Minneapolis vocational academy sees significant growth in student enrollment

By Ibrahim Hirsi | 04/06/17

It doesn’t take long for Mikell Middleton to fix a running toilet.

Or wire light switches.
outside the family business. That’s because, for years, Middleton didn’t have a high school diploma.

But that changed when he learned about the newly formed 10-week GED program of the north Minneapolis-based vocational school Summit Academy, which provides career training and job placement programs to low-income adult residents in the Twin Cities metro area.

So in September, Middleton enrolled in the course, which is part of his plan to become an electrician. “I thought it’ll give me the motivation to get up and make sure I’m learning all the things I want to learn and gather more knowledge than I can attain on my own,” he said of the GED program. “They have a lot of resources here.”

Growing demand
Middleton is one of a growing number of students from the Twin Cities metro area in search of accelerated, in-demand vocational training for health care and construction jobs, a population that has ballooned Summit’s enrollment population in recent years.

In 2010, the school had 375 students enrolled in the programs, with 218 graduating and more than 100 students placed in jobs. Today, the school has 800 students, with a 56 percent graduation rate and 80 percent employment placement.

But many of those prospective students, like Middleton, do not have high school diplomas. Indeed, as Summit Academy President and CEO Louis King notes, 72,000 residents in Hennepin County don’t have a high school education, and more than a quarter of those people are African-Americans. “It’s a silent epidemic,” he said.

In response, the school created a GED program for people who are seeking to go on to complete vocational training. “The best social service program in the world is a job,” King said. “If they don’t have a high school diploma or a GED, what’s the chance of us really having an impact on their children when the children are caught up in the circle that their parents live in every day?”

Last summer, the school raised more than half a million dollars to fund its GED efforts. And in December, it announced it had received another $250,000 from US Bank to support the program, which seeks to graduate 1,000 GED students in the next five years.

One of those students is Jasmine Teague, a 25-year-old who worked as a bartender in Edina and came...
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After the GED program, Teague enrolled in Summit's medical administrative assistance program, a 20-week course that prepares students to work in clinics, hospitals, insurance companies and other health-related professions.

Teague is poised to graduate next week. Though she isn’t expecting Summit Academy to place her at a job, she said she’s confident that she’ll land employment when leaves the school.

Middleton will also soon be graduating from Summit. After completing his GED program, he enrolled in the school's 20-week electrician program, and is set to graduate in a couple of weeks.

The program provides training in electrical construction, blueprint reading and power tool operations, among other skills. When he’s done, Middleton plans to continue working at his mother’s property management business in order to complete a couple of projects. After that, he said, he plans to pursue other opportunities as a construction electrician.

“I want to put some career together so that when it’s time to take over the family business,” he continued, “I can have a good credit and work history to buy a mortgage for the building.”
At last some good news...
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A program like this is long overdue. It deserves replication.