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West Michigan leaders will invest in career readiness

Alliance will help workers develop skills, earn certificates

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West Michigan leaders will spend millions over the next nine years to help the area's labor pool understand and apply the modern skills employers need.

The West Michigan Strategic Alliance announced Wednesday it wants to keep increasing the number of people who have a National Career Readiness Certificate.

Developed by ACT Inc., the certificate is a nationwide workforce initiative that allows recipients to show their competence in skills necessary for almost any job.

The top three skills employers want from employees, measured by the certificate, include reading for information, locating information and applied mathematics, ACT officials said.

West Michigan is already

CERTIFICATES

Officials have issued 11,732 National Career Readiness Certificates in West Michigan in 2007 and in the first-quarter of 2008. They will use as much as \$60 million from different funding sources to reach special populations and work on literacy skills to ensure 100 percent of West Michigan residents have the opportunity to the earn the certificate.

among the leaders in issuing the certificates, said company Chief Executive Richard Ferguson.

"You guys get it," he said. "I wish I could say that about every part of the country."

Ferguson said the certificate resulted from individual companies struggling to express what they wanted from educators. They realized a national standard, much like the ACT's college entrance exam, was needed to fill vacated jobs.

"We absolutely must make the connection," Ferguson said. "These are skills that are

See **CERTIFICATES, A2**

Certificates

From **A1**

going to be present in any job we have or will have skills are the difference."

The foundational skills are now being conveyed to educators and trainers across the country, he said.

More than 203 Michigan employers are beginning to ask for the certificates for current employees and new hires, said Greg Northrup, president of the strategic alliance.

There are three different

categories of the certificate that show difference in skills needed in more than 14,000 jobs in the country.

Officials hope having more residents with the certificate will help attract more companies to West Michigan.

"This will benefit the many businesses and residents of the region alike," Northrup said in a statement.

Obtaining the certificate can be done through a variety of means — employers, schools and Michigan Works offices.

That way there should be no barriers for those who are interested, officials said.