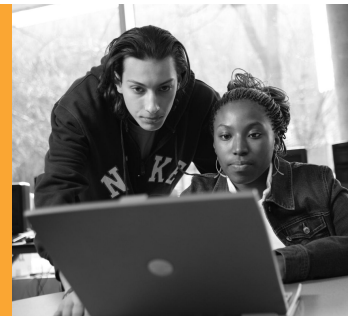


Adult Education Program Builds Student Confidence While Improving a Local Economy



Overview

- The Ava Adult Education and Literacy Center works with adult learners in Ava, Missouri, to help them attain the skills desired by local employers and to empower them to go on to higher education opportunities.
- To date, PLATO Learning courseware has helped almost 10 percent of the town's more than 3,000 residents attain their GED certificates.
- The program continues to grow with more students enrolling annually and increasing college registration rates by graduates of the program.

Larry Sorensen believes that every student can successfully attain their GED and find employment, provided they are self-motivated and willing to put the time in to it. As the instructor at Ava Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) Center in Ava, Missouri, he has helped almost 10 percent of the town's population and its surrounding areas attain their GED certificates using PLATO Learning software.

"I love my students," said Sorensen. "I started where they started, with a prep program, and now I'm paying back the individuals who helped me by helping my students."

Building self-confidence to improve local employment

Sorensen began using PLATO® software at the Ava AEL Center seven years ago with a small lab of five computers.

"I was working with Penmac, an employment agency, to help people get employed," said Sorensen. "Copeland Corporation, the town's biggest employer, wanted students with computer skills and needed educated workers. I began using PLATO, which helped improve students' computer skills and gave them the basic skills they needed to work at Copeland."

Sorensen's goal is to graduate 30 students a year. Currently, the program is averaging 36 graduates a year. But the program has bigger goals than just graduation rates. Sorensen believes that this program helps these students build confidence to attain greater success.

"I get them ready," Sorensen explains. "Many of my students never believed they could go to college. My job is to help build their confidence. The first thing we do in this program is goal setting, which is more than just 'My goal is to get my GED.' We work to set goals like 'I want to get my GED and move on to college' or 'I want to use my GED to get a better job to provide for my family.' It's about more than just graduating."

INSTITUTION: The Ava Adult Education and Literacy Center provides adult education services and instruction to the town of Ava, Missouri, and the surrounding areas. It is funded through a federal grant to the state that was bestowed on the West Plains R7 school district, as well as through private donations.

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LARRY SORENSEN, INSTRUCTOR,
AVA ADULT EDUCATION AND
LITERACY CENTER

“As students work through the courseware, their self-confidence improves along with their self-esteem and their ability to work and achieve academic progress by themselves,” said Sorenson.

These are the skills that Penmac and Copeland want in their employees. PLATO Learning courseware has helped Sorensen to expand the AEL Center’s partnerships with Penmac, Copeland, Drury University, and other area agencies to improve local employment rates.

The program has grown steadily over the years, mostly due to word of mouth.

“Word got around,” said Sorensen. “My students would tell other people about the program, about how you just go in, work at your own pace, and get it done.”

Working towards a self-motivated, self-paced goal

The program has a fairly informal process, and Sorensen enjoys being involved at every step along the way.

“When a student comes in, we first do the goal setting,” explains Sorensen. “After that, they take the locator test and the TABE test. I hand grade the TABE results so that I can talk the students through their own results and give them feedback and encouragement. Then I put them in the PLATO courseware and they do the PLATO assessment test, which assigns them the courseware they need. By the time they get familiar with the product and have started receiving that instant feedback—the gold stars—they’re off and running, and they’ll sit all day and work on the computer.”

The key to the program, according to Sorensen, is that the PLATO software is self-paced and allows the individual to put in as much or as little time as they need.

“My students are adults, and they have other commitments and responsibilities,” said Sorensen. “This program lets them come in when they can, and they can sit in front of the computer all day if they want to, or just come in for an hour at a time. I’ll help them as much as they want, but this program is truly self-paced and individualized, and their motivation is what gets them through it.”

Real results

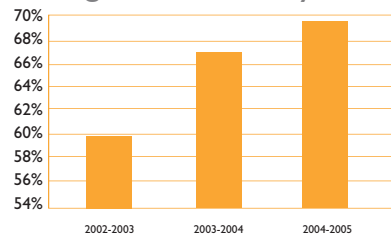
So far, the program’s goal setting and self-paced instruction have been successful, with one out of every four students working towards their GED attaining their goal. Almost 70 percent of program graduates have gone on to college.

Annual Ava AEL Graduates



“I think we’ve exceeded most expectations in that we have had 256 GED graduates and more than 110 students in college,” said Sorensen. “And that 110 only represents students at Drury University; it doesn’t account for students at other colleges. In all, we’ve helped almost 10 percent of our town’s population and the surrounding areas achieve their GED certificates, and I’m incredibly proud of the impact that my students have on the community. This program really helps our whole town.”

College Attendance by Ava AEL Students



Ava AEL Student GED Pass Rate

