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Education's new focus on jobs-ready skills

By Dave Gardner

Like multiple links joining to create a complex chain, efforts to join education with preparation to earn a living are coming together through Federal Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCT) grants. All grantees in receipt of these competitive grants are required to partner with employers to develop training programs to build employable skills.

Luzerne County Community College (LCCC), Northampton Community College and Lehigh Carbon Community College are sharing a \$10 million TAACCT grant. Libby Yeager, LCCC's curriculum, program development, and Title III project development director, explains that LCCC received \$1.8 million to create training opportunities which lead to targeted student credentialing in field including diesel technology and welding, plus engineering design and manufacturing. Some of the grant funding will be used for tuition assistance and to purchase equipment and renovate necessary space.

"We are required to finish our preparations by the fall 2015, so it's fortunate that community colleges can move quickly," says Yeager.

LCCC is now empowered to award a certificate for diesel truck technology, a diploma in welding, and an associate degree for the engineering curriculum. The TAACCT grant also requires each school to create a community practice component, which will be a regional educational model.

Yeager addresses the perceived disconnect between jobs and education by saying schools often don't establish good communication about students needs and at time have become very good at blaming previous educators for student weaknesses. "There is not a clear understanding of what it really means to be college ready, across all levels," says Yeager.

She urges all schools at every level to evolve because the world is moving fast in its demands upon the workforce. Schools must somehow see the future and prepare for it by teaching the skills that business will need. "Just look at how office technology has advanced," says Yeager. "A relatively small amount of time separates the manual typewriter from the computer."

Advisory input

At Johnson College, all of the school's educational programs use an advisory committee

of industry representatives to chart the direction of the curriculum. Using this system, Johnson has job placement rates of 68 percent in a field of study upon graduation, and a three-year rate above 90 percent.

Michael Novak, department chairperson for diesel truck technology, explains that the targeted goal for his program is for each student to become an entry-level troubleshooter able to perform all required tasks and labor. The graduates are well-rounded technicians who can successfully repair an entire diesel vehicle.

Enhancing employee soft skills is an area which Johnson consistently addresses. Students are taught how to deal with customers, create and process work orders, locate and order parts, and truly listen to a customer. "The students do transform," says Novak. "We are very serious about the subjects of English, verbal communication and technical writing."

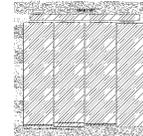
Katie Leonard, Johnson's vice president of institutional advancement, adds that the school's career services department is very active and concentrates on displays of student professionalism using mock interviews, coupled with advice like telling students to put away their phones, dress appropriately and pay attention to body language. These lessons are vital if a student is to reap the financial rewards of a tech school diploma.

"We introduce our students to the concept that they can work up to management once employed, and that they need to set goals for one, five and 10 years down the road," says Leonard.

Employer involvement

If superior job preparation is to be achieved across the educational spectrum, Thomas Viviano, Ph.D., executive director of the West Side Career and Technology Center, believes it is completely wrong to depend on standardized tests that require students to simply regurgitate knowledge. Moreover, he champions efforts to convince the general public that all kids don't need an expensive four-year college experience. Industry-recognized certification or two-year degrees are preferable for many students.

"This process of student self-discovery must start early," says Dr. Viviano. "The kids must learn to truly know themselves and develop rigor of thought, which leads to better career decisions."



Critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and education within broad context are also goals which Dr. Viviano believes every school should strive to teach. West Side Career Tech also administers a formal soft skills program. These must be joined to an understanding that employee give and take is vital within the workplace, and that virtually every employer has expectations of professionalism.

"All of these educational components allow a student to translate their thoughts into appropriate action which will translate into positive contributions," he says.

He also explains that any workable solutions to link education to jobs requires employer involvement. It's important to acknowledge that it's in an employer's best interest to get involved in the local schools. Employer-educator partnerships allow for a smoother student assimilation into the workforce.

Pennsylvania's Vo-Tech schools are also required to have a local advisory committee, which includes representatives of industry clusters. The advisory committee communicates about what programs the school should teach and which should fall by the wayside.

Occupational advisory committees, composed of craftsmen and professionals, further advise on curriculum, facilities and equipment. Some of these employers then hire students for cooperative work experiences and employ them after graduation.

"The education experience should be about work and targeted at learning to make a living," says Dr. Viviano.

ABOUT TAACCCT

TAACCCT provides community colleges and other eligible institutions of higher education with funds to expand and improve their ability to deliver education and career training programs that can be completed in two years or less, are suited for workers who are eligible for training under the TAA for Workers program, and prepare program participants for employment in high-wage, high-skill occupations. Through these multi-year grants, the Department of Labor is helping to ensure that our nation's institutions of higher education are helping adults succeed in acquiring the skills, degrees, and credentials needed for high-wage, high-skill employment while also meeting the needs of employers for skilled workers. The Department is implementing the TAACCCT program in partnership with the Department of Education.

All grantees are required to partner with employers to develop training programs to enable workers to build skills that will help them obtain good jobs. Partnerships with local small and medium sized employers as well as larger ones such as Exxon-Mobil, IBM, Delta, Jetblue, CVS,

and Habitat for Humanity, and with labor and community based organizations such as SEIU, Goodwill Industries, Urban League and the United Way, will assist in getting thousands of low-wage Americans access to more internships, apprenticeships, and job-relevant basic skills education and training in order to move up the career ladder into better-paying jobs that employers across the country are looking to fill.

<http://www.doleta.gov/taaccct/>

Luzerne County Community College has partnered with several industries in the area to offer streamlined and technologically advanced training programs designed to help you prepare for a new job quickly.

In addition, the JobTrakPA Programs offer:

- Short-term, career-specific courses
- Basic skills training
- Workshops for all aspects of workplace competencies
- Comprehensive support from a dedicated job developer
- Industry-recognized certifications
- Job placement assistance

Industries and programs:

Advanced Manufacturing
Industrial Maintenance Technician
Computerized Numeric Control Technology
Welding

Energy

Electrical Construction Technology

Solar Photovoltaic Installer

Job Ready Skills: About Solar Photovoltaic Installer
Our Solar Training system prepares Solar Technicians to confidentially assess and remedy the many challenges they will face on the job. Our training is developed with key industry partners. These leaders in industry are advisors on the curriculum and program delivery. They will be the pioneer employer for our participants.

Hands on Training

Photovoltaic Systems require specialized job skills. Technicians incorporate many traditional technical disciplines like electric motor control, wiring, rotating machines, piping, pumps with more specialized skills in solar technologies like installation, PV and system troubleshooting. Our training program teaches concepts along with hands-on training through application and troubleshooting.

High Market Demand

Industry demand for qualified Solar Installers is rising as more consumers and businesses apply solar energy in their communities. Solar electric energy demand has grown by an average 30% per annum over the past 20 years against a backdrop of rapidly declining costs and prices. This decline in cost has been driven by economies of manufacturing scale, manufacturing technology improvements, and the increasing efficiency of solar cells. In 2009, the photovoltaic solar industry generated \$38.5 billion in revenues globally, which includes the sale of solar modules and associated equipment, and the installation of solar systems. Growth in the world PV market is expected from \$46.3 billion to \$96.8 billion in 2014.

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Urban League panel, Bush stress 'Black Lives Matter'

by Christian Morrow

Courier Staff Writer

With multiple workshop sessions covering Black-on-Black violence, Domestic Violence, Police and Community Relations, and Child Abuse Detection and Reporting, the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh State of Black Pittsburgh Conference left no doubt about its priorities: Black Lives Matter.

The six-hour conference, held at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center May 16, featured concurrent sessions on all topics for both adult and youth attendees.

The highlights of the event were the keynote panel luncheon, featuring Pittsburgh police Chief Cameron McLay, New Voices Pittsburgh Founder LaTasha Mayes, Wesley Center AMEZ Church Pastor Rev. Glenn G. Grayson, and Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh President and CEO Esther Bush. WQED television and radio host Chris Moore moderated the discussion.

As always, the true highlight was Bush's State of Black Pittsburgh address, in which she noted that Freddie Gray's death at the hands of Baltimore police officers didn't allow for the simple "racist" projections applied in Ferguson, Mo.

"(In contrast to other cities that have been wracked by tension

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and protests over police confrontations with Black men, the city's mayor, its police commissioner, and the state's attorney are all Black, giving a somewhat different tenor to the clashes between the power structure and its critics," she said.

"Of the six police officers charged with various crimes because of their alleged involvement with Mr. Gray's death, three of them were Black and three were White. Mr. Gray's death in Baltimore makes us realize that this can't simply be explained by White versus Black. Across racial lines,

among Blacks as well as Whites, there is a lack of knowledge that Black lives matter."

The Urban League of Pittsburgh, Bush said, has been dedicated to the proposition that Black lives matter since it opened up shop on Wylie Avenue in 1918.

"Everything we do, the programs that are designed and implemented, the meetings and events we hold and to which we invite you all spring from the knowledge that Black lives matter, that your life matters, and that our community and our entire nation are better off when you are better off," she said.

Bush said in the last year the Urban League had, as it did for the 96 previous years, continued to connect African Americans with resources to meet their basic needs, and provided programming to foster full development of family potential through education and employment.

Bush highlighted last year's partnership with Pittsburgh Public Schools that saw 120 middle-schoolers attend the Summer Dreamers Academy, and 17 high school "techno teens" learn aspects of video game design. All of the senior techno teens graduated and are enrolled in college.

She also noted that 752 clients received general employment services, another 547 attended training, information recruitment or job seminars, and 160 gained employment. Another 106 clients attended the agency's first-time homebuyers workshops.

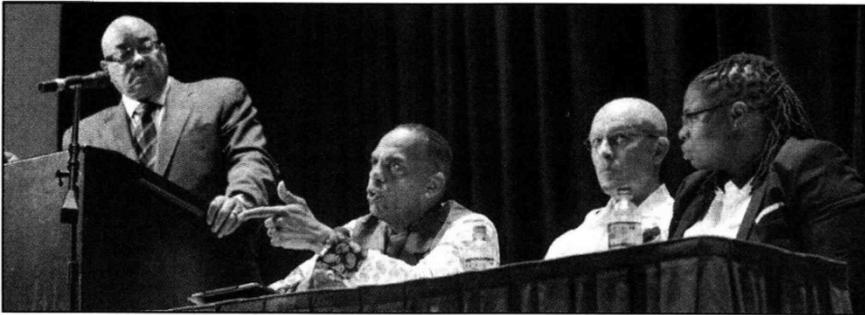
While proud of the accomplishments, Bush said the Urban League's work won't be finished "until there's nothing left that looks or feels like Ferguson, Mo. or Baltimore, Md."

"If I truly believe Black lives matter, and I want to have this attitude infiltrate every square inch of this nation, then I must start by being sure that I am treating myself as if my life matters," she said. "Realizing that I am fully capable translates into expecting a lot from myself, establishing standards for myself, and holding myself to them. Because, when I know that I matter, then I act as if I do."

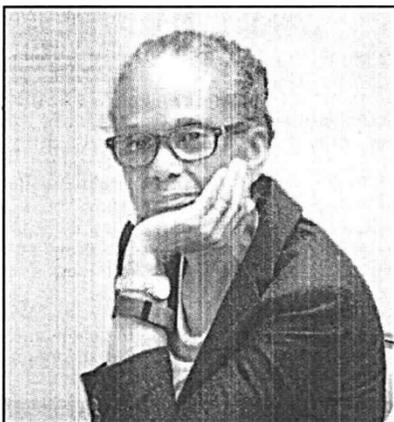
The program ended with a special "Call to Action" performance by award winning spoken word artist Vanessa German.

(Send comments to cmorrow@newpittsburghcourier.com.)





BLACK LIVES MATTER—Rev. Glenn Grayson comments during the keynote panel discussion at the Urban League's State of Black Pittsburgh conference as moderator Chris Moore, Pittsburgh police Chief Cameron McLay and New Voices Pittsburgh founder La'Tasha Mayes listen. (Photo courtesy of the [Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh](#))



SUPERINTENDENT LINDA LANE listening to speakers at open hearing during school board meeting.



REGINA HOLLY listening to speakers during open hearing at school board meeting.

Educational Equity and Excellence Project

"An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest."
— Benjamin Franklin

All across the country, people are gathering to observe an annual academic rite of passage: graduation. In a scene that will be played out countless times during this season of celebration, family and friends will dutifully take their seats in auditoriums and open fields around the nation and proudly look on as their loved ones walk across stages to receive their diplomas or degrees and, finally, turn the tassel on their graduation caps.

This tradition holds much more significance than its primary function as the formal recognition of a student's academic achievement. It is also firmly rooted in our American belief that education, particularly higher education, is the key to greater opportunity and the chance to live the American dream.

The era when a high school diploma was enough to climb the ladder into America's middle class is long gone. In today's increasingly high-tech society, it is a college education, or degree, that has become the minimum requirement for that climb up our nation's social and economic opportunity ladders. Access to college, therefore, cannot remain a privilege afforded to a few when it has become a prerequisite to achieve greater success by the many.

In recognition of this enduring state of academic affairs, the National Urban League is spearheading the Equity and Excellence Project. The proj-



ect — which has six areas of academic focus tightly related to our organization's mission, including common core standards and improved access to high-quality curricula and effective teachers — has also made college attainment, and most importantly, completion one of its priorities.

The higher education initiative of the Equity and Excellence project is currently being run at three National Urban League affiliates: The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, The Urban League of Springfield and the Urban League of Lexington-Fayette County. In those communities, communities that mirror so many Black and brown communities in our country, national and local advocacy and engagement efforts are underway to ensure that more of our young people go to college.

Right now, there is much to celebrate in our country when it comes to academic achievement in African-American and Latino communities. Today, we enjoy the highest high school graduation rates in history. More students of color are in college and dropout rates are at historic lows. But more work lies ahead.

Despite the fact that more Blacks and Hispanics are getting a college education than ever before, there is a gap in postsecondary attainment. In 2013, about 15 percent of His-

panics had a bachelor's degree or higher, degree attainment was at 20 percent for African Americans and 40 percent for whites, according to recent Pew Research Center analysis.

When a young man or woman is denied access to opportunity through education, we all lose. That potential graduate loses a well-known and well-worn path to individual success. College Board research demonstrated that people with bachelor degrees earned over \$21,000 more than high school graduates. People with some college and no postsecondary degree earned 14 percent more than high school graduates who worked full time. When young people are not obtaining post-secondary degrees, our nation suffers from the loss of their talent, their increased tax revenues, their civic engagement and more.

As was often quoted by President John F. Kennedy, "a rising tide lifts all boats." We need to rethink our funding of grants, we need to take a serious look at our student loan system, we — as a nation — need to confront head on all the obstacles to equity in access to quality post-secondary education. The return on our investment of the time, effort and money necessary to increase college attainment and completion, would be a competitive American workforce, a stronger economy and thriving communities.

Marc H. Morial, former mayor of New Orleans, is president and CEO of the National Urban League.



► CLOSER LOOK

WHO'S COMING

Scheduled events at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center

JUNE 2015

- International Bridge Conference
- Vaping Convention Circuit LLC
- Longwall USA
- Andrew Wommack Ministries – Pittsburgh Gospel Truth Rally
- American Association of Woodturners 29th Annual International Symposium

JULY 2015

- Barbershop Harmony Society
- Anthrocon 2015 Viking Invasion/Fun, Fur and so Much More
- Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. Annual National Convention
- ReplayFX Arcade and Gaming Festival

AUGUST 2015

- Fraternal Order of Police – 100th Anniversary Biennial National Convention & Expo
- Highmark Fun, Fit & Fabulous
- American Massage Therapy Association National Convention
- Connect & Connect Sports Marketplace

SEPTEMBER 2015

- Wizard World's Pittsburgh Comic Con 2015
- University of Pittsburgh College of Business Administration Career Conference
- Steel City Tattoo Convention
- Highmark Great Race Expo

OCTOBER 2015

- Pittsburgh Coal Conference
- Inferno Dance Class & Competition
- Where to Turn Resource Fair
- The Non-Profit Summit
- National Society of Genetic Counselors Annual Education Conference
- Pittsburgh Pet Expo

NOVEMBER 2015

- Cameos of Caring Dinner
- Tree Care Industry Association Expo
- American Diabetes Association Expo
- Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh Thanksgiving Distribution
- World Spirit Federation Steel City Classic

DECEMBER 2015

- Handmade Arcade
- Cheer Sport Competition
- PirateFest

DAVID L. LAWRENCE CONVENTION CENTER

