

College: Wallace Community College-Selma
Location: Selma, Alabama
Practice: Tutoring by Telephone
 Helping students obtain their GED by providing free, over-the-phone tutoring

<i>Year Started</i>	1989
<i>Budget</i>	\$25,000
<i>Program Participants</i>	1,350 students tutored; 82 have received GEDs
<i>College FTE</i>	1,500
<i>Target Sector</i>	Education
<i>Staff Size</i>	9
<i>Structure</i>	College program
<i>Key Outcomes</i>	Half of all GEDs from college's GED programs come from the Tutoring by Telephone program

Introduction

Illiteracy and poor education are ongoing problems in the Alabama counties of Chilton, Dallas, Lowdnes, Perry and Wilcox. For example, one out of every four adults in Dallas County has no more than an elementary school education, and the rate is even higher in Perry County. A 1986 study by the University of Alabama showed that one of the primary reasons for slow economic development was the low education level of working-age adults. It is the goal of the Tutoring by Telephone Program to place adult basic education within the grasp of every resident of the Wallace Community College-Selma service area through a technologically-simple distance learning program.

Community Background

Wallace Community College-Selma (WCCS) serves a rural area in the “Blackbelt” of Alabama, one of the most impoverished regions of the state and the country. In this area where nearly 49 percent of the population is African-American, the median household income is under \$18,000 and 55 percent of residents never finished high school or received their GED.

Alabama’s economy is growing with unemployment rates generally lower than the national average. Unemployment in Dallas and Perry Counties remains quite high. The region also has a high rate of poverty—nearly 35 percent. Other

Program focus	Sector specific	Economic condition	Economic base			Target populations
			Mfg	Agr	Svc	
Access and at-risk	No	Distressed	36	1.5	26	Economically disadvantaged, general, minorities, women

Service Area Dallas, Perry, Chilton,
Wilcox, and Lowndes
Counties

<i>Total Population</i>	123,000
<i>Median Household Income</i>	\$18,000
<i>% Below Poverty Level</i>	34.6
<i>% Unemployment Rate</i>	11.6
<i>% Minority Population</i>	49.3
<i>% Rural Population</i>	67.0
<i>% High School Graduates</i>	55.0
<i>% College Graduates</i>	9.9

problems include illiteracy, a low standard of living, and a high proportion of households on public assistance.

Program Description

WCCS is a member of the Alabama College System, the largest system of higher education in Alabama. WCCS offers a variety of two year degrees and certificate and diploma programs.

As its name implies, the Tutoring by Telephone Program provides over-the-phone tutoring to adults studying for the GED exam. The program augments adult basic education classes at WCCS, and is designed to reach adults in rural areas who cannot attend classes because of work, lack of transportation, or lack of childcare opportunities. It encourages preparation for the GED exam at an individual pace, allowing participants to study at home at their own convenience. The college offers the tutoring free of charge for adults in Dallas and Perry counties, as are all books and materials. According to one of the tutors, “If they can’t come to the lessons, we’ll take the lessons to them.” Tutors are available on campus 20 hours a week for the students to call on as needed.

Because phone calls to WCCS from parts of Dallas County and all of Perry County are long distance, a special telephone system was put in place. Students must dial a “1” first, and then the call is toll-free. A federal special demonstration project grant of \$13,800 paid for the phone system as well as materials and postage to implement the program. Ongoing resources come from state and federal adult education funds. Last year,

approximately \$25,000 was budgeted for the program, and the Alabama Power Company pays the phone bill.

The program began by targeting women who were unable to attend classes due to insufficient childcare or a lack of transportation. Now, however, the program is open to all adults. The only requirement is that participants pass a screening process, be self-motivated, and read at least at the seventh grade level. Participants range from 17 to 80 years of age. The county’s oldest GED recipient ever, and only the fifth GED recipient over 80 in all of Alabama, received his GED with help from the program. The program is part of a statewide plan for improving the basic education of tens of thousands of adults.

Outcomes

Half of the GEDs earned in the school’s adult basic education programs came from the Tutoring by Telephone program. The program has been averaging ten GEDs per year, per 50 students enrolled.

In place since 1989, the program is making a life changing difference. Students who would not otherwise have received their diploma now have their GED because of the Tutoring by Telephone program. Some of the students who received their GED now attend WCCS for further education.

Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

A key strength of the program is that it is extremely cost-effective. Toll free phone lines and the U.S. mail service are used to make the program work. The fact that there is no cost to the participant is also a strength.

One disadvantage of the program is the lack of face-to-face contact between the teacher and the student. Without in-person support, not all individuals will thrive and complete their preparation for the GED.

Because of the program’s success, some companies have started a workplace education program in their plants involving WCCS, the Selma/Dallas County Chamber of Commerce, All-Lock Company, and the workers’ union there. Several other colleges have traveled to the school to learn about and replicate the program.

For more information, contact:

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