



"EDUCATION FOR A BETTER LIFE"

ACHIEVE

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PLUGGED IN By Karen Gent

PlugGED In, a free six-month program consisting of a contextualized GED curriculum with the goal of helping adults earn their GED credentials, as well as preparing them to successfully move into targeted technology sector jobs, began classes on February 3, 2009.

Partners in this initiative include the Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University, the Virginia Department of Education, Southwest Regional Adult Education, Southwest Virginia Community College, University of Virginia at Wise, Microsoft, Inc., Northrop Grumman, and CGI, Inc.

The *PlugGED In* class consists of twelve adults from Russell

and Tazewell Counties. In addition to earning the GED credential, each student will be given the opportunity to earn a Career Readiness Certificate and various Microsoft certifications. Individuals who complete the program will have a guaranteed interview with Northrop Grumman, which has a facility in Lebanon.

The program focuses on four content areas: GED curriculum and Career Readiness Certificate, professional soft skills, digital literacy skills, and 21st century skills.

The class meets three nights each week at the UVA at Wise's Southwest Virginia Technology Development Center in Lebanon and will

continue through July. Over the duration of the class, students will also meet regularly with mentors from Northrop Grumman and CGI, Inc. Students will participate in mock interviews, experience online learning, and earn community college credits.

Students will also complete a capstone project in which they will integrate and apply the knowledge and strategies learned from the *PlugGED In* content.

The overall goal of the program is to provide the opportunity for students to develop the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the 21st century workplace.

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PLUGGED IN 2009 CLASS MISSION STATEMENT

We, the *PlugGED In* Class of 2009, choose to work hard to receive all available certifications while implementing 21st century work skills. We commit to encourage one another to study, to complete all assignments, to attend class regularly, and to be punctual, in order to develop character and confidence.

We believe we are all equal; therefore, we will respect each other. We will be open to each other's ideas, trust each other, and encourage one another to think independently. We believe we will become more productive individuals as we learn to work interdependently, declaring that each student and instructor can depend on us to do our part.

In light of the above statements, we believe we will gain knowledge in all areas of instruction, develop correct paradigms, choose to be more proactive, and prepare for the 21st century workplace and/or college.

Therefore, we choose to change the course of our lives by being totally involved in and committed to the *PlugGED In* class.

Regional Program Manager-
Linda Allen
Administrative Assistant-
Susan Lester
Regional Data Technician-
Dreema Campbell
Fast Track Coordinator-
Karen Gent
Outreach/Recovery Specialist-
Betty Balkcom



PLUGGED IN

A Career Pathway to Tech Sector Employment and Education

Background

- Find solution to a challenge proposed by Virginia's Secretary of Technology Aneesh Chopra
 - Quickly move high school non-completers in the Southwest Virginia region into tech sector jobs at Northrop Grumman & CGI, Inc.
- PlugGED In developed to address a regional education and employment issue
- Created as a possible career pathway model to replicate in other localities and states

Funding

- Governor's Productivity Investment Fund: \$127, 000
- Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education and Literacy (OAE): \$48, 338
- Chancellor's E-learning Enhancement & Development (CEED) Grant: \$54, 546
- In-kind donations
 - Center for Innovative Technology
 - UVA at Wise
 - Area businesses (Charter Media, Lamar, Hardee's, Wendy's)

Development & Evaluation Team

Dr. Richard Sebastian: Project Manager/Principal Investigator
Dr. Laurie Henry: Lead Curriculum Developer
Dr. Nancy Berger: Workforce Consultant
Dr. Kevin Leander: Lead Evaluator
Tara Alvey: Evaluator, doctoral assistant

Curriculum

- 6 months (February-July 2009)
- 3 nights a week
- 4.5 hours a class
- 4 integrated strands
 - GED/CRC
 - Professional Soft Skills
 - Digital literacy
 - 21st Century Skills
- Portable certifications
 - GED
 - CRC
 - MS Digital Literacy
 - IC3
 - Microsoft Certified Application Specialist (MCAS)
- Online portfolio (LinkedIn)
 - Project work
 - Resumé
- Industry mentor participation (Northrop Grumman & CGI, Inc.)
- Career coach support (Southwest VA Community College)

Instructional Staff

- 5 instructors

PLUGGED IN

- o 3 IT instructors
- Industry mentors
- Career coach

Students

- 21 enrolled students (4 county region) o 6 males
- 17 students joined the class in February o 10 females
- Average age of 29

Evaluation

- Dr. Kevin Leander, Vanderbilt University
- Tara Alvey, Vanderbilt University
 - o Classroom observation
 - o Student mock interviews
 - o Focus groups
 - o Artifact analysis
 - o Case studies

Preliminary Results

- 9 students completed the program
 - o 3 males/6 females
- 9 GEDs
- 9 CRCs
 - o 1 bronze
 - o 5 silver
 - o 3 gold
- 4 IC3 certificates
 - o other 5 earned at least 1 of the 3 IC3 certification exams
- 7 students enrolled at Southwest Virginia Community College (Fall 2009)

Challenges

- Difficulty creating an integrated curriculum
 - o Training issue
 - o Class took on a "test prep" environment
 - o Tension between certification focus & designers' desire for integration & authentic workplace engagement
 - o Class lacked programmatic coherence between Tues class & Wed/Thur class
- Focus on discrete skills rather than conceptual frameworks
 - o Curricular materials used (MS, IC3) were not integrated
 - o Instructors lacked integration experience/training

Successes

- Program manager successfully created safety nets for students who dropped out
- Consistent student reports of increase in self-efficacy & self-esteem
- Capstone project became an agent of change for instructors & students

Capstone Project

The development of a capstone project was intended to help learners integrate and apply knowledge and strategies learned from the *PlugGED In* core content.

The capstone project required learners to identify a challenging issue within the community, locate information from multiple resources that relates to the challenge, critically evaluate information that is relevant to the challenge, create a solution to the challenge, and present the solution in both oral and textual formats.

PLUGGED IN

The challenge that the class decided to undertake was that of developing **three eco-friendly outdoor activity areas** for Lebanon Community Fellowship, a local church that was adding a building to its current facility. The church had to tear down its existing playground in order to construct the new building.

The class divided into 3 groups. Each group designated a group leader and was responsible for designing one of the three lots. One student served as overall project leader. The class created a Ning site to communicate with each other outside of class and worked with instructors across all three nights of class to develop the project.

Gave public presentation of project to the community on June 23, 2009.

Recommendations

- Robust pre-program training with regular on-going instructor training throughout class
- Reduce amount of curriculum content
- Emphasis capstone project earlier in curriculum
- Ensure a strong, hands-on manager with full buy-in
- Forge strong local partnerships

Future Plans?

- October 2009: Two additional PlugGED In classes funded
 - Lebanon, VA
 - Dickenson County, VA
- Pilot program in Southeastern KY
- PlugGED In included in 3 ARRA grant applications
- Session on PlugGED In at AERA 2010

Project Timeline

Aug. 2008: PIF grant awarded	Jan.-Aug. 2009: Evaluation
Sept.-Jan. 2009: Curriculum Development	Jun. 2009: Career fair/formal dinner
Oct-Feb 2009: Recruitment/Outreach	Jul. 23, 2009: Capstone project presentation
Jan. 2009: Training	July 31, 2009: Graduation
Feb.-Jul. 2009: PlugGED In class	Oct 2009: Second PlugGED In class begins
Feb. 2009: Kick-off event	

Partners

- The Literacy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University
- Virginia Department of Education, Office of Adult Education & Literacy
- Southwest Regional Adult Education
- Southwest Virginia Community College
- UVA at Wise
- Center for Innovative Technologies
- Microsoft, Inc.
- Northrop Grumman
- CGI, Inc.

Contact Information

Richard Sebastian,
Instructional Technology Specialist
Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center
Virginia Commonwealth University
<http://www.valrc.org>
rsebastian@vcu.edu