

## Berkeley County Adult Learning Center celebrates opening of new location

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Superintendent Dr. Ryan Saxe speaks during the Berkeley County Adult Learning Center ribbon-cutting ceremony on Wednesday.  
Journal photo by Ainsley Hall

MARTINSBURG — Berkeley County Schools' Adult Education program recently moved to a new location at 261 Aikens Center, located on Edwin Miller Boulevard in Martinsburg.

This new space allows the Adult Education program to provide more services in one place. The new Berkeley County Adult Learning Center has space for students pursuing their GED and those in the English as a Second Language (ESL) or Strategic Planning in Occupational Knowledge for Employment and Success (SPOKES) programs.

This all started when Mendy Marshall, director of the Office of Technical and Adult Education in the West Virginia Department of Education, asked Berkeley County Schools Adult Education and CTE program Director Kenneth Pack and Eastern Panhandle Instructional Cooperative (EPIC) Adult Education Director John Holmes about combining these services to provide a centralized location for adult learning in Berkeley County.

Pack described it as a "one-stop shop" for those seeking to further their education.

"Not only does it offer these services in one place, but (it) creates opportunities for teachers to collaborate in order to meet the needs of the students," Pack said. "Some students might come in for the ESL portion but realize they can get their GED here, as well, and teachers can work together to help them achieve that goal."

Many teachers at the center are passionate about what they do, including Cathy Sickel. Sickel helps students get their high school equivalency. Every day, she works with around 10-20 individuals who are dedicated to learning.

"I love getting to help individuals who want to learn," Sickel said. "They are people who want to better themselves. It's really motivating for me as a teacher."

Through the new space, Sickel can provide group classes for even more students. Adult learners also have the opportunity to use the center's new computer lab to work in an environment without distractions. Teachers are available to help them if they have questions and need extra support.

Sambo Teng is another teacher who helps students earn their Microsoft certification, which they can add to their resumes. Teng shared that one way this new space helps him provide a better educational experience is by creating a more positive environment for everyone.

"It's really the atmosphere that this new office gives us," Teng said. "It's more uplifting, and we have a lot more room. You just feel happier when you walk into a place that is so much nicer than where we were before."

Since the beginning of its school year, the Adult Education program has served 50 GED students, 137 ESL students and 25 SPOKES students. One of those students, Paula Allen, is only one test away from reaching her goal. Allen wants to show her grandkids that education is important, and it doesn't matter what age they are.

The new center is special for students like Allen, because it gives them the chance to become a better version of themselves.

"It means a whole lot," Allen said. "I'm free to learn more and work hard in a better environment that fits my needs. I have good teachers that want to help me understand what I don't understand."

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