Program Summary: Moraine Valley Community College

The Walmart Brighter Futures 2.0 (WBF 2.0) Project at Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC) afforded us the opportunity to pilot interventions that assist us in retaining students and moving them towards their individual completion goals. In our efforts to advance the goals of the national completion agenda, we worked collaboratively across the institution to enhance instructional programs at MVCC. By identifying highly motivated students, and assessing their academic ability and individual employment goals, we were able to provide them with realistic middle-skills occupations that they could pursue and attain in what they considered to be a reasonable time frame. With our case management approach and continuum of services, we were able to identify pathways for participants by providing career exploration opportunities, contextualized general education, scholarship awards, supportive services, and job-readiness training to prepare them for options they may never have considered.
Strategic partnerships are cultivated both on-campus and throughout the region we serve with employers and social service agencies that offer resources to unemployed and underemployed individuals. WBF 2.0 Project participants are new and currently enrolled students who receive referrals to and from the Job Resource Center, BTW 50+, TRIO, WIA, and DOL grant-funded programs at MVCC, public libraries, community-based organizations, and the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

Through innovative programming and cross-campus collaboration, the WBF 2.0 Project provided 30 low-skilled participants with access to college-credit career programs in middle-skills occupations over the past year. MVCC developed and piloted I-BEST inspired programs in healthcare and manufacturing. I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) is a nationally recognized model that pairs two instructors in the classroom. One instructor teaches technical skills and the other instructor reinforces terminology and math skills. This proven model is designed to increase students' literacy levels and improve their work skills. With individualized instruction and academic support, WBF 2.0 Project participants successfully completed college-credit courses in healthcare and manufacturing. Prior to interventions offered by the WBF 2.0 Project, these students were considered ineligible to enroll in some of our occupational training programs.

The project also supported the development of contextualized manufacturing bridge programs. Four-week career exploration cohort programs were offered to 11 high school youth during the summer and 20 GED/ESL students during the fall and spring semesters. Exploring Careers in Manufacturing consisted of touring MVCC career programs' instructional facilities, taking field trips to area manufacturing facilities, engaging with guest speakers, and focusing on vocational math needed for manufacturing jobs. Participants learned to use micrometers, calipers, and other tools to measure materials. Participants who completed the manufacturing bridge programs increased their math test scores, on average, by at least 1.5 grade levels. Not only did math test scores increase but the confidence levels of students in both groups rose dramatically.

The following statement came from a parent of a high school student who participated in Exploring Careers in Manufacturing.

> I want to let you know that James is loving this program. He even said that he thinks his math skills are getting better because of the repetition. James has never enjoyed going to school and learning for many reasons. With this program, he is up and ready in the morning before I am! He is doing his homework without complaint and homework has always been a huge issue as well as going to school. The instructor has made a huge impact on James. He reinforces James' strengths and then moves on from there. This has given James the confidence to challenge himself in math. This has never happened in the past. I do believe James' scores will improve by the end of this program, but more importantly, he believes in himself, that he can learn more and has confidence when walking into the classroom.

The overarching goal of the WBF 2.0 Project is to place people in employment within middle-skills occupations. One of our success stories comes from a dislocated worker. Edwin, age 54, was employed for 30 years at a chemical plant, where he worked as a Chemical Operator. Edwin planned to retire from the same plant at which his father worked until his retirement. In December 2013, there was an explosion that caused the plant to shut down permanently. Eight months later, when Edwin contacted MVCC, he had no idea how much job searching had changed since he hadn't interviewed or completed an employment application in three decades. The WBF 2.0 Project provided Edwin with much-needed job-readiness training, which included resume review, mock interviews, and employment assistance. After several months of searching for work, Edwin was hired by Argonne National Laboratory, which is one of the U.S. Department of Energy's oldest and largest national laboratories for science and engineering research. Edwin is elated with his new job and thanks the WBF 2.0 Project staff. "The Walmart Brigher Futures staff went above and beyond to help me and I am happy at my new job. The help I received from the Walmart program was more than I expected." When asked to describe Argonne, Edwin said, "The people are friendly and Argonne has a great, no, excellent atmosphere."