**WorkforceGPS**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**Virginia Best Practice Model: Workforce & Adult Ed Working Together**

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JONATHAN VEHLOW: So without further ado, I'd like – without further ado, I'd like to turn things over to our moderator today, Susan Worden, Supervisory Program Analyst, U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration Office of Trade Adjustment Assistance. Susan?

SUSAN WORDEN: Thanks, John. Welcome, everyone. I'm very excited to be part of today's presentation. John has done a great job introducing me, so with that, we'll get on to the presentation.

So I have been aware of the best practice that we're going to see today since 2014. I first got in touch with today's presenters in connection with today's best practice model in connection with a – (inaudible) – conference for promoting a best practice that would help coordination between community colleges and the workforce system, which includes TAA.

And I want to tease out the fact that today's best practice model is a very sophisticated composite of several strategies that we've independently identified as really great best practices on their own. So I would imagine it would be very easy to be intimidated given the level of sophistication that's been put together in this best practice model.

So I just want to kind of emphasize some of the individual components, which are worth exploring on their own and obviously in combination are even more powerful. So most important thing, I think, about this best practice model is it's one that was founded through adult education.

And for the trade program, and I think also dislocated worker program title I of WIOA, adult education is a really essential partner for our demographic. For the TA population, you're seeing a lot of participants who are very narrowly skilled with very limited education and that even though they may have high school degrees because they're probably of couple decades away from high school are actually testing at a much lower level of competency, which will be spoken more about later.

The adult ed. population really understands how to work with what I'm going to call a training averse population. These are folks that probably didn't like school the first time around, much less coming into it two decades in with a mortgage, a couple of kids and a lot of work experience. So the idea of coming into an traditional classroom is not very welcoming and I think that's something that our adult ed. partners really have a handle on.

The other thing that's great about this best practice is it's really initially – the initial focus is about identifying employer needs. So we're talking about identifying, you know, what is high demand in terms of what's needed in the labor market; many times, even connecting with direct employers in terms of trying to understand their specific needs and partnering with them in the development of a curriculum so you can be sure that at the other end, this is going to be something that really does meet the needs of employers.

Another factor that I think is really exciting about this model is the tiered levels of remedial training that is more contextualized. So working back to talking about how our population very often has a very low level basic reading and math, that the remedial levels of training are work contextualized to make it engaging for the participants and seen as relevant in real world terms.

I think this is something that is just so important and we don't identify this and we don't provide training that is work contextualized, a lot of times we're setting ourselves up for failure. The fact that this best practice model works as a cohort – it's a cohort model – is really important that the peer support in getting through training participation cannot be overstated.

These are folks, again, who are really not comfortable going back into a classroom environment and feeling like they're all in this together is a really important contributor to success. Last but not least is the integration of soft skills and IT competencies.

A lot of the very basic competencies that we need to operate in the modern work world do require a basic understanding of things like Microsoft Word and Excel and other basic IT competency and the soft skills, you know, it's not enough to give somebody training if they're not – if they don't have the interpersonal skills to be successful in working together with others.

So that's another component that is built into all of the training curriculum for the best practice model you're going to see today. So again, just circling back, remember, we're not talking about doing everything overnight, but please remember throughout these individual components help to create success in their own right as well as in combination, which obviously is the ideal, but you know, you start with what you've got to work with and improve from there.

And with that, I'm going to turn it over to today's main presenters, starting with Kate Daly Rolander, who is from the Virginia Department of Adult Education. Kate, take it away.

KATE DALY ROLANDER: Hi. So I am a – I'm Kate. I am the Workforce Education Specialist at the Virginia Adult Learning Resource center and I also serve as the PluggedInVA coordinator. And Susan did a killer job of just doing I think the key takeaways for PluggedIn, so I'm going to contextualize this with the help of my co-presenter, Anna Rice-Wright, who is the Virginia TA State Coordinator with the Virginia Employment Cmmission and she's going to talk about specifically how PluggedIn works with TAA and the outcomes of some pilots and some projects we've done together.

So to begin our discussion, I would like to throw these questions out to the participants. And the first one here is what are your biggest challenges in developing or identifying effective employer based training in your state? And if you notice, we have several example responses.

What I would ask you to do, because we're going to have this come together – the responses will come together in a word cloud, which is really neat, because the more people say one response, the bigger it gets, so you can kind of see the themes in the responses.

But to make that make sense, if you could provide either one or single word responses or if you have phrases, like we've provided as examples, combine them with a hyphen and that way it will show up as one word all together. Otherwise your words won't stick together.

All right, so we are going to switch over real quick. You'll see this on your screen and if you could – and you're welcome to put in several words if you want, but if you're putting in a phrase, make sure that they're connected with a hyphen or something so that they stick together.

But again, the question, what are your biggest challenges in developing and identifying effective, employer based training in your state? And some of the examples we had were foundational skill levels, like literacy or numeracy, staff levels, soft skills, so what are your thoughts? What are your experiences?

And you can enter that into little line there, the little field, and then click send and we'll have a beautiful word cloud. So I'm seeing employability, soft skills, employer buy-in – that's a huge one; retention, great. I like the color scheme of this one. It's nice. You're more than welcome, if you've got more than one idea, go ahead and throw them in there because we can have as many ideas – that will help me to address what we put into this word cloud.

Employer buy in is really difficult, especially, I've found, from adult education, which is relatively new to the workforce development system, per se.

MS. WORDEN: Keeping in mind that if you have multiple words, you want to join them by a hyphen or just do them as one long screen. That will help ensure that your full idea gets represented as it multiplies.

MS. ROLANDER: I think we'll just wait for a couple more responses, but these big ones are employer buy in and soft skills and partnerships, I would say that goes right along with the challenges we've experienced in general. And we'll have this saved so you'll be able to see this later when we send out the recording of the webinar.

All right, well, thank you for your responses on this and we'll just keep in mind that employer buy in, soft skills, partnerships, employability, those are some big, key ideas for this. So now that we've identified some pretty big challenges to identifying and developing effective employer based training, I want to pose another question, a follow up question, which we're also going to do in the same way with a word cloud.

And this one, we've identified the problems. What resource or strategy would resolve this issue, in your mind? Anything. Pie in the sky. And we have a couple of just sample ideas to start off. Business engagement expertise, that's a big one, ability to engage partners to come up with comprehensive solutions and eliminating partner silos. Now, keep in mind, that because this is a word cloud, these are entirely inappropriate responses, but feel free to write them all together or to hyphenate them.

But what, to you, would be a resource or strategy that would resolve this issue of identifying and developing effective employer based training? Consistent messages, yes, definitely. I'm curious, equality, what kind of equality? If you want to either put that in the chat or add.

Oh, so employers and providers leveled at a planning table. That would be fantastic. That is fantastic, when it happens. So we definitely have one overarching theme showing up. This is when I love the word cloud.

We'll have a few more – wait for a few more responses. English for special purposes, that's a good one too. That's very good. All right, so we have some pretty good themes in there, collaboration being a good one, but that level planning table and employer engagement are big things that we've really tried to address in the PluggedInVA model.

Just quickly, it's not right here on your slide, but if you are interested in popping over and looking at more information at any time, more information can be found on the PluggedInVA website, which is just PluggedInVA.com and in a nutshell right here is a good summary statement.

PluggedIn is a career pathways bridge program that prepares adult learners with the knowledge, skills and credentials – industry recognized credentials, that they need to succeed in post-secondary education, training, for high demand, high wage careers in the 21st century.

And this is really a model built on partnerships. It does not work without partnerships. It's generally anywhere from a couple of months to six months co-enrollment, so the students, learners are in both adult education programs and occupational training, generally provided by the community college system in Virginia, but we've had other technical schools and other providers too.

The real emphasis here is to find something that works for the regional Workforce Development needs and whatever training provider is going to work the best to really connect our learners with good employment opportunities is what we want to do.

So I'll go on next to just give a brief history of where this came from. In 2008, there was a call to produce a comprehensive education and training program in the southwestern part of Virginia where they were trying – working to attempt technology businesses.

And the challenge was, in order for students to skill up academically, get their secondary credential, meaning their GED or to review and strengthen what they've learned in high school and then go on to post-secondary training, not to mention to acquire specific professional soft skills and digital literacy skills.

This process, for a lot of learners, was the way our systems were set up, could take years and we lose people along the way. Retention becomes a problem when you space things out over too long a time. So the challenge was to put all this into something that could be done in six months together and so in 2008, PluggedInVA was developed as a project, as a governor's innovation fund project at Virginia Commonwealth University's Literacy Institute, which is where the resource center is housed.

And in 2009, the first PluggedIn pilot began in February in southwest Virginia in information technology. From 2009 until 2011 when the innovation fund led to the expansion to different sites, PluggedInVA was sustained through local funding. The program was such a success and people believed in it so much at the pilot, that local community colleges and local organizations worked to keep it going.

They kept the funding going without any help from the state. So that is a strong model from which we have to follow. In 2011 and '12 we were able to expand it to two additional sites and do a little pilot testing of our own to see if different, certain aspects of the model could be adapted.

And from that experience, we were really able to distill what works in PluggedIn and we'll see that in just a bit when we go over the essential elements. In 2014, we were able to expand to 12 additional sites with a line item in the Virginia Governor's Budget, which we have been able to maintain since then through three governors now – four governors now, just so quick, and both Republican and Democratic support, so it's a very bipartisan project.

And in 2013, through our collaboration with TAA, which Anna Rice-Wright will go in to in much more detail, we were able to expand the model to address learners at lower skill levels. The PluggedIn model that we've talked about so far was really developed for the ninth grade and above level so students would be able to succeed in the co-enrollment and the rigorous program that required post-secondary coursework.

So we were able to develop a curriculum for that fifth through eighth grade level, which is where we found the majority of our learners were falling, in that fifth to eighth grade level, despite already having high school credentials, many of them.

And then we are working now in developing curricula for the Virginia Pathways level that kind of takes us from literacy to fourth grade – so an entire literacy to post-secondary pipeline with multiple entry and exit points.

Throughout the last five and six years, we've been able to expand the model to other learners through partnerships with TAA through a current – (inaudible) – ENT program at seven different community college consortia in Virginia through a DARS project, that's the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services, focusing on adapting the program for adults with disabilities, and that program is CPID, Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities, and then through various VCCS, Virginia Community College System Initiative.

So PluggedIn has been brought in through all of those grant opportunities as a model for workforce development for low skilled adults who need supportive services and academic and soft skills strengthening.

We've also worked with WIOA dislocated workers as well, so we want to make sure that's included in there. So the PluggedInVA model has these essential elements, and aside from that, is a very flexible model into which you can incorporate curricula for any industry.

So industry specific contextualized curricula to strengthen those basic reading, writing, math skills within the context of the industry cluster. Co-enrollment at a post-secondary institution and co-enrollment is specifically important that instruction between the adult education side and the occupational training side are aligned and contextualized through consistent collaboration and communication.

The outcome of an industry recognized credential or more or certificates, things that will be recognized and valued by employers in the region in high demand industries and jobs. Career coaching, either through community college career coaches, which we have in Virginia, or through WIOA case workers, somebody who works with the student throughout to really focus on goal setting and planning for a career beyond the confines of the PluggedInVA program so that they have good next steps for when they're done and ready.

Active business participation, including and particularly importantly though curriculum input. Active business participation really varies depending on the industry, depending on the partnerships, but can be anywhere from visits to worksites and field trips, visits to the classrooms to talk about the industry, on the job training opportunities, volunteerism, internships, guaranteed interviews, mock interviews and we have, in some cases, guaranteed jobs for completers.

This all depends on the actual partnerships and industries and the length of time that the program has been in existence. As the program becomes better known, we've had greater participation and greater promises from our employer partners. A large part of the PluggedIn curriculum involves a capstone project.

That's the six essential elements, and this is a comprehensive, integrated collaborative project that students do in teams through facilitation from their adult ed. instructors where they identify a community need and work with their instructor to develop solutions, develop proposals, including budgets and narratives and presentations and sometimes actually going through with these projects and presenting them to an audience at the end of the PluggedIn project, which kind of serves as a graduation.

An example of one of these capstone projects was in southwest Virginia for a construction and weatherization cohort and they identified a need to weatherize a local homeless shelter, which was really having a hard time keeping warm in the winter and cool in the summer, so they put together a proposal, sound materials, budgeted for labor and materials and were actually able to do it and weatherize this shelter and hold their capstone project in the shelter itself where they invited key stakeholders in the community as well as their family and friends and teachers to see what they've done.

And this also serves for the learners as a great portfolio piece and something to talk to and speak to at an interview when they're looking for jobs. What really makes this project work, and we did try this out when we were able to expand the model in 2011 and 2012 is the cohort model.

The students become support – they've become a support system for each other. Not only through providing help with transportation and childcare and food, but also motivation. If someone is not feeling it or if they're struggling, they really do work with each other to make sure that they have the support they need.

It also provides extra motivation to attend, because they do a lot of group work together and they become very dependent on each other. So without this cohort model, we've not seen the retention that we have when they are able to stay together throughout the entirety of the program – through adult ed., through occupational training and through work exposure and work experiences.

And then another key element, which we could not do this without, is supportive services through partnerships like TAA and those wraparound services, some of which adult ed. is not able to provide, we get those through very close collaborations with our agency and employer partners.

So we have – in addition to these key elements, these are the college and career readiness outcomes that PluggedIn really focuses on. Students at the top level, at this career level, the ninth grade and above, really should not leave this without a secondary credential or at least a plan to continue working on it.

Without the secondary credential, we do – (inaudible) – their potential progress in a career pathway, so we want to make sure they have the tools and the credential before they go into a career pathway.

Academic skills gains, so really focusing on the academic skills strengthening. Even for those students who already come in with a high school credential, there is a huge jump between high school credentials and post-secondary work.

There's also a huge skill gap sometimes between the GED or high school level and the literacy and numeracy levels required for these credentials and required for training and work in occupations. So ensuring that learners are skilled up academically to be able to perform well and to learn well within training and their actual jobs is vitally important to the success of student's trajectories and their career pathways.

Transferrable and stackable credentials and training. This is vital. This is an essential outcome. If they do not have this, we do not count them as a completer of PluggedIn. So all of our data only includes folks who have completed an industry recognized credential and transferrable, stackable training.

Digital literacy certification. Regardless of the field they are in, digital literacy is no longer something – it's a part of every occupation. It's a part of every job search process, so this is important and the certification shows employers something concrete that says these employees have these skills.

They're able to function at least on this level in the digital world, on computers. And sometimes we work – we generally use Microsoft Office. They have digital literacy for their, but there are other programs too that work quite well in the workforce, including something like North Star.

Workplace readiness certification. In Virginia, most of our programs use the National Career Readiness Certificate, but any kind of workplace readiness certificate that shows employers that students have certain academic skills related to the work place is – and it's also just another good thing to add to an interview.

Another certification that says they're serious about learning and becoming an invested employee and then industry certifications, which I did already cover. I got ahead of myself, but they're important – (inaudible).

OK. Actually, I'll speak to that now. We have a question real quick, how have you been able to bring employers to the planning table? I won't lie. That has actually been our biggest challenge. In areas, especially in southwest Virginia where the program has been going on since 2009, we now have employers that ask for PluggedIn programs tailored to their upcoming jobs, because they've seen successes of the training and the supportive services and specifically and very importantly, the soft skills.

But other methods we use are just cold calls. We are very involved with our Workforce Development boards and get contacts and work from there to identify employer partners who are interested in working with us. Go for those first who are interested in this. It's harder to try to convince people when you don't have someone at the table, but finding willing partners is vital and that can happen through Workforce Development boards, just making calls to people, going to visit and really offering us as a service.

If we're able to do your recruitment and your training, that helps an industry in a lot of ways. That helps an employer in a lot of ways. You save money on finding new employees. You save money on training and if we're able to really incorporate the skills that you or the employers really find lacking in their current applicant pools, then will probably help with retention too, which saves a lot of money.

So it's making the deal that we are a value added service and just working with your networks and your contacts and your Workforce Development system to identify employers who are willing and want to work to enhance the quality of their applicant pool.

It's just not – I wish I had a silver bullet response, but it's a toughy.

MS. WORDEN: But it's multiple strategies.

MS. ROLANDER: Yeah. It's a lot of things together. But the networking – and your agency partners and your WIOA partners and your TAA – they're going to have their contacts too of people they've worked with. So just opening the conversation up to other partners in the agency, it helps to make sure that everyone knows who has approached whom so that employers don't get too many asks for the same services.

Yeah. I could talk about that for a while.

MS. WORDEN: So if you want to know more, feel free to contact Kate to talk more about that.

MS. ROLANDER: I love being contacted. So I'll go on and talk briefly about the capstone projects and I went over them when I talked about the essential elements, but this really does provide, I think the most comprehensive opportunity for students to build 21st century skills, which include collaboration, creativity, teamwork, even diversity awareness, which is something that employers do identify as something they value and need in employees and it gives an excellent opportunity to build confidence to speak in front of a public audience in a place where they are supported and they are building their skills and they are able to show off their skills.

So the capstone project – and we have guidance on our website about the capstones in addition to some examples of some good capstone projects. But there's a great opportunity to combine everything that we learned throughout the PluggedIn program. Their academic skills, their digital literacy skills, their soft skills and their occupational training skills.

So I'm just going to introduce this and then I'm going to turn this over to Anna Rice-Wright who is going to really talk about how partnerships really make this project work. Partnerships between adult education, between the Workforce Development system, employers and post-secondary and occupational training institutions.

It does take a lot of collaboration, especially on the front end, and then consistent communication. But this is a really excellent way to kind of bring in all our forces together. We're all working towards the same goals and PluggedIn can provide a great framework for that and it hinges on the success of its partnerships.

So Anna, if you'd like to come in on here.

ANNA RICE-WRIGHT: All right. Thank you, Kate. Adult ed. is the key to a lot of the Workforce programs. I mean, Virginia Employment Commission TAA unit faces the same problems that other state agencies around the country face in that so many of the trade affected workers, which are, by the way, first and foremost dislocated workers, the average employment for these individuals at the time of layoff is that they've been employed at least 20 plus years.

Their average age at the time of separation from a trade impacted employment is – they're usually around 40 plus years old. The majority have a high school diploma or a GED. What we were finding is based on our comprehensive assessments that the majority of these displaced workers are falling at a 4.9 grade equivalency with a high school diploma and GED, which makes it a little bit difficult, not to mention intimidating, for those workers to enter straight into a post-secondary training type.

What we found is when we would approach post-secondary and, at these levels, many of the individuals were taking placement tests and resulting in numerous classes of developmental such as in math and English, which equaled more semesters added onto their training.

As all of Workforce programs, we all have goals and objectives and the main goal of objective is returning these displaced workers, these trade affected workers, to gain full reemployment as quickly as we can. It didn't take the VEC TAA unit long to realize in order for this – these displaced workers become – (inaudible) – removing barriers, all these barriers.

I mean, you have an individual that's a 4.9 grade equivalency, but we're at a level that, as far as the curriculum, – (inaudible) – post-secondary, we're very able to undertake that. And so we started searching for programs that could open those doors for us, that could open the door and offer a whole lot more to these displaced workers no matter what level they tested at. To do this, we knew that we needed extremely strong partners and that could address truly that lower skill deficiencies, but we wanted to be able to couple it with the post-secondary curriculum.

Again, opening up to that individual, no matter what level they fell at. That's when TAA was introduced to the PluggedInVA model.

Next slide.

MS. ROLANDER: Anna, I can touch this one.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: Yeah, if you don't mind. I was going to talk about the overall framework, but that's fine.

MS. ROLANDER: There's a quick question, Anna, if you don't mind addressing it.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: Uh huh.

MS. ROLANDER: About the Workforce Readiness Certification, is that being paid for with trade funds? Do you know?

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: What we basically do is when we work with adult ed. on a PluggedIn model, they actually incorporate all of it into an actual training program. So any of these pieces are actually put in on the front end of the program, then it's divided between each participant that we have in the classroom through tuition, books and supplies.

MS. ROLANDER: OK.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: Does that – in essence, yes, we do. We don't directly pay for it, but we pay for it as part of the overall training program.

MS. ROLANDER: And I do note that through other non-TAA PluggedInVA programs, the adult education programs generally cover the Workforce Readiness Certificate – Career Readiness Certificate testing. So that's – hopefully that answers that.

I'd also like to address another question very quickly, if there is a place for English language learners in PluggedInVA. We have run English language – PluggedInVA projects in the northern Virginia region comprised entirely of English language learners and they've been incredibly successful. In fact, they've been some of our best retention rates of all of our programs.

So at any level, the curriculum is flexible enough that we can incorporate whatever scaffold they need to happen for English language instruction into the academic skills piece. The one issue we're still having trouble overcoming, especially at lower skill levels, is finding – because industry credentials are a required outcome of the PluggedIn project, it is difficult sometimes to find credentials whose examinations and certification tests are at a literacy level that is approachable and easy for lower literacy students.

So advice there would be to see if you can get a hand on either training materials for the specific credential or the actual credential examination itself and work towards that strengthening the vocabulary, the literacy skills, the numeracy needed for that and tailoring that to English language instruction. But that's been an issue for our learners in general, both native speakers and non-native speakers.

But it's a great model. Contextualized instruction is ideal for English language learners and they've been very successful in these programs in the past. I want to speak briefly to business engagement. I covered it earlier, but it is such an important component and as I mentioned earlier too, it's sometimes our most difficult to engage.

But from the very, very beginning, engaging businesses and designing not only the curriculum of the program, but also making sure that the credentials that we're focusing in are things that they actually value and recognize.

There are a lot of credentials out there and some of them are not valued by employers. So we want to make sure that from the very, very beginning we're creating something that will lead to not just a credential, but a job. So working with employers to say like what do you want? What do you value? In your current employees, what are you finding lacking?

What are you having to retrain people and what are some of the reasons you've had to let go of workers? And really hone in on those responses and those skills to build a program that is responsive to local employers and what they need. And keeping them abreast of what's going on, what students are doing, inviting them to the capstone project and engaging them in work exposure activities that will really give students a chance to experience the business and the job.

Just really to actually know what it would be like and maybe something that would help employers get to know the students themselves so that they have some direct interaction before they go into a potential job interview situation.

So that is ideal business engagement and it's going to be different in the particulars from place to place, but really making sure they know that you've been responsive in designing a program. This is what's happening and then what can we do next for you and how can we engage you with our students?

MS. WORDEN: And I just want to put in a quick plug for you, Kate, in that one of the things that you've emphasized in previous presentations is that PluggedInVA has worked across all 12 regions of Virginia, which includes a very broad range of socioeconomic status from highly urban to highly rural.

So they really have applied a real combination of strategies depending on the economic community in order to be successful across that level of diverse economic environment. So a great source of wisdom on a variety of socioeconomic fronts.

MS. ROLANDER: Yes. Thank you, Susan. Yeah. It works very well in both – it turns out, both rural and urban areas. So we've been happy with the flexibility of the model in that respect.

So I'm just going to introduce this framework and then I really – Anna is going to talk to how this ties in with TAA and Workforce Development. This is the – very simply, this is the overall framework we use for all of our PluggedIn programs from literacy to post-secondary.

An integrated approach to these four essential elements for the curriculum, focusing on basic skills development, professional soft skills, very explicit focus on professional soft skill, digital literacy skills and 21st century skills combined in these integrated learning applications and workforce exposure.

So Anna, if you'd like to elaborate on its place in the Workforce Development system.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: Oh, absolutely. One of the things that we know from employers here in the Commonwealth are that they are in need of certain certifications. We know that. But just the basic skill development, and when we say basic skill development, yes, reading, writing, arithmetic, math, but there's also things known as employer math, employer reading and writing type, and we knew from employers that that was a key element.

We also knew that the professional soft skills are a key element that we're needing within the workforce programs that we're offering – the 21st century and the digital learning literacy skills. And that's why, when we were introduced to the PluggedIn model, it was perfect. It was, okay, it does everything.

It gives us the whole package to include that curriculum of study piece added at the post-secondary level and again, you know, the main focus was that we had to have a program that would work no matter the level of a person. You know, many times, again, when you have somebody that tests at a 4.9, if they don't make it at a certain level on the placement testing, then, you know, we were kind of forced with what do we do?

You know, so this program was exactly what we needed for our trade affected workers and how to bring them into that next skill level that we knew employers needed at within the market.

MS. ROLANDER: Thank you, Anna. That's a perfect tie in, thank you. So I'm going to just talk quickly about how the curriculum ties – aligns with outcomes and assessments. The main foci for our outcomes and I just got made fun of a little bit for using the word foci, secondary completion, college readiness, workplace readiness and then assessments including industry recognized credential assessments and workplace readiness assessments such as the national career readiness certification and others.

So the curriculum is flexible enough that when you take your outcome goals, such as these, whatever assessments, whatever credentials, whatever skills are there can be plugged into a framework and some of the assessments that we've used specifically in Virginia are the VPT, the Virginia Placement Test, which is the community colleges' entrance exam.

And this is very important for students at that higher level of PluggedIn, because if students do not test very well in the CPT, they do get placement to remediation, which as Anna mentioned earlier in the webinar, can add semesters onto their course of study. So we stand a chance to lose them at greater numbers if we don't prepare them for this.

The Career Readiness Certificate, the GED 2014, and digital literacy certificates and then of course industry recognized credentials at all literacy levels. So to put all this into perspective, here is a very colorful overview of the PluggedInVA curriculum framework and this graphic is available on the website, if you go into it and go into educational resources.

So you basically input your content into each of these bars and they all run concurrently, contextually, throughout the entirety of the program. When PluggedIn is run like this, it is an approved integrated in education training model.

So when all these things are contextualized, the academic skills become more relevant, the soft skills become more relevant and they tend to stick. Students become more motivated and retention is increased. So this, for further reference – for future reference, is just a snapshot of everything that we put into the curriculum in a PluggedIn model.

So to end – to end our discussion of the PluggedIn model, here are just some sample certificates and career studies certificates, which are short term credentials supplied by the community college system in Virginia. And as you can see, we've covered an entire – like the whole swatch of industries; a full range from healthcare information technology, HVAC, electrician helper and construction weatherization.

Think of it you can put it into a PluggedInVA model. This also ties into what Susan mentioned earlier about its success in both urban and rural areas. Employers in both of those environments have been very receptive to this model through this range of industries.

So the flexibility of this is something I cannot overemphasize. One other question that came up here is have we ever used a – (inaudible) – Workforce Certification? Yes, we have. You know what, I actually cannot answer that with full confidence. I'm going to look into that and I will send out a response to that and see if anyone has used that, but I do believe we have in the northern Virginia program. But I will make sure and get back to you on that.

All right, and just to – as a final concluding slide to the discussion of the model, we have a lovely photo on the next slide of a graduating class in our TAA model. This is at New River Community College and it was a healthcare related field and I just think they're happy.

They look great. And to put a face on the model, some of our students in the – see good age range here, but it is a rewarding model for the students, for the teachers and for the partners who work in it. And we're going to continue and talk about how it's expanding to the literacy level now and I'm going to turn that over to Anna Rice-Wright to talk about that expansion.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: Thanks, Kate. As I spoke with you earlier about is that talking about the different framework the PluggedIn model had for us was great example of the programs that we were looking for; the wrap around services. The one piece that didn't work for us at first was they only had – PluggedIn only assisted those individuals at 9th grade and as we know, based on our testing, the majority of individuals were falling into that 4.9 grade equivalency.

Therefore, group came back to the table, designer of the program, etcetera and we wanted an entry point so that it didn't matter where the person was. They could enter and still continue to the careers pathway and as you can see from this layout, that's exactly what happened. You have the pathways, which is literacy to fourth, workforce goes fifth to eighth and careers is ninth to post-secondary.

So it didn't matter where any of our participants fail, we had a place that they could start with our wonderful partner adult ed. Again, it is truly – the need was there to expand the pipeline, which I think Kate would honestly say it gave them the opportunity to expand it. And it gave us the opportunity of a wraparound program that we were desperately needing for trade affected workers here in the commonwealth.

In fact, we were – after we were introduced to PluggedIn, once we expanded the pipeline, so had accepted the individuals, we decided to actually put it into action. We had a major layoff that happened in an area of Radford, Virginia. We decided – it's called the TAA NRCC, which is New River Community College project, in which we wanted to keep this group of individuals that had been working together for all these years, for 20 plus years, to use them as a solid cohort that could go through this training from the beginning to the end and wanted to make sure everybody understands we don't put them – while we may do this for, like the digital, the developmental basic developmental skills and etcetera, each of the studies, of the curriculum of the studies are different.

You may have a group, some of the participants that go into one particular area, but they're all mixed in and that's the wonderful thing about adult ed. where they wrap their hand around and can bring an individual at any point. To the actual – we actually had the adult ed. instructors that would go into the classroom at the post-secondary watching instructors on how they were teaching certain things and would come back and then would be in a tutoring mode to ensure that our TAA participants were successful in that classroom, which I thought was just phenomenal.

That's why I said this program just wraps their hand completely around any displaced worker and moves them forward. We learned through assessments, of course all the assessments and the placements to kind of get an idea of where the majority of the individuals fail and which group, which what I was talking about on the pipeline.

The cohort, we had no doubt that we wanted to build a cohort on the current group that were at this particular layoff and we actually had 58 participants so we could actually walk in. And the other thing, we could start it. We didn't have to, with PluggedIn, and a lot of times I think a lot of the states are faced with the same thing, having to start a program on the next semester.

But that's not how this works. We could start this program. Once we had everything, the components in place, we could start it immediately based on the assessment pieces, etcetera. The curriculum was built and from the outcomes and the lessons learned, one of the things that I could tell you beyond a shadow of a doubt, the bonded cohort is truly the piece that helped these individuals go through this process.

They, you know, since they're bonded at work, they're now bonded in a different environment, but they challenge each other. They work with each other until they see, you know, 100 percent success.

The TAA NRCC project. Here's a little bit of – I'm not going to go into a whole lot of detail about this screen, but I think the key that I want you to look at out of the 58 participants, as you can see how the majority of them actually fell into that group that we were talking about earlier, which is the workforce group, which is the 5th to 8th grade level. The majority fell into that.

We had, in this particular case, the nine that were the – (inaudible) – were for literacy at 4th and then we had 15 and as you can see, we did a post-secondary educational games, they enrolled in the post-secondary, which I think out of the 34 for the group, all of them are pretty phenomenal when you look at it.

When you have nine that are enrolled and then on the post-secondary – enrollment post-secondary, we're not that far off from the numbers, which was pretty phenomenal on this particular project that we ran. And Kate, I will turn it back over to you.

MS. ROLANDER: Thanks, Anna. I'm going to quickly address a question from a participant. The question is, what if a student does not complete at the same time or the same rate as the rest of their cohort and do they continue with another cohort?

While we have high retention, it's generally around 75 to 80 percent of those who begin end together in our PluggedIn program, but we do have students who, for one reason or another, and a lot of these are life situations – work, family, other things that happen and they have to leave, or some do not progress as quickly in achieving their secondary credential or some of the industry credentials.

If those happen, if they have to stop out, then we try to make sure that they're aware that if funding allows and if this happens again, there will be another opportunity to participate in a future PluggedInVA cohort.

We also give them other options for training and continuation with adult education. So they are presented with lots of options, especially as they work in conjunction with their career coaches in their goal setting and their planning and their progress and we do follow up calls 30 days out, a few months out and try to keep in touch with them.

If they are trying to stay in the program, but are having or struggling with some of the credentials, we have in place tutoring opportunities, extra help, extra adult education classes they can attend to work on the skills they need working with.

So there are many different solutions and options for students who are not at the same rate as the rest of the cohort. This happens, but not as often as you might think. Generally, they do help and support each other.

We do have some who go through the PluggedIn program and do not still have their secondary credentials, so we work with them to really get that done post completion. So there are a lot of options. It does happen, but we try to make sure they know they're supported and that there are future opportunities for them to continue.

So I hope that answers that question as best I can.

MS. WORDEN: Yeah. And I'd just like to step in right now and looking at the slide on the outcomes, one of the things that I think is interesting about when you have a blended enrollment between adult ed. and Workforce.

Workforce is generally focused on getting somebody into a job as quick as possible whereas adult ed. tends to very often be focused in getting that person to the next level of education. So on that second bullet where you'd say 47 percent of students enrolled in the 2012-2013 cohort gained or retained employment, that's not to say that the other 53 percent basically went back unemployed.

It's basically an indication of the fact that you had mixed outcomes in terms of combined going up into higher ed. versus going into straight employment. So I just want to contextualize that for the Workforce audience.

MS. ROLANDER: We have a hard time getting some of this data, but immediately after completion of PluggedIn, many, many of our students do continue on to higher education and training, which is that first bullet there.

Throughout that year where we had external review of evaluation of PluggedIn, 70 percent of those completers continued with at least one additional semester at the community college. That's four times the general rate of adult education students. That's a huge jump.

So the support, not just academic support, but the soft skill support and then the wraparound support, the familiarity with the college setting is a huge thing too. PluggedIn really helps students identify themselves as potential college students, which many of our students do not.

Many of them are first generation college. Some don't even know other people who have been to college and it can be an intimidating endeavor. So this program is a very supportive way to get students into that door and to see themselves as college students.

And that last bullet point talks to our expansion across the state of Virginia into currently 14 different sites. Well, we were 12 back when we first got the Governor's Line Item. So I'll go to the next slide and follow – continue with some outcomes.

Funding streams and partnerships are included here, because our outcomes as PluggedInVA have become harder to track because we have been incorporated into so many different projects and grants that have different reporting systems.

What I can say for sure for PluggedIn overall is that we have completed over 150 cohorts. Learners completing cohorts, we now have over 1600 in our different projects through different funding streams and to be counted as a completer, students must have earned at least one industry recognized credential.

The GED completion rate is about 90 percent for those who do not have secondary credentials and that's during the program. And industry recognized credentials, that's 100 percent. So everybody who goes through PluggedIn and completes, earns at least one industry recognized credential that is valued by an employer.

And this is a snapshot of our funding stream and what we operate through the adult education office is the Virginia Governor's Line Item Budget where we are able to expand geographically across the state and in those projects, adult education service is the fiscal lead and generally is the focus – the focal point for the PluggedInVA project.

TAA New River Valley, which Anna Rice-Wright talked about, title II career in technical education, that has been our main funder and a funding partner since it's conception in 2009. That is what – (inaudible) – funds adult education. The Governor's Innovation Fund was how we were able to expand the project and currently we are part of the following projects.

We are part of a large – (inaudible) – ENT grant that has been administered through Virginia's Department of Social Services and the Virginia Community College system and that puts us in seven different community college consortia.

We are part of a DARS grant and currently we're working specifically on logistics like warehousing and distribution with adults with learning disabilities and other kinds of physical disabilities as well.

We're working on several community college system projects, including the Road to Success in Virginia Program, or RSVP, and Strata, which is localized – (inaudible) – conjunction with the community college workforce alliance focusing on specific target populations in the logistics field in the Richmond area.

So we are expanding to more populations to more areas and we are being adapted in ways that fit more needs for both employers and learners. And with that, I'm going to throw this back to Susan to help – wait, wait, there's a question.

So does TAA approve a training plan for PluggedIn credential as their end credential? That's for you, Anna.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: Yep, that's for me. OK. When you take a PluggedIn program, again, we're taking the framework that we shared earlier, but our decisions on what these individuals end up in as far as a program of study are based on labor market information and what that employer is needing in that area to bring their skill level out.

So if you're asking me, does the – if I have a person that is already skilled in electrical, but we know that they need the digital piece and all the other pieces to go with it, then we will incorporate that as an actual training for that person to give them, because they are skill deficient in that and that gives them those skill levels to get them back with that employer as quickly as possible to employment.

So with trade, we have a little bit more flexibility as far as, when you say a certification, does every program, a person may have a certification that's already there, but they lack those other particular framework skill sets that need to go with it to make them more marketable for that area. Does that address your question?

MS. ROLANDER: I think that sounded good. Like a good response. Yeah, and please – well, I'm going to send this back to Susan to close it out and handle any Q&A.

MS. WORDEN: So I just want – so we've got – I'm not sure we've mentioned it thus far, but based on our registration, we've got a really rich mix of folks from both the adult ed. community as well as from TAA and Workforce.

So I just want to remind folks that through Workforce GPS we have a number of best practice webinars that we've already run through, some of which tie directly to the best practice model we have today or would combine very well with it.

How to file a TAA petition online, of course is always our old standby, because we don't have participants without a group eligibility determination that starts with a TAA petition. So outreach to the labor market to make folks aware of the fact that the TAA program exists is always a constant drum that we beat.

Who is the TAA customer resources, characteristics and strategies for TAA and other adult learners. This presentation really gets into the concept of TAA participants as well as many other workforce – dislocated workers who really are training averse.

Many of the things that you heard Kate and Anna speak to today in terms of the remedial needs of the resistance towards maybe traditional training models and just the unfamiliarity with especially post-secondary environments is something that gets looked at and is really an important cornerstone when putting together any kind of training plan, certainly for TAA participants as many – as well as many of the other dislocated workers.

TAA fiscal and state best practice webinar is a focus on the currently abundant TAA resources, which equates to money that is readily available within the state workforce systems. We're always looking for best practices to encourage – (inaudible) – to understand that outreach as well as collaboration with training partners are all acceptable ways of leveraging case management funds and be sure to reach out to your ETA regional coordinator as well as the National Office, if appropriate, if you have any questions, but this webinar provides some information on that.

Last but not least, we had a recent best practice webinar from the state of Oregon that was quite closely targeted on leveraging TAA resources to conduct outreach and not only for the purposes of TAA petition filing, but also for the purpose of identifying OJTs, which is obviously something that would merge very well with the best practice model that we saw today and just the importance of being connected to the labor market in identifying any sorts of successful strategies for reemployment.

So if you haven't already seen any of these, please see the link. I highly recommend them. And next. Oh, wait. OK, so do we have slides after this? Good. OK, good. We just want to make sure that we're collecting any additional questions that you may have with regard to today's best practice webinar.

We're about to, after we get through this question slide, provide the contact information for Anna and Kate as well as additional contacts that are available, but if you want to take advantage in the live environment now to ask any additional questions, please do so.

MS. ROLANDER: I just thought of another potential – another answer that I've heard to the question earlier about how to engage businesses and one that we found out when we talked to PluggedIn programs as part of the – (inaudible) – ENT was that their vocational occupational training partners oftentimes had those relationships with local employers already.

So really leveraging those existent relationships and making sure that they were very aware of adult education's role in there and beefing up the relationship by asking what adult education could do as part of that partnership. So looking at what relationships are already in existence can sometimes be a really valuable shortcut that ends up strengthening the whole program.

MS. RICE-WRIGHT: And Kate, if it's okay, I'd like to add too, this is Anna, from the Workforce standpoint. I think too many times that we're seeing adult ed. is the GED folks, that we as Workforce need to understand that they are truly a much – they're essential part to the success of our programs and it may come down to the simple thing and you're talking about employer outreach, employers sometimes have that same premise that when they hear the word adult ed. that it's the GED folks.

Well, they are that, but they are truly the essential part that we need for our Workforce programs for retraining and if it means simply rebranding what adult ed. is to incorporate these essential parts of the training that there are enough surveys out there that show that the employers in an area are telling us what they need and they want the 21st century skill sets.

They want the digital learning, literacy learning, and here's the opportunity for adult ed. to basically look at that and be a key element for outreach. I encourage partnering with – (inaudible) – in every one of the states. They're key.

And also the business and economic development people that are also housed within each one of the WIB locations. There are so many ways to do outreach, engage employers, we're just missing some tremendous amount of opportunities.

MS. ROLANDER: Thank you, Anna. That plug is so important and understanding adult education's role in the Workforce Development system, it is really fundamental – a fundamental partner.

MS. WORDEN: Right. And I think overcoming the preconceptions and stereotypes is going to be key to bringing this critical partner fully into the fold, because they really are critical.

MS. ROLANDER: Yep.

MS. WORDEN: OK. All right. So looks like we've pretty much wrapped up all the questions that we're seeing in the chat, so we'll bring it forward to just making you aware of contact information. On this slide, as I indicated and Kate indicated herself, she – both Kate and Anna are always ready and available resources to answer questions, as is true with many of the folks in this business.

They are very passionate crusaders in really wanting to share what they've learned and also learn from others. So to the extent possible that we can encourage you to reach out to them. If you do have any concerns or questions, we, you know, given that we are now operating a lot in virtual environments, please don't hold back.

They are very accessible and very friendly and willing to talk to you about any level of concerns or questions you may have about what's going on in your specific state environment to work together.

Also, you'll notice at the bottom of this slide, we've added in the website for PluggedInVA.com, which is really an excellent resource for learning about all the different aspects of what PluggedInVA is about, from outcomes to talking about the basic structure to many of the other – drilling down on many of the other aspects that Kate touched on today.

MS. ROLANDER: In addition to other resources, there is an implementation guide – kind of step by step in the educational resources tab of that website. So please take a look and contact me and Anna any time.

MS. WORDEN: And given that as I mentioned earlier, we do have a combined audience today. Wanted to make sure that our – those in the audience from the Workforce side were aware of the points of contact on the state level for adult education state directors.

It's available through the link you see on this slide and on the next slide, for those of you in adult ed. these are the contacts for the state trade coordinators as well as regional trade coordinators who basically operate on the ETA level from the federal side and may be able to provide assistance in terms of addressing questions.

And before we close out today, I just want to put in a personal plug specifically to our TAA coordinators and to a lesser extent anybody with the dislocated workers program that we are seeing, to some extent, folks on the state workforce side leveraging that flexibility that they have to facilitate the development of customized training curriculum that meet specific employer needs and working directly with training vendors, including community colleges, to create things that not only meet employer needs in terms of specialized skill sets, but also in terms of timing.

Being able to start in the middle of a semester, to be as immediately responsive as possible and obviously speaking on behalf of a trade program, if there are any trade staff in the audience that have more questions about their flexibility and being able to proactively have a role in that process and you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to your regional trade coordinator or to us here in the national office.

And with that, last but not least, I want to remind folks that our next OTAA webinar is going to be focusing on leveraging TAA data and that is data that is collected quarterly through the new TAA data collection system, which is part of the larger WIOA data collection, which is called the Pearl, and that will be on March 20th from 2:00-3:30.

And now, I am ready to close it out and hand it back to you, John. Thanks.

MR. VEHLOW: Well, thank you very much, Susan.

(END)