



***“A focus on college readiness alone does not equip young people with all of the skills and abilities they will need in the workplace, or to successfully complete the transition from adolescence to adulthood.”<sup>1</sup>***

ASPIRE, Inc., is a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization, based in Carbondale, Pennsylvania, is committed to making a difference in the lives of underserved and low income young adults and their families in Northeastern Pennsylvania. <http://www.goaspire.org>

ASPIRE is dedicated to inspiring and educating young adults so that they may create healthier lifestyles, practice integrity and self-respect, build valuable relationships, sustain stronger communities, and have fulfilling lives.

ASPIRE's programs, services and practices are designed to bring forth new possibilities, new openings for actions, and a brighter view of the future, for underserved individuals and families who are facing and are stopped by life challenges and obstacles in their path toward personal & professional growth, fulfillment and success.

ASPIRE'S team is a group of committed people who have dedicated their hearts and souls to make a difference for other courageous individuals. They know that life is full of challenges, and that we all make choices about how to deal with those challenges. ASPIRE's staff and board of directors believe in coaching, and have realized the benefits of having a coach and mentor who can work with people and have a positive impact in their lives.

ASPIRE'S programs are cutting-edge and innovative. They incorporate activities that challenge our clients to understand and get related to themselves, others and their productivity in a whole new way. These programs guide individuals to understand how their past decisions and experiences are molding their future productivity and effectiveness. They begin to see what is preventing them from having a joyful life, full of self expression, possibility and fun. They examine every area of their lives, looking for and realizing what has worked and what has not. After defining what areas are not working, our program leaders guide each individual to seek new possibilities. These possibilities are new ways of being and functioning that allow their lives to be lived with integrity, productivity, excellence, and awesome relationships. Each participant is trained, supported, and encouraged to create a life they love, and to fulfill the promise that is within them.

As an approved Educational Improvement Organization (EIO), ASPIRE will launch the ASPIRE TO BE initiative. ASPIRE TO BE will serve as the regional conduit for EITC resources, providing career related activities to school districts within the Intermediate Units 18 & 19 designation. As an organizing unit, ASPIRE TO BE will work with existing EIO's within the northeast region, providing a service of connectivity to existing

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<sup>1</sup> Pathways to Prosperity – Harvard Graduate School of Education, February 2011

quality programming. Through full collaboration with the approved EIO, Northeast Pennsylvania Junior Achievement, ASPIRE TO BE will focus efforts on the promotion and assistance of increasing participation in the following programs:

JA BIZTOWN: Junior Achievement's Elementary School Program uses a sequential approach that is designed to show students the relevance of education to the workplace, as well as to prepare them for secondary school and lifelong learning.

JA FINANCE PARK: By building a resume, identifying one's interests and balancing a budget, students learn lifelong skills. The Junior Achievement Middle Grade Programs stress the importance of education and staying in school, while introducing students to economic concepts and the world of work. The programs build on the elementary school message, helping students recognize education as the key to success.

Through gap analysis, ASPIRE TO BE will focus its efforts on implementing EITC approved career related activities within underserved school districts.

Under Chapter 4, Title 22 (Education) of the Pennsylvania School Code, Pennsylvania K-12 Career, Education, and Work (CEW) Standards are to be implemented in every school district in the Commonwealth. Despite this, many districts do not have a K-12 CEW plan or have addressed the standards in a random fashion. Through regional focus group sessions, Superintendents cite the increasing number of mandates, testing, and waning resources as primary reasons for this failure.

ASPIRE TO BE will focus on three major innovative educational program areas, inclusive within this application, that are critical to ensure baseline consistency with relation to career readiness programming within the region. As a community partner, ASPIRE TO BE will serve as a regional source for information and connectivity to other available programs and services, making certain EITC resources will be invested prudently and duplication will not occur. By identifying other applicable resources to leverage, school districts will have the ability to expand the impact of career readiness services.

ASPIRE TO BE will utilize its relationships with Local Workforce Investment Boards and Economic Development Organizations to enhance the collective spirit of commitment through regional business and industry support and the promotion of alignment with established workforce plans and economic development initiatives. It will utilize the products and services of the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis (Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry) to ensure directionality of high priority occupations and sector strategies are being appropriately conveyed within career readiness activities. By working in collective unity with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, ASPIRE TO BE prepares and empowers regional school districts to successfully and confidently implement career focused education and essential workplace skills that will ultimately have a regional economic impact by actively developing a prepared workforce for the future.

Innovative Educational Programs for EITC investment:

1. Career Coordinators in Regional High Schools

BASIC FUNCTION: The Career Coordinator, under the direction of a high school administrator, will organize, maintain and operate a high school Career Center and provide a wide variety of career information and materials; will communicate with students, faculty, parents and community representatives concerning career planning, including college entrance and postsecondary training.

**REPRESENTATIVE DUTIES:** Will provide career and college entrance information and assistance to students, teachers, parents and counselors; coordinate day-to-day operations and schedule activities, programs and speakers. Will prepare career education and instructional materials for use by teachers and students; assist students in locating and using college/career information as needed for research, assignments and post-high school planning. Will obtain, organize, file and display guidance materials; catalog and prepare for use by students; maintain displays and bulletin boards. Will plan, organize, develop and implement career events and publications; prepare letters, flyers, mailers and other materials to publicize Career Center services, resources and speaker programs. Will contact, schedule and arrange guest speakers from the local business community, colleges and military services to present information regarding specific occupations. Will schedule visitations by representatives from local colleges; organize, coordinate and publicize career-related events and other opportunities for students to learn about higher education and vocational training and preparation. Will develop and maintain a current and comprehensive occupational library including information on careers and career clusters, employment prospects and trends and employment requirements and opportunities; obtain and circulate current college catalogs. Will maintain current lists and bulletins concerning scholarships and other financial aids available; provide information concerning specialized scholarships and assistance in completing application forms. Will provide information concerning scholastic aptitude and achievement tests; assist students with applications and scheduling; distribute test results as appropriate. Will assist students with using Career Center materials and equipment. Will prepare and deliver informational presentation as requested; orient students to Career Center resources and services. Will maintain a current inventory of Career Center equipment and materials; assist in determining purchase priorities. Will plan and conduct Career Days, Career Month, Teen Job Fairs, or College Fairs. Will attend meetings, conferences and seminars regarding career trends, college entrance and financial aid. Will train and provide work direction to volunteers and student assistants.

**PROGRAM GOAL:** To provide a professionally trained workforce professional who is not a teacher or guidance counselor that has real time experience developing partnerships with external organizations to provide the most current information to students, faculty, and parents on career and training opportunities available locally, regionally, statewide, nationally and globally.

## 2. CareerLinking Academies

**BASIC FUNCTION:** The academies are designed to allow students to learn about careers in high-priority occupation areas while having fun! Students will become aware of many exciting opportunities that are in high demand occupations in our area, while practicing skills that they will keep with them forever. *CareerLinking Academy* is an innovative high school educational program centered on aligning education with workforce needs. The program promotes and encourages students to take an active leadership role in their future careers, whether it is attending a college or university, a technical or trade school or joining the workforce.

A *CareerLinking Academy* is aligned to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Academic Standards in Career Education and Work and adheres to federal, state, and local career education initiatives, such as Project 720, High Schools That Work and Career Pathways, and may be used as a class project or senior graduation project. A *CareerLinking Academy* is an initiative designed for high school students that provides students with the opportunity to participate in a structured program where they will explore career interests and become linked to the world of work and education.

The *CareerLinking Academy* curriculum includes, but is not limited to, career awareness activities, interest assessments, continuing education in the 21st century, leadership skills, job and labor market information, mock interviewing skills and resume preparation, cover letters, briefs, job applications, interviewing with human resource managers to discuss skills, interests, employer needs and expectations, job shadowing opportunities, college, university and career and technical school tours, resources connections, and much more. It includes workshops for parents on continuing education and financial aid. The *CareerLinking Academy* model and its components can be innovatively integrated into the school year curriculum or can be offered as a week-long continuous project.

This five-day intense program includes:

Career awareness and preparation centering on leadership training, training on careers for the 21st century including industry clusters, labor market exploration and growing industries and economic development in northeast Pennsylvania, work with human resource managers, one-on-one, to explore employment opportunities, educational goals and employment options, Career Cruising career interests, interactive web-based resources, real-life experiences, development of resume portfolios, work with workforce professionals to research and further explore employment opportunities, and discussions with industry leaders regarding career pathways and career ladders within organizations.

Career acquisition centering on portfolios, resume and transferable skills workshops, personalized development of resume and cover letters and learning how to complete employment applications on and off-line, learn about key words, participate in focus groups on workforce initiatives, critique new Career Gates e-media tools, and participation in role play of good/bad interviewing skit. Students also learn about the concept of a personal commercial.

Career acquisition and retention centering on interviewing skills and techniques on presenting themselves as the best candidate for the job, and interviewing questions asked when entering the workforce. Students also are required to perform a task of producing a 30-second personal commercial about themselves for use in interviewing, volunteering, internships or college interviewing. One-on-one employment interviews with human resource managers, detailing all aspects of employment including foundation skills, educational requirements, work descriptions, benefits and advancement, typical work day, job shadowing and internship opportunities.

Employer tours and job shadowing centers around individualized, personalized tours and job shadowing experiences with employers within targeted industry clusters, briefing on learning options and continuing education in the 21st century in preparation for scheduled career and technical school, community college and university tours, bus tours of industrial parks highlighting where employers are located, skills sets required, educational requirements for employment, and workplace readiness skills needed.

Career and Technical School, Community College and University tours center on visiting schools, local colleges and universities and getting the inside track on education opportunities and campus life, admissions requirements, programs of study, financial aid, and options beyond a high school education. This promotes and encourages students to take an active leadership role in their future careers, whether it is attending college or university, a technical or trade school or joining the workforce.

## PROGRAM GOAL:

To provide high school students with the opportunity to explore career interests, map career paths, and link to employment and education opportunities. Students will participate in work-based learning and career exploration experiences. All activities are aligned to the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Academic Standards for Career Education and Work.

### 3. Educator in the Workplace

**BASIC FUNCTION:** Local educators to spend a week of their summer working with local businesses/organizations related to their fields of instruction or responsibility. The program exposes educators to the academic and technical workplace competencies needed to succeed in the diverse industry and learns about the local career opportunities available to their students. Teachers use these experiences to create and deliver work-relevant learning activities in their classrooms. "Educator in the Workplace" gives teachers a chance to interact with business, industry and community partners. Educators are exposed to an influx of new ideas, management strategies and the requirements for success in those careers.

- Raise students' academic, technical, intellectual and personal skills by making learning experiences relevant to workplace needs.
- Inspire creation of lessons tied to the workplace issues and to enhance curriculum topics.
- Facilitate communications and connections between education and industry.
- Provide an answer to the student question, "Why do I have to learn this?"
- Gain first-hand perspective.

**PROGRAM GOAL:** The exchange between educators and business partners will help to make the classroom learning more relevant and at the same time prepare students for success in the world of work and the current skill demands. Businesses inform educators about new ideas and resources to bring to the classroom. Teachers develop lessons with real-world relevance. Educators and industry leaders build relationships and gain insight into each other's worlds. Educators connect with students in new and exciting ways Pathways for students from school to a highly qualified workforce are forged.

Overarching outcomes for the above projects are:

- Create a regional baseline of consistency for career development activities in all school districts within Intermediate Units 18 and 19
- Increased long term partnerships among higher education, business and industry, local leadership
- A model designed for replication in underserved schools
- Increased academic and skill achievement at secondary and postsecondary levels
- decreased need for remediation at the postsecondary level
- Increased enrollment and persistence in postsecondary education
- Increased attainment of post-secondary degrees, certificates, or other recognized credentials
- Increased rate of entry into employment or further education