

**County of Union**  
**Workforce Investment Board**  
**Adult Literacy Plan**



**Introduction**

a. *Executive Summary*

The purpose of this plan is to review the current state of adult basic literacy in Union County and offer recommendations for its improvement. Adult education lacks a cohesive strategy to assist adults in raising their basic skills to improve their ability to earn a living, support the economy, become better parents, and participate more fully in their community. Adult education services are delivered as disparate programs. We must go beyond the “one shot” approach and incorporate successive steps in the continuum of adult learning. This is an adult literacy plan that attempts to put in place strategies that will ultimately benefit both residents and businesses.

For nearly two years, the Union County Workforce Improvement Board (WIB), through its Literacy Committee, has been engaged in developing a framework for literacy improvement, including specific goals and objectives (see Appendix). These goals seek to explore innovative ways to provide services; to increase public awareness of low basic skills and the inherent impediment to a growing economy; to assist employers to increase the effectiveness of their employees, thus increasing productivity; to elevate literacy levels of our residents to remain competitive; and to put in place a system for early intervention at the K-12 level.

The economic landscape has changed dramatically both nationally and globally over the past twenty years. Policymakers have recognized that the most fundamental impediment to our growing economy is the lack of skilled workers. This plan addresses the need in our community for a more structured systematic approach to the delivery of basic skills/ESL services.

With support from the New Jersey Act for Supplemental Workforce Funds for Basic Skills, the plan proposed in this document will enable the Union County WIB to design a more effective, comprehensive response to current and future workforce literacy needs. By insuring area employers have a pool of skilled, literate employees to fill their jobs, Union County’s economy will remain strong. Additional funding provided by the supplemental workforce literacy funds will enable workers to upgrade their skill sets and increase their job-related effectiveness. Employers will benefit from increased efficiencies and greater profitability, which are essential for business to remain globally competitive.

The above recognitions and intents are contrasted against a background of stark literacy statistics and changes in the demographics of the County. There are 522,541 residents of Union County;

of that total 392,600 (75%) were 18 years of age or older. The total labor force (in 2000) was 268,300. Citing recent census data, 24% (85,000) people aged 25 or older lack a high school diploma or GED, and 38,500 have not completed ninth grade. Viewed from another perspective, *an unacceptable percentage of the current workforce in Union County is attempting to earn a living with less-than-high-school credentials at the same time that skill requirements for competing in a global economy are increasing.*

Further, the past 20 years have seen dramatic increases in the population of Union County by immigrants and by demographic cohorts whose English-language skills and educational backgrounds have been undermined by long-term systemic failures. For example, the Hispanic/Latino population increased by a staggering 66.3% during the 1980-1990 decade, followed by a 52% increase in the most recent decade. Of the 169,000 Union County residents born outside the United States, 42% (73,317) reported that they did not speak English “very well.” Other populations are increasing as well, including African-Americans and those from Europe, Asia and the Caribbean. While local statistics are not readily available, we know that nationally many of these groups are those with the lowest levels of formal educational attainment: nationally, 16.9% of all adults 18 and older have not graduated high school; yet 22.4% of African-Americans 18 and older have not graduated high school and 43% of Hispanic/Latino adults 18 and older do not possess a high school diploma or equivalent. *As the Literacy Committee of the WIB attempts to ‘move forward by catching up’, the County’s demographics are resulting in falling further behind.*

The Literacy Committee has recognized that the most comprehensive solutions to the issues noted above require financial and other resources far beyond the scope of the WIB, or of Union County itself. With support from the New Jersey Act for Supplemental Workforce Funds for Basic Skills, the plan proposed in this document will provide a basic strategy and framework for improving the current system and for reaching far more individuals and families with literacy training in the future.

The Committee has endeavored to identify improvements to the existing adult education delivery system. These proposals encompass the following:

1. Provide basic skills/ESL **services to individuals based upon need, not income.** This is consistent with WIA’s basic tenet of ‘universal access’. This Plan seeks to begin the process of creating a true second-chance system for adults to raise their literacy levels in order to achieve self-sufficiency and support career advancement and lifelong learning. Resources made available from the Supplemental Workforce Literacy Funds (SWLF) will provide increased access to literacy services for individuals who otherwise may have been denied.
2. To enhance accountability of adult education programs and to provide more effective case management, the Committee recognizes the need for a standardized assessment tool. **A standardized assessment tool is necessary to support client learning, evaluate program performance, and establish consistent understandable results.** The NJDOL and NJDOE Division of Adult Education have stated their intent to provide CASAS as the sole assessment instrument to be used for all adult education programs. This would facilitate client assessment and referrals to appropriate basic skills providers. **The**

**Committee looks forward to transitioning to the CASAS assessment tool for basic skills and ESL client evaluations.**

3. To provide additional basic skills/ESL services, the Committee explored the mix of educational mediums: one-on-one tutoring, distance learning, computer literacy labs, software, classroom and on the job instruction. **Union County supports the use of software and computer labs for the delivery of adult basic skills/ESL instruction as an adjunct to classroom instructor led training.** This strategy would reduce training costs because the software would be reused many times. Software like “English Discoveries” should be utilized to provide access to computer labs for individuals that function below the fifth grade level. The ability to provide basic skills/ESL services to individuals that function below the fifth grade level will benefit our residents because demand is great for these services. Instructional material for low level learners coupled with the copious educational materials at the NJDOL computer labs provides for an enriched learning experience.
4. There exists a great need for **GED preparation and testing in Union County.** It is understood that the attainment of a GED should not be viewed as the end of educational pursuits. The attainment of a GED is the first step in pursuing career opportunities in high demand occupations and exploring higher educational opportunities.
5. The **development of a centralized database** would be an integral component in the design of an efficient system by having the ability to document client learning gains and track clients as they move through the system. Information would be captured for all adult education programs, i.e. courses enrolled, test results (historical relevance), attendance, and services. Data would be compiled to assess program performance based on client outcomes. The centralized database would offer a convenient method to create electronic transcripts that could be used by clients to formally indicate to employers the skills they have mastered.
6. Other important features of a model adult literacy service system **are a centralized information and call center.** The call center would function as a single point of contact for all adult literacy services and that would greatly assist individuals and employers in obtaining services. A centralized information center would assist case managers to make appropriate referrals based on reliable up-to-date client information.

The adult education delivery system is fragmented and lacks integration. The Literacy Committee will serve as the primary coordinating body of the WIB to review and assess all policies and practices of adult basic skills and ESL service providers. The Committee will assure that all interests are represented. The Committee will also be responsible for gathering and analyzing all appropriate data pertaining to the literacy needs of the County’s populace and working with the One-Stop Career Centers to design and implement the most suitable and effective programs. One-Stop Career Centers will be the unique focal point for all referrals and services.

The One-Stop, working with the Literacy Committee, will oversee the delivery of services by the respective providers, making certain that clients who have difficulty meeting their particular needs will be given appropriate alternatives and that all follow-up activities will be carried out to assure that no one will be left out of the system.

This plan seeks to implement innovative strategies to ensure program performance, integration of classroom and computer based learning, and a streamlined coordinated service delivery system. The success of this plan is contingent upon funding availability.

**b. Vision**

The WIB is acutely aware of the endemic problem of basic skills deficiencies of native born and immigrant populations. Due to the recent influx of immigrants during the past decade, ESL services have become a priority for our residents. The high dropout rates of our inner cities, specifically in Elizabeth and Plainfield, and past failures of the public education system precipitated the crisis of low functioning individuals unprepared to participate in our growing economy.

The WIB stands resolute in the belief that all individuals who want to improve their lives through education and training should have access to these services. The WIB is committed to creating a system that offers universal access.

The Union County WIB Literacy Committee seeks to plan for and implement effective methodologies to correct the past failures of K-12 public education system by providing remedial basic skills education to high school dropouts and individuals who possess a high school diploma but did not acquire the requisite basic skills. The Committee is aware that an inordinate number of adults in our community lack fundamental English and math skills.

Union County is a port of entry for immigrants. As such, a large percentage of our workforce lacks sufficient English proficiency. Our County must enhance and expand ESL services.

Our goals include the development of an efficient client referral process, higher program integration (across funding streams), and a true second chance system for all individuals in need of these services.

The Literacy Committee's vision is to improve the adult education system in creating a standardized assessment system to be used by all prospective participants in workforce readiness programs. This standardized assessment would be used by all One-Stop Partner agencies. The Committee agrees that it is vital for effective case-management and program evaluation. This comprehensive assessment system would be used across "to work" funding sources (i.e. TANF, Welfare-to-Work, DFD, WIA (adult), and WIA (older youth)).

To implement an efficient service delivery system, adult education requires higher program integration, a streamlined referral process, effective case management, and the provision of services in the most cost-effective manner.

To enhance performance and effectiveness, the adult education delivery system demands a strong case management process; centralized record keeping with appropriate access; program accountability; uniform client assessment; program benchmarks used for continuous improvement; and to the extent possible, customer choice to achieve realistic goals within the

ability to deliver appropriate services. All clients registered at the One-Stop have individual employment plans (IEP) prepared that identify the specific service strategy to achieve their short and long term goals.

To allow workers time to learn, services must be provided to accommodate clients' busy work schedules. This requires that basic skills/ESL education classes must be offered at various times during the week and weekends. To provide for universal access, program schedules should be flexible and offered both on the job and/or near a client's work or residence.

To assist welfare clients to achieve, at minimum, financial self-sufficiency, the One-Stop Centers will contact welfare clients who are employed and offer to get them into education programs. With better skills and a higher level of education these clients have better prospects of enhanced earnings.

For workplace literacy programs to be effective, learning objectives need to be clear, realistic, and based on careful needs assessment. These are key components of individual education plans. The coupling of client pre and post assessment and program evaluation will help clients and One-Stop staff make informed decisions about the "steps" in a client's education ladder.

### *c. Plan Development*

The membership of the Literacy Committee and the One-Stop Career System partner agencies have been involved in the development of this literacy plan. The ideas presented in this document have evolved out of a collaborative effort to design an effective adult education delivery system.

The Union County WIB Literacy Committee has diverse membership and active participation.

The agencies represented on the Committee include:

- Verizon
- Wakefern Food Corporation
- INFINIUM USA, L.P.
- Frank H. Lehr Associates
- Papetti's Hygrade Egg Products, Inc.
- ElizabethPort Presbyterian Center
- Information Technology 2000
- Plainfield School Based Youth Services
- City of Elizabeth
- PROCEED Inc.
- Elizabeth Board of Education
- Union County Superintendent's Office
- Catholic Community Services
- Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders
- Union County College
- Literacy Volunteers of America of Union County - Elizabeth & Plainfield

- UCEDA School
- Kean University
- Elizabeth Public Library
- Linden Adult High School
- Gateway Institute, Kean University
- Union County Workforce Investment Board
- Union County Department of Human Services/ Division of Workforce Development
- Workforce Advantage
- CMI Community Center
- Elizabeth Housing Authority - HUD
- Family & Children's Services
- Unlimited Access Institute
- Union County Vocational/Technical Schools
- Community Access Unlimited
- Workforce New Jersey - Elizabeth Office
- Union County One-Stop Career Centers Operator
- NJ Division of Vocational / Rehabilitation
- Union County Department of Economic Development

A Literacy Planning Subcommittee was formed with representatives from the WIB, county college, local ESL/basic skills service providers, employers, economic development representatives, New Jersey Workforce New Jersey Offices, the One-Stop Operator, NJ Division of Vocational/Rehabilitation, and Board of Education. Each representative had input into the plan and discussions regarding the plan and specific issues were deliberated by the full Committee. The central theme to the plan was the creation of a “system”, for services to be provided in the most efficient cost effective manner and establish a mechanism for program evaluation. The mix of instruction whether computer based and/or classroom and the benefits derived were discussed at length.

The Committee agreed that self-paced tutorials were effective but must be coupled with classroom instruction. The issues of client motivation and interest were considered in deciding the best use of computer self-paced instruction.

The Union County Division of Workforce Development Operations (DWDO) is presently the One-Stop Operator. The One-Stop Operator has worked closely with the WIB Literacy Committee in developing this plan. The One-Stop Operator and partner agencies in association with the Literacy Committee helped determine the referral process and the number of individuals that would be provided services from our request for supplemental workforce funds for basic skills. The One-Stop Operator, Workforce New Jersey- Elizabeth Office, the Elizabeth Office of the New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and Union County College are all participating members of the Literacy Committee.

The One-Stop career system has implemented a standardized referral form for all participating organizations and that form will be used for all adult program referrals. The One-Stop Operator was instrumental in defining the staffing requirements and system design (details) in order to provide additional basic skills and ESL services with the use of supplemental workforce funds.

The Literacy Committee has been engaged since early 2000 in developing its goals and objectives (see appendix). These goals seek to explore innovative ways to provide services; increase public awareness of low basic skills and its inherent impediment to a growing economy; assist employers to increase the effectiveness of their employees, thus increasing productivity; elevating literacy levels of our residents to remain competitive; and put in place a system for early intervention at the K-12 level.

The WIB and the Literacy Committee believe that being proactive with respect to providing services to individuals in need is a necessary doctrine. Without knowledge or anticipation of additional funding, the Committee continued to effectuate positive change in the "system" and discussed the need for continuous wrap around services for clients: both employers and individuals. With this in mind, the Committee sponsored a Literacy Conference on November 2, 2001 that brought together representatives from the business community, providers of literacy services, and client participants. The employer community responded well to the Conference.

The conference format consisted primarily of two panels, which consisted of five providers and four employers. Conference attendees participated in focus groups that identified employer concerns, highlighted governmental resources, and helped to establish communication with the various businesses and agencies. The findings of the focus groups (see appendix) will help us to develop more effective occupational literacy programs and work more closely with the business community.

The Committee discussed the importance of family literacy that addresses the intergenerational nature of literacy. The Conference focus groups identified the need for literacy programs to have services available for the entire family and to create an atmosphere of learning so that each member of the family can benefit from instruction. Children's literacy levels are strongly linked to the educational level of their parents, especially their mothers.<sup>1</sup>

#### **d. EFF Integration**

The Literacy Committee is in accord with the State Adult Literacy Council regarding its adoption of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) Equipped for the Future Content Standards (EFF) as the framework for all adult literacy programs. This framework provides a holistic approach to adult learning that better prepares individuals for the real world. EFF standards specify the competencies that individuals need to better function, adapt, and take advantage of personal and career growth opportunities.

Equipped for the Future Content Standards (EFF) should be integrated into all adult education curriculums. The WIB will adopt EFF to ensure that all instructional curricula will impart the knowledge necessary for all adult learners to meet their goals. EFF will be utilized to establish adult education program accountability. EFF would assist in designing meaningful contextualized learning experiences that allows adults to learn more effectively. It is a highly effectual instructional medium that incorporates the three major role models in the context of sixteen definable skills to measure performance. EFF reinforces the importance of lifelong learning, work, citizenship and family. Skills that are necessary for career advancement, personal growth, and community involvement are essential for successful participation in society. EFF should allow for better quantitative assessments and evaluations that function as

better indicators of performance for clients and providers. The common standards will provide for ease of referral and a structured step-by-step systemic approach to learning.

EFF would be utilized to establish uniform assessments and standardized performance expectations among providers. EFF would be extremely useful to establish a common language among practitioners, individuals, businesses, educators, and workforce professionals.

To ensure quality in program design, EFF would be required to be incorporated into all adult basic skills and ESL instruction. Vendor proposals would be required to include EFF into the adult education curriculum for approval. EFF functions as a common standard to assess knowledge and skills development. This “framework” for adult literacy programs will enable the County to accurately measure client and program performance. An effort will be made to integrate basic skills/ESL instruction with workplace literacy. This creates a more powerful learning experience that can connect with real world situations and job related requirements. The case-managers/instructors and program assistants will be trained in EFF to increase their effectiveness by ensuring that the curricula and instruction will assist clients to achieve their career goals.

Credentialing would be based on acquired basic skills competencies defined by the three Adult Basic Education (ABE) Levels, which are: Beginning Basic Literacy, Intermediate Basic Literacy, and Adult Secondary Education. These uniform standards were established by the State of New Jersey, the Commission on Higher Education to assess students’ academic progress. Credentialing for ESL proficiencies would be based on three levels of acquired competencies: Beginning ESL, Intermediate ESL, and Advanced ESL.

*e. Agreements*

Many basic skills/ESL service providers participate on the Literacy Committee and will have input into the content of agreements and the responsibilities associated with being a part of the system. The agreements would help establish base line performance standards for programs, ensure quality, and hold providers accountable for results.

As a requirement for WIB funding approval, all basic skills/ESL service providers must have entered into agreements that would specify the process for client referrals, transfer of records, and learning gains recognized. Agreements would be mandatory for all organizations that provide basic skills/ESL instruction and require WIB approval for their proposals: irrespective of funding sources.

If the centralized database initiative and one point of contact call center are realized, then providers would be induced into entering into agreements to avail themselves of these services. The database would be used as a tool that would assist in the student referral process and in the transfer of records. The database would be a repository for quantified results of learner gains. In each client file there would be an electronic transcript with all learner gains recorded. The WIB would offer the incentive that if the providers agree to the terms of the agreement, client assessments (funded from supplemental workforce funds for basic skills) would be provided free of charge to the provider agency.

## ***Needs Assessment***

### ***a. Individuals***

The statistical data that quantifies the need for Union County residents for basic skills and ESL instruction is compelling. Seventy-five thousand (75,000) of the County's residents do not have high school diplomas or a GED, and 38,500 have less than a ninth-grade education. Many Union County residents (169,000) were not born in this country, and for 86,000 of them, English is not the primary language spoken at home. Three-quarters of the adult population in Union County is 18 years or older. According to the Literacy Volunteers of America, nearly 88,000 residents of Union County are at Level 1 Literacy, the lowest level. These statistics are much higher in Congressional Districts 10 (40%) and 13 (29%).

The Hispanic population has undergone a 6% increase as a percentage of total population (13% in 1990 & 19% in 2000). The African-American population rose by 2% and the Caucasian population decreased by 9%. In terms of percentage rate of growth, the Hispanic population increased at a rate of 52%, African-Americans 17%, and Caucasians experienced a 7% decrease.

In the City of Elizabeth – the most populated city in the County is 50% Hispanic. Plainfield – the second-largest city – has experienced a 72% increase in its Hispanic population. Many of these immigrants have moved into multi-family dwellings and taken on menial jobs to assimilate into the local economy. Many come with a strong work ethic, but they encounter many barriers to achieving adequate education and employment.

A variety of issues must be addressed for these recent immigrants to fully participate in the economy. Due to this major influx of immigrants over the past decade in Union County there is an overwhelming need for ESL, basic skills, and GED preparation for our foreign-born residents. Union County is home to diverse populations. Some municipalities have high per capita incomes and educational levels. The older inner cities of Union County have experienced a major influx of immigrants over the last ten years: Elizabeth, Plainfield, Rahway, Union, and Linden.

According to the NJDOE, eleven hundred fifty eight students dropped out of school during 1998-1999 in Union County. Black and Hispanic males had the highest number of dropouts: 276 & 259 respectively. Black and Hispanic females also had high dropout rates: 228 & 184 respectively. Whites were less likely to dropout. One hundred fourteen White males and eighty seven White females dropped out.

Union County had the fourth highest dropout rate in the State. Only Essex, Camden, and Passaic fared worst. According to the the US Census 2000, “among people 16 to 19 years old, 8 percent were dropouts; they were not in school and had not graduated from high school.” This situation is clearly abysmal, citing the extra funding from the ABBOTT Legislation for Plainfield and Elizabeth ABBOTT Districts to provide for additional resources to raise the aptitude scores of students. These individuals will require remedial education in the future.

There are 522,541 residents of Union County. Of that total, 392,600, or 75%, were 18 years of age and older. The total labor force (in 2000) was 268,300. The US Census 2000 indicates that 24% of people 25 years and over (85,000) lack a high school diploma or GED in Union County and 38,500 have not completed ninth grade.

The U.S. Census 2000 clearly identifies the need for remedial basic skills education and GED preparation. Nationally, 16.9% of adults, 18 years and over from all races and both sexes, have not graduated high school. Nationally, this translates into more than 34 million adults who lack a high school diploma. Of all races, African Americans and Hispanics fared the worst in educational attainment. 22.4% of African American (both sexes) adults, 18 years and over have not graduated high school. 43% of Hispanic (both sexes) adults, 18 years and over do not possess a high school diploma.

21 to 23% - or some 40 to 44 million of the 191 million adults in the United States - demonstrated skills in the lowest level of prose, document and qualitative proficiencies (Level 1). 25 to 28% of adults in the United States demonstrated skills in proficiency Level 2 on each of the literacy scales.<sup>ii</sup> 25% of adults who performed at level 1 were immigrants who may have been just learning to speak English. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of those in Level 1 had terminated their education before completing high school. A third were aged 65 or older, and 26% had physical, mental, or health conditions that kept them from participating fully in work, school, housework, or other activities. 19% of adults in Level 1 reported having visual difficulties that affect their ability to read print.<sup>i</sup>

In 2000, 28.4 million foreign-born resided in the United States, representing 10.4% of the total U.S. population. Among the foreign-born, 51% were born in Latin America, 25.5% were born in Asia, 15.3% were born in Europe, and the remaining 8.1% were born in other regions of the world.<sup>iii</sup> In 1999, 85.9% of the native population age 25 and over had graduated from high school or more, compared to 65.7% of the foreign-born population age 25 and over.<sup>iv</sup>

The population diversity of Union County mirrors the national averages. Union County is a port of entry for immigrants from around the world. From 1990 to 2000, Elizabeth and Plainfield have experienced a significant increase in immigrant populations, predominantly Hispanic, European, and Asian.

In terms of language, 169,000 Union County residents are not native Americans. According to the US Census 2000: Among people at least five years old living in Union County, 37% (175,303) spoke a language other than English at home. Of those speaking a language other than English at home, 48% (83,434) spoke Spanish, and 52% (74,646) speak an other language; 42% (73,317) reported that they did not speak English "very well."

Between 1980 and 1990 the county's Hispanic/Latino population increased by a staggering 66.3% (from 40,756 in 1980 to 67,797 in 1990). This dramatic rate only slowed slightly during the next decade. Between 1990 and 2000, the population increased by 52%.

According to the 2000 Census, the number of Hispanics increased substantially in New Jersey and Union County during the 1990s. Union County has the third largest proportion of Hispanic

residents (19.7%) in the State. Union County is home to 103,011 Hispanic residents with an increase of 35,214 residents over the ten-year period from 1990 to 2000. The Hispanic population has settled in the county's two main urban centers, Elizabeth and Plainfield. Elizabeth's Hispanic population jumped 10% and 49.5% of the total population is now classified as Hispanic while Plainfield saw an increase of 72% and Hispanics comprise 25.2% of the city's population.

The City of Elizabeth has the fourth largest Hispanic population of all municipalities in the State (59,627). During the 1990s the City of Elizabeth experienced a substantial loss in White, non-Hispanic population but due to the substantial influx of Hispanics, the City of Elizabeth had a net gain of more than 10,000 total residents.

There was a 23.3% increase in the State's African American population from 1990 to 2000 (+21,637 residents). The largest increase in the State's African American population during the 1990s occurred in Union County (+15,786 residents).

In Union County there was a 63.1% increase in the Asian population from 1990 - 2000 (8,592 residents). The White non-Hispanic population decreased by 12.1% from 1990 to 2000 (38,902 residents). Union County's population is comprised of the following percentages of residents by race: White- not of Hispanic or Latino origin (54.2%), Black or African American (20.8%), Hispanic or Latino origin (19.7%), Asian (3.8%), American Indian and Alaska Native (0.2%), and Other (6.4%).

Nearly 32 million people in the United States speak languages other than English -- a 38 percent increase over 1980. More than 50 percent of adults learning English as a second language are Hispanic. Other common first languages of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) participants are the following: French, Portuguese, Polish, Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese.

The County's shift of industry from manufacturing and labor-intensive employment to those involving technical, professional and managerial occupations coupled with a low level functioning immigrant population endangers the County's economic vitality. According to the National Institute for Literacy, a number of national and state organizations, including the National Governor's Association have identified an Adult Basic Education (ABE) Level 3 proficiency as the minimum standard for success in today's labor market. The dilemma the County and the country as a whole face are that a large proportion of Hispanics and native-born African Americans are unprepared to meet and take advantage of the opportunities.

The International Adult Literacy Survey from 1994 to 1998 found the literacy levels of adults between the ages of 16 and 65 and foreign-born or those learning English as a second language, to be as follows:

- 14% of the native-born population was at ABE Level 1 (reading at or below the level of a 4<sup>th</sup> grader), compared to 63.7% of the second-language foreign born.
- 27.3% of the native-born population was at ABE Level 2, compared to 17% of the second-language foreign born.

This is a major impediment to developing a competent skilled workforce to support business expansion in Union County. It indicates that 80.7% of the foreign-born population learning

English as a second language are not qualified to work in the country in which they now reside according the National Governor's Association.

The National Adult Literacy Survey of 1992 found that the older an immigrant was when they arrived in the U.S. the lower the average literacy level. This statistic is a red alarm to Union County considering the majority of its Hispanic immigrants are adults when they arrive.

- 79% of the foreign-born were 18 to 64 years old, as compared to 59.7% of the native population and 94.9% lived in a city or metropolitan area, as compared to 79.4% of the native population.

For recent Hispanic immigrants to learn to read and improve their situation in America, they must first learn to speak English or at least learn to read in Spanish. Of the county's 522,541 residents, a staggering 180,081 classified themselves as speaking a language other than English, or don't speak English "very well." The adult literacy problems facing Union County are immense and require immediate and direct support. The National Household Education Survey of 1994-1995 found that 64.5% of the adult Hispanic population did not enroll in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class in the previous 12 months and were not interested in doing it in the future. The main barriers were time, 40.1%, money/cost, 26%, and child-care or transportation, 23.4%.

Just because a Hispanic immigrant may have a high school diploma prior to entering the U.S., does not imply they are capable of reading or meeting the ABE Level 3 status of maintaining a steady job. According to the National Adult Literacy Survey of 1992:

- Level 2 was the average literacy level of the African-American population born in the U.S. or arrived before the age of 25. Level 1 was the average level for the immigrant African-American who arrived at or after the age of 25.
- Level 2 was the average literacy level of the Hispanic population born in the U.S. or arrived before the age of 12. Level 1 was the average for the Hispanic immigrant who arrived at or after the age of 12.
- The overall average prose proficiency of the immigrant population (including Hispanics) with a high school education was Level 1 (NOTE: Level 1 indicates a level at or below the level of a 4<sup>th</sup> grader).

In 1990, only 75.2% of the county's residents 25 years of age or older were high school graduates. The rates for Union County's two main urban centers were worse than the county's overall average. Only 71.4% of Plainfield's residents of the same age category held a high school diploma and only 58.5% of Elizabeth's residents 25 years of age or older were high school graduates.

The future employment prospects of the U.S. and Union County-born adult Hispanic population are bleak without government intervention. Their average prose proficiency was Level 2. America's education system has failed its native-born African-American and Hispanic population despite the fact that their population is rising faster than any other race.

Persons served by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) often need literacy skills training but unfortunately this training has limited availability. The counselor must work

around the issue by providing DVRS services toward a vocational goal appropriate to the overall ability of the client. If funding is made available from the Workforce Supplemental funds to provide literacy skills training for persons with disabilities, then the Rehabilitation Plan could include these services as major components and have the effect, in some cases, of broadening vocational options. Over the last three fiscal years 615 individuals under the age of 21 have become DVRS clients. Almost 500 of those were referred from school systems and most of these clients function below the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. Approximately 75 - 80% of these DVRS clients would benefit from basic skills/ESL education.

Improving adult literacy in Union County will be beneficial for welfare recipients who are required to transition to work as soon as possible. New Jersey's welfare reform legislation limits benefits to a maximum of five years. Over the last five years, Union County's welfare caseload has ranked fifth in the state. Half of the County's welfare recipients reside in Elizabeth and 23% reside in Plainfield.

Census data indicating a rapidly growing immigrant population, unemployment rates that are slightly higher than the state's unemployment rate, a high welfare caseload, and high dropout rates, all underline the importance of implementing an Adult Literacy Plan in Union County. This plan will offer adults a chance, or a second chance, to gain the skills they need to become self-sufficient and the opportunity to advance to higher paying jobs.

#### **b. Employers**

The level of basic skills that an individual requires to be productive in the workplace and allow for career advancement has increased over the last two decades. There is a certain minimum skill set that a prospective employee needs to gain employment at companies that have traditionally resided within Union County. In a survey of small business owners by American Express entitled, "Voices from Main Street: Assessing the State of Small Business Workforce Skills" listed their top skills needed most in an employee:

- 86% verbal communication skills
- 77% interpersonal skills
- 62% mathematical skills
- 59% written communication skills
- 52% basic business skills

By observing the table entitled, *RESIDENT EMPLOYMENT BY OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY UNION COUNTY: 1980 & 1990*, in the year 2000 U.S. Census, Union County's job opportunities are drastically changing. Notice the following statistics and the drastic changes throughout the 1980s:

- Executive, administrative & managerial occupations increased by 22.1%
- Professional specialty occupations increased by 17.8%
- Technicians & related support occupations increased by 27.8%
- Sales occupations increased by 24.1%

This is in direct contrast to:

- Companies manufacturing both durable and non-durable goods have decreased by 60.2%
- Private household occupations have decreased by 14.5%

- Precision production, craft & repair occupations have decreased by 13%
- Machine operators, assemblers & inspectors have decreased by 33.1%

The aforementioned statistics underscores the need for effective adult education programs to ensure Union County’s current adult population has the basic competencies to be employed within the county’s burgeoning retail industry and/or the basic groundwork in order to attend higher educational institutions and enter the ranks of the county’s “new economy” businesses. Union County’s largest employers are now pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, communications research centers and food distribution facilities. All of these industries require a highly skilled workforce to remain competitive. This could be a major impediment to the County’s economic expansion and may hinder sustainable growth for these businesses.

Currently, three of the county’s 10 largest non-governmental businesses are international pharmaceutical corporations, three are hospitals, along with a food distribution center for one of Northern New Jersey’s largest grocery store corporations, a communications research center, an international package transport company and an automobile assembly plant that is scheduled to cease operations by the end of 2002.

These health, pharmaceutical and research center-based forms of employment will all require a very knowledgeable, intelligent and sophisticated workforce. A Level 3 literacy comprehension will be the minimum required for most of the positions at these companies.

Union County’s current ten biggest projects are primarily engineering, logistical, construction and reconstruction projects designed to enhance and ready the county’s infrastructure, housing and transportation links for the next hundred years. These projects will involve tens of thousands of skilled to semi-skilled workers capable of building advanced structures efficiently, safely and economically. These tasks will not be able to be completed by workers functioning at low literacy levels (level 1 & 2). Union County’s, as well as New Jersey’s and even the nation’s economy depends upon a resident workforce with above-average literacy skills.

### 10 Largest Non-Government Businesses in Union County by Employment

<b>Firm</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Type of Business</b>	<b>Employees</b>
Merck & Co.	Rahway	Pharmaceuticals	6,500
Schering Plough	Kenilworth & Union	Pharmaceuticals	4,745
FedEx	Elizabeth	Package Delivery	3,356
Overlook Hospital	Summit	Hospital	3,000
General Motors	Linden	Auto Assembly	2,750
Lucent Technologies	New Providence	Communications	2,000
Trinitas Hospital	Elizabeth	Hospital	1,900
Novartis Corp.	Summit	Pharmaceuticals	1,500
Wakefern Foods	Elizabeth	Food Distribution	1,400
Muhlenberg Hospital	Plainfield	Hospital	1,300

▪ **2000 Annual Labor Force Estimates – Elizabeth and Plainfield vs. Union County**

<u>Municipality</u>	<u>Labor Force</u>	<u>Employed</u>	<u>Unemployed</u>	<u>Rate</u>
Elizabeth	54,661	50,589	4,072	7.4%
Plainfield	25,187	23,557	1,630	6.5%
Union County	262,173	250,296	11,877	4.5%

Source: NJ Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Force Statistics, March 2002.

▪ **Union County Industry Employment Projections By Major Sector**

	<u>Employment</u>				<u>Change</u>	
	<u>1998</u>		<u>2008</u>		<u>1998-2008</u>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
<u>Overall Goods Producing</u>	58,600	24.2	56,800	22	-1,800	-3
Construction	9,100	3.8	9,750	3.8	650	7
Manufacturing	49,500	20.4	47,050	18.2	-2,400	<b>-4.9</b>
<u>Service Producing</u>	183,550	75.8	201,250	78	17,700	<b>9.6</b>
Transportation, Comm., Utilities	20,200	8.3	21,050	8.2	850	4.2
Retail Trade	32,200	13.3	36,600	14.2	4,400	13.6
Services	72,300	29.9	85,450	33.1	13,150	18.2

Source: NJ Dept of Labor July 2001.

Notice the sharp difference between the reliance upon goods producing vs. service producing. Especially manufacturing (goods producing) vs. retail trade (service producing).

▪ **Industries With The Greatest Employment Projections (UC Private Sector)**

	<u>Employment</u>		<u># Change</u>	<u>% Change</u>
	<u>1998</u>	<u>2008</u>		
Business services	16,450	22,950	6,500	39.5
Health services	22,700	25,200	2,500	11.1
Social services	4,050	5,560	1,600	39.7
Engineering & Mngt. Services	8,300	9,750	1,450	17.5
Eating & drinking places	9,000	10,400	1,450	15.9
Apparel & accessory stores	1,500	2,450	900	59.9
Local & interurban passenger transit	1,800	2,650	900	50.5
General merchandise stores	1,700	2,400	700	41.3
Furniture & Home furnishings stores	3,000	3,650	650	21.8
Miscellaneous retail	5,550	6,150	550	10.3

Source: NJ Department of Labor, Labor Marketing & Demographic Research, May 2000

**c. Current System Capacities**

There is not enough space in programs to serve everyone who wants to learn English. Most cities have waiting lists of several months to several years.<sup>v</sup> An indication of demand for services is the number of individuals waiting for basic skills/ESL instruction. The following are waiting lists for individuals to access literacy services in Union County:

- Union County College, Career Institute: The target populations served by these programs include TANF, DFD, GA, Food Stamps, TRA, WEP, DVR, newly arrived immigrants, unemployed and the underemployed. The current waiting list for literacy and related programs is over 2,000.
- Workforce Advantage, a private agency, provides ESL and occupational ESL training on a fee for service basis. It has a waiting list of 490.
- Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA), a national volunteer organization, provides one-to-one tutoring in basic reading and mathematics and conversational English (Adult Basic Education – ABE) and ESL. LVA offers instruction at both the Plainfield and Elizabeth Libraries. The Union County LVA program has a waiting list of 570.
- Union County Division of Workforce Development Operations refers clients to providers of literacy training (ABE) under the NJ Department of Labor with funding from Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I Adult Funding, and WIA Title II Youth Funding. The two computer labs have a waiting list of over 800.
- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation - present Spanish speaking client caseload has 156 consumers, ages 18-62. Approximately 50 individuals waiting for ESL services and 400 clients could benefit from basic skills education.

The following are some of the findings from our survey of service providers in Union County. From previous experience - what works well:

- Having programs offered at convenient locations with free parking and close proximity to mass transit
- Having comfortable inviting facilities to put individuals in the right frame of mind to learn
- Class instruction to small groups - individuals receive quality attention
- When work-related skill/competencies are part of the program
- Competent certified instructors

From previous experience - what needs improvement

- Lack of funding - forces interruption of existing services and reduces opportunities for improvements
- Constant need to submit proposals to continue adult programs - as a result some adult schools have discontinued programs
- Securing/retaining quality, certified tutors and curriculum developers
- Retaining students for the duration of the course

**See Attachment: Inventory of Basic Skills/ESL Program Providers**

#### **d. Target Population(s)**

The Committee has identified the following populations of Union County that are in need of basic skills/ESL services. They include recent immigrants, working poor, unemployed,

underemployed, persons with disabilities, TANF clients, WFNJ clients, and high school dropouts.

Groups other than Hispanics require ESL services. There should be an outreach effort to inform these groups, i.e. the Haitian community, about the wide range of services. Haitians represent a small percentage of Union County's population and their language barriers are very prohibitive because most published information regarding services is available in either English or Spanish.

There requires a distinction in the level of services based on whether an immigrant is highly educated or illiterate in their native language. The educational and occupational backgrounds of individuals must be taken into account so that appropriate services can be provided.

## **Service Strategy**

### ***a. Literacy Levels***

The Committee has explored adult education resources and anticipates the development of a streamlined information and referral process. Organizations that provide individualized tutoring, i.e. Literacy Volunteers of America, would be appropriate basic skills providers for native speaking individuals that function below the fourth grade level. Other agencies that can provide services to clients functioning at Level 1 literacy levels would be explored.

Clients functioning below the fourth grade level would be referred to Literacy Volunteers of America or other appropriate training providers for basic skills individualized tutoring. After an individual has received services from Literacy Volunteers of America, they would be referred back to the One-Stop Career System for additional skills training. Clients who function at or above the sixth grade level would be referred to the Literacy Learning Laboratory for basic skills and occupational literacy training. An RFP process to provide classroom instruction would be utilized for workplace literacy, for more in depth basic skills and ESL training. The Committee believes the \$2,000 maximum for the procurement of literacy services is realistic and will recommend funding up to this limit. Limited funding would be set aside to pay for remedial reading instruction on a "fee for service" basis. This would be beneficial to the disabled population (cognitive and learning) that function below the fourth grade level and require this type of remediation.

The Plainfield One-Stop Career Center has available software, "English Discoveries", that can be used as an adjunct to individualized instruction that organizations like Literacy Volunteers of America perform for low literacy functioning individuals. This software has shown to be beneficial for both ESL and English speaking populations. It is currently being utilized by Union County College as an adjunct to instructor led classroom instruction.

Most if not all providers have programs for all ABE and ESL levels. More resources would be required for level 1 ABE and ESL instruction because of the protracted time frame for tutoring and the necessity for one-on-one instruction.

An important consideration when recommending the level of ESL instruction is whether the individual is literate or illiterate in their native language. This is a major distinction in the type and intensity of instruction.

***b. Priority of Services***

The WIB hopes that funding will support our vision of universal access, however if funds remain insufficient then after exploring gaps in services, the WIB agrees that funding should be directed to provide educational opportunities for the working poor, underemployed, and economically disadvantaged because there is minimal funding available for these populations. Due to reductions in WIA funding, there has been reduced funding for services to economically disadvantaged individuals.

All categories of individuals identified as “target populations” are in need of literacy services but there is funding available from other sources for welfare clients and dislocated workers.

***c. Outreach and Recruitment***

Outreach and recruitment of target populations will be accomplished through the One-Stop Delivery System (OSDS). Because of lack of language skills that restrict employment opportunities, the One-Stop will provide all reasonable accommodations to “fast track” clients into training. Partner agencies and CBO’s will identify and provide referrals to the One-Stop Career Center (OSCC). All target populations will receive information on opportunities to improve their skills through flyers and when they attend their initial orientation session. These individuals will be referred to intensive services where they will be assessed and given further assistance. The WIB reaches out to the employer community through forums and workshops.

If funded, the WIB staff person assigned to literacy program oversight and monitoring would be responsible for coordination of services among various literacy initiatives funded by different agencies, evaluation of program performance, continuous update of inventory of providers and programs, and marketing of workplace literacy services to employers. Special emphasis would be given to contact and collaborate with faith-based and community-based organizations to expand the network of literacy service providers. Integrating faith-based, community-based, and private organizations into the literacy services delivery system would strengthen outreach efforts.

***d. Access and Referral***

The overarching component of an effective service strategy is comprehensive case management. To assist case managers and clients, a directory of all basic skills/ESL providers would be available at all One-Stop partner agencies. The directory will include literacy provider addresses, names of contact people, and a brief description of programs offered. Case managers would be made aware of the services available at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for people with disabilities.

The customer will have input into their individual service strategy with the identification of realistic goals. The importance of case managers cannot be understated because their professional judgement is necessary to provide appropriate services and the process to attain

these goals. The case manager will assist the client in setting realistic goals and help to establish a series of steps to achieve these goals. The One-Stop case manager must be knowledgeable and have current information regarding availability of services and inform client as such to have them make the best informed decision.

Case Managers and OSDS partnering agencies will first assess the basic skills needs of individuals who may need basic skills services. An Individual Employment Plan (I.E.P.) will be developed. Based on the outcome of an individual needs assessment, eligibility and funding availability, customers are referred to an appropriate provider for services, which may include access to the One-Stop Workplace Literacy Labs or any eligible training provider.

Due to the comprehensive nature of WIA, a requisite for WIA Title II program funding, for Adult Education and Literacy is a WIB recommendation form that acknowledges receipt of organization's intent to submit a proposal and to ensure that the proposal is consistent with the local WIB strategic workforce development plan. The One-Stop Operator and the Workforce New Jersey Elizabeth Office Manager regularly attend the WIB's Literacy Committee meetings. Through this forum information regarding NJDOE, NJDOL, and HUD adult basic skills and ESL grants are disseminated. The One-Stop Operator is aware of all proposals and would refer clients to organizations that have been successful in obtaining literacy funding. Relationships have been forged among the various organizations and a formal referral process is under development. To use resources effectively, a mechanism will be put in place that would allow the One-Stop system to register the client and make the appropriate referral to a service provider organization from the State's eligible provider list that can match the individual's educational needs.

*e. Assessment*

All provider organizations conduct their own assessment, but if funding becomes available for a centralized assessment system then Union County College would be selected to administer all client assessments. Assessments would be conducted on site at both the Elizabeth and Plainfield college campuses and arrangements would be entered into to provide assessments at remote locations of provider organizations to allow for easy access for individuals. The UCC Career Institute will schedule all arrangements and an effort will be made to keep services in the community to reduce barriers: childcare, transportation, and schedules.

Training agencies provide a preliminary assessment using the TABE but if the case manager deems it necessary for a more comprehensive assessment the client would be referred to Union County College. The case manager is critical for the system to function effectively. It is important to have certified case managers that are trained to make the correct determination of services. Important considerations in the assessment process would include defining the participant's occupational goals, and the educational levels required to reach those goals. The whole client evaluation process will take into account the various assessment tools utilized by service provider organizations whereby case managers would evaluate the appropriateness of the test and reliance on results.

The goal, however, is the creation of a standardized assessment tool to be used across “to work” programs in a centralized assessment system, which would provide universal standards of accountability for continuous improvement.

The CASAS is not being utilized at this time; however, the Union County OSCC uses the TABE for assessment purposes. All of the OSDS partnering agencies, providers and the OSCC will be responsible for administering assessments should they have the ability to do so. Assessment will be made available to customers with specialized needs. Certain partners will be responsible for different types of assessment based on the customer’s specialized need. Whomever administers the assessment will be responsible for maintaining data and sharing it with other partners. GED testing services will be provided through the OSOS by the establishment of a GED testing center. Test materials will be purchased and a GED examiner has been identified. A calendar that identifies regular test dates will be developed and distributed throughout the LWIA.

The One-Stop Career system will employ the best assessment test that incorporates and quantifies proficiencies associated with the EFF standards. The TABE for basic skills, the BEST for ESL and other testing tools (e.g. the New York State Placement Test) will be used initially because the system is in place. The WIB expects to transition to the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) during the next twelve months because of its high level of integration with EFF standards and client tracking. The costs associated with the CASAS assessment system will be higher than current assessment because of initial implementation expense, new training and testing materials, and a higher cost per test. Training for case-managers/instructors will be required to ensure accurate use of tests and interpretation of learner results, and to support continuous program improvement. The case-managers will rely on the CASAS system to make appropriate referrals for training. CASAS will be used to place learners in programs, diagnose learners’ instructional needs, monitor progress, and certify mastery of functional basic skills. CASAS will be used for both native and non-native speakers of English.

With the anticipated increased use of the CASAS assessment tool for all clients, there will be a savings due to economies of scale, which will lower the per assessment cost. This would help to stretch existing resources by reducing costs.

The case-manager/instructor is critical to the success of the program. He/she would be responsible for the initial client evaluation and would refer clients to One-Stop staff for aptitude assessment using the TABE assessment instrument. If further assessment were warranted, clients would be referred to Union County College’s Career Institute, a One-Stop Partner, for comprehensive assessment of educational levels, aptitudes, and interests. Important considerations in the assessment process would include defining the participant’s occupational goals, and the educational levels required to reach those goals.

The comprehensive assessments conducted by Union County College Career Institute would include pre- and post-program and client profiling which includes workplace aptitude, employment readiness (skills and interests using “Robert System”), occupational identification, and goal setting (vocational counseling). This assessment will use the Robert System, otherwise referred to as Technology-Based Solutions (TBS) -- a multifaceted interactive assessment tool used to evaluate each student on an individualized basis.

The TBS multiple software assesses students in a variety of areas, and is designed to measure the student's strengths and weaknesses and assess their ability to become productive and successful workers, in specific areas. This also increases employee retention and reduced company expenses. The programs have been validated in both the airline and supermarket industries, resulting in decreases in workers compensation insurance claims, and late/ tardiness.

Other elements of this software include the: (1) Abilities and Possibilities Test (AP), which measures students' aptitudes and potential to learn skills for a specific occupation; (2) Employability Attitudes (EA), which measures the ability in finding a position, and to identify interventions that would contribute to career promotion; and (3) Employment Inventory (EI), which asks over 260 questions, which are interlinked to provide a true assessment of a student's work habits/ ethics. This last test assesses in the following four areas: Performance, Tenure, Customer Service, and Sales. This test is also available in Spanish for ESL students.

If funded, Workforce New Jersey Employment Counselors and/or case-managers/instructors at the One-Stop Career Centers would be trained to capably perform pre-screening of individuals for medical conditions, i.e. hearing and vision, that may be an obstacle to learning. If it is determined that comprehensive medical screening is necessary to evaluate for learning disabilities, cognitive impairment, psychological, visual, or hearing problems, individuals will be referred to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, a One-Stop Partner, and/or medical service providers.

#### ***f. Service Integration***

The OSDS has One-Stop Centers in Elizabeth and Plainfield; literacy and basic skills labs are integrated in each location. These Centers can provide individuals with the latest adult literacy and basic skills software programs to assist them in improving their basic skills. The WIB has approved the OS Operator's plan for delivering all federal and state adult literacy initiatives.

Each One-Stop Partner agency would be made aware of the additional services provided by the supplemental workforce funds for basic skills. Subsequent to registration in OSOS, each client would participate in the One-Stop orientation where staff would provide information on Workplace Literacy services. All materials explaining assessments, employment plans, basic skills and ESL services would be included in the orientation package. These materials would be available in both English and Spanish. Customers that meet the criteria and/or are interested in workplace literacy services would be referred to the One-Stop system's partner agency, Union County College Career Institute for assessment.

One-Stop case managers will develop an Individual Employment Plan (IEP) for all clients. The IEP will detail the strategy to attain an individual's agreed upon realistic goals. The client, in concurrence with the case manager, will determine appropriate services. A prescriptive criteria, i.e. client profiling, needs to be formulated to help case managers direct services for clients. The Committee hopes that the OSOS has the robust functionality to support the adult literacy case management function: to track clients through the service delivery system, record test results, and maintain electronic transcripts. If OSOS cannot support our vision of a centralized database then the WIB would like to pursue software to make it a reality.

If our initial literacy plan modification is approved, the Elizabeth One-Stop will have installed at each workstation a combination of software including Microsoft Office 2000, English Discoveries, and Real English. This software will complement the existing instructional material available through the Workforce New Jersey Learning Laboratory.

In March 2002 the One-Stop Operator and Union County College established the USDOE funded program, Community Learning Networks-Expansion (CLoNE). This program provides specialized basic skills software offering self-paced English and math instruction, down to low Level 1 functional literacy. Instruction is provided through interactive software that can be utilized by individuals who function at a first grade level. The software is comprised of three components that cover K-12 competencies. This program offers services that were previously unavailable to our residents.

The Community Learning Networks-Expansion (CLoNE) will expand the ongoing and successful "project to stem the digital divide" by providing additional access to basic skills and ESL instruction and information technology for residents of the two major Union County underserved target areas, Elizabeth and Plainfield.

Union County College, in collaboration with the One-Stop Operator, will build upon the success of its existing three Community Technology Center (CTC) Network sites previously funded through a "TOP" grant from the US Department of Commerce. With additional funding from the US Department of Education CTC program, two additional CTC Learning Labs will be installed and enhancements will be made to the three existing sites. Instruction will be provided to area residents in the areas of Computer Basics, Internet, English Literacy, ESL (beginner to advanced level) and MS Office. The WIB believes that the CTC network will allow educationally and economically disadvantaged residents of Elizabeth and Plainfield to improve their skills and, therefore, their economic status.

The three existing Community Technology Centers (CTCs) are located at the Housing Authority of the City of Elizabeth (HACE), the Elizabeth Public Library (EPL) and Union County College's Elizabeth Urban Campus. With the expansion to the Elizabeth and Plainfield One-Stop Career Centers and PROCEED (a community-based organization) outreach efforts will be intensified throughout the One-Stop Career system, to provide services to the underserved and at-risk segments of the target population.

Though the services will be targeted to reach the unemployed and underemployed, limited English proficiency immigrants, and the chronically underserved, low-income residents of Elizabeth and Plainfield, services will be opened countywide to those in need. The CLoNE program anticipates serving four hundred educationally and economically disadvantaged residents primarily from Elizabeth and Plainfield. The Workforce New Jersey Workplace Literacy Program funded through Supplemental Workforce Funds for Basic Skills will enhance the services available through the CLoNE program and will provide services for a minimum of three hundred additional individuals. The two literacy labs located in the Elizabeth and Plainfield One-Stop Career Centers will provide educational opportunities for a minimum of seven hundred individuals.

The NJ Workforce Literacy Program is a basic skills pilot program that is operational at the Elizabeth One-Stop Career Center. This pilot program delivers occupational training programs and basic skills services using digital television technology and the Internet. The New Jersey Network (NJN) provides interactive training instruction that allows participants to work at their own pace. This pilot is a partnership of NJN, the NJ Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Human Services, in partnership with the WIB's One-Stop Career Center.

The Workforce New Jersey Learning Laboratory, currently established at the Elizabeth One-Stop, provides severely needed educational services to adults who, for a variety of reasons, are deficient in English and/or math. The class size learning laboratories are an efficient and economical method for basic skills service delivery. With the support of organizations that provide individualized tutoring (i.e. Literacy Volunteers of America), program integration is stronger and individuals will have at their disposal an array of basic skills services that can be tailored to their individual needs.

The WIB wholly supports the NJDOL initiative of Workforce New Jersey Learning Laboratories. The integration of Union County College Career Institute's Community Learning Networks-Expansion (CloNE) programs with New Jersey Learning Laboratory services will provide for comprehensive basic skills instruction from Level 1 to Level 3, including all levels of ESL education.

Subsequent to registration in OSOS, an employment plan would be developed for each individual to attain their realistic goals. Depending on the academic level of participants, appropriate services would be determined. If clients are assessed at functioning at Level 1 (at or below the fourth grade level), they would be referred to agencies that provide individualized tutors, i.e. Literacy Volunteers of America, or if functioning above the fourth grade level, participants would be enrolled in the Workforce New Jersey Learning Laboratory at the Elizabeth One-Stop Career Center. As these participants move through this program, case-managers would assess their progress. If additional training were warranted case managers would refer clients to appropriate service providers for more intensive services.

The Workforce New Jersey Office is usually the first door for unemployed individuals to enter the One-Stop Career System. Included in the orientation presentation would be information on the Workforce New Jersey Workplace Literacy Program and the availability of basic skills and ESL services. Front line staff (case-managers) would refer appropriate clients to its One-Stop partner agency, Union County College, Career Institute for comprehensive assessment.

Medical screening to check for learning disabilities, eye, or ear problems would be requested when appropriate, especially upon review of the results of the comprehensive assessment. Medical screening may be deemed necessary to investigate low scoring. All clients whose services will be provided under this program would be registered into the OSOS for case-management and tracking. Participants accessing services through the One-Stop under this grant would be registered under WIA guidelines for core, intensive, and training: whichever is appropriate.

To offer Union County residents services that will assist them in career exploration and achieve success, literacy services must be coupled with GED preparation and testing. This certificate would open doors for career advancement. The attainment of a GED is not the end, but a stepping-stone to lifelong learning. Case-management would include information and encouragement to enroll in higher education or other training services offered at the One-Stop.

There is an enormous demand for GED testing in Union County. Presently, there are no GED testing centers in Union County. To provide ease of client access for GED testing, testing facilities should be made available at the Elizabeth and Plainfield Workforce New Jersey Offices. The WIB requests funding to provide for a Regional Examiner that would float between the two Workforce New Jersey Offices in Union County. It is anticipated that with the backlog of individuals waiting for GED testing, over five hundred individuals would be tested in the first year.

Bilingual case-managers will make it easier for clients who speak English as a second language or have limited English proficiency to obtain the services they require. The case-managers will play an essential and necessary role in assuring that all clients achieve their objectives, both in overall literacy and in gaining suitable employment opportunities.

***g. Coordination and Leveraging of Resources***

All coordination and leveraging of resources in the One Stop is initiated and completed through the partners participating in the One Stop Delivery System. The County College has partnered with the One Stop in the development of the literacy located at the Plainfield One Stop Career Center. The County College has provided the software that is being utilized for the program. The College is also providing the staff to the One Stop to help provide training of the participants taking advantage of the lab. There is a waiting list of clients ready to enter the program which indicates the extreme need of literacy programs within the Union County LWIA.

Client assessments are insufficiently supported by other funding, i.e. supplemental welfare-to-work, Division of Family Development, Workforce Investment Act, WIA adult youth.

***h. Support Services***

On the basis of the outcome of the Individual Employability Plan where specific barriers have been identified, customers will be referred to the provider of the necessary support services, which may include, but is not limited to any of the nineteen partnering agencies as identified in the MOU.

Supportive service links to other programs for mental, psychological, and learning disorders would be provided by the One-Stop Career system.

**See attached One-Stop Operator and Partners MOU for list of available support services.**

***i. Performance Standards***

The Committee agrees to adopt the State's minimum performance standards for adult education programs. The Committee reserves the right to establish additional standards and/or set higher standards for adult basic skills/ESL providers in Union County.

**Supplemental Workforce Funds for Basic Skills**

***a. Plan for Use of Supplemental Funds***

i. The NJDOL approved a small percentage of our original request for our Initial Literacy Plan. The NJDOL approved GED test materials for 500 individuals. We hope the NJDOL approves our request for a GED regional examiner so the County can utilize the testing materials and begin testing. Funding to provide training for twenty clients was approved. The Committee will RFP for services upon receipt of the notice of obligation.

The NJDOL communicated the need to modify our initial request because some items approved could not be funded retroactively. In lieu of the funds approved for a bilingual case manager and a GED regional examiner, the Committee altered its request to include the creation of Union County College's Career Institute's Community Learning Networks-Expansion (CloNE) Program at the Elizabeth Workforce New Jersey Learning Lab located at the One-Stop Career Center. This software provides for self-directed computer based instruction for low level learners. It will expand the range of services available at both One-Stop Career Centers.

ii. The key to enhancing Union County's ability to provide Adult Literacy training and support life-long learning without eligibility guidelines.

This Plan will allow individuals who are not eligible for other funding sources to be assessed and obtain the necessary education and training. The Supplemental Workforce funds would provide for true universal access to services. The WIB requests the addition of program staff, specifically a One-Stop bilingual case manager, that would be essential to process the projected increase in ESL client case loads, and will assist clients in obtaining the appropriate services. To help address the Hispanic population's concerns of being unable to navigate the system, it is essential to have a bilingual case-manager on site.

To reduce the wait for individuals to receive basic skills or ESL training, Supplemental Workforce funds would be used to increase the level of service. It is anticipated that within the first twelve months, over one thousand additional individuals would be assessed. A new standardized assessment system would be developed where services could be accessed during regular business hours, evenings, and weekends. This would provide for increased accessibility and convenience.

The WIB requests funding for an additional staff person to perform program oversight and monitoring of literacy services throughout the County. Responsibilities would include program provider liaison, coordination of services among various literacy initiatives funded by different agencies, evaluation of program performance, continuous update of inventory of providers and programs, and marketing of workplace literacy services to employers. Special emphasis would

be given to contact and collaborate with faith-based organizations to expand the network of literacy service providers and develop a holistic system to increase educational opportunities. Integrating faith-based organizations into the literacy service delivery system would strengthen outreach efforts.

The WIB portion of the Supplemental Funds would be used to provide literacy services to individuals based on need not income. Prospective clients would include the underemployed working poor. The WIB requests funding for a minimum of **200 clients** for **class size GED and/or Basic Skills/ESL instruction**. All literacy providers would be encouraged to submit proposals and a conscientious effort would be made to have these services offered at various locations in the County, with special attention given to Elizabeth and Plainfield due to their higher concentration of the target populations. This program will assist individuals to develop their abilities to overcome barriers that prevent them from participating more fully in the economy and reaping the benefits of a higher level of functioning on the job, at home, and in the community.

The Union County WIB Literacy Committee looks forward to expand the services of the One-Stop Career System. GED testing is greatly needed in the County. Presently, there are no GED testing sites in Union County. The last testing site – the Elizabeth Board of Education – closed its doors in August due to the extremely low rate of reimbursement (\$10) from the State. Applicants must be taken to Perth Amboy or Newark in order to be tested. This situation is undesirable for a variety of reasons: students may not have their own transportation or may be unfamiliar with the testing locations at these cities and be further discouraged from actually taking the test.

To support Union County residents in upgrading their educational skill levels it is imperative that the “One-Stop system” provides GED preparation and easily accessible GED testing centers. Our Plan incorporates a lifelong learning strategy with remedial education as first steps in the process of achieving a GED certificate. At minimum, Union County needs two GED testing centers: one in Elizabeth and one in Plainfield. The WIB requests funding for a GED regional instructor that will float between these two GED testing sites to administer GED tests.

The Literacy Committee approves funding for the continued operation of the Workforce New Jersey Learning Lab at the Elizabeth One-Stop Career Center. The Literacy Lab is a powerful tool that provides for adjunct instruction that expands Union County’s basic skills and ESL service delivery. The Learning Lab offers an extensive range of instructional material for our residents. Also a full time bilingual case manager/instructor is requested to provide training five days a week with extended hours.

To support the continued operation of the Workforce New Jersey Learning Laboratory at the Elizabeth One-Stop, the WIB requests funding for a full time on-site bilingual case-manager/instructor. The case-manager/instructor is critical to the success of the program. He(he) would be responsible for the initial client evaluation and would refer clients to One-Stop staff for aptitude assessment using the TABE assessment instrument. If further assessment were warranted, clients would be referred to Union County College’s Career Institute, a One-Stop Partner, for comprehensive assessment of educational levels, aptitudes, and interests.

Currently there exists a backlog of over 500 individuals waiting for GED testing. For residents that will take advantage of literacy services, the WIB requests funding for 100 clients for GED preparation and GED testing material for 600 clients. These individuals would be enrolled in GED preparation after determination of case managers to be ready to study for the GED.

The Committee anticipates that our initial plan modification request for funding to make available software like "English Discoveries" at the Elizabeth One-Stop Career Center to provide instruction for individuals functioning at the K-4 grade level will be approved. There is an unmet need for these services because some individuals who are interested in raising their skills function at very low literacy levels. It has been noted that One-Stops have turned away individuals who fall into this category.

The WIB requests funding for two computers with Adaptive Technology. One computer would be located at the literacy lab in each One-Stop Career Center to meet the needs of the disabled consumer. A PC with appropriate low vision (large screen) and hearing impairment technology, track ball or other mouse adaptation, specialized keyboard and other technical hardware and software will allow individuals with physical and other disabilities access to PC based learning. Appropriate computer workstations would be provided that meets accessibility standards especially for wheelchair users. The specifications would be developed using the services of the DVRS technology consultant.

The WIB requests funding for EFF training for case-managers/instructors and program assistants to increase their effectiveness by ensuring that program curricula and instruction will assist clients to achieve their career goals. Funding is also requested for CASAS training for One-Stop staff to be familiar with its application: weaknesses and strengths.

**iii.** At the Plainfield Workforce New Jersey Office there is a NJDOL representative that has been identified as the employer contact for information and services. This individual would be utilized as a single point of contact for employers interested in workplace literacy services.

The Committee would utilize employer and labor union representatives on the WIB, the WIB's Economic Development Committee, contacts with the Union County Department of Economic Development, the Union County Alliance, Literacy Conference 2001 attendees, New Jersey Business and Industry Association, and Chambers of Commerce to publicize the availability of workplace literacy services to area employers.

If funded, the WIB staff assigned responsibility for literacy program oversight would market customized training services to employers. All contacts would be forwarded to the NJDOL representative at the Plainfield Workforce New Jersey Office to develop the customized training contract with the employer. Literacy service providers that would operate workplace literacy training would be selected from the NJDOL list of eligible providers.

Small employers that participated in the Literacy Conference would be contacted to make them aware of these services for their employees. Many employers expressed a desire to promote from within, but were unable because of limited basic skills proficiencies of their employees. Small employers would not be able to use customized training funds for literacy grants for on-

site literacy training and may not be able to afford the requirement to pay employees' salaries while in literacy training.

Large employers would be informed of the availability of literacy grants from the NJDOL, Division of Customized Training for on-site workplace literacy programs for their employees.

***b. Budget***

**See Attachment**

**Conclusion**

***a. Opportunities and Barriers***

Language barriers restrict access to literacy; other social services; inhibit personal and career growth.

Barriers to services include:

1. Lack of awareness of the County's One-Stop Career System by both clients and small businesses;
2. Insufficient funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction;
3. Undiagnosed medical conditions among the client population that may be an impediment to learning; and
4. Limitations on the programmatic eligibility of some clients that preclude clients' access to services.
5. Limited transportation services -- particularly public transportation -- to certain literacy providers are limited;
6. Lack of child care poses a problem for many because hours being offered by providers may not be compatible with work and family obligations;
7. Nearly 40% of Hispanics in Union County said that they do not know how to obtain services or that neither a case manager nor linkages to resources were offered; and
8. Over 80% of Hispanics said they would need a case manager to help them through the process of receiving services.

With funding reductions and changing state and national priorities, the adult learner will have less opportunity for continuing education and increased earnings in the present economy. The policies of "no child left behind" and that "all adults will have the basic literacy skills" are monumental undertakings that must be addressed.

Certain aspects of this proposal may change, as this initiative becomes operational, i.e. level of service, depending on the literacy level of clients that are referred to the One-Stop Career Centers for basic skills and ESL instruction. If clients function at low Level 1 literacy levels more services would be required to increase their skill proficiencies. The WIB is dedicated to create an efficient and effective service delivery system for client assessment, referral, educational instruction, and training.

We hope that the NJDOL and the SETC will support our proposal for funding from the Workforce Development Partnership Fund to implement the aforementioned programs and initiatives. Distance learning and computer laboratories with class size programs provide the most cost effective basic skill component of our workforce service delivery system. The WIB supports the vision of the NJDOL and the SETC to bring basic skills and ESL instruction into the community, where it is needed most.

This plan is a living document and will continue to evolve so as to remain current and relevant as changes in demographics, trends, needs, and available resources occur.

**Signatures:**

The Union County Workforce Investment Board and its Literacy Committee have approved this plan for adult literacy services for residents of Union County.

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Margaret Neafsey  
Chairperson, Workforce Investment Board

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Julio Sabater  
Workforce Investment Board  
Chairman, Literacy Committee

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Date

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Date

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<sup>i</sup> National Institute for Literacy, “Fact Sheet: Adult and Family Literacy - April 2000)

<sup>ii</sup> Kirsch, Irwin S., Ann Jungeblut, and Lynn Jenkins, et al., “Adult Literacy in America: A First Look at the Results of the National Adult Literacy Survey,” U.S. Department of Ed., NCES, Washington, DC, 1993. (pXIV)

<sup>iii</sup> Lollock, Lisa, “The Foreign-Born Population in the United States: March 2000,” U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2001. (p1)

<sup>iv</sup> Newburger, Eric C. and Andrea Curry, “Educational Attainment in the United States: March 199,” U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 2000 (p5)

<sup>v</sup> National Institute for Literacy, “Fact Sheet: English for Speakers of Other Languages,”