

Joint Senate Education and Labor and Industry Committee Hearing
Adult Education and Workforce Development
September 22, 2021
Jeff Nobers, Executive Director of the Builders Guild
Testimony

Ladies and Gentleman, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning about the importance of infusing adult basic skills education into workforce development. My name is Jeff Nobers and I am the Executive Director of The Builders Guild of Western Pennsylvania.

The Builders Guild is a labor/management initiative representing 16 building trade unions, nine affiliated general and specialty contractor associations, and the Pittsburgh Regional Building Trades Council. The Builders Guild is focused on growing a dedicated and diverse workforce and to promoting the benefits of union construction on both public and private projects.

Ever-increasing demand for skilled tradespeople coupled with the continuing retirement of the baby boom generation has created significant career opportunities in the regional construction industry. Several new projects are underway in Western Pennsylvania that will further elevate demand, such as the Pittsburgh International Airport Terminal modernization, redevelopment of the former Civic Arena site, and Hazelwood Green, among others.

The Builders Guild of Western Pennsylvania and Literacy Pittsburgh have launched a collaboration to help create meaningful, skilled work for some of the region's most vulnerable adults. There are an estimated 54,000 working-age adults in Allegheny County that lack a high school credential. The new Trade Up program will give these individuals the skills and background needed to pursue lucrative careers in the construction trades.

Trade Up integrates GED preparation and construction trades pre-apprenticeship training. It builds upon the success of The Builder's Guild's existing Introduction to the Construction Trades program. Focused on the recruitment of disadvantaged people – especially minorities – the program boasts a minority participation rate of nearly 85%. Our completion rate is 97% with more than 80 % of all participants placed in union apprenticeships, full-time employment with contractors, or other construction-related employment. We're partnering with Literacy Pittsburgh because of their successful track record in helping thousands of adults attain the GED over many years.

In addition to our partnership for Trade Up, Literacy Pittsburgh has been teaching Math for the Trades within our pre-apprenticeship program. Math skills are essential in the construction trades and partnering with Literacy Pittsburgh allows our pre-apprentices to benefit from Literacy Pittsburgh's instructional expertise and graduate ready for the various apprenticeship exams.

The construction industry in the 12-county southwestern Pennsylvania region is facing an unprecedented labor market shortage. At present, there are nearly 52,000 construction jobs, with a projected growth rate of 9.2% over the next 10 years. At the same time, 30 to 35 percent of current tradespeople are expected to retire over the next few years. This situation has created thousands of opportunities for motivated people to establish a solid middle-class way of life.

The Trade Up program provides a clear path for those who desire a life changing opportunity and who are willing to work hard to achieve that. The reward for those who successfully complete both the GED and pre-apprentice programs is guaranteed entry into a trade apprenticeship or other opportunities in the construction industry. While Trade Up is just getting started, we believe it and the existing partnership for Math for the Trades are great examples of how employers, job training providers, and ultimately job seekers can benefit when adult education providers like Literacy Pittsburgh and workforce development collaborate.