

# Needed: Workplace Supports for Young Adult Learners

by Maria M. Golightly

The Western Connecticut Regional Adult and Continuing Education program (WERACE) has record numbers of young adult learners that are in the 16-21 year age group. In order to broaden their learning opportunities, WERACE has started to plan field trips, and the response among the students has been tremendous. One trip to the Norwalk Maritime Center was a huge success. The bus was filled to capacity. One student told us that he had never experienced anything like it in his whole life and couldn't thank us enough for taking him.

On some occasions, however, students have difficulties getting time off from work to take advantage of these excursions. They not only miss the field trip, but they lose the shared experience with classmates as well as the extra credit toward their high school completion program. I often write notes to employers explaining the importance of students' presence on the field trip, but this strategy meets with mixed results.

It occurred to me that employers do not see adult education students in the same light as traditional high school or even college students. One

high school student that I tutored last year plays basketball and works at a grocery store part-time. During basketball season, his job is put on "hold" until the season is over. For some reason, our young people in adult education programs don't seem to receive that same recognition.

Unfortunately, the problem is not limited to extra-curricular activities. I have often had students leave in the middle of a class because they have to work. Can you imagine a traditional high school student being scheduled to work at 11:00 a.m. on a weekday? I ask students to tell their employers not to schedule work during class hours but their employers don't always listen. The student is caught in the middle as part-time jobs are so hard to obtain at this age. These students fear losing their jobs if they make too many demands.

As the number of young adult learners continues to increase, it is important that our students gain support from the entire community in their struggle to continue their education.

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*Maria Golightly teaches at WERACE.*

## For Discussion

**Young people** (ages 16-18 and still in school) have some legal protections. For example, they cannot be scheduled to work during school hours, and there are limits on how many hours per week they can work. If you are in this age range, but are in a GED program instead of high school, these protections do not apply. What do you think about that?

**Try this role-play:** A young adult who attends a GED program asks her boss for time off to go on a field trip. What happens? How does it feel to play the role of the student/worker? How does it feel to be the boss?

**Write a letter** to your boss asking to change your schedule so that it better accommodates your work hours. What sort of a case can you make that he or she should respond favorably to your request?