

# Sponsors use newspapers to win the literacy war in Massachusetts

**MORE THAN 750,000** Bay State adults don't have a high school diploma.

The Massachusetts Literacy Foundation (MLF) is teaming with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the American Council on Education (ACE) to change that. MLF is a program of Herald Media, Inc., parent of the *Boston Herald* and four other daily newspapers, 89 weeklies, 21 specialty publications, and many online materials.

Founded in 2002 and dedicated to the development of a fully literate population, MLF realized that it had a unique weapon: newspapers. Herald Media products link communities statewide and can provide both tangible resources and visibility for literacy programs, says MLF President Carol Anne Conroy.

MLF "could connect schools, families, and the workforce by using the newspaper as the common denominator," Conroy says. "Newspapers have a natural link to literacy. Some papers say they can't reach the 18-24-year-old market. This *is* that market."

In March 2004, MLF and its partners launched a 9-week GED Preparation Program (GEDPP) series in the *Herald*. Once a week, one page featured practice questions in math, language arts, science, writing, and social studies; study hints; and information on other resources, including the Massachusetts Department of Education Adult Literacy Hotline at 1.800.626.9433 and program times for *GED Connection*, telecast on the City of Boston's local access channel.

"With a GED certificate, adults are better prepared for employment opportunities and eligible for continuing education," says Conroy. "Yet, many who need the

certificate are embarrassed and hesitate to seek help. By providing free study material in the paper, we offer an anonymous and easily accessible way for readers to practice for a GED exam in the privacy of their own homes."

Readers who register by mail with the *Boston Herald* receive annotated answers to each week's questions. The answers are provided by the ACE. Additional GED resource information provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education are included with the answer sheet.

"It's important to remember that many adults dropped out of school for personal reasons, not because of poor grades," Conroy notes. "Many can take the GED exam after completing the practice tests."

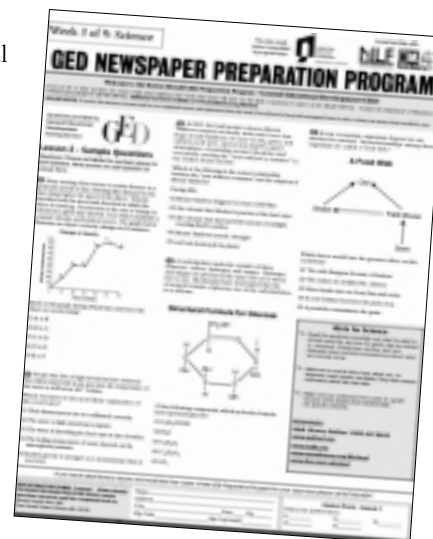
The *Herald* also supplied newspapers and supplemental study guides to 44 adult education programs, ESOL, and other community learning centers, and corrections facilities.

Initial results of the prison outreach are intriguing, Conroy says. "The motivation level is higher," she says. "Inmates enjoy reading the paper and feel that if it's in the paper, it must be important. Using the newspaper seems to render GED programs more relevant to the incarcerated students."

The program is "a natural," Conroy adds.

The state Department of Education offers assessment and referral, as well as centers providing classes and other services. ACE contributes the official practice questions, Nellie Mae provides funding, and the newspaper makes it all visible.

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— Carol Anne Conroy

who passes it is ready for the workforce," Conroy says. "It's fun to go to meetings, and other professionals will say, 'I tried to take the test and I couldn't answer some of the questions.' We say that."

In the first series, lessons 1 through 7 garnered an average of 100 responses each week. Surveys conducted after the first series led the *Herald* to move up the timetable for the second series, which started in February. The results were encouraging in other regards as well. Sixty percent of respondents finished

the entire series, 41.5 percent indicated they would be taking the GED exam in the next six months, and 60 percent said the series influenced their decision to do so.


Asked if they found

the program useful in prompting students to take the exam, 100 percent of instructors answered yes.

Conroy believes other cities could launch similar programs.

Implementation involves a partnership: a newspaper; an educational component, perhaps a community college, local school system, or area university; close collaboration with GED officials at the state level; and a funding source.

This program is "so visible" that local businesses might be interested in funding an outreach, Conroy theorizes. Partnerships among private businesses, civic organizations, educational institutions and not-for-profit groups are the key to generating community dialogue and helping to conquer literacy and education issues.

For more information, visit the Massachusetts Literacy Foundation website at [www.massliteracy.org](http://www.massliteracy.org). 

A GEDPP series package is available to other newspapers. For more information, contact Carol Anne Conroy at [cconroy@bostonherald.com](mailto:cconroy@bostonherald.com)



GED  
Connection

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Muy pronto en español