

TPS partners with UT, community groups: Teamwork gets adults back to school

BY NOLAN ROSENKRANS
BLADE STAFF WRITER



Toledo Public Schools Superintendent Jerome Pecko, left, chats with Lonzo Shields, who has returned to college after 20 years, thanks to a TPS program. Behind them are, at left, Jeff Jones of the Greater Toledo Urban League and Lynne Hamer, associate professor of education at UT. *THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER* [Enlarge](#) | [Photo Reprints](#)

Collaborations among Toledo Public Schools and several area organizations will allow central Toledo adults to restart their educations and improve job prospects.

The University of Toledo is offering college courses at Samuel M. Jones at Gunckel Park Elementary. Free legal advice will be offered monthly. And financial education and GED courses are available.

The programs are part of an initiative to educate parents and neighbors of central-city schools not only to improve their job prospects but also to inspire children at those schools to value education. Children take classes just down the hall from their parents.

Precious Kimbrough has two children at Jones Elementary and is enrolled in the college program.

The initiative is “a great inspiration for my children and the children of Jones,” Ms. Kimbrough said.

Much of the initiative is funded through a grant by the Toledo Community Foundation.

Other programs, such as the legal aid, are volunteer-based and free. District officials said the efforts at Jones show the power of collaboration among the district, Toledo institutions, and community groups.

“This is how change happens in Toledo,” said the Rev. John Jones, president of the Greater Toledo Urban League.

Fifth Third Bank employees will provide financial education and lessons on personal finance.

Local lawyers will offer adults legal advice and will aid with expungements on minor offenses, which should help job applicants pass background checks.

The biggest component of the initiative is the adult education programs.

Students who did not graduate from high school can start with basic skills courses taught by instructors from the Penta Career Center, then move on to GED preparation courses.

Once they receive their GEDs, they can enroll in the UT programs.

Students at Jones can take two courses for two semesters. Federal Pell Grants cover those credit costs, so if students qualify for the grant, they can earn up to 12 credits with no debt. They later can make the transition to the university's main campus.

The district, Penta, and UT began the program last year at Pickett Academy. Maria Gonzalez started taking college classes last year at Pickett after her travel business slowed down and she had to find new employment.

She said the TPS-UT collaboration has helped her ease into college life and lessened the intimidation factor.

She is finishing her second semester at Jones and plans to take courses next year at the university's main campus.

"This program has taken the fear for me from going to college," Ms. Gonzalez said.

Contact Nolan Rosenkrans at: nrosenkrans@theblade.com or 419-724-6086.