



New Jackson Area Career Center GED prep class giving people chance to finish high school

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SUMMIT TOWNSHIP, MI – Clarence Budd has a son in middle school who’s struggling a bit with his classes.



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Volunteer tutor Nancy Ward, left, helps Michael Walls Sr. with some language arts work on Monday morning. The Jackson County Intermediate School District is offering its first GED completion class this year.

He’d like to push him to work harder and hang with it, but there’s one thing holding him back. Budd, 53, is a high school dropout. “It’s hard to stay on him when I didn’t finish school,” said Budd, who lives in Cambridge Township. “I have to finish to set a good example for him and all my kids.” Budd is one of 16 students, who range in age from early 20s to mid-50s, enrolled in the first **General Educational Development – or GED – preparation program being offered by the Jackson Area Career Center’s Adult Career Education program.** “It’s a whole lot harder than I thought,” said Budd, who left school as a teenager to get a job to help support his family when his father became ill. “I always wanted to go back. I’ll be glad to get it done.”

Students must master five tests to get their GED. Since this program began in January, six students have taken at least one test and one has taken four, said Nancy Norris, of the Community Action Agency of Jackson, Hillsdale and Lenawee counties, who leads the class. “I just tell everyone to not give up on me, no matter how hard it is,” Norris said. “If they keep coming we’ll get them through this one bite at a time. We’ll walk them through every step.”

The Jackson County Intermediate School District decided to offer the program when it learned there were waiting lists for GED classes already being offered by Community Action Agency. "There was a real need," said Tommy Cameron, the ISD's alternative learning supervisor. "We think this is very much a part of K-12 education and we know more people getting their GED will lead to more people getting jobs and less people being on unemployment."

Classes meet from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Monday and Wednesday and 1 to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. A class from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Monday and Thursday is set to start April 9. Jackson County students pay a \$25 registration fee and \$5 weekly tuition. Those outside the county pay a \$50 registration fee and \$10 weekly tuition. People can register by calling 768-5100 or visiting the **ISD's website**. Students work at their own pace and receive help from Norris and volunteers who help them with course work and pre-tests that tell them if they're ready for the real tests, which are given at T.A. Wilson Academy.

"No one else offers anything like this," said Kim Conley, 41, of Jackson. "There is actually someone here to help you. You can't do this on your own." Conley rides to the class with her daughter, who's taking nursing classes across the street at Jackson Community College. She has dreams of someday joining her daughter at JCC. "This is the first step," Conley said. "I'll get my GED and get a part-time job and go to JCC and then hopefully get a better job. I'd like to be a nurse's aide."

The GED is the key, said Cameron, citing statistics that show a person will make about \$425,000 more in their lifetime than a person who has not completed high school. "This is not an easy program either," Cameron said. "Getting your GED is something people should be very proud of. It's a real accomplishment."

Jennifer Hammond, 31, of Jackson has tried unsuccessfully twice before to get her GED. She thinks this third time will be the charm. "I don't want to be labeled a high school dropout anymore," she said. "I want to set a good example for my kids, and I don't ever want them to drop out. You just can't get anywhere in life without your education."