

Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board



Report of the Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages Committee August, 2008



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Deval L. Patrick, Governor
Timothy P. Murray, Lt. Governor
Suzanne M. Bump, Secretary
Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development
Tamika N. Correia, Executive Director
Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board

A Message From Joseph Bevilacqua

On behalf of its 65 members, The Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board (MWIB) is pleased to issue the Report and Recommendations of the Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages MWIB Committee. The Report and Recommendations is intended to be used as a guide that will help low-literate and low-English proficient adults succeed in the Massachusetts Workforce Development System. The audience for the report includes Governor Deval Patrick; Secretary Suzanne M. Bump, Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development; Secretary Paul Reville, Executive Office of Education; Legislative leaders; Board of Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Board of Higher Education; Commonwealth Corporation; Workforce Training Fund Advisory Council; and other parties interested in meaningful solutions to the challenges of access to basic skill development for individuals with limited English proficiency and low basic education skills.

This report was formulated through the research of the Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages Committee of the MWIB, led by Jerome Rubin, President/CEO of Jewish Vocational Services.

It is my sincere hope that this document will be used to provide the Commonwealth with solutions to support the alignment and resources needed for Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages programs.

An electronic copy of this document can be found at www.mass.gov/mwib.

Sincerely,



Joseph Bevilacqua
Chair – Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board
President – Merrimack Valley Chamber of Commerce

A Message From Jerome Rubin

Over the past year and a half, the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board – Adult Basic Education /English for Speakers of Other Languages Committee has worked on two major priorities of Governor Deval L. Patrick and Secretary Suzanne M. Bump; raise the overall capacity of the Massachusetts workforce system to respond to the labor market needs of our economy and close the skills gap that exists between available workers and employers through a strategic use of resources and full engagement of the business sector. The Committee then set a goal to explore how the Commonwealth could more effectively use its resources to provide services to help low-literate and low-English proficient adults achieve greater labor market and economic success.

The Report and Recommendations developed by the Committee will provide insight into how the Commonwealth can strengthen and align its resources to further the opportunity for economic success for Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages students.

I sincerely appreciate all the efforts of Committee members who took part in creating this outstanding document. I look forward to your comments as we put this document into practice.

Sincerely,



Jerome Rubin
Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board
Chair – Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers
of Other Languages Committee
President/CEO Jewish Vocational Services

I. Executive Summary



The MWIB ABE/ESOL Committee was created to determine and recommend how the Commonwealth could more effectively use its resources and provide services to help low-literate and low-English proficiency adults achieve greater labor market and economic success. A critically important part of this work is developing an effective pipeline of education and skills development from K-12 to jobs skills development, post-secondary education, and beyond. Included in this pipeline is an effective delivery of ABE/ESOL services to tens of thousands of Massachusetts adults who simply cannot move up in this pipeline or participate in advanced job skill development or higher education without adequate basic skills. The Commonwealth's quality of workforce and economic future depend on addressing this challenge.

For adult workers, accessing and utilizing existing workplace education resources can be very challenging. Less than 5% of the Commonwealth's ABE/ESOL resources is available for workplace education. In addition, the limited workplace education resources that are available, are spread out among several distinct programs with different emphases, administrative requirements, and schedules. Much of the available workplace education resources require service delivery that is more appropriate to community education models and doesn't adequately reflect the realities of business environments. And, too few community-based ABE/ESOL programs are integrated with occupational skills or have clearly articulated connections to occupational and/or post-secondary opportunities tied to career paths.

After in-depth analysis and review of the current workplace education programs and resources, the MWIB ABE/ESOL Committee makes the following recommendations to the full MWIB:

- 1. Create a coordinating body with state-level policy-making authority to undertake the tasks recommended herein**
- 2. Create a dedicated fund for workplace education**
- 3. Increase capacity development for the field**
- 4. Improve linkages to post-secondary education, training, and employment**
- 5. Support educational counseling, job coaching and transition counseling**
- 6. Increase employer participation for investment in adult basic education**

The MWIB ABE/ESOL Committee welcomes feedback and comments on the report and recommendations. In developing these recommendations, the Committee has given much consideration to the limited resources in the Commonwealth and the challenges associated with re-engineering adult education. It is the intent of the MWIB ABE/ESOL Committee that this report not only generate serious discussions concerning the future of ABE/ESOL programs and resources, but propel a strong coalition of actions for improvements in Adult Basic Education/English for Speakers of Other Languages under the Patrick Administration.

Student Quotes



"This opportunity is my first step in continuing my education. It has given me the desire to not want to stop learning."

"I really appreciated this program because I learned a lot for my life and I will certainly use all I have learned in the future. In addition, my English has been improved and thus I am confident to continue my studies and look for a better job."

"I learned a lot, such as new vocabulary, grammar, how to do a resume and much more. I am so happy and proud that I took this class."

"I appreciate the performance of our instructor with the classmates and the way she encouraged us to never give up our dreams and make us feel confident and strong to go forward."

II. Introduction



In 2007, the Patrick Administration set forward three major workforce priorities for the Massachusetts' public workforce development system and its Workforce Investment Board. The first priority was to raise the overall capacity of the workforce system to respond to the labor market needs of our economy. The second was to close the skills gap that exists between available workers and employers through a strategic use of resources and full engagement of the business sector. And, the third was to enhance the youth pipeline by increasing and aligning youth education, training and employment programs in order to tap this critical source of workers.

The MWIB ABE/ESOL Committee was created to address the first two priorities. The Committee set out to explore how the Commonwealth could more effectively use its resources and provide services to help low-literate and low-English proficiency adults achieve greater labor market and economic success. The ABE/ESOL Committee considers the findings and recommendations in this report to be an important complement to the report of the Readiness Task Force.

The Committee set out to research and analyze the following areas:

1. how to more effectively deliver ABE/ESOL for workers at the workplace
2. how to make other ABE/ESOL delivery more accessible for working adults
3. how to better provide students with the skills they need to succeed in the labor market and post-secondary education

Following that, the Committee investigated a broadly defined ABE/ESOL "system," including public, private, and non-profit resources and service delivery. The Committee did not explore all aspects of the Commonwealth's adult basic education system; however, the group focused on labor market and economic success issues. The Committee recognized that the broader system provides an important set of adult literacy services to thousands of individuals with a wide range of interests and needs.

Student Quotes



“The JVS English class was refreshing. It helped me become better at emailing and communicating with my coworkers and boss. I am now able to provide better services to others...I feel more confident.”

- Padam, a Nepalese immigrant who attends JVS English classes at his work place, Children’s Hospital.

“The Communications with Computers class has helped me transition in to taking college level classes. The teachers used a variety of different tools to help with the basic skills to further your thinking process. From reading the Newspaper online to reading short stories aloud. We had written our thoughts on different topics using a word processor. It is like riding a bike you never forget how, its just a little rusty from the years of not using it.

The combination of both reading and writing gave me the confidence to dig deeper and come up with a plan for my future. In January I registered to take my first online class for college credit”.

- Sherry Brown, Medical Records Analyst at Falmouth Hospital; enrolled in on-site basic skills classes sponsored by 1199SEIU Training & Upgrading Fund/Cape Cod Healthcare and 1199SEIU

III. Background



Effective Service Delivery

Effective delivery of ABE/ESOL services is critically important part to the overall work of the MWIB in order to develop an effective pipeline of education and skills development from K-12 to jobs skills development, post-secondary education, and beyond. Tens of thousands of Massachusetts adults simply cannot move up in this pipeline or participate in advanced job skill development or higher education without adequate basic skills. The Commonwealth's economic future and quality of life depend on addressing this challenge.

Several facts provide important background for our focus on labor market and economic success in adult basic education:

- One third of Massachusetts' 3.2 million workers lack adequate literacy skills for workplace success (MassINC, "New Skills for a New Economy," 2001).
- If it were not for immigration, the Massachusetts labor force would have shrunk in recent years (Northeastern University Center for Labor Market Studies, "The Changing Face of Massachusetts," 2005).
- 70% of immigrants lack the literacy skills necessary to fully participate in their workplaces (MassINC, "The State of the American Dream in Massachusetts," 2006).
- Two in five employers say that there are too few qualified workers to fill job openings and that training resources are insufficient to prepare workers to meet their needs (Workforce Solutions Group, 2006).
- Nearly 70% of Department of Elementary of Secondary Education (formerly the Department of Education) adult education program participants surveyed by the DOE stated that getting a new or better job is of primary importance to them (Mass DOE Student and Staff Satisfaction Survey, 2005).
- The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy found that there is a direct correlation between literacy, employment status, and incomes.
- The waiting list for ABE/ESOL services exceeds 24,000. 38% of those on a wait list are males and 62% are females (Department of Elementary of Secondary Education (formerly the Department of Education), Background Fact Sheet Prepared for MWIB, May 22, 2007).

A substantial percentage of entry-level workers lacks the literacy and/or language skills they need to perform their jobs well or to move up to better jobs. Coupled with that, a considerable number of residents of the Commonwealth who lack adequate literacy skills work at least full-time in addition to raising families. For these reasons, delivering adult education and ESOL at the workplace is an effective way to provide educational and skill development opportunities for working adults. Additionally, workplace-based adult education and ESOL leverage substantial employer investment, thus supplementing otherwise limited public funding and expanding potential services.

Lack of funding presents a big challenge for adult workers trying to access and utilize existing workplace education resources. Currently, less than 5% of the Commonwealth's ABE/ESOL resources is available for workplace education. (Report of the Massachusetts Department of Education Adult and Community Learning Services to the ABE/ESOL Committee of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, July 16, 2007). While it's recognized that resources are limited for ABE/ESOL services overall and waiting lists for community-based programs are long, the demand and need for workplace education far exceeds the available resources. Of the \$154 million invested in Workforce Training Fund Grants (WTF) to date, approximately \$12 million has supported basic skills training (Report of the WTF staff to the ABE/ESOL Committee).

Not only that, the limited workplace education resources that are available are spread out among several distinct programs with different emphases, administrative requirements, and schedules. Much of the available workplace education resources requires service delivery that is more appropriate to community education models, and fails to adequately reflect the realities of business environments.

Current funding for adult workplace education is limited. The primary funding source dedicated to workplace education, DESE's workplace education program, is very small, is available on a very limited basis (often less than once a year), and has many stringent program requirements which make it very challenging for employers to use more widely. (DESE is currently examining these requirements and considering making significant program design changes). The single largest source of potential funding for workplace education, the Workforce Training Fund, has a much broader incumbent worker training focus than ABE and ESOL and also has several program requirements that make it difficult to use for ABE and ESOL. Non-profit employers, particularly in health care, education, and human services, have a large concentration of low-literate and low-English proficient entry-level employees, but are typically not eligible to take advantage of important ABE/ESOL resources through the Workforce Training Fund. In addition, two other programs, the Workforce Competitive Trust Fund and the Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative, also allow for and do include workplace ABE and ESOL in their funded projects, but they are typically a small part of much larger employment and training initiatives.

Limited workplace education is only one factor limiting labor market success for low-literate and low-English proficient adults. For example, there is limited availability of evening, weekend or summertime ABE/ESOL classes, particularly in the Boston area, to fit the schedules of working adults for whom workplace education is not practical. Other factors can include lack of time, transportation, self-confidence, or advancement opportunities within some employers and sectors, health, family responsibilities, long wait lists for community-based ESOL, and many others. With innovative changes and resources, community-based ABE/ESOL programs can also provide more significant labor-market outcomes for low-literate adults.

Too few community-based ABE/ESOL programs are integrated with occupational skills and have clearly articulated connections to occupational and/or post-secondary opportunities tied to career paths. There are few ABE and ESOL programs for laid-off workers or job seekers that offer enough learning hours per week and have enough industry-specific content to enable students to obtain a GED, obtain good jobs or enter more advanced training programs.

The Committee undertook extensive research on linkages to post-secondary education, training, and employment, including both a literature review and direct survey research. The literature review identified the report, *Policies to Promote Adult Education and Post-secondary Alignment*, presented by Julie Strawn, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy to the National Commission on Adult Literacy in September 2007. This report highlighted the necessity for aligning ABE systems with that of workforce development to create more seamless pathways for ABE/ESOL students to gain the skills needed for entry into employment sectors and post-secondary education with clear career and educational paths. Strawn's research notes that if state agencies work to craft policies that are aligned, more students at all levels of the education pipeline will be served effectively with paths to academic and occupational skill attainment that include career guidance and other support services. The report addresses three areas around which many of our recommendations are based:

- *Increase state capacity to track individual outcomes across adult and post-secondary education and training services, over time and into the labor market; and use this data to set goals for system improvement;*
- *Integrate adult basic education and English language services with post-secondary education and training to increase attainment of credentials leading to family-supporting jobs;*
- *Adapt financial aid policies to the needs of lower-skilled adults, and support their success in adult and post-secondary education and training.*

Recent studies by MassINC ("The Changing Face of Massachusetts" and "The State of the American Dream"), Northeastern University's Center for Labor Market Studies ("America's Perfect Storm"), and other research organizations clearly point to post-secondary education and training as a requirement to build career paths toward employment with family-sustaining wages.

Emerging Trends in Occupational-Related ESOL and ABE

The Committee surveyed 180 existing Massachusetts ABE/ESOL service providers to identify emerging trends in workplace education. Overall the respondents provided insight into the extent to which integrated and contextualized strategies were being utilized currently or had been used in the recent past. The survey generated a 38% response rate. Responses given include:

- 51% of respondents offer ABE or ESOL integrated with occupational skills or employability skill development
- 69% of respondents include general employability skill development in program designs
- Respondents who include specific industry sector strategies:
 - Certified Nursing Assistant - 33%
 - Food service/hospitality – 26%
 - Office skills – 26%
 - Technology – 24%
 - Education/child care – 22%

Clearly, new directions are emerging among ABE/ESOL service providers that are consistent with the ABE/ESOL Committee priorities. Responses to the survey support the assumption that increasing state investment in workplace ABE/ESOL models will more effectively meet the needs of both students and businesses.

Funding from WIA Title II (ACLS) was identified by 57% of respondents, and workforce system funding was identified by 30% of respondents. 95% of respondents identified that career guidance and connections to further education and training are provided. 60% of respondents identified those students in industry-sector initiatives were placed in jobs or further education.

Supports Needed to Ensure ESOL Students Success

There are very limited resources to support case management or career and academic coaching that can help ABE/ESOL students successfully navigate from one educational, training, or career development opportunity to the next. While some participants in ABE/ESOL programs will succeed without significant resources for support and guidance, others will require greater individualized assistance. Since the goal of the workforce development system is to serve not only those individuals who are most prepared to succeed, but also those who face significant barriers and challenges, supports such as job coaching, transition support and/or educational counseling are crucial.

Through consistent education, career and job coaching, ABE/ESOL learners can better understand the particular needs, expectations and requirements of a given workplace, and better adapt to the workplace culture. They can receive critical feedback and direction, and better recognize their own areas of strength and areas where further skill development is needed.

To help participants advance educationally and professionally, programs should offer support to facilitate effective transitions. This may include participants' transitions from ABE/ESOL programs to higher education or advanced skill training; from ABE/ESOL programs to work; or from entry-level employment positions to those requiring greater skills in mathematics, reading/writing, communication or supervision.

Participants may also require support and direction in developing strategies to overcome barriers related to health, mental health, transportation, stable housing or child care that would limit their ability to remain employed or enrolled in post-secondary education or skill training. Others may need assistance setting educational or employment goals that are appropriate and realistic.

Other Needs

To be effective, ABE/ESOL program staff fulfilling these functions, whether they are educational counselors, job coaches or transition counselors, must have knowledge across various areas of education and workforce development. By doing so, they will be able to provide informed counseling and be better positioned to work with counterparts across various areas of the workforce development system.

ABE/ESOL programs also need assistance in expanding their capacity to work with employers and to provide workplace education. In addition, workplace education instructors need ongoing professional development, orientation, and ongoing support as the requirements of their jobs both in the classroom and in relationship with employers demand specific skills, resources, ongoing support and opportunities for professional development.

Too few employers are involved in workplace education. Too few employers are aware of workplace education resources and there appear to be lower than average levels of awareness in some regions and industries. Additionally, it is very challenging to deliver workplace education for smaller employers who may lack the necessary internal resources and a critical mass of students/employees. There is some evidence to suggest that more employers will participate in workplace education efforts if they are more aware of available resources and successful models, and have the proper incentives to participate.

IV Recommendations



1. Create a coordinating body with state-level policy-making authority to undertake the tasks recommended herein

The ABE/ESOL Committee recommends that the coordinating body be a Committee of the MWIB, and that it be co-chaired by the Secretary of Education and the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, with required participation from Executive Office of Education, DESE/ACLS, Commonwealth Corporation, BHE, and DTA. In addition, the coordinating body should also interface or share membership with other relevant policy groups that are addressing this issue, such as the Governor's Readiness Council and the 21st Century Skills Task Force. The coordinating body should report back to the MWIB on its progress no later than six months following the MWIB's approval of this report and no less than twice each year until implementation work is completed.

This coordinating body should be charged with developing policies and recommending operational procedures that achieve the following:

- Build collaborative statewide linkages among adult basic education, post-secondary education and training (including vocational technical post-secondary programs), and workforce development (local workforce boards, One-Stop Career Centers, and job training CBO's).
- Establish formal inter-agency and intra-agency agreements and processes to create seamless pathways through adult basic education and post-secondary education, and training toward gainful employment. Examples include:
 - DESE and BHE will collaborate to ensure that all Adult Secondary Education students can take the ACCUPLACER (without penalty) at least 6 to 12 months before they are eligible to enroll in college;
 - DESE/ACLS, BHE, EOLWD will agree on adult basic skill assessment tools and strategies, referral criteria, policies on dual enrollment and dual credit;
 - DTA will develop policies on allowable [increased] education and training that fulfill work requirements;
 - ABE/ESOL and Voc-Tech will share career planning tools;
 - Local workforce boards/career centers should share information on key industry sectors with growth potential with all local ABE/ESOL programs;
 - All ABE/ESOL students will learn about and tour the local One-Stop Career Center.
- Set cross-agency goals with the ultimate outcome that lower-skilled adults can earn credentials that lead to employment opportunities with family-supporting wages.
- Establish data-sharing agreements between relevant adult education, training, and post-secondary institutions to allow tracking of individual outcomes for lower-skilled adults across programs and services and into the labor market.
- Ensure that performance accountability systems for post-secondary education and training accommodate the demonstrated needs of students with significant barriers to success (such as allowing a long enough time to attain a degree, providing mentoring and/or career counseling, etc.).

2. Create a Dedicated Fund for Workplace Education

The ABE/ESOL Committee recommends that a dedicated workplace education fund should be built from current funding sources, but be structured so that it could accept new funding sources, should they be available in the future.

A dedicated workplace education fund would best be created through a “blended” or coordinated funding arrangement, similar to the arrangement done under the BEST (Building Essential Skills through Training) initiative, in which several sources of current funding could be linked, be specifically targeted for workplace education, have a single application and a single set of administrative requirements, and be managed by one office or department, with staff provided from participating agencies/departments. Under the model utilized by the BEST initiative, funding would not be literally blended, but be coordinated internally by an administrative entity and be made available to applicants through one application with a single set of guidelines, policies and procedures.

Current funding that should be considered for such a “blended” or coordinated approach including DESE workplace education funding, funding from the Workforce Training Fund, and federal WIA 15% “Governor’s Discretionary Funds.” Additionally, legislative appropriations to the fund could be considered, should they be feasible in the future.

Possible options for locating the management of the dedicated fund include:

- The Commonwealth Corporation, which currently manages the Workforce Competitive Trust Fund (WCTF) and the Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative (ECCLI), and provides technical assistance for the WTF. Such a management arrangement should also include staff participation from DESE and WTF to take advantage of the workplace education knowledge and expertise in those program areas.
- The DESE, using the current staff expertise in the workplace education program. Such a management arrangement should also include staff participation from Commonwealth Corporation and WTF to take advantage of the workplace education knowledge and expertise in those program areas.

The dedicated fund should be operated with administrative guidelines that set a clear policy direction but maximize flexibility for users of the fund. These guidelines should reflect the following principles:

- **Eligibility:** Similar to the eligibility requirements of the WCTF, all types of employers, multiple-employer consortia, labor-management partnerships, community-based organizations and workforce intermediaries should be eligible. Additionally, there should be maximum flexibility around eligible models. Partnerships should include employers and other partners that are critical to project success. Bridge programs to post-secondary education should be allowed and encouraged whenever appropriate.
- **Match requirements:** Private investment matching should be required but should be flexible, depending upon the types of participating applicants.
- **Use of Funds:** Funds should be available both for program operation as well as direct services. Grant dollars should be available for use in managing partnerships.
- **Grant Availability/Size/Duration:** The size of allowable grants should be tied to the goals/needs of the project and the demonstrated ability of the project partners to utilize the dollars. Grants should be regularly available to reflect the rapidly changing circumstances of businesses. Requests for Proposals should be issued and grants made available on a rolling or quarterly basis, with a duration of 3-5 years, and with the ability for renew based on demonstrated results.
- **Planning Phase:** Workplace education programs should begin with a planning phase, during which, the partners will conduct a thorough basic skills needs assessment. The planning phase serves as the foundation for the successful implementation of the program, and may be completed prior to the submission of a grant application or as part of the grant project. Outcomes should be tied to needs and goals of the project, established through the needs assessment and adjusted over time as the project matures and changes.

- **Project Management:** Workplace Education programs benefit from a project management team that helps to develop, implement and evaluate the project. It is important however to consider the size of the project. Expectations should be adjusted with the size of the project.
- **Coordination:** Workplace Education programs should have on-site coordinators providing ongoing intake, recruitment, assessment, staff development, staff evaluations, and communication with managers and supervisors.
- **Intensity:** Workplace education programs should be based on the principles of adult learning and second language acquisition and should be of sufficient intensity and duration to support the achievement of measurable learning gains and other benchmarks such as competencies that allow the worker to be more successful on the job, including the ability to read technical documents, do math relating to business, passing credentialing tests, etc.
- **Performance outcomes:** Research data on results tied to intensity should be used as a benchmark, but not rigidly imposed, so that there is flexibility to reflect realities at the workplace.
- **Contextualized Curriculum:** Workplace education programs should develop contextualized curriculum that is customized for the workplace. By contextualizing curriculum, workplace education programs can address the educational needs of the students and the content needs of the employers.
- **Evaluation:** The funding source together with the workplace should be responsible for developing and implementing an evaluation process that measures the achievement of agreed-upon program goals.
- **Release time/Matching Funds:** Company support can be shown in ways other than paid release time for employees. Private investment matching should be required but should be flexible depending upon the types of participating applicants. For example, the company can support the program by providing space, employee incentives and/or access to on-site computer labs. However the support is provided, it should be significant.
- **Promote workplace education through marketing:** Businesses engaged in workplace education offer a great deal of anecdotal evidence that on-site basic education services benefit both the employer and the employee. Documenting the return on investment and promoting the multiple benefits of offering basic education services could help to create more interest among businesses to target training for workers in need of basic skills.
- **Explore funding distance learning in workplace education:** Investigate the current status nationally of distance learning/workplace education. Provide pilot funding to explore the effectiveness of distance learning as an option for delivering workplace education. Pilot funding should be provided for hybrid distance learning/workplace programs, so that a 2-4 hour per week workplace program can be augmented by a distance learning component. The goal would be to increase intensity, which should lead to faster/greater progress.
- **Support pilot projects to accommodate smaller employers:** Fund pilot projects to explore a range of models through which smaller employers and their employees can share ABE/ESOL services. For example, smaller employers could be organized by geographic proximity or by business type.

Interim Steps to a Dedicated Fund

Creating a dedicated fund is the clear preference of the Committee. However, given that there may be several challenges to the blended approach that could take some time to resolve, we also propose some interim steps that could significantly strengthen workplace basic skills education. Challenges to a blended approach include possible resistance by contributing departments; an existing policy board or staff of each funding source; restrictions for each funding source that could limit flexibility; and lack of consensus on which agency is best positioned to administer workplace education programs. Interim steps would involve making improvements to the two primary current sources of funding for workplace education so that these funds are easier for employers and other potential applicants to use.

The DESE currently operates a workplace education program supporting many important and effective workplace education initiatives, though the funding for these efforts is very limited. DESE has substantial workplace education experience and expertise, but ACLS programs as a whole are more oriented to traditional community-based adult education, and the workplace education funding has several administrative requirements which make it challenging to use. However, current efforts to streamline DESE's workplace education program are very encouraging. Areas that should be considered for re-design include:

- Regular availability of funding, perhaps on a rolling or quarterly basis.
- Flexibility around intensity and sequencing of education courses.
- Flexibility around partner participation in planning, training, review and other administrative activities, to reflect the different sizes of projects and the high cost to businesses.
- An increased focus on outcomes and less strict up-front requirements on specific required program design elements.
- Changes to budgeting to provide vendors more flexibility to build in required work-place education planning and preparation activities, and allow them to cover their actual costs.

The Workforce Training Fund, while perhaps the largest potential source of funding for workplace education, also has several challenges that would need to be addressed for the WTF to be more easily used for workplace education. Areas that should be considered for re-design or policy changes include:

- Flexibility around the length of a project. Currently, funding for projects under the WTF is limited by statute to two years, and WTF policy limits repeat funding to new services or new employees. This discourages longer-term investments, often required for real progress in workplace education projects.
- The WTF currently excludes administrative costs by policy. This should be relaxed so that projects can be effectively managed, particularly if there are multiple partners involved.
- The primary allowable applicants to the WTF are employers, which is appropriate. However, WTF policy excludes providers as allowable applicants, which limits involvement by workforce intermediaries, CBO's and workplace education vendors. This restriction should be relaxed, while continuing to require employers as partners.
- The WTF does not allow employers who do not pay into the UI fund to receive funding from the WTF, which excludes many non-profit institutions. This is a particular problem in health care, since many long-term and acute care institutions are non-profits and do not pay into the UI fund but are self-insured.
- Current discussions by the WTF around return-on-investment measures may have a limiting effect on the use of the fund for workplace education. To the extent that the ROI measures reflect short-term financial returns, rather than long-term returns that result over time from specific and measurable ABE/ESOL learning gains, proposals for workplace education may be handicapped. The WTF staff should consider further consultation with workplace education professionals on how to effectively measure workplace education outcomes and their effect on other workplace outcomes.
- The WTF and its staff have limited expertise in workplace ABE/ESOL. If the WTF is tapped more significantly for workplace ABE/ESOL, the staff resources of the DESE should be further utilized.

3. Increase Capacity Development for the Field

If increased resources for work-place education were made available, the provider community has some significant capacity limitations that could limit the effective utilization of these funds. Capacity development for the field is critically important and should be supported by a dedicated workplace education fund. Several principles should be applied when capacity development resources are made available:

- Capacity development should be flexible and sized appropriately for the size of the project. Capacity development resources for both vendors and employers and employees should be of the highest quality, should be made available so that it is not a burden on employers, employees or providers, and should be flexibly delivered.

- Capacity development to “ready the field” to utilize dedicated workplace education funds should be made available through training academies and other formats.
- Ongoing technical assistance to help with planning, proposal development, and project implementation should be available.
- Professional development and training for workplace teachers should be supported.
- State resources for workplace education should include a budget for infrastructure needed to develop and maintain the capacity of the ABE/ESOL field to deliver workplace education and provide professional and organizational development needed to maintain high quality and expertise.
- Given that there are a number of technical assistance providers currently working in the field (SABES, Roundtable, Commonwealth Corporation, DESE, WTF Applicant Assistance), there should be an effort to coordinate, support and sustain these efforts, rather than create an entirely new infrastructure.
- A database of qualified workplace basic skills providers should be developed, updated regularly, and made easily accessible to employers and other potential users.

4. Improve Linkages to Post-Secondary Education, Training, and Employment

Community-based and workplace-based ABE/ESOL initiatives require significant innovation in order to provide links to the education and skills resources necessary to succeed in the current labor market. The following innovations will make a significant contribution to the ability of the ABE/ESOL system to support better labor market outcomes for participants:

- Expand Transition to College Programs to all community colleges and community-based ABE/ESOL programs. Expand the capacity of such programs to serve both adult and younger students appropriately; and support program designs that meet local workforce development needs (including introducing students to local labor market information), and that support students in identifying and following a career path toward entrance into employment in that industry. Support programs that offer transition services to assist learners to understand their options for the future, including financial aid awareness/assistance, education and career counseling, study skills for college success, and community services.
- Initiate pilot projects that utilize best-practice models of integrated programming. Create interagency funding mechanisms to develop model or pilot initiatives that a) demonstrate effective integrated adult basic education and post-secondary education and training; b) offer contextualized ABE/ESOL programs that teach how to using the language and activities for specific industry/occupational environments. Track the outcomes of these pilots and compare cost/benefits to those of existing programs and/or systems.
- Promote and fund ASE programs to offer higher-level academic content to ensure that lower-skilled adults master academic content needed to succeed in post-secondary education and training (example: math content will be taught at levels that address intermediate algebra; writing will prepare students for 101 level composition classes in community colleges). Promote and fund ABE/ESOL services to include models with more intensive levels of instruction (15-20+ hours/week) to enable students to reach their goals in a more timely fashion.
- Create new or melded funding streams to offer career-specific bridge programs, and concurrent or dual enrollment initiatives with supportive services for all interested ABE/ESOL students.
- Develop policies to ensure that state agencies will do the following: use common goals and language; jointly plan meetings and/or conferences to ensure collaboration toward common goals; jointly promote efforts on agency websites; jointly promote promising practices and excellence in the field; jointly develop, promote, and fund professional development opportunities for state and local practitioners (examples: CORI, Basic Skills Assessments, Career Planning Tools, Understanding Labor Market Information, Youth Worker Skill Development, etc.).
- Expand the state’s Individual Training Account (ITA) list to include DESE-funded providers, and support local workforce representatives in working with local ABE providers as appropriate to have them identified on local approved ITA vendor lists.

5. Support Educational Counseling, Job Coaching and Transition Counseling

Research data strongly suggests that student supports may be equally important predictors of education and labor market success as direct instruction. Yet, there is a dearth of available resources for adult student support services. The following actions could significantly improve this situation:

- Staffing costs for educational counseling, job coaching and/or transition counseling should be considered as allowable costs under all Massachusetts ABE/ESOL grants and contracts (including DESE, EOLWD, Commonwealth Corporation, Workforce Training Fund, etc., and including workplace and non-workplace programs).
- Staff of ABE/ESOL programs who serve in educational counseling, job coaching and/or transition counseling positions should have access to training opportunities to help them understand resources and challenges across various sectors of the workforce development system, and should be provided with paid staff time to attend such trainings. Trainings should be developed by a group such as the SABES (System for Adult Basic Education Support), Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable, or CWC (Commonwealth Workforce Coalition) and should comprise participants from various sectors (DESE providers, Career Center staff, Community College Staff, DTA staff, workplace education staff, community-based training program staff, etc.).

6. Increase Employer Participation for Investment in Adult Basic Education

Too few employers are involved and aware of workplace education resources. There appear to be lower levels of awareness in some regions and industries. While further research is needed, evidence suggests that more employers will participate in workplace education activities if they are more aware of available resources, successful models, and have the proper incentives to participate. The following recommended efforts can make a significant contribution to increasing employer participation in adult education at the workplace:

- Require flexible but substantial employer match in all workplace education funding.
- Survey employers to better understand potentially effective tax or other incentives for investing in workplace education.
- Explore individual state tax credits for post-secondary education and skills training.
- Explore a state Life Long Learning Account pilot.
- Undertake an extensive marketing effort to showcase successful workplace education projects, models, and available resources. This marketing effort should be done in cooperation with business and trade associations, regional workforce investment boards, adult education providers, and other potential partners.

Works Cited

Outline of Draft Recommendations from the ABE/ESOL Committee of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board

"Challenges in Providing ABE/ESOL Services to Adults That Are Difficult to Serve: ABE/ESOL Committee of the State Workforce Investment Board," Roberta Soolman, Executive Director, Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts, Inc., MCAE, October 12, 2007

Report of the Massachusetts Department of Education Adult and Community Learning Services to the ABE/ESOL Committee of the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board, July 16, 2007

"Integrating Adult Basic Education and Occupational Training: A Review of Research and Practice", Lisa Soricone, Commonwealth Corporation

"Workplace Education Yields Demonstrable Benefits", Report to the Network Conference of MCAE, October 26, 2006, Dr. Lloyd David

"Policies to Promote Adult Education and Postsecondary Alignment," Julie Strawn, Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy, September 28, 2007

"Overcoming Obstacles, Optimizing Opportunities: State Policies to Increase Postsecondary Attainment for Low-Skilled Adults" Amy-Ellen Duke and Julie Strawn, for Jobs for The Future, March, 2008

Regional Economic Transformation Model

Definition of Terms

ABE = Adult Basic Education (typically comprises ESOL programs as well as ABE for English speakers)

ACCUPLACER = An assessment that measures students on academic skills in math, English and reading

ACLS = Adult and Community Learning Services (Division of Mass. DESE)

ASE = Adult Secondary Education

BHE = Board of Higher Education

CBO = Community Based Organizations

DESE = Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

DOE = Department of Education

DTA = Department of Transitional Assistance

EOLWD = Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development

ECCLI = Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative

ESOL = English for Speakers of Other Languages

MWIB = Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board

SABES – System for Adult Basic Education Support

WCTF = Workforce Competitive Trust Fund

WIA = Workforce Investment Act

WTF = Workforce Training Fund

Acknowledgements

This report was made for the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board (MWIB).

The following individuals participated in ABE/ESOL Committee meetings to assist in the creation of this document.

Jerry Rubin* (Chair) – Jewish Vocational Service
Don Anderson* – Workforce Central Career Center
Marie Downey* – Best Corporation
Warren Pepicelli* – UNITE/HERE
Anne Serino* – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ACLS)
Michael Sullivan* – Mayor, City of Lawrence
Patricia Williams* – HarborOne Credit Union
Jim Ayres – Center for New Americans
Linda Braun – Brockton Public Schools
Francisco Brea – AFL/CIO
Harneen Chernow – 1199 SEIU Training & Upgrading Fund
Leonard Coriary – Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board
Lloyd David – Creative Workplace Learning, Inc.
Bernadette Driscoll – Taunton Adult Basic Education/Bristol Community College
Jean Fox – Greater New Bedford Workforce Investment Board
Marie Grady – Regional Employment Board of Hampden County
Carol Bliss-Furr – Roxbury Community College
Don Gillis – Massachusetts Workforce Board Association
Claudia Green – Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Coalition/English for New Bostonians
Christina Hebert – Quinsigamond Community College
Jennifer James Price – Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development
Dan Kobayashi – Workforce Solutions Group
Ruthie Lieberman – Crittenton Women's Union
R.J. McGrail – Executive Office of Labor & Workforce Development
Connie Nelson – Massachusetts Worker Education Roundtable
Andrea Perrault – Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ACLS)
Mary Sarris – North Shore Workforce Investment Board
Melissa Scibelli – Hampden Regional Employment Board
Laurie Sheridan – World Education
Roberta Soolman – Literacy Volunteers of Massachusetts/MA Coalition for Adult Education
Brad Sperry – Hampden Regional Employment Board
Kenneth Tamarkin – Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education
Victor Vasquez – Department of Transitional Assistance

* MWIB Members

Student Quotes



“The teachers and students at the Adult Learning Center are completely different than what I was used to. Teachers have time to teach and listen. Students are actually here to learn.” Tianeisha P.

“As a recovering addict, school has helped me to be sober and clean. I want to get my high school diploma and I am learning a lot.” Yolanda A.

“I came to school to get my GED so I can move forward with my goals.” Edgar G.

“I quit school at sixteen and started working, I need the GED to get a job.” Edward H

“I came to school to learn and finish my education and to better my future. My experience here has been exciting.” Troy K.

“I have come to school because its time for a change. I want my GED and to finish Medical Assistant. Marian P.

“This program has helped me with my writing.” Maribel O.

“This program has helped me communicate with my customers in the Mexican restaurant, where I work.” Nicanor S.

“This program has helped me to speak better and help my son with his homework and to speak with his teacher” Loide G.

“This program has helped me to speak better, understand and write when I need to.” Susan P.

“This program has helped me to go to the doctor by myself. I have also worked with others on the health and newspaper committee.” Sandra S.

“This program has helped me to speak better to take my son to the doctor’s office and I have also improved my computer skills.” Maria P.

“I can speak English much better which helps me to have more opportunities at my job. I can do everything by myself.” Sedínoel F.



For further information please contact:

Jerry Rubin, President/CEO
Jewish Vocation Services
29 Winter Street, 5th Floor
Boston, MA 02108
jrubin@jvs-boston.org
(617) 626-3138

Or

Tamika Correia, Executive Director
Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board
One Ashburton Place, Suite 2112
Boston, MA 02108
Tamika.correia@state.ma.us
(617) 626-7112



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Deval L. Patrick, Governor
Timothy P. Murray, Lt. Governor
Suzanne M. Bump, Secretary
Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development
Tamika N. Correia, Executive Director
Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board

