed the course, three of them passed the certification exam. The online curriculum is only in English, so finding additional resources that could be translated into other languages was somewhat challenging. Presenting the textbook visually, so students could highlight, annotate, and follow along in the chapters was key. Chunking the text, repetition, and allowing time for students to process and then to make connections to the material presented was very important. Building time

into the curriculum to share their prior knowledge is essential. Some of the students in our program were healthcare professionals in another country and are in the process of getting back into the medical field. Their shared experiences contributed to the overall class, making the curriculum more relatable to those new to healthcare professions.

User friendly, online supplemental medical resources that translated into other languages to be used as companion guides provided support to students. It's important to remember these students are interpreting college-level material in a second language. Adult ESOL students rely on tools to help them process and understand the information presented to them. The CDC website is one of those resources. YouTube also has short videos related to the many healthcare topics we discussed, and these can easily be translated. Creating unit study guides in Google docs gives students the opportunity to translate and process the information. The expectation is that all assignments be completed in English, however, having a companion guide gives them the opportunity to process the information at a faster rate.

Finding time outside of the classroom for students to study is challenging for all adult learners, and this is especially true of ESOL adult learners. Both myself and my TA have worked hard to build a relationship with each student so we are able to assess where they are in relation to knowing the curriculum. The TA offers tutoring 30 minutes before class begins and this is a time where students may review and practice skills they may be struggling with. Students also use this time to get caught up if they have missed a class. A few weeks prior to the NOCTI Health Assisting Certification exam, I set up a student study group via Google Meet for students. I provide study guides and vocabulary graphic organizers for the students to work through together. They also use their textbook online resources to quiz each other. If they have any questions or need clarification, they may email me or my TA, or follow up in the next class. The feedback we received from students regarding the organized study group was they felt more prepared and comfortable going into the exam.

Interest among our adult ESOL students increased after our first group of students

completed the course. A six-week *Introduction to Health Assisting* exploratory class was offered for the first time in the spring of 2023. This six-week course presented a brief overview of the course and included a visit to an elderly care facility where students were able to see first-hand medical professionals in the United States healthcare system. The class was conducted in the nursing lab at the technical center, so students were able to practice vitals and other procedures required of a health assistant. Ultimately, we want all of our ESOL students to successfully finish the program, understand the commitment and rigorous curriculum, and make an educated decision whether the program is right for them. Providing additional time and structured support as well as user friendly tools, they have the opportunity to succeed in any course. 🌍

ESOL-Friendly Health Assistant Websites:

- [Brainscape/Spanish/English Medical Terms](#)
- [CDC /Other Language](#)
- [Anatomy Explorer](#)
- [Hospital English/Visual Aides](#)
- [Web Junction/Health Websites for Spanish Speakers](#)
- [Health Science Virtual Career Cards](#)



Monika Halligan began teaching in 1989, and has taught for more than 25 years in the public-school system. She is currently an ESL teacher and the ESL Department Chair at Salem Church Middle School, and has been teaching adult ESOL for Chesterfield County Schools since 2018. She has a master's degree in English and education, and she is the 2023-2024 Salem Church Middle School teacher of the year.

From The Partner's Perspective



Innovative Approaches through Partnerships to Address Disparities for Multilingual Communities in Virginia

by Dilshad Charania & Spencer Turner

Living in the wealthiest country in the world can sometimes obscure our understanding of poverty and access to essential resources like healthcare. We might assume that because a third of the richest counties in the U.S. are in Virginia, for example, healthcare access is a given for the people working in the factories and stores that help generate that wealth (Johnson, 2025). However, a closer examination reveals that despite the state's general prosperity, many working individuals—especially English language learners (ELLs)—still struggle to access the basic resources needed for a healthy life.

Recent data from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) indicates that statewide, only 8.72% of the population remains uninsured—a significant improvement from the 17% uninsured rate in 2013 (Shelton & Connaughton, 2025). But does this mean it's time to celebrate? Not quite. A deeper dive into the numbers shows that while 10.3% of Virginia's overall population is Hispanic or Latino, a staggering 25% of the uninsured belong to this group. This disparity stems from a variety of factors, including poverty levels, educational attainment, immigration status, transportation access, provider availability, and language barriers.

To address these disparities, [Capaz+IT](#), a community-based organization in the Greater Richmond area, has spearheaded a unique partnership of adult education programs and health agencies in order to break down the barriers that prevent ELL residents from accessing better health outcomes.

How it All Started

In the late summer of 2022, Dilshad Charania, a resettlement specialist and Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Services (VDBHDS) Behavioral Health Interpreter (BHIT) and Master Trainer, and Spencer Turner, also a BHIT trainer and secondary educator were both enrolled in a Community Mental Health Awareness Sessions (CoMHAS) facilitator training sponsored by Dr. Eva Stitt at the VDBHDS Office of New Americans - Refugee Services. During this training, Dr. Stitt encouraged participants to offer this program and the BHIT to their own communities. Dilshad and Spencer realized that they both lived in the Greater Richmond area and, between them, worked with the key refugee and immigrant communities in the region. Through her work in resettlement within her Shialsmaili Muslim faith group, Dilshad realized the

Continued on p. 12>>>

>>>Continued from p. 11

potential this curriculum had to not only address language barriers in mental health, but also to build an engine for career development for many new arrivals who have one of the most valuable skills in the job market—speaking more than one language. Additionally, Spencer worked at a nonprofit that served Latino communities during the pandemic and became aware of the centrality of digital skills to any career development or healthcare initiative. Dilshad and Spencer brought their experiences, language skills, and passion for their respective communities together under the name, Capaz+IT, which is a play on the word Capable and Capacity in Spanish.

Key Partnerships and Their Roles

- **Chesterfield Health District** identified disparities in healthcare access and workforce gaps, particularly along the Route 1 corridor. They also provided public health data to guide targeted intervention efforts.
- **Chesterfield Public Schools Adult Continuing Education Program** offered ESL programs and Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs to enhance workforce readiness.
- **CodeVA** provided a link to corporate partners who were donating refurbished laptops to groups working with at-risk communities.
- **Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA)** provided career pathway programs and training opportunities for bilingual healthcare professionals.

- **Virginia Department of Behavioral Health** supported the Behavioral Health Interpreter Training (BHIT) program to increase the number of professional interpreters in healthcare settings.

Capaz+IT's first initiative, funded through a grant from the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation, was called "Community Digital Health Advocate Training" and was entirely in Spanish. It was a two-day training during which participants would receive a donated, refurbished laptop from the Altria company, get training in how to use it, complete a mental health awareness session, and then learn how to use the laptop to access mental health resources. The organization immediately realized that their mission of supporting the career growth and wellness of immigrant communities would need to partner with others. They reached out to Martha Garcia at the Chesterfield Health District who immediately tasked her Community Health Workers with registering participants. The program was wildly popular and 90+ individuals were "capacitated" with laptops and the knowledge of how to use them to help friends and families in crisis. Having Chesterfield Health Department employees participating made this peer-to-peer model much more potent.

Although we knew from the beginning that working with community partners in the government and private sector would be essential, this program reaffirmed our intuition. Spencer, who was working as a Reengagement Case Manager at the time and Dilshad who had partnered for many years with Henrico County and Henrico Schools, wasted little time in reaching out to discuss offering the BHIT program to bilingual county residents. What we did not see was how powerful this career training program could be when coupled with existing ESL programs already on offer in the Counties. After reaching out to then Alternative Programs Coordinator Rebecca Harmon about this program, she immediately connected us with Joyce Jackson and Melinda Dart at Chesterfield Adult ESL. They were already connecting ESL program participants to





careers that might change their lives. By working together, we aim to foster wealth-building strategies that improve health outcomes while increasing the number of bilingual healthcare workers. This approach ensures that ELL individuals feel comfortable seeking the care they need, ultimately bridging the gap in healthcare access.

Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs that would both extend their English learning and help them move into more meaningful careers. With the help of Hilary Parr, who drafted an IET plan that was accepted at the VDOE, the BHIT IET program was born and has grown year over year.

This experience was, in fact, the impetus for the development of our current Family Futures program which we now deliver in partnership with the Virginia Health Department - Chesterfield at Ramsey Church and the Cornerstone Revitalization Center at Shady Hill Mobile Home. After meeting with Capaz+IT, the VDH acknowledged the potential of our Family Futures program to support ELL families in upskilling and exploring career pathways in bilingual healthcare. Through this initiative, participants undergo evaluations using [CASAS STEPS](#) and Spanish Reading tests to assess literacy gaps. Those needing Adult Basic Education receive tutoring and access to [Spanish-language Aztec programs](#). Students ready for GED® preparation can enroll in AZTEC Pre-GED® or GED® prep programs in Spanish. Participants also work toward [Northstar Digital Literacy Certificates](#) and engage in a WIOA-based ESL program. Additionally, they complete a two-week career search skills program and a six-week module focused on bilingual healthcare careers.

To ensure a direct pipeline to employment, we've partnered with regional organizations like the [Community College Workforce Alliance \(CCWA\)](#) and the [Chesterfield Adult Continuing Education](#) program to inform participants of pathways and

Program Benefits for Partners

Each of these partnerships has yielded mutual benefits.

- **For Chesterfield Health District:** A stronger bilingual workforce improves healthcare access and engagement with the ELL community.
- **For Chesterfield Public Schools Adult Learning Center:** Enhanced education offerings through workforce integration, helping more students transition to stable careers.
- **For CCWA:** Strengthened ties with community organizations and expanded career training opportunities for underrepresented groups.
- **For the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health:** Increased availability of trained interpreters ensures better communication and care for ELL patients.

Outcomes from These Partnerships

Through these collaborations, we have achieved significant milestones:

- **Family Futures Program Impact:** Participants undergo literacy assessments (CASAS STEPS, Spanish Reading tests) and receive Adult Basic Education or GED® preparation through Spanish-language programs. Graduates advance to Northstar Digital Literacy Certification and WIOA-based ESL training. Over 200 participants have been through at least one of our literacy programs and 36 have successfully completed

Continued on p. 14>>>



the full 12-week Family Futures Pre-Pathway to healthcare careers program which is offered at no cost to community members and includes Revive, American Red Cross CPR/First Aid/AED and Mental Health First Aid Certification and a refurbished laptop. Of this group, 12 are currently working as healthcare professionals. We currently have 60 individuals enrolled in the program now offered at two locations in partnership with the VDH. We are currently developing a pre-early education pathway in partnership with Thrive Birth to Five.

- **Behavioral Health Interpreter Training (BHIT) Success:** The program, initially developed by Dr. Eva Stitt, has created a pipeline of professional interpreters, filling a critical gap in healthcare and education and expanded adult learning options at regional adult learning centers in Henrico and Chesterfield Public Schools. Through the addition of learning support offered by certified staff at Chesterfield Adult Ed, the program success is not just for current language professionals with advanced degrees but can be an authentic pathway for recent high school graduates who

are bilingual.

- **First Cohort Graduation:** The successful graduation of students in the Region One program in 2023 exemplifies how these integrated approaches lead to tangible community benefits.

Moving Forward

As a relatively new nonprofit, our work with regional partners has reinforced our belief in community-driven solutions. By fostering dynamic collaborations and innovative workforce training, this partnership is not just addressing healthcare disparities, but also creating pathways to economic stability for ELL individuals.

The sooner our region and our state develops culturally responsive strategies to support access to good jobs and quality healthcare for ELL individuals, the sooner both private and public community partners can create a healthier, more prosperous region for everyone. If you feel these programs might benefit immigrant or refugee individuals in your community and would like to learn more or discuss partnering on a program, please find us online at Capaz-it.org or reach out directly to our Deputy Director, Spencer Turner at spencer@capaz-it.org.

References

Shelton, K., & Connaughton, S. (2025). *Virginia's plan for well-being 2025–2029*. <https://virginiawellbeing.com/>

Johnson, S. R. (2025, January 1). *The 15 richest counties in the U.S.* U.S. News & World Report. <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/slideshows/richest-counties-in-america?onepage>



Dilshad Charania is the Co-Founder and Executive Director of Capaz+IT. She has worked for more than 30 years as an educator. Dilshad holds a Certificate of Master trainer for the Behavioral Health Interpreter Curriculum in clinical and educational settings from the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and has trained more than 250 interpreters and spent over 500 hours in training. She has a bachelor's degree in business administration and management and a master's degree in sociology from Bombay University (India).



Spencer Turner is the Co-Founder and Director of the Eva Celda Padilla Stitt School for Newcomers. He is a graduate of Virginia Commonwealth University and a Level 2 BHIT trainer. His 24 years in education includes time as an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program Coordinator in Brazil and English Head of Department in Peru.

Building Stronger Communities



Through Partnerships

The Power of Collaboration in English Language Education

by Lisa Vaughn

I really appreciate that this community cares enough to help me learn English. I don't make any excuse, I tell myself, 'I must go to class!' And one day I will be fluent in English.

– Alexandria City Public Schools English for Parents and Caregivers participant



For the English Empowerment Center (EEC), partnership is a priority in our work to foster opportunity and equity for English language learners. For more than 60 years, we have taught beginning-level adults to read, speak, write and understand English. For the immigrant adults we serve, 84% of whom make less than a living wage, these classes are a critical step to meet the immediate needs of their families, access

health and community resources, gain a foothold in the workforce, obtain new or better jobs, move on to higher-level learning, and engage in their children's education. EEC's partnerships play a key role in our ability to remove barriers and provide access to these educational opportunities, create pathways for students to reach their goals, and to create connections between our diverse student population and the community .

Addressing Critical Needs: Partnering with Schools to Support Families

EEC partners with Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) to provide English classes in familiar and accessible locations, while removing barriers for English language learning parents who participate. Partnering since 2014, these family literacy

Continued on p. 16>>>

classes are targeted at parents and caregivers, providing English language instruction in the context of involvement in their children's school and education. EEC provides the curriculum, the trained instructors and volunteers, and instructional support. ACPS identifies the families most likely to benefit, school spaces in the locales of greatest need, childcare, and even frequently provides dinner to support busy families. We also work together to enrich our curriculum, [inviting guest speakers](#) or organizing field trips, tying lessons about vocabulary and language to important community topics such as [mental health, libraries, and civic engagement](#). These collaborations reduce barriers to participation and increase access for parents and caregivers eager to break cycles of poverty by investing in their own and their children's education.

Bridging to Opportunities: Career and Community Engagement Initiatives

For EEC participants, learning and practicing English skills is not just an academic endeavor, but a strategy to reach their individual and family goals. To this end, EEC is bolstering our efforts to work with partners to ease transitions and create warm handoffs between our organization and others, creating clearer pathways and diverse options for students to use their language skills as scaffolding on which to build. This is highlighted in our Career and Opportunities Fair, which engages local companies and community agencies to share job and resource information with EEC students, while EEC volunteers assist students with language or cultural barriers to navigate the booths, in many cases providing multilingual assistance. For companies seeking hard-working, talented, and diverse employees, for community partners who want to spread the word about their services, and for EEC students who are gaining in confidence and opportunity, this annual event is a valuable resource.

Community-Centered Solutions: Holistic Support through Local Collaborations

EEC sees our investment in partnerships as far from transactional, but as key in doing our work effectively and in creating a connected community

that provides the resources and trust that students need to be able to participate in our classes. One of our partners is the Culmore Place Based Initiative, a collective working to holistically meet the needs of one of our county's most underresourced neighborhoods. Community leaders identified the type of English instruction most needed by the community, a church provided space which also serves as a hub for food and health resources, and a local community organizer built relationships, meeting with us to work through ways to make local residents feel most welcome. We now host a thriving class, with students, EEC instructors, partners, and staff, learning from each other about what it means to be a community.

The Power of Partnerships for Long-Term Success

EEC's time spent in fostering partnerships helps us fulfill our mission. ACPS's Family and Community Engagement Center shared, "Many of our parents who have been able to take part in EEC classes are those we see attending parent teacher conferences, working in our community, and becoming U.S. Citizens and productive members who contribute in a positive way in schools and community." As adult educators, our work is vital and by leveraging our collaborations, we can play an essential role in the strength of our communities as a whole. 🌍



Lisa Vaughn, BSW, MPA, is the Senior Community and Donor Relations Manager for the English Empowerment Center, formerly Literacy Council of Northern Virginia (Region 8). Her work includes fostering relationships to find resources, develop opportunities, and advance equity for English language learners throughout the region. In various roles across the country, she has spent more than 14 years partnering with schools, nonprofits, businesses, faith communities, and local governments, working together to build strong communities.

A Win-Win Partnership: University Interns Supporting Classroom Instruction



by Kathy Smith & Emily Loper

The [Bedford County Public Schools \(BCPS\) GED®/ELA program](#) is rapidly growing. Our program has become a small international community serving students from China, Venezuela, Honduras, El Salvador, Argentina, Trinidad, Mexico, and Russia; and it is exciting and inspiring to see how hard these learners work on their English skills. However, with up to 16 students attending each class and dozens more on the waitlist, we realized very quickly that one instructor, even with an aide, could not adequately serve each student.

Learners come into our program speaking varying degrees of English, with some speaking no English at all. Kara Wagner-Brown, our English language acquisition (ELA) instructor, does use Google translate in a pinch but it is not always effective. And although she speaks and understands some Spanish, it is oftentimes not enough. Further, registering and testing new students can be time consuming so when an instructor must focus on these other tasks, they must create lesson plans and activities for current students to work on independently.

We desperately needed extra, experienced help

but we did not have funds to hire another teacher or aide. Miraculously, in our time of need, a Liberty University student living in Bedford County reached out to us. RaeAnn Hernandez, who speaks fluent Spanish, was finishing up her Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) degree and asked if we needed an intern. She explained that her husband is Hispanic so she is very familiar with the struggles and obstacles that English language learners face.

We immediately contacted BCPS Human Resources to find out what the process would be for an intern to be approved. They had never experienced using an intern for a GED® or ELA class, but BCPS has a great relationship with Liberty University so they used the same process that is in place for recruiting student teachers. It consists of a background check, a letter from the university student's professor, and a letter from the instructor.

RaeAnn was an online student, so our classes were very easy for her to fit into her schedule. We have two ELA classes a week and she attended both. RaeAnn quickly learned how to administer

Continued on p. 18>>>

My experience volunteering as an ESL teacher at ACE in Bedford was incredibly rewarding and hugely instrumental in my teaching journey. I not only made connections with an amazing group of students, but I also learned a lot of valuable tools that I now utilize every day in my teaching career. The in-class experience was precious to me, and if I had the opportunity to do it again, I would in a heartbeat!

- RaeAnn Hernandez, Intern

The benefits of this partnership are that TESL interns provide day-to-day support to English language instructors from the Adult Education Program at Bedford County Schools. This support includes teaching, tutoring, and other activities such as lesson planning, research, and more. The Adult Education program also assists student interns in fulfilling their required internship hours, and the program's English language instructors provide quality mentoring to each intern.

- Sharon Shipley, LUO TESL Undergraduate Internship Coordinator/Director

Having an Intern in our English Language Class has been a fabulous experience. It allows us to more easily split into different ability groups. This way, more attention can be given to teaching the variety of skills needed. We also benefit from the new ideas and knowledge that the Intern brings to our class. The teacher and the students both love welcoming an Intern to our class.

- Kara Wagner-Brown, ELA Instructor



Center, RaeAnn with class.

tests and use our workbooks while our instructional aide taught her how to register students, thus giving the aide more time to finish paperwork and the Instructor more time to teach. RaeAnn’s kind and welcoming personality helped put students at ease and she even tutored a young mother online who due to childcare issues could not attend class. RaeAnn needed 135 hours with our program and this was accomplished with her in class hours, her online tutoring, and doing work assigned to her by the instructor. She was required to write lesson plans and research best practices for teaching English. All that was required on our part was to submit two evaluations to RaeAnn’s professor, one halfway through the semester and one at the end of the semester.

The experience that we have had with RaeAnn was so impactful that the local newspaper wrote a front-page story about our program featuring our intern. This article was great FREE publicity, which brought in more students to the program. We are staying in regular contact with Liberty University and hope for additional interns at the start of each semester.

Watch this video interview with RaeAnn - [Making a Difference: Volunteer and Internship Opportunities with ACE of Central Virginia.](#)

The Partnership

Our specific partnership with Liberty University (LU) began nine years ago when Ms. C. Wade, the previous director of their English Language Institute,

was teaching for [Adult and Career Education \(ACE\) of Central Virginia](#) in Campbell county. Since she had contacts at the university, she reached out to the chair of the Modern Languages department to ask if they would be willing to be a faculty sponsor, which would allow ACE to use LU classrooms. She also submitted our ELA class as a Christian/Community Service (CSER) option, which is a 20-hour requirement for all LU students. These two initiatives have resulted in ongoing correspondence between ACE and the dean of the Modern Languages department about opportunities for students and classroom needs.

Further, since LU offers a Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) major and an online TESL master’s degree program, students are looking for opportunities to complete their practicum and internship requirements. Students who are in the K–12 Licensure program need to find an accredited K–12 class to do their student teaching, but those who are not pursuing licensure can complete their requirements through our adult ELA classes. In addition, some students have a 40-hour practicum requirement where they must observe and teach lessons while others, like RaeAnn, have an internship requirement where they must complete 135 hours of teaching, planning, and observation at an approved organization.

The professors of these courses give our program’s contact information to students who are interested in partnering with ACE. The LU students email us and we conduct interviews before accepting them as interns. We primarily use CSER volunteers and practicum students as classroom

Continued on p. 20>>>





Front, far right, Intern Sela Harn, now hired as a teacher.

assistants. When we have several volunteers, we can provide our English language learners (ELLs) with one-on-one conversation partners. Our instructors also facilitate pair and small group activities where the LU students learn how to be patient, caring, and professional in the classroom.

As interns have a teaching requirement, they first observe and help with classroom activities and then they plan lessons and lead a class for a few hours a week. They log their hours and experiences and then we complete an evaluation form at the end of the internship. Since our classes only meet 5 hours a week, the interns need to supplement their hours by teaching approximately 10 hours of virtual lessons for the students.

Since our adult ELA class with ACE is free and has open enrollment, the number and type of ELLs who come to class varies each semester. Therefore, the role of the intern varies depending on the needs of the students that semester. For example, in the Fall of 2024, we had a large number of students who needed basic English instruction at a lower level than the majority of students. Thankfully, we had a bright, capable, overachieving intern who was willing to take on the responsibility of teaching that group independently in a separate classroom. I provided her with student books and an excellent teacher's guide that she could follow step-by-step to instruct the students. She said she was very nervous, but in the end, it was a very fulfilling experience as she created a fun, welcoming environment for the students. She created PowerPoint slides and meaningful activities to help

the students learn the basics of English.

More often, the intern will help as a classroom assistant for half of the class—leading a small group activity that provides individual attention and correction of pronunciation and grammar. Then in the other half of class, the intern will lead the class from the front with presentation slides.

You can see how this is a win-win for the LU students and the English language learners! The volunteers and interns gain valuable teaching experience while the learners get more attention and speaking/listening practice with native English speakers. We highly recommend other

programs recruit interns for ELA and GED® classes. It's a creative solution for localities that need help and a great hands-on experience for the interns. We suggest contacting the colleges and universities in your area that offer this program. Tell them why you need an intern and what a great experience it is for an intern. Or, any organization that could benefit from LU volunteers can go to their [website](#) and apply. 🌐



Kathy Smith is the local GED® Coordinator for Bedford County Public Schools. She graduated from Liberty University with a bachelor's degree in psychology the same year her oldest daughter graduated from high school. She then continued on to obtain an M.Ed. the same year her youngest daughter graduated from college. Kathy managed a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant program and taught GED® classes in the evening for six years before assuming her current role.



Emily Loper has been teaching adult ELA classes with [Adult and Career Education \(ACE\) of Central Virginia](#) for the past six years. During the baseball season, she is a proud English teacher to the international players of the Lynchburg Hillcats.



Innovative Practices in Finance?! Region 20 Shows How It's Done

by Dr. Alice Graham

Innovative practices involve trying something new. Within our Region 20 Adult & Continuing Education programs, there was a need to address gaps in all matters that involved finances. What I mean by this is that we needed to make sure everyone who handled our grant finances was on the same page, which included not just the Fiscal Agency, but also our local program managers and members of their respective/local grant finance team members.

So, let's talk innovative practices! What does that really mean? According to Hardwick et al. (2013), trust can be seen as a precondition for successful cooperative innovation. They explain that when individuals are able to build a platform of confidence within others, there lies the foundation of information and the exchange of implied understanding.

When I was moved to the Portsmouth Public Schools Adult Education program in 2017, I had no idea or thought in my mind that I would have to take on such a challenging role. Not only was I the Coordinator of Adult & Alternative Education for the school division, but with this position came the role of becoming the Region 20 Program Manager. Were they kidding me? Although I taught adult education

classes during my earlier years in education for Chesapeake Public Schools, I was no pro!

Now, I was tasked with learning to be a coordinator and oversee the Portsmouth Adult Education program in addition to navigating how to roll with the "Big Dogs" in adult education. Yes, all of the program managers within the region who, for the most part, had extensive years in this field and held titles of Director and Supervisor.

One of my most challenging goals was to learn how to fit in without micromanaging their programs. They were already experts and didn't need my advice, but what we needed as a whole was to learn how to truly become a region. In order to do this, I had to build relationships and make sure each of them was able to trust me. My goal included building relationships with practitioners, which encompassed the adult education leaders, partners, staff members, and students. I found myself visiting their localities to learn how each of them conducted business. During site visits, I not only spoke to the leaders, but also to their instructors and students. I met some of their finance team members and I needed to know what each of them did every day, while ensuring that they all felt valued and appreciated.

Continued on p. 22>>>



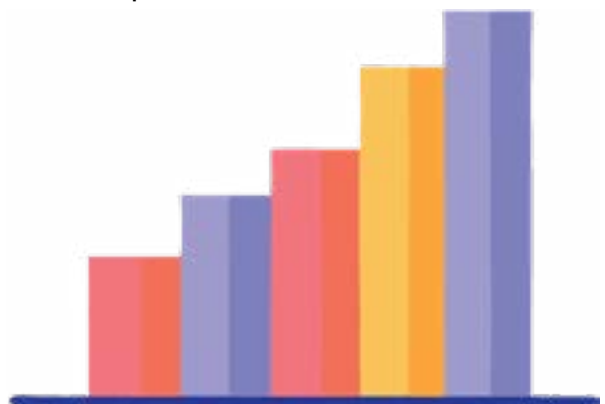
I conducted regional meetings with our team leaders. We wrote grants together. We shared best practices. We "GREW!" We grew in not only our educational craft, but as teammates. We were in this thing together! Not just instructionally, but financially. We learned to "TRUST" each other.

Okay! I've met with the adult education folks, now, I needed to pull in those finance team members. Getting "buy-in," from the fiscal agency was easy! They also wanted to build that collaboration. They wanted to also make sure we functioned as a team and most importantly, they wanted to address any financial misconceptions to ensure we were able to follow the grant guidelines. This need created the importance of conducting annual fiscal agency meetings, which gave our program managers, local finance managers, and fiscal agency leaders a reason to come together. Our local "grant handlers" needed to be in the same room, speak the same language, and build trust in each other. They, too, also needed to form relationships with each other.

Although Portsmouth Public Schools has a Grants Manager and Finance Associate who oftentimes say, "Graham, whatcha doing?" I realized that they just want to make sure I/we dot every "I" and cross every "T." So, in order to create an understanding of all of the grant's financial policies and guidelines, we began conducting annual Fiscal Agency Meetings. Those individuals mentioned above were all asked to come to the table. Our Grants Manager and Grants Accountant, respectfully Ms. Heather Hynes and Mrs. Donna Valdez, were asked to conduct the finance portion of the meeting to address every facet of our grant funding streams. Included in this article is the [presentation created by Mrs. Valdez](#). In addition, there were other topics covered outside of finances during this meeting.

In order to conduct this type of annual meeting, we followed these 10 steps.

1. Identify your meeting goals. From there, develop your meeting agenda.
2. Make sure you discuss your thoughts with your Fiscal Agency stakeholders. Ask them to provide the financial content for the meeting using a presentation and allow open discussion!
3. Send out a poll. Determine the best date, time, and place for all of your team members. Invite Fiscal Agent's Chief Financial Officer!
4. Provide meals, if you can. Ask for local support! Talk to your immediate Supervisor.
5. Set up tables in the meeting room. Post local program signs on cardstock—fold the paper in half using landscape. Use the computer, so the signs look professional and make sure you use the local school colors. Make sure the local team members sit together. This allows for collaboration! I've learned that although there are local program managers and local Grant Finance members, they may not have an opportunity to collaborate in-person during the program year.
6. Ensure that you have writing materials at each table. I make sure there is a box of supplies on each table. These items include Germ X, a box of tissues, sticky notes/pads, pens, pencils, etc. Oh! I also include some type of candy! Sweets make everyone happy!
7. While seated together, have your local program manager introduce their team members and share their roles for the local school districts. Invite everyone to bring their business cards to share with everyone at the meeting. This helps build relationships!





This practice has helped us become a TEAM! It has helped us address any financial gaps that have existed and/or those that may surface.



8. Make the finance portion of the meeting the first item on your agenda! This enables local finance members to return to their respective school districts! I've learned they wear multiple hats!
9. Allow opportunities for questions. Encourage everyone to write down their questions on the sticky notes! Don't know about you, but as I age gracefully, I have a tendency to forget! I can always admit that there are so many important things going on in my mind that I just can't keep up sometimes!
10. Before you close this portion of your meeting, make sure the Fiscal Agency finance team members share their contact information! Make sure you share yours! As a regional manager, it's a good idea to share your contact information with everyone as well! No matter the time, someone is at their disposal!

Although not perfect, I've learned this practice has helped us become a TEAM! It has helped us address any financial gaps that have existed and/or those that may surface. I have also learned that our region's practitioners are growing in the area of finance because we are seeing less errors! We have come a long way and I can honestly say that I am so proud to be a part of the Region 20 Adult Education team. I feel that we are not just a TEAM, but FAMILY!

I would challenge all of the adult education regions to conduct this type of annual meeting. It doesn't matter how small your region may be, your adult education practitioners who handle your finances must have the same "heartbeat!" It

is important that each individual feels valued and that they also have something to bring to the table. More importantly, every member of your TEAM/FAMILY must feel they can trust you as the regional manager and fiscal agency! As Region 20's fiscal agency, we are tasked not only with overseeing our local program responsibilities, but we must also ensure that we meet the needs of our entire region! There is no way any of this can be done independently, it must be done as a "TEAM!" 🌐

Resource:

[Portsmouth Public Schools FY 24–25 Fiscal Agency presentation](#)



Alice Graham, Ed.D., began her educational career with Chesapeake Public Schools in 1991 as a family & consumer science teacher, where she was also able to teach adult education classes for three years. After serving as a middle and high school assistant principal and principal, Alice joined Region 20 Adult & Continuing Education in 2017 as the Coordinator of Adult & Alternative Education for Portsmouth Public Schools and the Region 20 Program Manager.

Using Virtual Reality to Build Workforce Skills in Correctional Education



by Bryan Smith

A pair of virtual reality (VR) goggles is placed on the head of a learner in workforce training at a correctional facility. Suddenly, the sterile environment of the jail transforms into a virtual work site. They are able to grip a hammer, measure wood, and assemble a sturdy frame—all without touching a single physical tool. This scenario is what we as adult educators from the [RACE1 Regional Adult & Career Education](#) program see as the future of hands-on training in corrections—using VR to break down barriers imposed by security, budget, and space, and bringing real-world skills to the individuals preparing for life beyond incarceration.

Our (Region 1's) goal is to offer training within our region's correctional facilities that leads to certifications for jobs with higher post-release hiring potential. We are starting with the Home Builders Institute's (HBI) Pre-Apprenticeship Certification Training (PACT). HBI PACT is a nationally recognized

program designed to prepare individuals for careers in the building and construction trades. It combines an online curriculum and a hands-on training component to demonstrate proficiency and safety with various tools. HBI's VR simulations can substitute for the hands-on portion, making it possible to implement this training directly within correctional facilities. As part of a [Department of Labor Pathway Home 5](#) award, the participants in our program will have comprehensive reentry support, including personalized plans for transitioning back into the community, career development to prepare for employment, and mentoring to help achieve personal goals. Additional support includes covering costs for job training, essential items like clothing and tools, temporary housing, transportation, communication, benefit coordination, obtaining IDs, and more to ensure successful reintegration.

This idea emerged last winter during [VAACE's 2024 Learning Circles](#), where practitioners from three regions shared their workforce training efforts in correctional settings. Shannon Mutter in Region 3 was piloting a program with her workforce development board to offer HBI PACT in jails but the VR headset technology did not work and had to be replaced with pictures of tools. Recognizing the potential impact of VR technology on training inside our regional jails, Region 1 and [Region 3](#) successfully worked to troubleshoot the IT issues. As a result, both Regions 1 and 3 are now recruiting participants for HBI PACT IET cohorts with VR technology in the Duffield and Abingdon correctional facilities. Other regions who look to do something similar will want to work extremely closely with their local correctional leaders, and especially their IT departments, to ensure the VR headsets are allowed and will work in each facility

Reducing recidivism hinges on helping individuals from correctional facilities secure employment quickly after their release. Unfortunately, many jobs open to individuals with justice-involved backgrounds involve working with power tools and heavy machinery. By offering training in certifications and skills that align with employer needs, we aim to increase the likelihood

of employment for these adult learners.

In the past, providing this type of training was often not feasible due to the hands-on equipment requirements, which couldn't be met safely in correctional settings. Now, with a simple VR headset, the learners can immerse themselves in a virtual workshop, learning skills through lifelike simulations. This innovative solution not only addresses security concerns, but also redefines what vocational education can achieve within correctional facilities. 🌐



Bryan Smith has been with Regional Adult & Career Education (Region 1) since 2012, serving as IT Director, Data Specialist, and Software Engineer. With more than a decade of experience, he ensures the region meets its performance goals, all while supporting teachers and learners with what they need most.

Are you interested in learning more about the innovative practices in corrections that Virginia's adult education programs are implementing across the state?

Hear from three leading educators participating in a Virginia Association for Adult and Continuing Education (VAACE) Learning Circle.

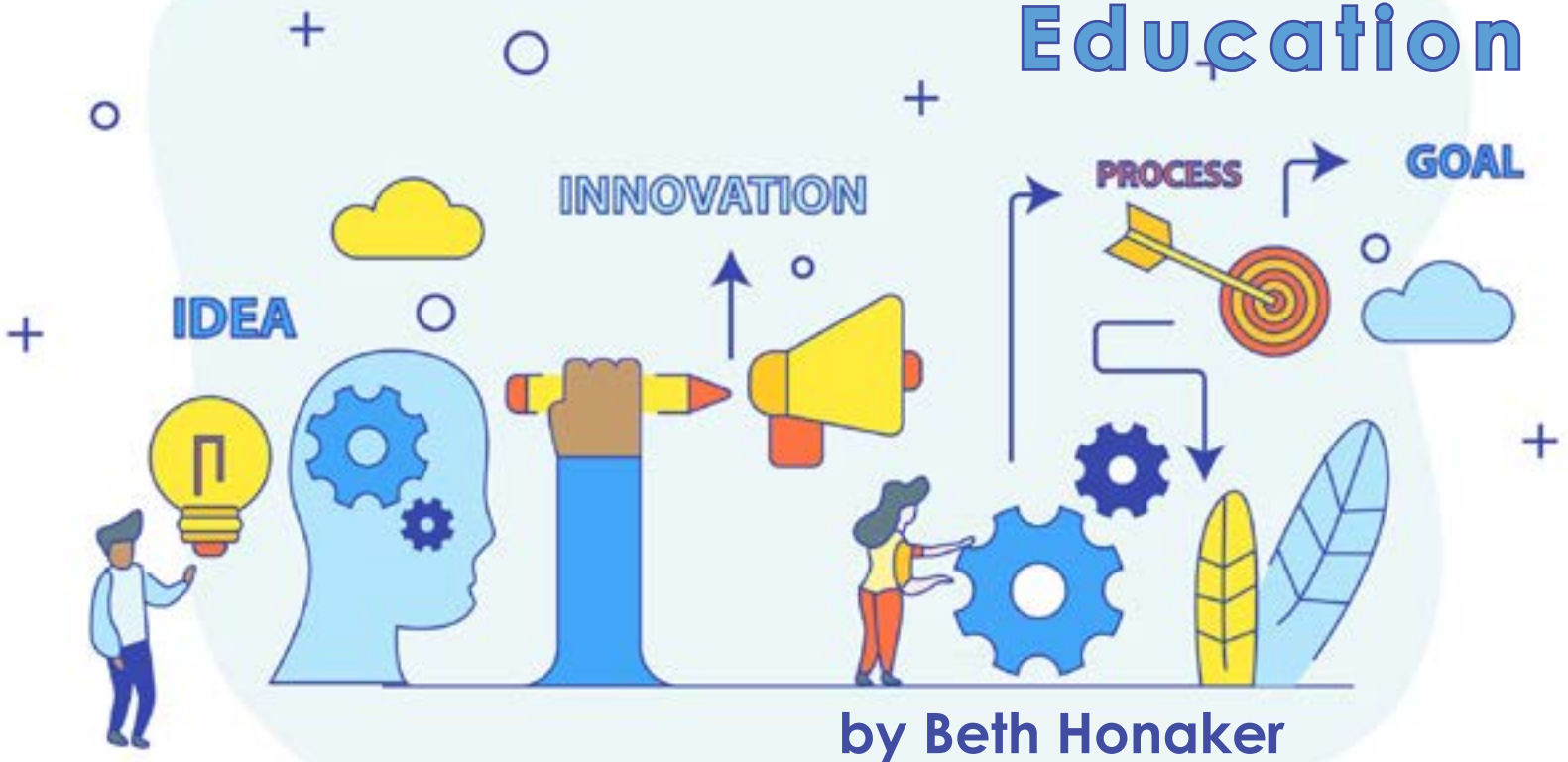
[Watch video.](#)

Interested in joining a Learning Circle?

[Learn more.](#)



From Start to Finish: An Innovative Process for Career Coaching in Adult Education



by Beth Honaker

For the past fifteen years, I have worked with high school students and adult learners as a career coach and counselor for [Southwest Virginia Community College](#) and, more recently, with the [Southwest Regional Adult Education Program](#). One of my first experiences involved interview practice with a probation class that was required by social services. I asked the common interview question, “Why should I hire you?”. As one student struggled to come up with a response, I prodded him with questions on whether he had a job and if he could highlight any successes from that experience. He had a job but failed to find an answer. At that time, he was employed at McDonald’s. Through our conversation, I discovered that he had never missed a day of work and even walked a mile to and from his job daily. I exclaimed, “That is it! That is why I should hire you. You are reliable and resilient. Brag about this!”. I could see

his confidence grow, and I was hooked. The skills he needed were already within him; he just needed help recognizing them.

That’s the rewarding aspect of my job—exposing students to new information that can help them better their futures or show them that they already possess essential skill sets to help make them more marketable in the workplace. Sometimes, it is as easy as finding the right words to describe their past experiences.

Continuous education opportunities, career exploration, résumé writing, mock interviews, and job applications are just a few of the topics I cover with students. My approach involves assessing individual needs and following up to provide continued support. Whether I am working with high school students or adult learners, I’ve found I have more success when I establish a relationship, and then follow with these three steps.

Step 1- Learn About Each Student's Background and Career Goals

I use a simple intake form I created on [Canva](#) to get to know each student. Once completed, our instructors provide this intake form to me so that I can identify specific areas where students may need help and the best way to follow up. The goal is to work with students at the beginning of their journey with Adult Ed so that when they complete their credentials, they will feel comfortable reaching out when they are ready to continue their education or move into the workforce. This intake also helps me to be aware of their short-term and long-term goals.

Step 2- Provide Students with Tools and Resources to Get Started

As part of my first contact with students, I email them helpful resources. Starting with career assessments, I recommend [ONet](#) and [VA Wizard](#) (both of these assessments are free to the students). These websites also offer a plethora of information about careers and job outlooks. Once a career goal is identified, we discuss the education or training needed for the student's specified career cluster. Working for the community college, I have the advantage of knowing the different program offerings and their prerequisites. If a student pursues a credited degree, I help connect them with an advisor, complete the college application, and fill out their Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)).


Step 3- Mentor Students in Developing Job Search Skills

I also address résumé writing, cover letters, and interview practice skills. I share résumé templates and recommend that students become familiar with Canva and Google Docs if they are searching for a more personalized format. I explain that a résumé is a "living document" that should be tailored to every position a student applies to because employers look at how well the applicant will fit their job requirements. We read job postings, discuss the required qualifications, and revise accordingly.

To stay current on employability topics, I research websites like Indeed or Career Development Centers on college and university websites. I frequent the [University of Michigan's Career Center](#) because this website offers YouTube videos for workforce

preparation, résumé templates, and action verb listings. I also routinely check job-search websites such as [Virginia Career Works](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Indeed](#), [USA Jobs](#), or [Virginia State Jobs](#) to stay current on the latest job postings and area outlooks.

Whether students plan to continue their educational journey or enter the workforce, I hope this collaborative process empowers them to navigate the career path they desire and recognize their existing skills. After implementing this 3-step process, I have had students reach out to ask for help getting into college and an individual who needed assistance finding a job. I'm there to support their goals and guide them in processes that can be frustrating and unfamiliar.

If you are interested in learning more about our career coaching process and student outcomes, please contact me via email at bethhonaker@russell.k12.va.us or Elizabeth.Honaker@sw.edu. 

Need a place to start in helping mentor your students in developing a career pathway? Check out this VALRC resource: [Virginia Career Guide for Adults](#).



Beth Honaker is a Career Coach for Southwest Virginia Community College (SWCC) and the Southeast Regional Adult Education Program (SRAE). She is a first-generation college student earning a master's degree in management with a human resources concentration from American Military University. She has B.A. in history from The University of Virginia's College at Wise and an A.A.S. in education from SWCC. Her past accomplishments include serving and chairing the scholarship and fundraising committees for the Virginia Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (VAEOPP). Beth has also participated in Congressional visits to advocate for [TRIO programs](#).



Workforce Preparation Best Practices for IELCE Learners

by Amy Dunster

Integrated English literacy and civics education, or, IELCE, is defined in the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) as “education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enable such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States” (VALRC, n.d.). How can adult education programs develop the most impactful workforce preparation programs, help learners transition their skills and education to a wage sustaining career in the United States and promote the staffing needs of career sectors in the local economy? Carefully designing workforce preparation programs can support learners and the community at the same time.

To address the unique challenges IELCE learners face; namely, understanding how to navigate a work environment and culture that may be very different from the one they came from, all while doing it in a non-native language, effective adult education programs should focus on goal setting and career exploration, workforce skills development and community engagement.

Goal Setting and Career Exploration

Workforce preparation programs should start at the beginning—helping learners understand

their needs and goals and the requirements of the industry in which they want to work. Although some learners have significant work experience in a particular sector, the educational and experience requirements may be quite different in a similar work sector in the United States and create a barrier to gainful employment. Researching the requirements for a specific career path will provide learners with a more realistic perspective of future employment opportunities. Even with experience from their home country, some learners may want to switch careers. Effective career exploration and goal setting, with the help of a career coach to provide advice and accountability, will give learners the information they need to develop an effective and realistic career pathway as well as a roadmap for success.

Workforce Skills Development: Digital Literacy, Job Search, Resume Writing, Interviewing and Soft Skills

Once a learner has devised a plan, developing job search skills and tools is the next step. Finding employment in the United States requires the development of many skills, most of them building on a foundation of digital literacy. Incorporating digital literacy training into IELCE programs increases the comfort level of learners to use online tools such as email, job search websites and other digital platforms.

A well-crafted résumé is an essential tool for

any job seeker, and for IELCE learners, developing a strong resume can be an intimidating task. As part of workforce preparation, programs should offer targeted support in résumé development to ensure learners not only understand the importance of the document, but also know how to highlight their skills and experiences and tailor their résumés for specific positions.

Interviewing is often one of the most daunting aspects of the job search process, particularly for learners who are still mastering the English language or unfamiliar with American workplace norms. Programs can help learners increase confidence and improve speaking skills by conducting mock interviews, offering feedback on their performance, and teaching them key interviewing techniques with a focus on cultural awareness.

Understanding the importance of soft skills in the American workplace is crucial. There may be many cultural differences in regards to time management, communication and interpersonal relations. Incorporating group projects, role-playing exercises, and collaborative activities can help learners understand cultural differences in the workplace and build the soft skills needed to be successful.

Community Engagement: Virginia CareerWorks and Local Job Fairs

Many IELCE learners do not know what community resources are available to help them with their job search. Introducing them to community partners such as Virginia CareerWorks, communicating what support is available and helping them feel comfortable utilizing resources provides valuable tools to advance their employment search.

One of the most valuable resources available to job seekers in Virginia is the Virginia CareerWorks Center, a comprehensive workforce development center offering job search support, career counseling, skills assessments, and training opportunities. For IELCE learners, visiting the Virginia CareerWorks Center can serve as an eye-opening experience, allowing them to explore a wide range of services designed to enhance their employability. In addition to one-on-one support, Virginia CareerWorks offers workshops on résumé writing,

interview preparation, and job search techniques, which can further complement the skills that learners are developing in their IELCE programs. These resources not only enhance learners' employability but also give them a sense of agency in managing their career progression.

Attending job fairs, with the support of IELCE instructors, is another valuable exercise in workforce preparation for IELCE learners. Job fairs provide an excellent opportunity for learners to apply what they have learned in the classroom to a real-world setting, interact with potential employers, and expand their professional networks. For IELCE learners, job fairs can be particularly beneficial in terms of language practice, exposure to various industries, and understanding employer expectations. Job fairs also offer the chance to receive feedback directly from employers about qualifications, skills, and experience, which can be incredibly valuable for future job searches.

Conclusion

Workforce preparation for IELCE learners must go beyond language instruction to incorporate a range of innovative practices designed to equip learners with the skills they need to succeed in the job market. Through goal setting and career exploration, skills development, and community engagement, IELCE learners are empowered to develop their path to wage sustainable employment. 🌍

Reference

VALRC, Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center. (n.d.). *Integrated English and Literacy Civics Education (IELCE)*. Resources. <https://valrc.org/resource/integrated-english-literacy-and-civics-education-ielce/>



Amy Dunster began serving in adult education programs overseas in Germany and Korea more than 30 years ago. She is currently the ESOL Program Coordinator for the [Peninsula Regional Education Program](#) in Hampton. Amy is passionate about understanding the specific needs of learners and helping them find resources, develop their skills, and learn the knowledge they need to fulfill their personal goals.

From Rookie to Ready: How Peer Observation Strengthens New Teacher Training

by Mora da Silva



Rookie teachers not only risk being ineffective, but can also inadvertently harm their students' progress. We all want new teachers in the classroom as soon as possible, but we also want to set them up for success—because when teachers win, students win.

In Regions 13 and 14, which encompass ten rural counties, we transitioned to remote learning in 2020 and have only partially returned to in-person instruction. The majority of students we teach prefers remote learning. Therefore, as we continue refining our online classes, using class recordings to train new teachers has become a standard practice in order to help them start strong.

Like all programs, we regularly hire new teachers, and as lead teacher, I facilitate their training. Our standard pre-service training takes about a month and includes:

- [CCRS on-demand modules](#) for ELA and math from Pennsylvania.
- [GED® Ready testing](#) for teachers to familiarize themselves with the assessments.
- **Weekly one-hour Zoom meetings** with the lead teacher (and occasionally the program manager) to discuss program expectations, policies, housekeeping, [TABE reports](#), and instructional strategies.
- **2-4 hours of peer observation** of the same content instructors will be teaching (which can extend into their first month in the classroom).

The Value of Peer Observation

Peer observation has proven especially beneficial for new teachers. With our online format, recordings are readily available and trainees can also attend live class sessions. Over the past two years, four new teachers—David, Janiel, Diana, and Sharon—joined our team from public school backgrounds.

During our initial weekly meetings, we reflect on observations. Here's what our teachers had to say:

- **David:** "I see you do a lot of scaffolding." "Watching other teachers helped me understand how to give instruction to adult learners, which reduced my anxiety."
- **Janiel:** "The teaching strategies were most helpful. Seeing how the teacher managed students at varying levels was also valuable."
- **Diana:** "Watching a recorded session answered questions I didn't even know I had! The most useful aspects were teaching strategies and pacing."
- **Sharon:** "Being able to pause or rewatch sections helped me grasp details I might have missed. It also reduced any embarrassment about not immediately understanding something others did."

Using recordings as an integral part of training boosts new teachers' confidence. As Janiel put it, "The video recordings helped me gain my footing. I was unsure whether I was delivering instruction

effectively, but after watching, I felt reassured and confident to continue.”

Addressing Common Rookie Mistakes

A key part of pre-service training is helping new teachers avoid common pitfalls. In one of our weekly meetings, we discuss rookie mistakes and how experienced teachers navigate them.

Rookie Mistakes and How to Overcome Them:

1. Thinking for Your Students

- Use [Talk Moves](#) for teachers and strategies that promote discussion.

2. Going Too Fast

- Allow students time to think and work.
- Review key concepts at the start of class and reinforce them throughout the month.
- Emphasize vocabulary and foundational skills.
- Integrate application-based problems.
- Use strategies like end-of-month quizzes, writing activities, and hands-on learning.

3. Going Too Slowly

- Maintain a rigorous pace.
- Start with simpler tasks and gradually introduce more challenging ones.
- Ensure students leave class feeling successful, not frustrated.

4. Choosing the Wrong Material

- Use TABE reports and a developmental spelling analysis to select appropriate content and consider students’ [Zone of Proximal Development \(ZPD\)](#).

Improving Training Based on Feedback

We view each training cycle as a prototype to refine based on feedback from teachers, students, and staff. Moving forward, we will:

- [Use the Evidence-Based Reading Instruction \(EBRI\) Observation Tool](#) to guide observations for reading teachers.
- **Provide specific observation focus points** such as pacing, materials, discussion techniques,

and engagement strategies—particularly in heterogeneous groups.

Variations on Peer Observation

Another effective method is **team teaching**, which I’ve done with two new reading teachers. As a reading specialist, I covered fluency, word study, and writing; while the trainee focused on comprehension. Teachers who have team-taught with me report positive experiences understanding how to teach word study and fluency.

Scheduling Peer Observations

Scheduling is straightforward—I email both the observing and observed teachers to coordinate a live session or provide a recording. This approach can be customized based on budget and subject area needs, including contextualized instruction or ELL classes.

Ongoing Support and Professional Development

We continue to support new teachers throughout their first semester. We check in to address any issues and hold **Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings** where teachers—new and experienced—share strategies, challenges, and successes. A recent survey found that most teachers feel our program provides sufficient professional development, though some expressed interest in more in-person gatherings.

Starting as a new instructor can be overwhelming. We can’t expect anyone to master everything in the first semester. One improvement I plan to implement is **sending more periodic email reminders** reinforcing key training topics, such as *Talk Moves*, mathematical discussions, and ZPD strategies.

A Culture of Respectful Coaching and Growth

In our program, we truly believe in the idea that when we respectfully coach a teacher, we empower them to return to their classroom with new insights and skills. We see teacher development as an ongoing journey rather than a one-off training session.

Continued on p. 32>>>

>>>Continued from p. 31

Every teacher, no matter how experienced, can benefit from taking the time to observe their peers, reflect on their practice, and make improvements. By making peer observation a regular part of our culture, we create an environment where teachers are constantly learning from each other.

This approach enhances our program in several important ways:

- **New teachers** build their confidence and gather effective strategies before they even step into their own classrooms.
- **Seasoned teachers** remain engaged by critically examining and refining their own teaching methods.
- **All educators** gain from the collective knowledge of their colleagues, which ensures that our students receive the highest quality education possible.

When we invest in our teachers, we are ultimately investing in our students. By nurturing a collaborative learning atmosphere, we make sure that every teacher has the resources and support they need to thrive. 🌍



Mora da Silva is a lead instructor and reading specialist for Regions 13 and 14 with almost 20 years of experience in adult education. Since 2005, Mora has directed an adult literacy program, taught adult education, and provided professional development to adult ed instructors and tutors. She also owns an art education business.

Q & A with Mora

Q: You mention using the *EBRI Observation Tool for Reading* but do you use any other tools or common structure for peer observations?

A: I use the [IDEAL Consortium Remote Instruction Observation Tool](#) for Science and Social Studies and the [CCR Observation Tool for Mathematics](#).

Q: Do you use any tools or specific methods for considering students' Zone of Proximal Development?

A: The standard assessments (e.g., CASAS, TABE, Northstar) are a starting point but conducting informal assessments throughout instruction are also helpful as gray areas require teacher judgment.

TABE, for example, has a decent [score to grade-level chart](#) that our instructors use to initially choose materials. We use this as our first assessment and primary tool for leveling.

In general, learners should be able to read at least 90% of the words in a passage for that passage to be used for instruction. They should also be able to answer about 50-75% of the comprehension questions. If they can only answer 40% of the comprehension questions but can read 100% of the words, the level is too high. The material should be taken to a lower level to work on comprehension strategies. We see a lot of that in our classes—perfect reading but very low comprehension.



The Benefits of Implementing a Peer Observation Practice

by Sherry Grantham

At least once a year, the Program Manager and/or Regional Specialist of Rappahannock Community College Adult Basic Education, Region 17, observe their ABE/ GED®/ESL instructors' classes. Use of the [College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education \(CCRS\) observation tool](#) makes these observations objective, thorough, and compliant. This tool provides a structured framework to evaluate key aspects of classroom instruction in coordination with adult education standards. When assessing teaching practices, it is critical to know if instructors are providing education that is aligned with Adult Education [College and Career Readiness Standards \(CCRS\)](#). Using the observation tool helps to ensure adult learners are receiving instruction that prepares them for secondary education attainment, postsecondary education, success in the workforce, and economic mobility.

This innovative practice is now an annual professional development requirement for all instructors. They, too, use the CCRS tool to observe their peers. Instructors find it easy to use and an invaluable resource in their professional growth.

What other benefits have we seen with this peer-to-peer observation?

1. Provides a valuable opportunity for instructors to receive feedback from their colleagues, which can help them identify areas for improvement

in their teaching methods, course design, and overall delivery—ultimately leading to a better learning experience for students.

2. By receiving constructive feedback from peers, instructors gain insights into how their teaching is perceived by other teachers, allowing them to address weaknesses and enhance their strengths.
3. Encourages ongoing self-reflection and development of teaching practices, promoting a culture of continuous improvement and growth among faculty members.
4. Fosters collaboration and community building among adult education instructors, allowing them to share knowledge, resources, and best practices.

Peer class observations have worked quite well for our region! Give them a try and see how your instructors will become empowered to grow and further develop their skills with their work family! 🌍



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 more than 10 years.

2025

PROGRESS CALENDAR

MAR

6 [VALRC: Structure Your Program So Students & Staff Want to Stay Webinar](#)
12:30 p.m.–2:00 p.m.

15 [VALRC: In-Person, Instructor Professional Learning Community \(PLC\)](#)
9:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

18 [VALRC: Regional Instructional Specialist Professional Learning Community \(PLC\)](#)
12:00 p.m.–1:00 p.m.

18–21 [TESOL 2025 International Convention & Expo](#)
Long Beach, CA

21 [VALRC: Digital Resilience in the American Workforce \(DRAW\) Professional Learning Community \(PLC\), Session 1](#)
1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

28 [VALRC: Trauma-Informed Practices: An Introduction Webinar](#)
1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

29–APR 1 [National Association of Workforce Boards \(NAWB\) The Forum 2025, Together. Forward. Change.](#)
Washington, DC

30–APR 2 [Coalition on Adult Basic Education \(COABE\) 2025 National Conference: Expanding Horizons](#)

APR

2–5 [National Council of Teachers of Mathematics \(NCTM\) 2025 Virtual Conference: Reconnecting & Reimagining, Honoring the Stories That Unite Us to the Mathematics of Our World](#)
Virtual

25 [VALRC: Digital Resilience in the American Workforce \(DRAW\) Professional Learning Community \(PLC\), Session 2](#)
1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

JUN

26 [Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium \(MERC\) Summit](#)
Richmond, VA

MAY

5–7 [National Skills Coalition: Skills Summit](#)
Washington, DC

16 [GED® Grad Day 2025](#)
1:00 p.m. Virtual

23 [VALRC: Digital Resilience in the American Workforce \(DRAW\) Professional Learning Community \(PLC\), Session 3](#)
1:00 p.m.–2:30 p.m.

AUG

4–6 [2025 GED® Conference: It Starts With You](#)
Chicago, IL

