

## **The State of Adult Education and Adult Literacy Initiatives in the District**

### **Committee of the Whole Hearing**

**September 24, 2015**

#### **Testimony from Nicole Hanrahan, Executive Director, LAYC Career Academy**

Greetings Council Members and staff. My name is Nicole Hanrahan and I am the Executive Director of the LAYC Career Academy Public Charter School, a proud District Resident and a DCPS parent.

The LAYC Career Academy (LAYCCA) is an alternative school that provides a bridge between high school and college for youth ages 16 to 24 in the District of Columbia. LAYCCA provides youth with a rigorous and self-paced GED program, a college preparatory curriculum, college classes through partnerships with universities, and career training in the health care and information technology (IT) fields. This school is the first in the District of Columbia to receive unconditional approval from the DC Public Charter School Board and the first GED school in the country to obtain a grant from the Walton Family Foundation, a foundation known for its dedication to high-quality college preparatory models.

I am here today to share three main points with the council:

1. Alternative and adult education schools produce powerful results but they look different than outcomes and processes within traditional education.
2. The GED is a thorough and rigorous test. It is worthy of the state high school diploma because of its rigor.
3. Attainment of adult basic education helps students with not just workforce outcomes but a variety of other key outcomes like improved health and benefits for students' children.

My first message is that alternative and adult education schools look different than traditional schools but they produce strong results for students. LAYC Career Academy students are still youth developmentally but they shoulder many adult responsibilities. One-third are parents, 15% are homeless or in foster care and 40% of our students work to support their children, parents and other relatives. Our students struggle every day to balance work, school, and family responsibilities. As a result, their attendance patterns look different than those of students in schools with compulsory attendance. However, our students' resilience and the high standards to which we hold them and to which we are held are apparent in our strong results.

Over our first three years:

- Our students made **an average of two years of gains** for every one year that they were with the LAYC Career Academy.

- Our students earned **more than 300 IT certifications** and **over 100 healthcare credentials**.
- Twenty one **students have earned a total of 140 college credits** through partnerships with Trinity Washington University, the University of the District of Columbia and Bard College.
- **Ninety four percent of graduates are working or in school**
- Over half of graduates are in college or advanced IT programs
- **One hundred percent of graduates who entered college previously remain enrolled.**
- Salary range for recent graduates working in IT and Medical Assistant fields: \$27,000-\$40,000

We have achieved excellent results and these strong outcomes are insisted upon by the PCSB through our PMF. The PMF holds us accountable to ensure that our students are making strong academic gains, earning industry-recognized job training certifications, and gaining and maintaining jobs and higher education after they leave us. We are held to high standards and we welcome the accountability and transparency required of us.

My second point is about the importance of the GED and the rigor of the test, which makes it worthy of a state high school diploma designation. The GED covers Science, Social Studies, Math, and Language Arts and helps students become eligible for jobs and post secondary education. Right now, the GED and NEDP are the only competency-based paths to a high school credential available to students in the District. The GED is an important tool to help older students with few accrued credits obtain a high school credential. Older youth with lower levels of education and high levels of family responsibilities cannot realistically also shoulder the more than 3000 hours of seat time required for a high school diploma at present. The GED's flexibility allows students to move at their own pace and attain the credential when they demonstrate competency.

The GED is now also a very difficult test. This test has changed drastically since the new iteration came out in 2014. In 2013, the year before the test changed, a total of 540,535 people passed nationally. The following year only 58,524 people passed. This demonstrates how much harder this test has become. The GED is a rigorous test and because of that rigor, students who attain a GED should be eligible for a state high school diploma. I hope that you will consider making this a possibility for the District's GED earners.

My final point is about how attainment of adult basic education helps students with not just workforce outcomes but also a variety of other key outcomes like improved health and benefits for students' children.

According to ProLiteracy Worldwide:

- Adults with low literacy skills are much more likely than others to suffer from heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. They are also likely to have health care expenses that are as much as six times higher than adults with average levels of literacy. As people gain literacy skills, they are more likely to understand their health problems and have the tools to find the right medical care and to follow their treatment plans accurately.
- Adult and alternative education programs also lower spending on public assistance programs. Eighty percent of literacy programs report an overall reduction in TANF enrollment among their students.
- Finally, when adults enter literacy programs and improve their literacy skills, their children become more likely to have better nutrition and health, stay in school, have fewer unplanned pregnancies, and higher rates of employment.

I firmly believe that adult and alternative education presents a strong return on investment for the District. This is true of job training programs that place students into employment and GED programs that help students access post secondary education and better jobs. This is also true of programs that merely help students increase their literacy skills. In addition to the positive effects on the health of participants and the success of their children mentioned above, **adult students who just participate in 100 hours of adult basic education are shown to have annual incomes of almost \$10,000 more than similar adults who did not participate in education programs.**

I ask for your continued support for alternative and adult education programs as they greatly benefit the lives of DC residents, help reduce public spending on healthcare and public assistance and help to increase tax revenue.

Thank you for your consideration.