

# National Career Readiness Certificate Attainment

**Narrative 2: National Career Readiness Certificate Attainment:** Present a plan to raise the National Career Readiness Certificate rate to 15 percent of working age (18-64) adults within three years. Plan should include **promotional strategies, training availability, and encouraging employer recognition of the certificate** (three pages maximum).

## Overview

A total of 1,476 National Career Readiness Certificates (NCRC) were awarded in Daviess County in 2010-11 according to the Kentucky Community and Technical College System. During that same time period, Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC) launched an NCRC pilot project funded through the Kentucky Breaking Through Initiative. This pilot project promoted ACT's WorkKeys® assessments and targeted instruction (Reading, Math and Locating Information) as an effective strategy to identify, remediate, and certify the foundational skill readiness of job seekers, as well as targeted career and technical program students. The NCRC pilot featured: on-site assessment and counseling; responsive scoring services; instructional support and WorkKeys® remediation for advanced technology center and high school students; and facilitated instruction at college learning sites.

The successful strategies of the NCRC pilot (accessible instructional and assessment support services) will provide the framework for our community as we work to raise the NCRC rate to 15 percent of working age (18-64) adults within three years. In addition, the promotional and training strategies highlighted below will strengthen our efforts to reach both employers and individuals.

## NCRC Promotional Strategies

Prior to the official launch of Kentucky's National Career Readiness Certificate in June 2011, our community had created the infrastructure to provide full-service delivery of assessment services, remediation/instructional support, and certificate attainment. According to a state level NCRC coordinator with the Office of Employment and Training, Daviess County provides four times the number of WorkKeys® assessments compared to all other Kentucky counties. The e3.ky.gov website shows that 5,004 NCRCs have been issued to Daviess County to date, which includes previous Kentucky Employability Certificate holders who received an NCRC. With Daviess County's success with WorkKeys® assessments, our primary focus now is outreach and engagement with employers to build the value of the NCRC as an economic and workforce development tool.

To articulate the vision of what the NCRC is and what it can do for both employers and career seekers, a three-minute video was produced in September 2011. This video features endorsements from Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear and Kentucky Chamber President David Adkisson. In addition, a thirty second public service announcement (PSA) was developed. The NCRC video and PSA will be distributed to local employers, management teams, and human resource staff members to provide a greater understanding of how the WorkKeys® system, paired with the NCRC, gives their organization a competitive workforce advantage. We will also market the

NCRC through One Stop partners, industry partner events, Career Centers and KYAE locations, public access channels, and web-based promotion such as web site hyperlinks, You Tube, etc. Daviess County provides a workforce tool called *Owensboro Works* that links job seekers and employers through an easy-to-use database system. *Owensboro Works* is free to participants and provides confirmation of demonstrated skills and training of job applicants. All job seekers are required to possess at least an Associate's Degree, professional certification or complete the WorkKeys® assessment in order to be approved in the database. Only job seekers who update their profiles or have current WorkKeys® scores (scores are good for five years) are kept in the database. *Owensboro Works* is a partnership of the City of Owensboro, Daviess County Fiscal Court, Owensboro Community and Technical College, and Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation who believe the future of our community depends on its well-prepared workforce.

Currently, there are 832 job applicants in the *Owensboro Works* database who live and/or work in Daviess County and who are eligible for a gold level NCRC. In addition, 2,098 job applicants in the *Owensboro Works* database, who live and/or work in Daviess County, are eligible for a silver level NCRC. These individuals will be targeted for an NCRC, as well as any new job applicants in the *Owensboro Works* database, as part of an ongoing promotional strategy.

### **Training Availability:**

SkillTrain, our community's adult education provider, offers services (at no charge) to help individuals prepare to take WorkKeys® assessments for the first time or to retake the assessments to improve their NCRC scores. Depending on the assessment outcome, individuals can enhance their skills through one-on-one and small group instruction options and/or self-study options through established programs such as KeyTrain™. Each targeted instruction option offers individuals the chance to review topics in the WorkKeys® skill areas and practice problems similar to those on an actual WorkKeys® assessment.

SkillTrain is located at Owensboro Community and Technical College within the college's Workforce Solutions division. OCTC has worked to counteract any negative perceptions or stigmas attached to entering an adult education program by branding it with a positive title designed to encourage participation and success and by providing both a professional and supportive atmosphere. So, those who are pursuing an NCRC can feel as if they are "in college" and not a remedial environment whenever they visit SkillTrain.

### **Employer Recognition:**

Local employer support of WorkKeys® is strong. For example, Owensboro Medical Health Systems (OMHS), our community's largest employer, launched an on-site WorkKeys® learning lab onsite in 2001. This assessment and educational training center served more than 1,000 OMHS employees. The initiative was highly successful in improving the essential skills and learning potential of their workforce. Housed at the worksite and operated by OCTC staff, program services were available to employees from all OMHS shifts through a twenty-four hour, open-access lab. In addition, small-group and individualized lab instruction sessions were also available to OMHS employees. In addition, OMHS paid a \$250 stipend to any employee who attained a Kentucky Employability Certificate based on their WorkKeys® scores. Twice recognized as a national ACT WorkKeys® "Best Practice" model, OMHS has been prominently featured at state and national conferences as an innovative "first step" to address critical shortages of skilled workers in the healthcare industry. As well, OMHS was profiled in the

Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy's (CAAL) 2005 report entitled *To Reach the First Rung and Higher: Building Healthcare Career Ladder Opportunities for Low-Skilled, Disadvantaged Adults* (Chisman and Spangenberg).

Prior to National Career Readiness Certificate, Daviess County was the site for the official kickoff of the Kentucky Employability Certificate (KEC). In May 2003, local leaders and representatives from the Kentucky Cabinet for Workforce Development, Kentucky Workforce Investment Board, and Kentucky Community and Technical College, hosted a press conference in Owensboro to launch the KEC. In October 2003, Owensboro Community and Technical College began a KEC community awareness pilot project that created WorkKeys® champions who inspired action and commitment to the KEC. Employer and job seeker testimonials were utilized in a KEC video and newspaper, radio, and television advertisements to demonstrate the return on investment for utilizing WorkKeys® and the KEC for developing the workforce.

Our plan, going forward, to encourage and secure employer recognition of the NCRC builds on the aforementioned activities and includes the following:

- The Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) will provide OCTC with an in-house certified WorkKeys® Profiler in 2012 who will work closely with local business and industry to promote assessment and certification opportunities, as well as NCRC attainment, to support workforce development efforts.
- We will seek endorsement from business and industry associations through presentations to association boards and/or committees, i.e. business associations, labor organizations, human resource manager groups, and industry associations.
- We will secure a definite commitment from employers that they will actively support the NCRC effort and promote this commitment.
- We will work with employer focus groups to identify core employability skills needs of business and industry and demonstrate how the NCRC will meet identified skills needs.
- We will hold public events, such as an informational breakfast, to provide an overview of the WorkKeys® system and the NCRC.