



Shared Investment,
Mutual Opportunity

Establish a Dedicated Fund for Workplace ABE/ESOL in Massachusetts

In September 2008, the MA Workforce Investment Board (MWIB) recommended to Governor Deval Patrick that the Commonwealth take a series of steps to 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 MWIB's multi-stakeholder sub-committee on Adult Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) called for creation of a **Dedicated Fund for Workplace Education**. The Sec. of Labor and Workforce Development, and Sec. of Education are working to launch the fund by July 1, 2009.

What can you do to make sure this Fund is implemented and well-used? Thank officials in the Dept. of Labor and Workforce Development and Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education for their commitment and let them know you look forward to implementation on July 1, 2009.

Ask your legislator to:

- ▶ Support full implementation of the Dedicated Fund, and level funding for the Workforce Training Fund (line item #7003-0701) and ABE/ESOL (line item #7035-0002).
- ▶ Encourage businesses, unions and providers in their district to address local ABE/ESOL needs by using the Dedicated Fund.

What's the challenge?

- ▶ One third of Massachusetts' 3.2 million workers lack adequate literacy skills for workplace success¹. 70% of immigrants lack the literacy skills necessary to fully participate in their workplaces.² Many of them work at least full-time in addition to raising families.
- ▶ 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.³
- ▶ The waiting list for ABE/ESOL services is nearly 21,000.⁴
- ▶ Currently, less than 5% of the Commonwealth's ABE/ESOL resources are available for workplace education, and just 8% of Workforce Training Fund grants are typically used for programs that include ABE or ESOL.
- ▶ The limited workplace education resources that are available are spread out among several distinct programs with different emphases, administrative requirements, and schedules. They typically require service delivery that is responsive to learners *or* businesses, but not both.

How will the Dedicated Fund help immigrant workers and the businesses that employ them? The Dedicated Fund will help promote public-private partnerships across industries and across the Commonwealth that specifically focus on workplace ESOL and Basic Skills, and allow for greater flexibility to meet the needs of workers and businesses.

¹ MassINC, "New Skills for a New Economy," 2001.

² MassINC, "The State of the American Dream in Massachusetts," 2006.

³ Workforce Solutions Group, 2006.

⁴ Department of Elementary of Secondary Education, May 1, 2009.

New partnerships will provide new opportunities for adult learners—who often juggle multiple jobs and family responsibilities—to learn at their jobsite. They will allow businesses to tailor programs to specific business needs, including improving customer service and teamwork, boosting worker retention and ability to promote from within, and reducing translation time. The Fund will bring new businesses, unions and ESOL providers to the table by providing predictable, dedicated resources.

How will the Fund work? The fund will have a single application and administrative requirements, guidelines, policies and procedures, and be managed by one office or department, with staff provided from participating agencies/departments.

The MWIB recommended a Dedicated Fund that would offer flexibility and reflect the following principles:

- ▶ **Eligibility:** All types of employers, multiple-employer consortia, labor-management partnerships, community-based organizations and workforce intermediaries, as well as different models and partner configurations.
- ▶ **Match requirements:** Match should be required but flexible, depending upon the types of participating applicants.
- ▶ **Use of funds:** Grant dollars should support direct services and program operation and management including a planning phase and an on-site coordinator to ensure an appropriate assessment of needs, strong communication, and successful implementation and evaluation.
- ▶ **Grant availability/size/duration:** Allowable grant size should be tied to project goals/needs and the demonstrated ability of partners to utilize the dollars. Grants should be made on a rolling or quarterly basis, with a duration of 3-5 years, and with the option for renewal based on results.
- ▶ **Intensity:** Workplace education programs should be of sufficient intensity and duration to support the achievement of measurable learning gains and other work-related competencies such as reading technical documents and 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:** Curriculum should be contextualized and customized for the workplace, addressing 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:** The Fund should require significant company match but be flexible depending upon the types of participating applicants. Matches could include paid release time, incentives and/or access to on-site computer labs for employees; or classroom space.
- ▶ **Marketing and experimentation:** The committee also recommended that the Commonwealth promote workplace education through marketing to businesses, and explore the use of distance learning in workplace education and support pilot projects among smaller employers.

How will the fund be paid for? This year, the fund will be created through “a blending” of current funding sources (Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Education workplace education funding and the Workforce Training Fund), but be structured so that it can accept new funding sources (for example, legislative appropriations or discretionary dollars) should they become available in the future. As it gets created this year, the Fund will be revenue-neutral, but we must protect the Workforce Training Fund and DESE Adult Education program in order to make it work.

The English Works Campaign is led statewide by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition and locally by the English for New Bostonians Initiative.

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