



SAC champions

Northrop blocks last-second shot to beat Homestead

SPORTS, PAGE 1B

Man down, Komets top Iowa

The Journal Gazette

\$3.00

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28, 2023

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA ♦ LOCALLY OWNED SINCE 1863

www.journalgazette.net

'Biggest increase' in works for adult education in state



Aman Johnson | For The Journal Gazette

Run Be attends a class offered by The Literacy Alliance.

Governor asks for \$12 million over 2 years to expand economic opportunity

ASHLEY SLOBODA
The Journal Gazette

Melinda Haines is familiar with the leaky workforce pipeline that plagues Indiana.

She leads The Literacy Alliance, a local nonprofit that helps plug the metaphorical holes by helping adults earn their high school equivalency diplomas, among other services.

The organization - which serves Allen, Adams and Wells counties - wants to help more

SEE ALSO

■ 71-year-old keeps promise to himself by earning diploma
Metro, Page 1C

than 145 students in its high school equivalency preparation classes this program year, which ends June 30. So far, the nonprofit has served about 100.

The Literacy Alliance's goal is tiny compared to the number of people ages 18 to 64 who don't

have a high school diploma or equivalent in its three-county service area. Almost 30,000 residents lack that education credential, according to state data.

Statewide, the total is nearly 425,000 - or about 10% of that age group.

Gov. Eric Holcomb wants Indiana to spend an additional \$12 million over two years on adult education training to reduce the wait list for services. It's

Adult, Page 4A

AT A GLANCE

Hoosier adults without a high school diploma in 2021:

- Adams County** - 3,185 (16.7% of ages 18 to 64)
- Allen County** - 23,949 (10.5%)
- DeKalb County** - 2,677 (10.4%)
- Huntington County** - 1,960 (8.8%)
- Kosciusko County** - 6,258 (13.2%)
- Noble County** - 5,239 (18.6%)
- Steuben County** - 1,847 (9.1%)
- Wells County** - 1,131 (7%)
- Whitley County** - 1,464 (7.3%)

Source: www.hoosierdata.in.gov



Arman Johnson | For The Journal Gazette

Carletta Harris and Halime Djimet attend a class offered by The Literacy Alliance.

ADULT

Continued from Page 1A

about 8,000 names long, according to a news release describing the governor's 2023 legislative and administrative priorities.

Boosting adult education funding to almost \$17 million in fiscal year 2023-24 and almost \$21 million in the subsequent year would be significant because state funding for that area has been stagnant for at least 15 years. Cuts made during the coronavirus pandemic have even reduced the annual budget item from about \$14.5 million to \$12.9 million, said officials with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the agency that oversees adult education.

"I can fairly, safely say that would be the biggest increase in adult education," said Jerry Haffner, Indiana Adult Education division director. "We have a great desire."

And so does Indiana as it works toward a goal it set in 2012 - that 60% of working-age residents would have a quality college degree or credential by 2025. As of last year, the educational attainment rate was 48%, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education said. A more recent percentage is expected to be available next week.

Education beyond high school provides Hoosiers with the opportunity for economic prosperity and social mobility, Commissioner Chris Lowery said. He noted that earning the high school equivalency diploma, or HSE, is a first step toward a quality degree or credential for some people.

"Indiana's employers require a robust talent pipeline to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow," Lowery said in a statement. "That means we need more students of all ages enrolling in and completing a degree or creden-

Lowery said. He noted that earning the high school equivalency diploma, or HSE, is a first step toward a quality degree or credential for some people.

BY THE NUMBERS

Indiana adult education:

- 19,430 enrolled students
- 14,162 active students
- 2,533 students enrolled in career training programs
- 70% of students employed after exit
- High school equivalency graduates' annual earnings increased by \$8,400
- 16% median quarterly income increase
- 82% of students completing career training are employed
- 24% of career training certificate earners saw a 24% increase in median earnings

Source: Indiana Department of Workforce Development

MORE INFO

Along with seeking services from local providers, Hoosiers can complete a high school equivalency diploma preparation or English language acquisition course on their own schedule through Indiana Online Only, the state's only approved online adult education program. Visit www.in.gov/dwd for information.

tial. It starts with helping those Hoosiers without a high school diploma finish what they started and earn the HSE."

Opening doors

Until recently, Ignacio Silva's priorities didn't include earning a high school equivalency diploma.

Originally from Mexico, the 64-year-old moved to Fort Wayne in 1974. Providing for his family and raising children came first, he said.

"Education never did cross my mind before," Silva said.

Silva is now a student in one of The Literacy Alliance's high school equivalency preparation classes. He'd like to continue his education at college, where he wants to learn medical terminology so he can be a translator at hospitals. "Now is the right time," he said of focusing on academics.

Adult education service providers, including The Literacy Alliance and Fort Wayne Community Schools, are eager to help students such as Silva reach their goals.

"Additional state funding would allow us to serve more students by offering classes at additional times and locations," Haines said.

State dollars cover 23% of high school equivalency

preparation program expenses in the nonprofit's current budget, she said. As an organization, government funding totals nearly 20% of revenue for all programs, she added.

Adult students all have a reason why they didn't finish high school, and they typically have barriers to overcome, such as a lack of transportation, officials with the two local service providers said.

Both providers - which also offer programs for English language learners - individualize their services to meet students' needs. For example, Literacy Alliance students take an initial assessment, receive a learning plan and are reassessed every 40 class hours, with their plan adjusted as necessary, said Francine Liebhauser, associate operations manager.

Lonnie Heck, manager of continuing education at FWCS, said adult education is about making things simpler for students to reach their goals - not about dumbing things down. He stressed an equivalency diploma is just as valid as a traditional high school diploma.

"It opens just as many doors," Heck said, adding he encourages graduates of the English language learner program to seek an equivalency diploma to further their opportunities.

System of equity

Indiana's adult education enrollment is more diverse than the broader population - about 40% of students are white compared with 78% of residents, according to data that Haines shared from last year.

What's more, The Literacy Alliance executive said, statistics show adult education has no achievement gap among races and ethnicities, unlike in K-12 and higher education.

"They're all making gains at the same rate," Haines said, calling adult education the system of equity in Indiana's education landscape.

There's no clear-cut explanation for this, but providers described a few likely contributing factors. Their students start on similar playing fields, they receive targeted instruction, and their participation in the voluntary program indicates they want to be in class.

"Students come to adult education to better themselves, help support their families and for a better future," said Haffner, from the state's workforce development department.

Heck agreed. "They're motivated," he said.

Adult education providers also understand their students need cheerleaders as they return to their studies. The students often are beat down, Heck said, and they usually have complex personal stories, such as those involving struggles with sobriety.

"They don't believe in themselves," Heck said.

The Literacy Alliance officials commended their volunteers' ability to build students' self-esteem with simple encouragement. Heck said a good test score can also change attitudes, which is why FWCS tries to get students an early win.

"It opens the floodgates of confidence," Heck said. "They need that arm around them that opens that door to hope, to confidence."

asloboda@jg.net