



Workforce Development Board  
County of Middlesex

## **LITERACY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, June 11, 2019  
550 Jersey Avenue  
New Brunswick, NJ 08901  
9:30 a.m.

### **Attendance**

**Present:** Gloria Aftanski, Kyle Anderson, Roseann Bucciarelli, Thomas Crane, Jill D'Amico, Jasmina Dizdarevic, Jessica Hudson, & Jessica Tomkins

**Staff & Guests:** Shamara Gatling-Davila; Akisha Canty and Jen Goodin

### **Welcome and Introductions**

The meeting was called to order at 9:30am. Gloria asked everyone to introduce themselves.

### **Review of Minutes from March 12, 2019 Meeting**

Jessica Hudson suggested a wording change for the last few sentences under ways to implement literacy strategic plan goal #1. The changes were agreed upon. Roseann made the first motion and Jessica Hudson seconded the motion to approve minutes, as amended. Jessica Tomkins abstained from voting.

### **Update from Libraries/Literacy Agencies**

Jessica from New Brunswick Public Library New Brunswick is on their 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle. They run 4 cycles a year and each cycle is between 6 and 8 weeks. To date across all the ESL programs offered there have been two hundred and ninety-four participants to attend at least one session. The programs are made possible through partnerships with Rutgers, Bonner Program through The Collaborative Center also from Rutgers, and a meeting with Middlesex County for more volunteers through their Bonner Program is scheduled for the near future. For this year's grant cycle, 150 volunteer facilitators were used to serve 3,256 hours. Those volunteers assist in small group instruction.

The library is starting a more intensive pilot program this summer. There will be three-week cycles meeting three times a week for two hours each. This schedule is more intensive than other programs offered, but it was requested by participants. The sessions will be offered in the morning and in the evening.

There are waitlists for all of the programs. If space becomes available, new people are invited from the waitlist to join the class. The English Conversation Café currently has 11 or 12 volunteers. The hours they complete are recorded as professional development hours.

The library hosted a community brainstorming workshop in English and Spanish. The idea was to invite participants, volunteers and staff to identify things in English they want to discuss and then developed curriculum around topics that were mentioned. Eleven community members participated, three volunteers and the staff were present. They learned from the participants the type of context wanted and geared in towards adult education.

Jen from JFS of Middlesex County JFS does not provide ESL programs, but they do offer citizenship classes which incorporates ESL. They prepare permanent residents to take/pass the US Citizenship interview. She is eager to find out what agencies offer ESL programs in order to refer her clients.

Jill from South Brunswick Public Library is halfway through their second and final session of the grant funded programs. Since the last meeting, post testing has been completed from the first session. Retention is still an issue with participants. The majority of those attending the program did move up a level on the CASAS scale. Happy to see the gains were good, the teachers appear to be well received, the curriculum appears to work well and the students seem happy. Now, the students are wondering what is next. They are encouraged to pursue bigger and better literacy goals after completing this program. Some of the students have formed a social group from working well with one another. Jill is cautiously optimistic on how the second session will end. Attendance may start to fall with summer approaching. Some of the classes are scheduled to end in July and the others in August. started the programs in mid-January and they will continue through the end of April/beginning of May. The classes are designed to run like semesters and have a total of 64 hours of instruction; 4.5 hours a week; summer classes are 6 hours a week. The library is waiting on updates from the state about the future of the program/additional grants.

Thomas from New Brunswick ALC and MCAEC he is currently working on the grant application for next year which is due June 14, 2019. Middlesex County Adult Education Consortium (MCAEC) is comprised of six-partners: New Brunswick Adult Learning Center (lead agency), Middlesex County College, Literacy New Jersey, Perth Amboy Learning Center, East Brunswick Board of Education and South River Board of Education. South River Board of Education and Literacy NJ are the smallest two providers of the MCAEC grant. New Brunswick and Perth Amboy run full, comprehensive adult learning centers day and evening. South River and East Brunswick programs are in the evening. Middlesex County College serves about 100 for ESL and HSE. Last year they were contracted to serve 1,329 students. Each year every partner meets and exceeds the contracted amount. Last year the consortium received a grade of "A" from the state. The grades for this current year are still pending regarding the benchmarks. This year the projected amount of students was 1,362. Next year will be the third year in a continuation grant. After the upcoming year, this will return to being an open-competitive grant.

Most of the programs run on a July 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30<sup>th</sup> schedule. The programs that do not start in July, will start in September.

New Brunswick Adult Learning Center has 156 graduates through the HSE, NJ Youth Corp and CARES programs. Once the last set of testing is completed, another 25-30 graduates might be added. A total of 186 graduates is around the amount of graduates over the past few years. The graduation date for New Brunswick Adult Learning Center is June 26, 2019. The Perth Amboy Adult School Graduation is possibly on June 25, 2019. Invitations to the graduation were handed out at the meeting.

Thomas will get a comprehensive list together of all the registration dates for the MCAEC. NB ALC handouts for the following were distributed during the meeting: Fall and Summer registration, citizenship classes and NJ Youth Corp. The New Brunswick Public Library representatives are planning a meeting with Tom to work out a referral between the two agencies. Flyers were distributed to advertise the fall and summer registration dates, citizenship classes and NJ Youth Corp.

Literacy NJ is wrapping up the session in Middlesex. In June the post-testing will occur and the results will be submitted for MCAEC. Since the funding for Literacy NJ is from Title II and the library grant, the same schedule of six-hours a week. There is a noticeable difference in the progress that is made by those that attend most of the hours a week. Almost 400 people were served this year. Over the summer things are slow due to being primarily volunteer based. When the volunteers seem to disappear, the staff will run a few group in the office.

Middlesex County College about a year ago the college did implement a new set of spring classes scheduled to start in May. Open enrollment ESL and Pre-academic ESL which prepares students for the academic classes is going on now. A little over fifty students have enrolled in the second spring cycle which began in May. The summer session will begin in July and have a Monday through Thursday schedule.

#### **Feedback Regarding Google Doc Directory**

Members feel the Google Doc would be used more often if they had a reminder that it is there to use. Jasmina mentioned setting up an outlook reminder. Shamara mentioned everyone writing a post-it note and attaching it to their monitors as a reminder. Jasmina added more rows as requested by the members. In addition to upcoming events and classroom space, Jasmina is asking everyone to list eligibility requirements; if applicable. Having the requirements listed will allow the person making the referral knowledgeable if that program is appropriate for that client.

#### **Updates about V.I.T.A (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance)**

Even though tax day, April 15<sup>th</sup>, has passed, VITA still prepares taxes on Wednesdays by appointment. VITA services are offered year-round; not only tax season. The United Way is currently negotiating an expansion in the Perth Amboy area. In Perth Amboy, during the 2015 tax preparation season, there were about 22,000 low-income tax returns filed. Of the 22,000 returns, only 205 were prepared by the

free VITA program. The rest were completed by paid preparers. Families could be paying around \$200 for federal returns and about \$50 for state returns. When factoring in the families being in the low income range, that is a substantial amount of money being spent on paid preparer paid. The goal for VITA during the next tax season is 1,000 tax returns within Perth Amboy. To reach this goal, United Way intends to have a full time staff in Perth Amboy in a pop-up location from December through mid-April. A lot of interest has come from the sponsor, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The financial support is there, but the volunteers are needed at this point. This year there were students from three high schools (Perth Amboy Charter, Piscataway and East Brunswick) who certified at the basic level and prepared taxes on the weekends at one of the VITA locations.

#### **Ideas on Ways to Implement Literacy Strategic Plan Goal #4**

Goal #4 is focused on state and federally funded programs working cooperatively and interdependently to achieve a common purpose of providing educational opportunities and employment preparation for under-educated, out-of-school youth, and adults at all levels. Google docs can be used as a starting point to list pre-apprentice and nationally recognized apprenticeships throughout the county. Various youth HSE and work experience programs should also be added. Jasmina will create tabs for the various groups to identify the subjects covered on each tab. This will reduce the search time to find a particular program.

#### **New or Old Business**

Jessica from Literacy NJ will recreate the literacy directory. She is requesting all partners send her their information to her to make sure they are all represented in the directory. Once the new directory is complete, United Way is willing to translate it to Spanish.

#### **Adjournment**

Meeting Adjourned.

<p><b>NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2019 – 9:30AM ROOM G 550 JERSEY AVENUE, NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ 08901</b></p>
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