**Proposal to Develop a Career Pathway Literacy Curriculum**

**to Address Healthcare Worker Shortages in Minnesota**

Minnesota is currently faced with a workforce shortage in the healthcare field. This shortage is especially seen in the certified nursing assistant (CNA) positions within the state. The CNA position is also seen as the first step in entering the health care field. Part of our answer to this shortage is to engage our low-skilled and refugee and immigrant populations in gaining the skills to enter this field.

The State of Minnesota has recognized this shortage in healthcare and in other fields with workforce shortages and has taken steps through its transitions programs to improve access to language acquisition and training opportunities for refugees, minorities, and other low-skilled individuals. These programs have been called FastTRAC, Career Pathways, and are now labeled Pathways to Prosperity programs. As a partnership between WorkForce Development, community colleges, and Adult Education, this approach increases the number of skilled workers in Minnesota, reduces unemployment, and improves our economy. The Pathways to Prosperity program financially supports the training costs for eligible individuals as lack of funds is a huge barrier to an individual’s ability to move forward. Support to the individual is provided through the three partner agencies to create success and the attainment of getting on that first step of a career pathway. Pathway to Prosperity models increase individuals’ confidence by allowing them to realize a greater vision for their future. Consistently, these training programs improve literacy and motivated for a better future for themselves, many individuals completing these programs have later pursued licensing as licensed practical nurses (LPNs) or Registered nurses (RNs).

**Development of Online Contextualized CNA Curriculum**

In the Pathways to Prosperity CNA program, a participant needs to be reading at an 8th grade reading level to be successful in attaining a CNA certificate. Therefore, this proposal seeks to create an online reading curriculum for individuals reading from a 5.5 to 8.5 grade level utilizing only health care vocabulary and content leading to a CNA job. This contextualized curriculum would then prepare individuals to participate in a Pathways to Prosperity CNA program. With support from Minnesota Adult Basic Education (ABE), the MN Department of Health, MN Department of Employment and Economic Development (MN DEED), and organizations representing healthcare providers, this proposal recommends the development of this free, online healthcare literacy curriculum.

With the future of education being delivered via technology, this online content would assist with raising the literacy levels of the public and address Minnesota’s certified healthcare worker shortage. This content also has implications for national use, revenue generation, and will provide a comprehensive framework for developing content for other skilled workforce fields. At this time no financial support is available to fund this project.

**Barriers or Challenges Individuals Face to Be Able to Attain a CNA certificate**

Often, low-skilled adults do not have the finances to afford tuition to take a course. They also face other significant obstacles: when these populations reach the intermediate range of literacy ability (4-8th grade), their language skills are developed enough to obtain a job that puts food on the table and pays the rent. However, much of this population does not – or cannot – seek additional seat-based educational opportunities because of time, family, transportation and already limited income. When these individuals reside in rural areas of Greater Minnesota, their ability to access services is reduced even more significantly due to transportation and ABE’s limited capacity to provide classes**.**

**Current Situation**

To teach a broad range of subjects, ABE and other providers deliver language acquisition services that utilize already developed content. An effective way for an individual to gain literacy skills is to read more frequently, particularly texts that meet his/her literacy level. Also, if the content is in an area that an individual has interest, the motivation to read and persistence to read increases. This also applies to career related content: if there is content available that allows an individual to learn the necessary skills for—and is a direct stepping stone to—a particular job, the individual will be more likely to read and learn the content. When we can create content relevant to an individual’s aspirations and goals, the more progress we are able to make in increasing the literacy levels in our state and developing a skilled workforce.

The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) is the tool used to determine if an individual’s reading ability will allow him/her to be successful in understanding content in training programs such as CNA classes. Through grounded research, the CASAS organization states it takes 80-120 hours of instruction to raise literacy one level. Using a hybrid delivery method of seat-based instruction and online content relevant to a student’s career aspirations, we expect to further increase literacy levels of the students enrolled in our training programs. The curriculum being proposed would cover the 220-235 range which spans one literacy level called High Intermediate.



Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems

NRS Educational Functioning Levels to CASAS Scale Scores and Grade Levels

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **NRS Educational Functioning Levels** | | | **CASAS** |
| **EFL** | **ABE** | **ESL** | **Score Ranges** | **Grade Level** |
| 1 |  | Beginning ESL Literacy | 180 & below | 1 | **Basic**  **Skills**  **Deficient** |
| 2 |  | Low Beginning ESL | 181-190 | 1 |
| 3 | Beginning ABE Literacy | High Beginning ESL | 191-200 | 1 |
| 4 | Beginning Basic Education | Low intermediate ESL | 201-205  206-210 | 2  3 |
| 5 | Low Intermediate Basic Education | High Intermediate ESL | 211-215  216-220 | 4  5 |
| 6 | High Intermediate Basic Education | Advanced ESL | 221-225  226-230  231-235 | 6  7  8 |
| 7 | Low Adult Secondary Education |  | 236-240  241-245 | 9  10 | **Not Basic Skills Deficient** |
| 8 | High Adult Secondary Education |  | 246-250  251 & above | 11  12 |

**Proposed Solution**

With limited ability to access seat-based courses, low-skilled populations could be better served through the development of online content and ultimately, mobile applications. This is the future of education and a vehicle underserved learners need to be able to attain economic self-sufficiency. The proposed solution could engage immigrants, refugees, and low-skilled adults to move into the healthcare field.

Initially, a literacy curriculum would be developed to address the high-intermediate literacy range of CASAS 220-235 (grade levels 5.5-8.5). This curriculum would utilize healthcare content surrounding vocabulary, skills, and concepts required to become a CNA and would be designed to raise a individual’s literacy level.

Promoted as a stepping stone to attaining CNA certification, the content would be online and made fully available to the public. While available to anyone wishing to utilize the content, it would ideally be used as a supplement to seat-based training in an adult education setting. The proposed delivery system for greatest effectiveness could be six hours of seat-based class and a minimum ten hours outside the classroom engaging with the online content. The eventual goal is to develop a platform that ABE instructors could use to monitor a student’s progress and time spent utilizing the content outside of class.

The CNA curriculum will be modeled after *Reading Skills for Today’s Adults*, an online curriculum developed by Marshall Adult Education Program (MN). Recognized by the National Institute for Literacy, *Reading Skills for Today’s Adults* has been praised as one of the best free online literacy tools available: <http://www.marshalladulteducation.org/index.php/reading-skills-for-todays-adult>. This online literacy tool is a versatile model that can be used independently by an individual for fluency practice with the ability to listen to repeated fluent reading of text; can be used online or in print form in a classroom; and can also be used with a volunteer or tutor.

**Future Implications**

After development, testing, and finding success through the proposed CNA contextualized curriculum, the goal is to duplicate the content to assist individuals with a low-intermediate literacy level (CASAS 210-220). The long-term expectation is that this curriculum will be available and promoted nationally for use by other Adult Education programs that work with immigrants, refugees, and low-skilled adults who have an interest in or who see a need to increase their qualified pool of healthcare workers. With the platform in place, this will also have implications for other career pathways; new content can be developed in the future to meet the demands of regional or national workforce needs.

**Support for this Project**

The state of Minnesota has embraced the Pathways to Prosperity model. The creation of an effective partnership between WorkForce Development, community colleges, and Adult Education agencies has proven beneficial to increasing literacy levels and credentialing of un- and under-employed workers, as well as providing an opportunity for individuals with low literacy levels to take the first step on career pathways in high-demand fields. The state of Minnesota has provided statewide financial support for Pathways to Prosperity programs to for further development and to ensure their continued effectiveness. We need to create the means to assist individuals to reach the literacy level required to participate in these trainings.

*Reading Skills for Today’s Adults* is currently being turned into a mobile application by Flink Learning (Cambridge, MA). Marshall Adult Education was asked to collaborate with Flink Learning to improve interactivity with the content and provide greater accessibility nationwide. This application has been submitted as a contestant to the Adult Literacy X Prize contest and is now in the stage of being developed. As an application being marketed through Flink Learning, *Reading Skills for Today’s Adults* will become a source of revenue to both Flink Learning and the adult education program. While the content will still be available for free on the internet, the mobile application is set to be promoted to schools and individuals for download. Since the format for the CNA curriculum will be modeled after *Reading Skills for Today’s Adults*, Flink Learning will already have the platform created. Because there is currently a lack of occupational content for widespread use, Flink Learning has expressed interest in also turning the CNA content into a mobile application. With similar revenue generation for this application, the profits could then fund future projects to address CASAS 210-220 literacy challenges and to develop content for other workforce needs.

**Contact for more information:**

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