

# BUILDING INDIANA

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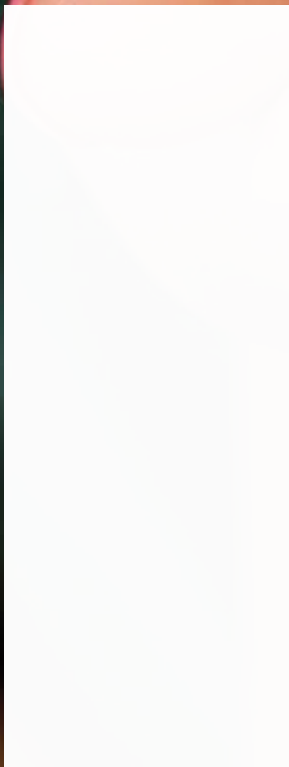
## *Sure* **BET**

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# Ready.. Set... EDUCATE

**W**orkplace literacy – a combination of the ability to read, write, perform math, think critically, and problem solve – is a leading problem for some Indiana employers. Between 960,000 and 1.2 million employed Hoosiers have literacy skills below the minimum standard for successful employment in a knowledge-based economy, according to the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. Research has shown that achieving a better trained and educated workforce can result in increased productivity, greater profitability, a better safety record, a decreased error rate, and a higher level of customer satisfaction. American businesses lose an estimated \$60 billion in productivity annually due to employees' lack of basic skills.

In 2005, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce commissioned a workforce skills study across the state. As a result of the study, the chamber created Ready Indiana, a state resource center in Indianapolis that offers

[www.buildingindiananews.com](http://www.buildingindiananews.com)

## Indirect Economic Benefits:

- Enhanced capacity to solve problems and cope with workplace change
- Better equipped to use new technology in the workplace
- Increased capacity to handle on-the-job training
- Improved results in job specific training
- Elevated employee morale/self-esteem
- More employees participate in job-specific training
- Better team performance
- Stronger labor-management relations
- Reduced absenteeism and increased employee retention
- Higher success rate in promoting and transferring employees within the organization

Source: Ready Indiana

employers access to resources needed to enhance the workplace literacy of their employees.

Ready Indiana focuses on increasing awareness of basic skills in the workplace including reading, writing, math, second language learning, team work, verbal and written communication, leadership skills, problem solving skills, and technical skills.

It's a free service to all Indiana employers that streamlines information, making it easier for employers to identify their workforce training needs, choose quality training providers, and investigate employer training grants to help cut their training costs. It contains the most comprehensive list of training providers across the state, including state agencies like Indiana Department of Workforce Development, Adult Education Works, Work One, Ivy Tech and private training consultants.

The resource center is a necessity, according to Ready Indiana's Kris Deckard.

One in three employed Hoosiers possess a skill level that's below what they need for their existing job or to transition to another job. If that ratio remains the same, or worse yet, rise, it will continue to restrict the earning power of individuals and put Indiana at a big disadvantage in business recruitment.

"Ready Indiana helps direct employers to services that best fit their needs," said Mark Lawrance, Senior Vice President of the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. "Improving the quality of the workforce is a top priority for the Indiana Chamber. Education is the key to getting people better jobs and what's key to a sustainable economic climate is an educated workforce."

There has never been a clearinghouse of workforce tools available before. Thanks to a three-year grant from the Lilly Endowment, Verizon Foundation, and Joyce Foundation, Ready Indiana began in 2007 and is helping businesses of all sizes.

"There are many companies that are proactive with training efforts, but there are some companies especially small employers, 50 or less, who don't have the personnel dedicated to train their employees," Deckard said.

One particular northern Indiana company has been investing in what it believes to be its most important resource, its workforce. And it's paying off with huge dividends.

More than a majority of the employees at the Hammond-based PacMoore are Hispanic, many of whom possess a varying understanding of English. It became readily apparent a few years ago for the food powder contract packaging and processing company that a better knowledge of English and subsequently enhanced com-



### Skill Gains for Employees:

- Improved skills required to understand, learn and apply information and analysis
- Stronger ability to read prose (e.g. reports, letters, computer, and equipment manuals)
- Enhanced ability to use documents (e.g. safety instructions, assembly directions, maps) and to use numbers by themselves or in charts and tables
- Better ability to communicate in English
- More positive attitude toward change
- Greater willingness and ability to learn for life
- Heightened understanding and willingness to work within the group's culture
- Better ability to build and work in teams

Source: Ready Indiana

munication was needed among Hispanic employees.

PacMoore management asked for assistance from the School City of Hammond Adult Education Department, a Ready Indiana provider, to develop a curriculum for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and a GED program for its Hispanic employees. ESL classes have been offered since 2006, consisting of a 16-week course held twice a year. Employees are paid while they attend the classes, gradually strengthening their ability to speak and understand

English. So far, 68 employees have attended the ESL classes, resulting in better communication between management and employees, General Manager Scott Reid said.

The ESL program is of little use unless employees are able to apply what they learn to the job. Employees must become certified in Standard Operating Procedures within one year, which requires passing a written test in English and performing the task.

A program that better hones employees' awareness and knowledge of important processes and tasks is called "Target Talks". The 15-minute talks, overseen by Performance Solutions, Inc., focus on a particular topic, such as personal safety and equipment safety. A poster board featuring pictures of the process and the repetitive use of plant vocabulary helps bolster a greater understanding of workplace components. What results is a safer and more productive workforce.

"It's been great. It's reduced vacancy and turnover. We have been able to build stronger teams who positively contribute to a safer work environment. We are operating at a much higher level," Reid said.

PacMoore contracted with Performance Solutions to oversee training and organizational development at the Hammond facility.

"We are building a culture where everyone is learning together. Target Talks take the classroom momentum from ESL and bridges it to the plant floor, and makes it real," said Ranya Verson, Founder and President of Performance Solutions.

Success at PacMoore's Hammond facility is based on good communication, something only achieved through education.

"You need everyone's collective intelligence and energy moving in the same direction. Communication is the tool. It empowers. It creates trust. It provides clarity," Verson said.

PacMoore's success can be replicated in other businesses that could benefit from programs that strengthen the workplace skills of their employees. For big and small businesses, resources exist statewide to make Indiana's workforce more educated and therefore more productive.

To learn more about Ready Indiana's resources, go to [www.buildingindiananews.com](http://www.buildingindiananews.com) ♦

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