Bloomington, Indiana – With reskilling and upskilling programs in place, adult education is an economic catalyst to help adults and their communities recover from the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adult education programs provide numerous options for participation, including working from home or receiving in-person instruction.

Monroe County Community Schools Adult Education joins more than 65,000 adult educators in “Moving Ahead with Adult Ed,” a new national campaign to enroll adult learners into programs that equip them with skills that lead to high school equivalency and jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. Millions of Americans are out of work or underemployed and need to reskill or upskill to re-enter the workforce or pursue their education. The pandemic has exacerbated the need for services.

MCCSC’s adult education program is currently providing instruction both in-person and online during morning, afternoon, and evening hours. CDC guidelines and sanitation protocols are in place for in-person instruction to ensure a safe learning environment.

An international study indicated approximately 43 million working-age Americans lack the skills needed for many of the nation’s fastest-growing and highest-paying jobs. According to the U.S. Census, there are over 22 million adults in the U.S. without a high school diploma.

“Adult education provides on-ramps to better jobs and postsecondary education and training,” said Robert Moore, MCCSC’s director of adult education. “With adult education, the infrastructure is in place to reskill and upskill Americans, and not only get them back into the workforce, but get them into better jobs than they had before the pandemic.”

“In Indiana, now is a particularly ideal time for Hoosiers to participate in their local adult education programs,” Moore added. “The high school equivalency test is free of charge until December 30, 2020, thanks to the decision of the Governor’s Workforce Cabinet to use some of Indiana’s CARES Act funding for that purpose. Also, we have a Workforce Ready Grant to provide free, short-term training in high-wage, in-demand
occupations. So far, we have had 49 adults in the training classes we’ve offered in our program since July 1 with that grant. Finally, an Employer Training Grant will pay for costs of training and upskilling new hires as well as current employees.” Employers and job seekers can apply for those grants at www.nextleveljobs.org.

Campaign partners Coalition on Adult Basic Education and the National Association of State Directors of Adult Education also estimate that for every dollar invested in adult education, a community receives $60 back in increased income, property taxes and savings on public assistance and legal-system expenses.

The #MovingAheadWithAdultEd campaign focuses on re-engaging the millions of Americans who need additional skills to compete in the workforce to recover financially from the pandemic. In addition to providing industry skills training, adult education programs like MCCSC’s teach literacy, numeracy and digital literacy, and offer high school equivalency, English language learning, and adult high school diploma classes.

In Monroe County, approximately 500 people are enrolled the school corporation’s adult education program each year. Among them currently is Lora Kemp. Although she has not contracted COVID-19, Lora was definitely impacted. She is a high-risk individual due to past medical issues and took a medical leave from her job to avoid exposure. When her return-to-work day of October 26 arrived, her doctor advised her to refrain from resuming her job, so her employer had to replace her. Lora and her husband have one daughter, a college sophomore. Her husband has a job, and together they have a farm, but they found it difficult to meet their expenses on one income. Lora’s husband heard about classes for adults looking for a career change through WorkOne. “I am not a computer person, but I decided the future jobs this career field offers may be the direction I need to go,” she said. Lora met with a career advisor at WorkOne and discerned that a career in information technology would provide opportunities for future employment. So, she signed up for a computer support specialist training class offered by MCCSC Adult Education free of charge to her through Indiana’s Work Ready Grant. Lora added, “I hope I am up to the challenge, and I hope it opens some doors that help me to get on the other side of this tragic health emergency.”

Another current student is Catalina Avila. Catalina is originally from Guatemala. She came to the United States and settled in Pennsylvania in November 2018, where she worked in a food preparation job for a year and 4 months. “I tried to take English classes when I lived there, but I couldn’t go to orientation because of work,” Catalina recalled. When she lost her job in the restaurant due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she moved to Bloomington to be close to family members. She contacted Tania Curruchiche, a teacher she knew in the MCCSC Adult Education program about taking English Language Learning classes. Tania encouraged her to register for classes and helped her apply for a job at Boston Scientific in Spencer. Through a workforce education partnership between Boston Scientific and MCCSC Adult Education, Catalina participates in two English Language Learning classes to improve her reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. But those aren’t the only new skills she has developed. Because of the distance between home and work, she received her first US driver’s license. She described a situation recently in which her English skills came in handy. “My car was overheating, and I needed help. So I waived someone over, and I told him—in English—what was happening. He helped me raise the hood and told me it was the water pump. I did it! I used the telephone and talked to the guy in English!” Another time, Catalina recounted, she had to call the Social Security office when she got her job at Boston Scientific. “I was able to talk to the man in English!” Catalina added, “My teacher is always telling us, ‘You can do it; you can do it.’” Catalina is now reunited with her family, has a job and the English skills not only to survive, but to thrive.