



Wilkes Community College

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Breaking the Cycle of Illiteracy

Over 22% of adults in North Carolina experience reading and writing difficulties that seriously affect their daily lives, and another 25% may do well in everyday reading tasks but could benefit from reading and writing instruction¹. In addition, when compared to the national average, literacy levels are lower among adults in North Carolina.

This means that over one million North Carolina adults and their families suffer from the many disadvantages of low literacy levels, including unemployment/underemployment, poverty, and poor health. Also, children of high school dropouts are more likely to drop out of school themselves, continuing the cycle of poverty and illiteracy.

Helping to break this cycle is Wilkes Community College in northwest North Carolina, with campuses in Wilkes, Ashe and Alleghany counties. The college provides literacy, ABE, GED, ESL, and Adult High School programs to over 1,200 adults per year who need to improve their reading, writing, mathematics, and communication skills. Students in these programs range in age from 16 to 80, but they all have one thing in common: they want to better their lives.

Jason Pilkington, the Basic Skills coordinator for Wilkes Community College, wants to see all of the students achieve their goals. Always looking for a better way to help his students, Jason attended a student assessment workshop taught by Wonderlic's Bradley Olufs, where he discovered the Wonderlic General Assessment of Instructional Needs (GAIN)[®] basic skills test.

“I was blown away by the diagnostics report,” he says. “It’s so specific – we can focus the student on specific skills they need to reach the next level.”

1. Stephen Reder, et al. *Synthetic Estimates of Adult Literacy*. S.I.: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratories, Portland State University, 1997.

Jason shared his information with other staff members, and the decision was made to switch to GAIN for pre- and post-testing of students in the basic skills and GED programs. Students who had previously tested with a different assessment found GAIN to be less stressful due to the shorter testing time and incremental structure, and the graphical report keeps them motivated as they see the progress they make. The reports are also an indispensable tool for the teachers at Wilkes.

“We are able to provide more targeted instruction,” Jason explains. “Knowing exactly what types of questions the students miss gives us an advantage. We’re able to teach them exactly what they need and not waste time on areas they already know.”

Time savings has been the biggest benefit the college has seen from switching to GAIN.

“We are always seeking ways to be more efficient so that more of our time is spent actually helping students learn, rather than doing paperwork. With GAIN, teachers no longer need to grade the tests – we get results immediately – and tracking each student’s educational gains for NRS reporting has never been easier.”

Jason is hoping to see increased EFL gains over the program year due to their new ability to target instruction more directly to student needs.

“It’s about helping our students reach their goals, and now we can do that faster with GAIN.”

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