

## NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR WORKFORCE EDUCATION EXEMPLARY PROGRAM AWARDS

Institution: Metropolitan Community College, Omaha, Nebraska

Category: Noncredit Workforce Development Program

### Executive Summary

Metropolitan Community College is a staple in the Omaha, Nebraska community meeting the needs for various levels of learners and providing programming of vast interest. In March 2017, the Greater Omaha Community launched the Heartland WorkReady Community Initiative co-lead by Metropolitan Community College's (MCC) Workforce Innovation Division and Heartland Workforce Solutions (HWS). The initiative created an ecosystem that seamlessly connected Education, the Workforce System, Greater Omaha Chamber and local businesses. As a result, education to employment pathways for individuals who experienced high barriers to successful, sustainable employment were created throughout the community, targeting jobs that demonstrate High Wage, High Demand, High Skill (H3) jobs (<http://h3.ne.gov/>). **MCC's Workforce Innovation Division's Career Skill Advancement and Adult Education Program** is just one of many programs at the college that embraces the need of serving adult learners and helping connect them to career pathways in various capacities. Currently, the Workforce Innovation Division (WID) has created 15 noncredit, short-term training programs which offer 28 different certifications. Of these 15 noncredit short-term training programs, nine have been created as Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs that incorporate both Adult Basic Skills Education and Workforce and Technical Education. These three components are delivered contextually and concurrently. MCC's WID Program takes education and workforce preparation one step further by integrating employment in these short-term training programs with the assistance of our 287 business partners, providing immediate access for individuals seeking to enter a particular workforce industry or upskill in their current field. All 15 training programs have an embedded Career Coach who focuses on career readiness and preparation to enter the workforce and aids in introducing participants to industry partners for potential hire. Furthermore, the IET programs have recently incorporated collaborations with MCC's programs of study for technical education and utilize the I-Best teaching model, pioneered by Washington State's community and technical colleges. Current student outcomes include gainful employment, enrollment into college credit courses and upskilling and promotions within their current workforce field.

These programs would not have demonstrated success without our private and nonprofit business partners. Omaha's Workforce Board plays an integral role in promoting and recruiting not only individuals, but also businesses to participate in programming at MCC – enabling us to bring with the end in mind.

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### Project Description

Career Skill Advancement and Adult Basic Education envelops a guided pathways philosophy that supports students as they navigate the journey through education to successful employment. MCC's WID Program has created an environment in which several components work concurrently to achieve results and impact the community. Each component of the system is outlined below.

#### *GAP Funded Short-Term Noncredit Training*

GAP funding is the precursor that allows for students to enroll in all 15 noncredit, short-term trainings at no cost. Each student completes an intake process, provides documentation for eligibility and must be willing to gain and maintain full-time employment (amongst other qualifying indicators). The training programs are approved by the State of Nebraska and must lead to industry related credential attainment and gainful employment in an H3 (High Wage, High Demand, High Skill) job. Additionally, employment tracking is required for all participants up to 3 months post training. Employment tracking includes wage data, FT/PT reported hours, job title, related industry and employer name/location. Additionally, MCC requires at least three businesses be identified as potential employers for the students who complete the programs. There is required communication and attained understanding with these business partners to ensure the programs address their industry needs and that the programmatic outcomes align to allow an individual to be employed in their industry.

Currently, there are 28 different certifications being utilized across the 15 programs. A few of the short-term, noncredit trainings are: Project Management Academy, Certified Fiber Optics Technician, Code School, Pre-CDL, and Facilities Maintenance Technician. Some of the certifications offered are: OSHA 10, Forklift License, Snap-on Measurement, Customer Service, Work Ethic Certification, CompTIA, Agile and CPR/First Aid. WID's Career Skill Advancement and Adult Education utilizes these 15 programs to ensure that entering participants do not accrue debt and educational costs remain affordable for those students and career seekers participating.

#### *Integrated Education and Training (IET)*

Currently, MCC's WID Department hosts nine IETs that work in conjunction with short-term training and noncredit programs. The programs are related to High Wage, High Demand and High Skill industries. Each program allocates time for technical instruction, application to industry, support/tutoring of

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technical instruction, language and vocabulary preparation, accelerated GED preparation and basic skills preparation. There are two instructors embedded into each program: one Technical Instructor and one I-Best Instructor. The program participants also work closely with a Career Coach who serves as the liaison between business partners and the students, along with providing outreach and community support for the basic needs of each student and their families. In addition to the IETs education and workforce training elements are pre-identified and committed business partners ready to hire students as they complete their program. At the completion of these programs, students then move into entry level positions in industries such as sheet metal and electrical; students progress in both their educational and career journey leading to advanced wage earnings and employment.

### *Career Placement Program (CPP)*

The Career Placement Program (CPP) is embedded in 11 GAP funded short-term, noncredit training programs and in all nine IET programs. The CPP contains a 32-hour long curriculum which includes three certifications, resume building, mock interview practice, professional dress consultation, workplace ethics/expectations instruction, customer service training, goal setting and job search strategies. Additionally, the Career Placement Program allows time for employers and business partners to meet directly with students and inform them about their job openings, hire and selection process, job expectations, wages, benefits and more. By the end of the one-week program, students have interviews scheduled for the following week with at least one of the industry business partners that presented during the week. The CPP is facilitated by a Career Coach who then supports the participants by connecting them with services and resources for basic needs while also supporting them in their career search. Each participant is tracked for six months post training.. Since 2017, CPPs served over 400 individuals, in which over 80% of students who completed the program gained employment at the conclusion of their training. Of the 80% of students who gained employment, 87% maintained employment post 6 months of employment. This time-tested method of creating a talent pipeline for local businesses also effectively assists employers in determining needs and opportunities with their existing staff members and employees. The Career Placement Program deploys intentional methods of identifying and preparing candidates for suitable positions within a business by aligning individuals' work-ready skill sets with skills required for actual jobs. The program accomplishes three key goals: (1) closes skills gaps, (2) reduces training time and (3) improves job retention.

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### *I-Best Instruction*

The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST) model teaches students literacy, workplace and college-readiness skills so they can more easily transition from school and into livable wage jobs more quickly. I-BEST uses a team-teaching approach; students work with two instructors in one classroom: one provides technical skills related job-training while the other teaches adult basic education in reading, math or the English Language. Students receive the assistance they need while studying in the career field of their choice; they learn by doing. The I-BEST model is also used so students can refine their skills as they learn college-level content towards a degree.

I-BEST challenges the traditional notion that students must move through a prescribed sequence of basic education or pre-college (remedial) courses before they can begin working on certificates or degrees. The combined teaching method allows students to work on college-level studies immediately, passing through many levels at an accelerated speed. Additionally, the I-Best Instructor offers supplemental instruction to students with basic skills deficiencies or who need to obtain their GED by the conclusion of the training program (i.e. accelerated GED instruction/training).

### *Transitional Learning Communities (TLCs)*

Transitional Learning Communities were incorporated into the program as a means to improve overall program outcomes and manage student enrollment. TLC classes take place prior to the beginning of every quarter. Students meet twice a week for three weeks; class times are held at the regular times ABE and ELL classes are held in order to maintain a consistent schedule for students once the quarter starts. Successful completion of this class leads to enrollment into ABE and ELL classes. During the TLC, all required program state paperwork is completed along with CASA testing. During the first week of class, Career Skills Coaches meet with each individual student to complete WIOA Career Pathways interviews from which education and career plans are created through interest inventories and conversations regarding a student's individual interests and career goals. Coaches are then able to identify short-term training programs or IETs that are best suited for each student. Other class topics include: reviewing program and student participant expectations, computer, technology and digital literacy as well as effective tools to help transition new students into a learning environment that utilizes online curriculum and co-instruction within each classroom.

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### Partnerships and Collaboration

Metropolitan Community College serves four counties with a total population over 800,000 people, over an area of 1,500 square miles. Our community connections are substantial and valuable, especially in advancing the mission and values of Metropolitan Community College and the Workforce Innovation Division; business and nonprofit partners understand the importance of education and its effects on the community and employment. Because of this, career readiness and basic skills training are now offered off-site at nine partner locations. Three public school districts offer classroom space and technology that allows us to conduct daytime and evening trainings; three nonprofits offer daytime and evening programming for their clients using MCC established curriculum; and two businesses offer on-site training to their current workforce during their employees' paid work shifts.

One of the largest partners and collaborators with WID's Career Skills Advancement and Adult Education program is Heartland Workforce Solutions (HWS), which is the entity that acts on behalf of the local Workforce Board of Omaha and operates the community's OneStop. Heartland Workforce Solutions is the centralized deliverer of local community services and houses over 15 community partners on site. MCC's Adult Basic Education and Career Skills programs have a dedicated technology-enabled classroom that is used for ACT WorkKeys test administration, GED instruction and other Career Placement Program Activities. HWS is also the network that assists the program with business engagement. Developing a Workforce Ecosystem that enhances and capitalizes upon partnership and collaboration requires funding support from local foundations, businesses, the City of Omaha and Douglas County. This ensures the programs' longevity and assists in removing barriers to education and career advancement.

Another major partner is the Learning Community Centers of Douglas and Sarpy Counties, which have two locations in the Omaha Metro area. The centers use a 2-generation approach to assist their clients in bridging out of poverty and providing educational access to both children and parents on site. Both locations have dedicated technology enabled classrooms for MCC's Adult Basic Education and Career Skills programs to host activities. One center uses a cohort model for ELL and GED Instruction. Both locations have worked with the Adult Basic Education and Career Skills programs to create customized workforce development activities to help the parents they serve earn certifications and become more equipped and skilled to enter the workforce. Additionally, both centers were able to identify parents they served who were interested in attending the GAP funded Facilities Maintenance Technician training.

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While parents attended the training, the two centers were able to off-set the cost of childcare, missed time at work and assist in elevating more financial burdens by providing a stipend for the time the parents spent in class.

Turner Construction is a major national construction company. Through a master collaboration between multiple resources, Turner Construction was able to create a credit and noncredit 8-week paid training program for individuals interested in entering a construction related field (included HVAC, masonry heavy machine operation and electrical) called Hard Hat in Hand. The program became an Integrated Education and Training Program allowing individuals to work simultaneously on their GED and English Language acquisition during the program. An I-Best Instructor and Career Coach were provided by MCC's Adult Basic Education and Career Skills programs to assist in the GED and English Language acquisition components while connecting student participants to community resources when needed. Heartland Workforce Solutions assisted individuals in applying for Title II – WIOA funding to assist with the tools and equipment purchases needed to attend/complete the training, while also supplying up to \$500 per participant to be applied to the total cost of the program. Turner Construction funded the remaining costs of the program. In the Hard Hat in Hand Program, students are hired by a company while participating in the training (before completion). The Hard Hat in Hand Program (HHH) is a partnership with Turner Construction, MCC and the Workforce Board. Students participating in HHH enroll in 11 credit hours for basic Construction, receive minimum wage while completing 5 weeks of in-seat classes at Turner Construction's current job site, have the support of a basic skills instructor and move into employment with several different construction industries (including union trades).

Tyson Foods, Inc. is one of the largest employers of English language Learners in the Omaha community. Recently, Tyson invested over \$20,000 to renovate a previous office space into a technology enabled classroom equipped with high speed Internet, furniture and instructional material storage to continue training on-site, reducing adult student barriers of transportation and locational access. Additionally, Tyson covers the cost of MCC Adult Basic Skills Instructors and students in these classes attained 1 Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gain (equivocates to 2-3 grade levels) over 10 weeks time, which is a noteworthy outcome. Class meetings are held four days a week (Monday through Thursday), with two schedules available, allowing flexibility for the students to attend class either before or after their shift work. Currently, there are a total of 38 students enrolled and actively attending class. Since the beginning

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of this program/academic year, 2087 hours of instructional time have been delivered and seven students have received EFL gains, with 20 students still pending to CASAS post-test due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students are also provided important life skills instruction such as English Language acquisition to help improve communication and break through language barriers, support job retention and safety while on the job as well as the ability to advance within the company. This past year alone, as a result of their hard work and English communication improvement, two students were promoted into roles in QA

Departments and one was promoted into a Line Lead Position. This ultimate investment lead to national success and recognition for Tyson Foods' Upward Academy,

### **Economic Impact**

MCC's Career Skills Advancement and Adult Education programs have transformed educational delivery and outcomes for high barrier, low-income populations in the Greater Omaha metro area. Our co-leadership approach to developing a Work Ready Ecosystem in Douglas and Dodge Counties through the development of intentional partnerships for customized workforce solutions led our community to receive national recognition and we were just recognized as a Work Ready Community at the 2019 ACT Workforce Summit.

According to the Washington Post, "of the nation's 70 largest major metro areas with statistically significant populations of black and white residents, only 28 had shrunk the unemployment gap, and none at a faster rate than Omaha". Metropolitan Community College's Workforce Innovation Division and Heartland Workforce Solutions formed partnerships with city, county, chamber, public school officials and employers. Our shared goal is to close skill gaps, align individuals to well-suited, sustainable jobs/employment and develop a competitive advantage for our region. Clientele included job seekers (GED, ELL, Re-Entry populations, students and community members), businesses, training programs and adult basic education programs.

This program is partially funded as a contract with Heartland Workforce Solutions to develop intentional ways of utilizing the ACT National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) and the ACT Work Ready Communities Initiative, to connect individuals to sustainable-wage employment opportunities in high-demand industry sectors; and building partnerships and discovering creative ways to develop talent pipelines. The focus is to reach zip codes in the Greater Omaha area where unemployment is in the

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double digits. The results demonstrate the use of education to decrease unemployment rates while simultaneously increasing wage earnings through educational pathways. Over 400 job seekers and participating students completed the Career Placement Program to move into various positions with High Demand, High Wage, High Skill careers. Retention rates are averaging at 87% which is about 40% higher than industry average (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.t16.htm>).

Additionally, the Career Placement program has not only increased employee skill sets and retention rates, it has also trained some of our businesses' top performers while systematically saving the company money in the process. Through using internal calculations that estimated the cost of rehiring one Point of Sales Position at \$13,488 per person, the Career Placement Program yielded cost savings of approximately \$650,000 last year alone for one of our business partners.

### Program Results

In terms of the Career Placement Program that is utilized in 11 of the GAP funded short-term, noncredit training programs, employment information is tracked for up to 6 months post program completion. In 2019, CPPs served over 120 individuals, in which over 70% of students that completed the program gained employment at the conclusion of their training. Of the 70% of students who gained employment, 93% maintained employment post 6 months of employment.

In 2019:

- Over 1,000 National Career Readiness Certifications were issued;
- Over 150 Work Ethic Certifications were issued;
- Over 50 Basic Computer Skills Training certifications were issued;
- Over 200 industry-related certifications were issued;
- Six programs were created for GAP funding;
- Three programs were created as Integrated Educational Trainings (IETs);
- 71% of active students made an Educational Functioning Level Gain (2-3 Grade Levels of improvement within a year);
- 39% of the total student population made an EFL Gain during the program year.

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In 2020 (January – May):

- Two programs were created as Integrated Educational Trainings (IETs);
- 20 students were enrolled in IETs;
- Online Career Placement Program was launched;
- All ABE and ELL classes are offered online or in an alternative instructional format.

### Replication

Replication would not be possible without support of the local Workforce Board, community sponsors and the state Department of Education. The connection to local workforce systems cultivates streamlined communication with strategic business and industry partners, which enables the alignment and creation of integrated education and training partners. Our partnerships with businesses like Tyson Foods, Inc and Turner Construction have produced small, but wonderful opportunities that encourage and make it possible for ABE students to not only further their education, but also be supported by their employer while doing so. Additionally, the collaboration between local human services agencies to offer holistic support and allow for direct referral systems from the college have provided tremendous support for our students to be able to connect with assistance for housing, transportation, childcare, unemployment and additional training dollars to support their career and educational goals. Omaha, Nebraska is situated in one of the most giving communities, where many local foundations fully support education and career training. Their continued support allows for innovation to flow. Because of our local funders, we were able to solidify paid education and training opportunities using a 2-generation approach with the local Learning Community Centers. Their clients were able to come to MCC to attend ABE and career training, while receiving a stipend, transportation assistance and childcare assistance from the Learning Community Center(s). Collaboration and innovation are key in replication. Additionally, ensuring partners and collaborators' missions align with that of education and career training will ultimately produce the greatest results, like that of the WID's Career Skills Advancement and Adult Education Department at Metropolitan Community College.