Governor's Workforce Development Council

Policy Solutions that Work for Minnesota

Progress of Chapter 65 Collaborative Local Projects and Recommendations to Achieve Chapter 65 Goals

Report to the Legislature

as required by *Minnesota Laws* 2009

Chapter 65, Sec. 2, Subd. 5

March 11, 2011

Governor's Workforce Development Council

The GWDC's mission is to analyze and recommend workforce development policy to the Governor and Legislature toward talent development, resource alignment, and system effectiveness to ensure a globally competitive workforce for Minnesota.

Mandate and Membership

As Minnesota's state Workforce Investment Board, the GWDC is mandated and funded by Section 111 of the federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and further defined by Minnesota Statutes, section 116L.665. Council membership is dictated by state statute to include the following sectors: business and industry, community-based organizations, education, local government, organized labor, state agencies, and the State Legislature. Twenty-seven GWDC members are appointed by the Governor and serve terms three years in length. Two State Representatives and two State Senators are appointed to the GWDC by their majority and minority leaders.

Author

Bryan F. Lindsley, *Executive Director*
Governor's Workforce Development Council

Cost

Total cost of salaries, printing, and supplies in developing/preparing this report is $1,350 (reported as required by Minn. Stat. 3.197)

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Dear Members of the Minnesota Legislature,

We are pleased to present recommendations on funding, system design, and statutory changes that are reasonable and necessary to engage low-skill workers in increasing their skill levels.

The Chapter 65 progress report is a follow-up report to the Minnesota Legislature in fulfillment of *Minnesota Laws* 2009 Chapter 65, Sec. 2, Subd. 5. This report focuses on the goals accomplished by four collaborative pilot projects and makes recommendations on employment, training, and education goals.

It should be noted that this report goes hand in hand with the GWDC's 2011 Policy Advisory, *All Hands on Deck: Sixteen Ideas for Strengthening Minnesota's Workforce*; and the GWDC's 2011 WorkForce Center Report, *Working to Close the Skills Gap*. In just seven years, 70 percent of Minnesota jobs will require education beyond high school and the workforce system, including local collaboratives, must help us meet this demand. No one policy or organization will be able to successfully engage low-skill workers in increasing their skill levels – but together, through long-term collaborative and multiple policy changes, Minnesota can answer the call of low-skill workers and businesses.

The Council stands ready to help you implement these recommendations for the good of Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Bryan F. Lindsley, Executive Director

March 2011

Executive Summary

Minnesota cannot address its skilled worker shortage without focusing on the current labor force. By 2018, seventy percent of Minnesota's jobs will require some sort of postsecondary education or training.[1] Because two-thirds of the state's 2035 labor force is already of working age, it is impossible to reach this demand for skills by focusing only on new entrants to the workforce.[2] Accordingly, Minnesota must focus on helping more adults pursue additional education and training.

As one way to address this skills gap, Chapter 65 legislation mandated the creation of four collaborative local projects across Minnesota. Though not funded by the legislature, the four projects operated over the last year with a small amount of Workforce Investment Act incentive funds to address the ten goals of Chapter 65.

However, the scope and magnitude of the issues addressed in Chapter 65 are simply too big and complex to address with short-term pilot projects. Minnesota is home to 1.2 million potential working learners — individuals that lack postsecondary credentials who are wage-earners for themselves or their family — which comprises 60 percent of Minnesota adults ages 18 to 64.[3] Serving this large population — which includes a wide array of individuals from English language learners to ex-offenders — requires rethinking the way Minnesota delivers education and training programs.

Despite some laudable successes – some of which are chronicled in this report – the collaborative local projects could only address a few Chapter 65 goals. A long-term effort supported by state leaders and funded by state agencies and the legislature is needed to systematically engage low-skill workers and close the skills gap. At this time, the Minnesota FastTRAC Initiative represents the most promising statewide effort to form collaborative projects that engage low-skill workers, provide basic skill training, and meet the needs of working learners.

Four GWDC recommendations address funding, system design, and statutory changes that are reasonable and necessary to systematically achieve the goals of Chapter 65.

1. Establish goals and plans for increasing adult credential attainment statewide.
2. Expand the Minnesota FastTRAC Initiative to all 25 Minnesota State Colleges.
3. Use state data systems to better understand and serve working learners.
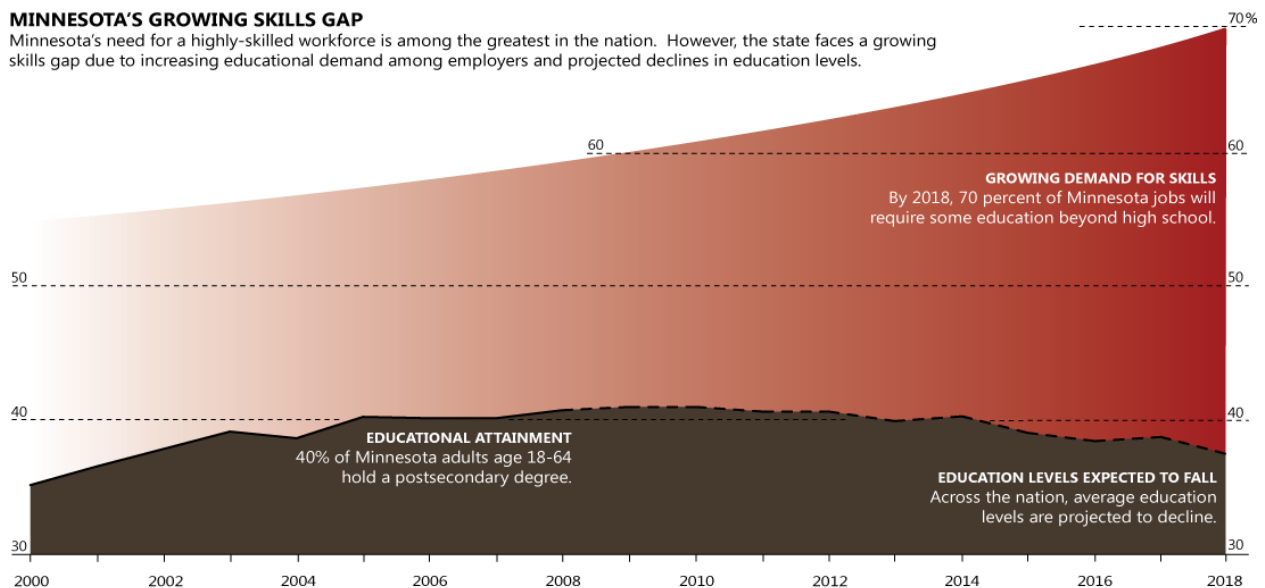4. Reduce cost barriers to credential attainment.

Introduction

How can Minnesota engage low-skill workers to increase skill levels? How can local workforce councils provide skill training, upgrade basic skills, and ensure training is accessible to individuals currently working? Chapter 65 legislation aimed to address these goals and seven others with the creation of four collaborative local pilot projects across Minnesota.

The goals of Chapter 65 projects are significant because the need to help low-skill workers improve their skills is critical to Minnesota's economy. Current demographic and labor market data is clear that Minnesota faces a growing skills gap. Just seven years from now, 70 percent of Minnesota jobs will require education beyond high school.[4] The state's growing need for a highly-skilled workforce, which is among the greatest in the country, has been brought on by an increasingly competitive global economy and rapidly evolving technologies.[5] Yet today, only 40 percent of working-age adults in Minnesota have a postsecondary degree, such as associate's or bachelor's degree.[6]

MINNESOTA'S GROWING SKILLS GAP
Minnesota's need for a highly-skilled workforce is among the greatest in the nation. However, the state faces a growing skills gap due to increasing educational demand among employers and projected declines in education levels.

GROWING DEMAND FOR SKILLS
By 2018, 70 percent of Minnesota jobs will require some education beyond high school.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT
40% of Minnesota adults age 18-64 hold a postsecondary degree.

EDUCATION LEVELS EXPECTED TO FALL
Across the nation, average education levels are projected to decline.

Sources: American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau; Help Wanted, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce; National Center for Higher Education Management Systems. Trendlines beyond 2008 are based on single-point-in-time estimates. Chart taken from the Governor's Workforce Development Council 2011 Policy Advisory, "All Hands on Deck."

Minnesota is home to 1.2 million potential working learners — individuals that lack postsecondary credentials who are wage-earners for themselves or their family — which comprises 60 percent of Minnesota adults ages 18 to 64.[7] Chapter 65 goals were designed to better serve this population, which includes a wide array of individuals from English language learners to ex-offenders.

Working learners struggle in traditional postsecondary education and training programs. From raising a family to working full-time, most working learners must balance their school work with other responsibilities. This balancing act can be tricky, making success at school a challenge. Among those with a degree goal, it is estimated that one-third of "workers who study" leave school in their first year without any credentials (compared to only seven percent among "students who work"). And after six years, nearly two-thirds of "workers who study" do not have a degree or certificate and are no longer enrolled.[8]
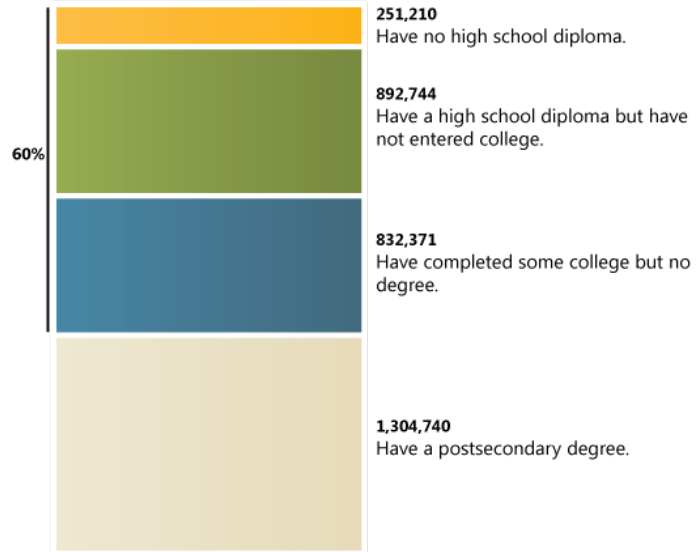
For those working learners who lack basic skills, the uphill climb can be even more challenging: of individuals who need to take nine or more credit hours in postsecondary remedial courses, only about 25 percent complete all of their remedial courses and only about four percent complete a degree or certificate within five years of enrollment.[9]

Part I reviews the goals of Chapter 65 projects and reports on the progress of each project toward meeting the legislation's ten goals. Despite successes, the short timeline and lack of funding meant collaborative local projects could only address a few Chapter 65 goals.

Part II presents four GWDC recommendations that address funding, system design, and statutory changes that are reasonable and necessary to systematically achieve the goals of Chapter 65. If implemented, these recommendations would create a long-term effort that would systematically engage low-skill workers and begin to close the skills gap.

WORKING LEARNERS IN MINNESOTA
Among individuals 18 to 64 years old, six in ten lack a postsecondary degree.

60%

251,210
Have no high school diploma.

892,744
Have a high school diploma but have not entered college.

832,371
Have completed some college but no degree.

1,304,740
Have a postsecondary degree.

Source: American Community Survey 2008, U.S. Census Bureau

Part I: Goals addressed by Collaborative Local Projects

Each local project submitted a progress report to the GWDC in implementing their plans (see Appendix for copies of submitted reports). The selected collaborative local projects were:

1. **Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board (RCWIB)** – Healthcare Initiative
2. **Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (SBETC)** – Training and Employment Skills Team (TEST)
3. **Workforce Development, Inc. (WDI)** – Stackable Credential System
4. **Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council (GMWC)** – Working Learners Collaborative Initiative

The following is a GWDC evaluation of the goals addressed by each collaborative local project based on the progress reports submitted.

Chapter 65 Goals (as listed in Sec. 2, Subd. 2)	RCWIB Healthcare Initiative	SBETC Training & Employment Skills Team	WDI Stackable Credential System	GMWC Working Learners Collaborative Initiative
1. Engaged low-skill workers in increasing their…				
...assessment skill levels*	✓	✓	✓	✓
...occupational skill levels*	✓			
2. Provided skill training while upgrading basic skill levels	✓			
3. Improved the provision of skill training to individuals currently working				
4. Integrated employer contact efforts to improve responsiveness to employer's needs	✓		✓	✓
5. Strengthened employer input with training curriculum	✓			
6. Improved access to service and training to public assistance recipients				
7. Integrated career planning and job placement efforts among institutions	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Maximized coordination and reduced duplication among providers	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Evaluated industry training needs	✓			✓
10. Provided noncredit remediation at no cost to students	✓	✓	✓	✓

* "Assessment skill levels" refers to National Career Readiness Certificate and/or WorkKeys. See page 8 for important distinction between career readiness credentials and occupational skill credentials.

The projects' inability to comprehensively address Chapter 65 goals is expected. The pilot projects were short-term and though mandated by law, were not funded by the legislature. Each operated over the last year with $25,000 of Workforce Investment Act incentive funds and addressed some but not all of the ten Chapter 65 goals. But more importantly, the scope and magnitude of the issues addressed in Chapter 65 are simply too big and complex to address with short-term pilot projects. Addressing the issues related to the skills gap will take much more than was available in Chapter 65 legislation.

However, the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board's Healthcare Initiative deserves to be singled out for most comprehensively tackling the ten goals of Chapter 65. The Ramsey County project was the only Chapter 65 project that provided occupational skill training while upgrading basic skills. It should be noted that this was made possible by synthesizing Chapter 65 efforts with that of an existing FastTRAC grant.

All projects used the National Career Readiness Certificate and/or WorkKeys assessment, but assessment and career readiness credentialing are not occupational skill training and do not alone increase occupational skill levels. According to the U.S. Department of Labor:

> A credential is awarded in recognition of an individual's attainment of measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to obtain employment or advance within an occupation. These technical or occupational skills are generally based on standards developed or endorsed by employers. Certificates awarded by workforce investment boards (WIBs) are not included in this definition, nor are work readiness certificates because neither of them document 'measurable technical or occupational skills necessary to gain employment or advance within an occupation.'[10]

Ramsey County's success derives from the fact that it used assessments within the context of career pathway education and in consultation with employers guiding curriculum development. The other projects, for which assessments were the focus, notably did not provide occupational skill training.

Part II: Recommendations

Despite some successes, collaborative local projects could only address a few Chapter 65 goals. This section lists a summary of recommendations made by each project on funding, system design, and statutory changes that are reasonable and necessary to achieve the goals of Chapter 65. The report concludes with four comprehensive recommendations from the GWDC to systematically engage low-skill workers and close the skills gap.

Recommendations from Chapter 65 Projects

Assessments

- Expand use of the WorkKeys readiness indicator to all program areas, including Dislocated Worker, MFIP, WIA Adults, and special projects. (GMWA)
- Review the myriad tests from participating agencies to determine which tests align needs and benefits to students. (RCWIB)
- Study implementation of the National Career Readiness Credential in other states to determine impact on job seekers and employers. (SBETC)
- The State should endorse the National Career Readiness Credential. (WDI)

Staffing

- Provide more staff to serve unemployed and dislocated workers. (GMWA)
- Fund staff to serve as single point of contact for participants. (RCWIB)
- Ensure collaboration between college instructors and ABE instructors. (RCWIB)

Employer Engagement

- Maintain business contact and input to allow for changes to curriculum and services to fit local needs as well as economic shifts. (RCWIB)

Data

- Address the challenge of using multiple tracking systems. (RCWIB)
- Coordinate outcome expectations between partnering agencies. (RCWIB)

Collaboration

- Engage multiple partners and collaborations in local workforce board planning process. (GMWA)
- Funds for collaboration are important and necessary. (RCWIB)

Recommendations from the GWDC

A long-term effort supported by state leaders and funded by state agencies and the legislature is needed to systematically engage low-skill workers and close the skills gap. Closing the skills gap would better connect employers and workers, reducing the national unemployment rate by 2.5 percent.[11] At this time, the Minnesota FastTRAC Initiative represents the most promising statewide effort to form collaborative projects that engage low-skill workers, provide basic skill training, and meet the needs of working learners.

Four recommendations unanimously approved by the GWDC on August 10, 2010 address funding, system design, and statutory changes that are reasonable and necessary to systematically achieve the goals of Chapter 65.

1. Establish goals and plans for increasing adult credential attainment statewide.
2. Expand the Minnesota FastTRAC Initiative to all 25 Minnesota State Colleges.
3. Use state data systems to better understand and serve working learners.
4. Reduce cost barriers to credential attainment.

These four recommendations are described in detail below.

Recommendation 1: Expanding the Minnesota FastTRAC Initiative

An innovative career pathways strategy called FastTRAC can help Minnesota's low wage workers successfully upgrade their skills and attain postsecondary credentials.
Minnesota FastTRAC (Training, Resources, and Credentialing) helps educationally underprepared adults achieve success in well-paying careers by integrating basic skills and career-specific training in formats that are convenient and manageable for working adults. A collaboration between the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Adult Basic Education (ABE), the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and local workforce development partners, human services, and community-based organizations such as the Greater Twin Cities United Way, FastTRAC is beginning to change the way Minnesota approaches talent development for adults. The FastTRAC approach is grounded in principles that have proven effective in improving educational outcomes:

- **Blending career training and basic skills education to get the most out of each.** Many adults need help with basic academic skills, general workplace competencies, and training for a specific career. Traditionally, these services are offered separately with a number of limitations: doing them separately takes longer and is more costly, basic skills courses often lack the workplace relevance needed to keep students engaged, and career training often assumes a level of academic readiness that many students do not have. FastTRAC programming combines all three aspects of skill development by putting ABE/English as a Second Language (ESL) and career and technical instructors together in the same classroom. And in contrast to similar strategies in other states, FastTRAC aims to serve adults regardless of their skill level, all the way from pre-literacy to a postsecondary credential.
- **Ensuring students get what really matters: new skills *and* a credential.** The explicit goal of the FastTRAC approach is to ensure students receive a credential, not just credits. Research shows that one year of postsecondary credit and the completion of a credential leads to significantly increased wages: $8,500 more annually for students starting in ABE and $1,700 or $2,700 more for students starting with a high school diploma or GED, respectively.[12] This is an important threshold: evidence shows that students who earn less than a year's worth of credits and no credential tend to receive negligible economic benefits.[13]
- **Targeting occupations that are in high demand locally and offer family-sustaining wages.[14]** By being attuned to the needs of the local economy, FastTRAC acts as an effective supply chain for local businesses seeking skilled labor. This helps FastTRAC students find jobs that pay well and offer room for advancement.
- **Offering programs that are tailored to the needs of working learners.** To a student with significant work and family responsibilities, a one-, two-, or four-year program may seem daunting, particularly if classes are offered during typical work hours. FastTRAC breaks up the long voyage from basic skills to a degree into a series of smaller steps, each building off the one before and each culminating in a "stackable" credential. Courses can be offered on evenings and weekends and can incorporate on-line learning. This allows working learners to move through training programs at their own pace, while reaping on-the-job benefits at each step. Moreover, FastTRAC guides adults from step to step through intensive career and academic advising, and offers support services like child care and transportation that help students succeed.[15]

- **Using data to measure performance and improve programming.** By linking data from K-12, higher education, ABE, and the workforce development system, managers and providers are able to identify gaps in student achievement, evaluate programs, and determine ways to strengthen services.
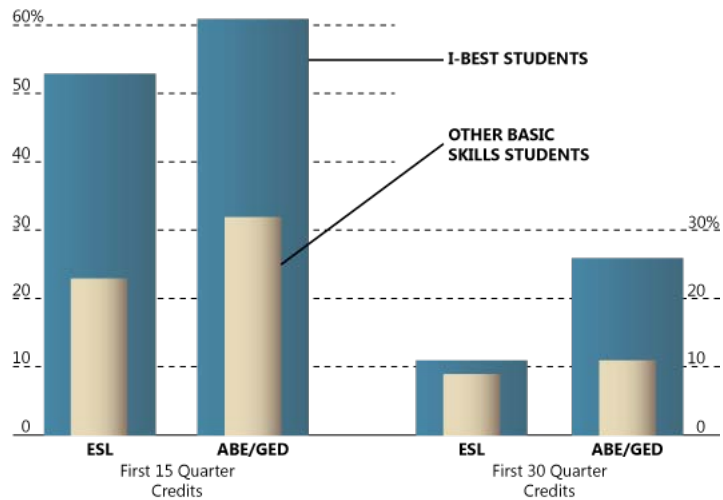
Programs like FastTRAC have been successful in other states, spurring a national movement.
Models similar to FastTRAC are underway in at least seven states, and such models have been endorsed by a number of national organizations, including the National Governors Association, the Joyce and Lumina Foundations, the National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education.[16]

Washington state's program, I-BEST, is perhaps the best known and most studied of these models.[17] Evaluations of the I-BEST model have documented its effectiveness. I-BEST students earn an average of 14 to 18 more college credits than non-I-BEST students, and they are 29 to 35 percent more likely to earn a postsecondary credential.[18] I-BEST students also make higher average gains on basic skills tests and have been 15 times more likely to complete workforce training.[19]

WASHINGTON I-BEST: INCREASING ADULT LEARNER SUCCESS
The percentage of students earning college credits is significantly greater within I-BEST, a career pathway program similar to FastTRAC.

Source: Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

FastTRAC is improving the way workforce development partners do business in fundamental ways.
Since no one organization or system can meet the needs of working learners on its own, the FastTRAC approach involves significant collaboration. Since its inception, FastTRAC has led to a significant change in the culture of the organizations involved, most notably among ABE and at MnSCU. Program providers have started to change the way they deliver services, focusing more on long-term outcomes. The larger systems involved have begun to create a shared vision for success, learning how to align their limited resources rather than compete for them. Plainly put, FastTRAC is helping systems to focus less on helping themselves and more on helping the working learners they serve.

The FastTRAC strategy is underway in many Minnesota communities, and with additional funding could expand statewide.
In 2007, the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears initiative and the Bremer Foundation awarded planning grants to Minnesota because the state lacked a collaborative strategy for training working learners but had the dedication to develop one. After laying the groundwork for the FastTRAC strategy, the Joyce Foundation awarded Minnesota with additional grants to develop seven pilot projects to test the new strategy. Based on the successes and lessons learned from these pilots, the Joyce Foundation provided additional funding to implement further programming and to begin aligning the workforce development, ABE, higher education, and human services systems, including traditionally siloed funding streams like

federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title I and Title II dollars. This has led to 12 *program design and implementation* projects and ten programs offering the *integrated and bridge* portions of the FastTRAC model.

The support of the Joyce and Bremer Foundations, along with funding, staff, and support from state and local partners, has been integral to building a foundation for FastTRAC across the state. However, sustaining and expanding local collaborations and further aligning state policies and resources will require more reliable funding and support.

Recommendation 1

Within three years, the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system (MnSCU), and Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) - Adult Basic Education (ABE) should collaborate with workforce development and community-based organizations and other service providers to provide one or more Minnesota FastTRAC (*Training, Resources, and Credentialing*) career and technical education programs at each of the 25 Minnesota State Colleges. These programs should be required to offer a stackable credential or an industry-recognized credential to successful participants.

To support ongoing coordination and the sustainability of the FastTRAC Initiative, funding sources should be identified and formalized. State funds, along with focused professional development, should be used to incent coordination and to leverage and align the financial resources of local partners.

Recommendation 2: Setting goals and developing plans for increasing adult credential attainment

Minnesota's workforce development partners should make an explicit commitment to increasing credential attainment among working learners.
Given the enormous challenge of boosting educational attainment among working adults, Minnesota's workforce and education partners — including the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Adult Basic Education (ABE), the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and their local partners — must build a shared vision for increasing skills and credential attainment among adults.

These partners should set a goal, devise a plan to reach it, and measure progress over time.   This will ensure that the relevant systems align their core missions and services with one another toward the outcome of increased adult credential attainment, which has a well-documented positive impact for educationally underprepared adults.
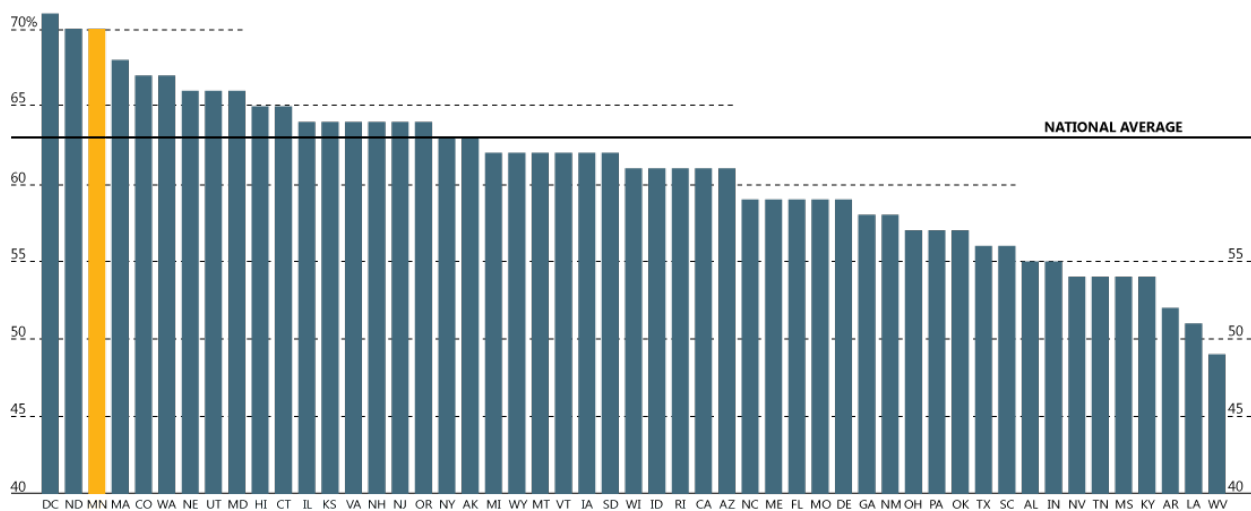
Setting measurable goals and developing a plan will not only ensure that MnSCU and its partners make broad system changes; it will also incent the replication of strategies like FastTRAC that successfully help educationally underprepared adults through to completion.

MnSCU and ABE have already taken steps to support adult learners. MnSCU's strategic plan for 2010-2014 details the system's commitment to increasing access, opportunity, and success among a diverse array of students, including adult learners. The strategic plan also includes using data on student outcomes to drive accountability and continuous improvement.
In 2008, MnSCU created the Board of Trustees Accountability Dashboard to track performance of the system and its 32 colleges and universities. The dashboard, which is available online, incorporates ten indicators including student persistence and completion, employment outcomes for graduates, and tuition costs. For the past six years, MnSCU has also engaged in an Access, Opportunity and Success

MINNESOTA'S DEMAND FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION
Seventy percent of Minnesota jobs in 2018 will require a postsecondary education. Minnesota's demand for education is significantly higher than the national average of 63 percent, and second only to the District of Columbia.

Source: Help Wanted, Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce

initiative, which has supported the development of local programs that recruit and retain underrepresented students. More recently, MnSCU was awarded a grant by the Lumina Foundation to create a program to increase re-enrollment, degree progress and degree completion among adult students who previously enrolled in MnSCU institutions but did not earn a degree. Lastly, MnSCU's policy on credit for prior learning provides an avenue for working learners to earn college credit for past work and non-credit learning experiences.

The ABE system has formally expanded its core mission to include transition to postsecondary goals for adult learners. In addition, the system has established a multi-year transition to postsecondary priority which includes a re-direction of existing resources to focus on transition strategies, including Minnesota FastTRAC.

Taken together, these initiatives provide a strong foundation on which MnSCU and its partners can build further efforts to help adult learners achieve postsecondary credentials.

Other states can provide useful best practices for MnSCU and its partners.

A number of states have started to measure working learner progress and outcomes, set goals, and develop ways to link institutional behavior to those goals. In particular, momentum points and performance funding merit additional consideration in Minnesota.

- **Measuring Outcomes.** A handful of states have started to measure student progress through momentum points — milestones that are significant to student success because they build momentum toward completion of a degree.[20] Through its *Complete to Compete* initiative, the National Governors Association has defined a set of metrics that it believes all states should measure and report publicly.[21] This includes outcome measures (such as degrees and certificates awarded and graduation rates) and progress measures (such as success beyond remedial education, and success in credit accumulation). The development of momentum points should depend on the nature of the institution and the students it serves. For instance, the FastTRAC team has identified a set of leading indicators of success for low-skill adults.

    Importantly, these metrics measure not only how many students make it to degree or certificate completion, but also how students advance on their journey to that point. This helps higher education systems understand where students are getting stuck and develop strategies for relieving those barriers. Moreover, putting weight on progress ensures that colleges focus not only on those students who are most likely to graduate, but also those students who may need more support along the way.

- **Funding Outcomes.** While student outcomes are the most important thing that colleges produce, most states base their funding of public higher education on enrollments. This can create little incentive for these systems to ensure that students earn credentials. Around the country, however, states are reconsidering these policies to better incentivize positive student outcomes and increase educational efficiency.

At least ten states have reconfigured higher education spending so that a relatively small portion of funding (often close to five percent) is apportioned based on key performance outcomes like degree completion.[22] Notably, Washington State has linked performance funding and momentum points, creating a performance funding system that accounts for both student outcomes *and* progress. Washington's system, part of its Student Achievement Initiative, has been designed so colleges compete with their own performance over time, and it ensures that year-to-year funding is stable.[23] The results are encouraging: from the 2006-2007 baseline to 2008-2009, the average number of momentum points per student increased by 12 percent.[24]

Recommendation 2

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), in partnership with the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) and Minnesota's Adult Basic Education (ABE) system, should set a broad strategic goal for increasing the number of low-skill adults that earn credentials leading to high-demand occupations that provide family-sustaining wages, and should develop a plan to reach that goal. The plan should be submitted to those committees in the Minnesota Legislature that oversee MnSCU and its partners. The plan should address how MnSCU set its goal and how the plan will be implemented to meet that goal. Further, the Legislature should require that MnSCU and its partners report on their progress toward the goal on a yearly basis.

In addition:

- The plan should involve expanding collaborations with ABE, workforce development partners, and human services providers to develop and expand access to academic programs, including career, technical, and general education programs, and student support services that support the success of low-skill adult learners.
- The plan could include setting goals for helping students meet momentum points for student success that fall along a continuum, from basic academic skills through postsecondary credential attainment. These "momentum points" should be evidence-based and linked to student labor market success. These momentum points should include, but not be limited to, the completion of stackable credentials, including certificates, diplomas, and degrees.
- These momentum points could be integrated into the accountability dashboard framework currently used by MnSCU so that colleges are able to track their progress in helping students meet momentum points along the continuum from enrollment to completion of credentials.

Recommendation 3: Integrating state data systems to better understand and serve working learners

Data is a powerful tool for better serving working learners.
Increasingly, states are using data to inform decision-making, better understand customers, and improve the services they deliver. Minnesota agencies concerned with workforce development — including the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Adult Basic Education (ABE), the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Office of Higher Education (OHE), and the Department of Human Services (DHS) — are increasingly partnering to meet the needs of adult learners. As these collaborations have grown, a data framework that can track customer outcomes and program performance across systems is increasingly needed.

Minnesota's existing information systems are inadequate for fully understanding working learner success.
While individual programs and agencies are able to track the immediate outcomes of their participants, their data systems do not talk to one another in a comprehensive fashion. Because most participants use multiple systems and often transition between them, the insights these separate information systems yield are inadequate. A fuller picture would allow policy makers to understand participant success (or failure) from any entry point (e.g. ABE, the K-12 system, various workforce development programs) all the way through to eventual labor market outcomes.

An integrated data system would enable better-informed decisions.
A comprehensive system would answer a number of important questions: Which programs and educational pathways are most effective at achieving the desired labor market outcomes? Which transition points are most problematic for students, and how can we better align programming to smooth these transitions? Why do some working learners succeed while others flounder?
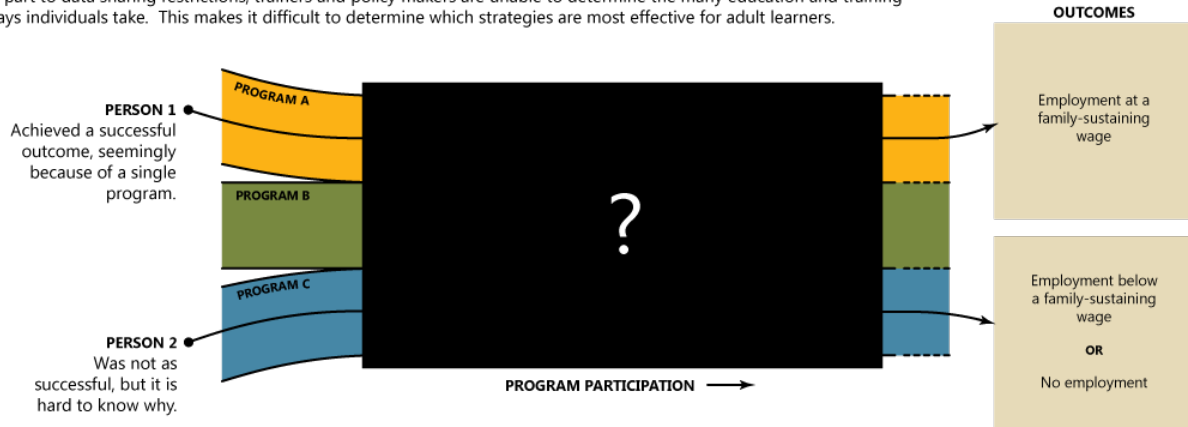
More generally, linking the state's data systems will help to create a culture of evidence among program managers and policy makers, allowing them to make better-informed decisions and more strategic investments. In addition, allowing various data systems to talk to one another will improve overall informational efficiencies, eliminate duplicative efforts, and lower long-term costs.

Lastly, an integrated data system would produce focused research that could further our understanding of the state's workforce challenges and build a case for effective solutions. For instance, in Washington state, research led to the identification of a "tipping point" — a distinct educational outcome for low-skill adults that translated into significant wage gains — that has helped to fundamentally improve the state's capacity to serve this population.[25]

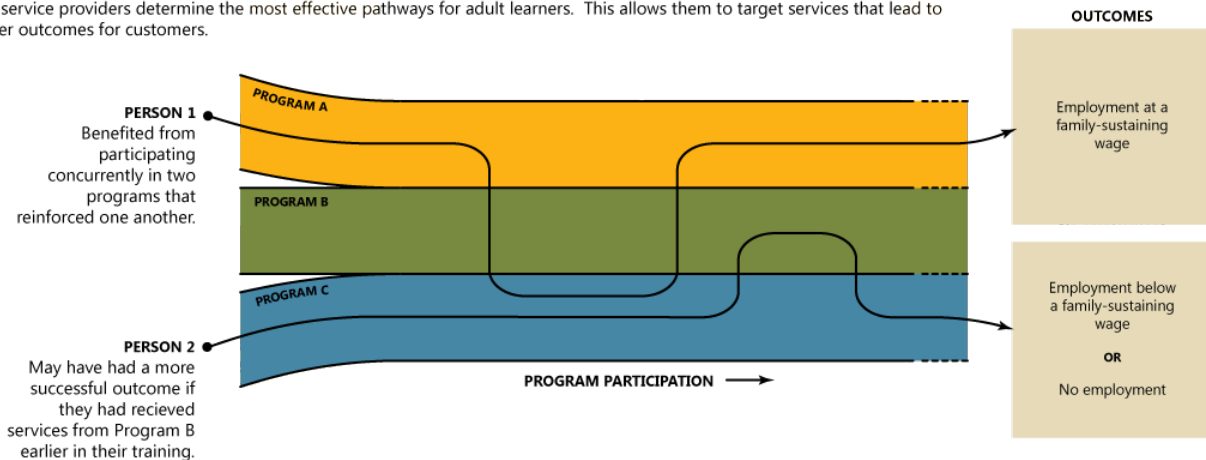## INTEGRATING DATA ON ADULT LEARNERS: CREATING A CLEARER PICTURE

COMPARTMENTALIZED DATA: A BARRIER TO SERVING ADULT LEARNERS
Due in part to data sharing restrictions, trainers and policy makers are unable to determine the many education and training pathways individuals take. This makes it difficult to determine which strategies are most effective for adult learners.

PERSON 1
Achieved a successful outcome, seemingly because of a single program.

PERSON 2
Was not as successful, but it is hard to know why.

PROGRAM A

PROGRAM B

PROGRAM C

?

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION →

OUTCOMES

Employment at a family-sustaining wage

Employment below a family-sustaining wage

OR

No employment

INTEGRATED DATA: MAKING BETTER DECISIONS
After observing a significant number of common participants in multiple data systems, patterns emerge that help policy makers and service providers determine the most effective pathways for adult learners. This allows them to target services that lead to better outcomes for customers.

PERSON 1
Benefited from participating concurrently in two programs that reinforced one another.

PERSON 2
May have had a more successful outcome if they had recieved services from Program B earlier in their training.

PROGRAM A

PROGRAM B

PROGRAM C

PROGRAM PARTICIPATION →

OUTCOMES

Employment at a family-sustaining wage

Employment below a family-sustaining wage

OR

No employment

A number of efforts are underway to create a more robust data framework in Minnesota.
These efforts should work together to better understand and serve working learners:

- The **State Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS)** is being developed through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Through this grant, Minnesota will develop a statewide longitudinal data system that allows student data to be linked from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary education and on into the workforce. This will allow the state to identify predictors of long-term student success and drive policy decisions about particular programs and the overall system.
- The **FastTRAC Data Management Plan** seeks to pilot components of the SLEDS to assess and improve FastTRAC programming, tracking ABE students through MnSCU and into the workforce.
- **Action Analytics** is a set of capacities being developed by MnSCU to monitor and improve performance at the system and institution level. Notably, MnSCU is working to develop predictive models that would permit targeted interventions to improve student success.

- The **Workforce Data Quality Initiative** refers to a grant Minnesota recently applied for from the U.S. Department of Labor's Workforce Data Quality Initiative. If received, this grant will help DEED to streamline its many data capacities and augment the SLEDS by helping DEED to link information on wages to postsecondary student information from OHE, MnSCU, and ABE.

Recommendation 3

The State of Minnesota should use data systems currently in place or under development, such as the State Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS), the FastTRAC data management plan, and Action Analytics, to enrich policy makers' and program managers' understanding of the educational pathways working learners use to move through and across these systems, why some go on to succeed in the labor market and others do not, and how we can better serve all customers.

DEED and FastTRAC staff should convene the representatives from the relevant data systems and initiatives, including those listed above, to establish shared goals pertaining to understanding working learners. These partners should meet on an ongoing basis to ensure integration between systems.

Recommendation 4: Reducing cost barriers to credential attainment

The cost of postsecondary education is a significant barrier for low-income, low-skill adults.
The total annual cost of tuition and fees at public two-year colleges in Minnesota is twice the national average, and net costs (after accounting for financial aid) are three times higher than the national average.[26] Historically, two-year public college tuition rates have increased by about 4.7 percent per year.[27] At this rate, the cost increases faster than inflation, doubling roughly every 15 years. At the same time, wages for low-skill workers have stagnated in the last 30 years, leading to a growing affordability problem.

In a national survey of adults who did not complete their postsecondary education, 80 percent of respondents said that allowing part-time students to have greater access to financial aid would have made college graduation feasible.[28]

While federal Pell Grants and Minnesota State Grants help many students afford a postsecondary education, these programs are limited in their ability to help most working learners since they target more traditional students and have minimum requirements for the number of credits a student takes over a school year.

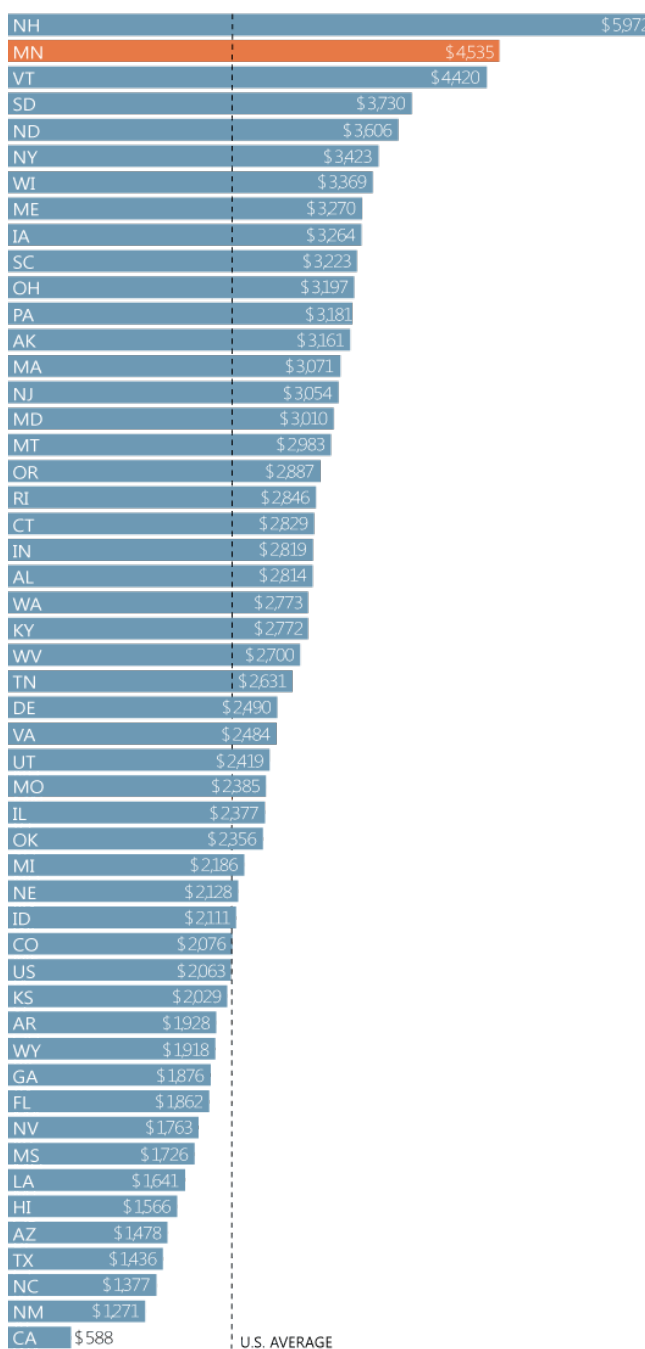**Minnesota should take steps to address the affordability problem.**
To complement other reforms to Minnesota's education and training systems, the state should create targeted incentives that will enable working learners to get the education they need in high demand fields. Targeting funds to individuals increases educational choice and rewards self-determination.

Spotlight: Washington State's Opportunity Grant Program
Washington's Opportunity Grant program helps low-income adults train for high-wage, high-demand careers by helping to pay for up to 45 quarter credits (equivalent to one year

TUITION AND FEES AT PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGES
Minnesota is the second most expensive state in the nation, with tuition and fees double the national average.

State	Amount
NH	$5,972
MN	$4,535
VT	$4,420
SD	$3,730
ND	$3,606
NY	$3,423
WI	$3,369
ME	$3,270
IA	$3,264
SC	$3,223
OH	$3,197
PA	$3,181
AK	$3,161
MA	$3,071
NJ	$3,054
MD	$3,010
MT	$2,983
OR	$2,887
RI	$2,846
CT	$2,829
IN	$2,819
AL	$2,814
WA	$2,773
KY	$2,772
WV	$2,700
TN	$2,631
DE	$2,490
VA	$2,484
UT	$2,419
MO	$2,385
IL	$2,377
OK	$2,356
MI	$2,186
NE	$2,128
ID	$2,111
CO	$2,076
US	$2,063
KS	$2,029
AR	$1,928
WY	$1,918
GA	$1,876
FL	$1,862
NV	$1,763
MS	$1,726
LA	$1,641
HI	$1,566
AZ	$1,478
TX	$1,436
NC	$1,377
NM	$1,271
CA	$588

U.S. AVERAGE

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education. Figures are for 2007-2008 school year.

of full-time study) over three years.[29] The program funds up to a year of credits because this threshold is linked with significantly increased wages.[30] In addition to covering tuition and fees, up to $1,000 can be used for books and supplies. The program also links students to tutoring, career advising, college success classes, emergency child care, and transportation. In most cases, students are served by a single contact who coordinates both financial and overall support services for the entire duration of the student's time in school.

The program started in 2006 as a pilot funded by a $4 million appropriation to the state's community and technical colleges system, serving 843 students in 130 high-demand, high-wage career fields. In 2007, the Legislature expanded the program by $7.5 million, investing a total of $11.5 million per year at all community and technical colleges in the state. This expansion has allowed the program to serve several thousand students each year. Opportunity Grants have boosted student retention and completion rates in Washington. In 2007-2008, 81 percent of Opportunity Grant students who enrolled in the fall were still enrolled in the spring or left having reached the completion threshold. This surpassed the overall rates for two comparison groups: Pell Grant recipients (73 percent) and low socio-economic status students (54 percent) who were enrolled in the same programs.

Many states have programs similar to Washington's Opportunity Grant program. These include:

- Illinois' Monetary Award Program and Student Success Grants
- Kentucky's Go Higher Grants and Ready to Work Initiative
- Vermont's Part-Time Grant Program
- West Virginia's Higher Education Adult Part-Time Student (HEAPS) Grant Program

Recommendation 4
The Legislature should target grant and loan forgiveness programs to low-income adults who pursue and complete education and training in regionally high-demand career fields that provide family-sustaining wages. This could be accomplished by modifying existing grant programs or by creating a new grant program to provide financial support to low-income adults who are training for high-wage, high-demand careers. In either case, resources should incentivize program completion and credential attainment. In addition, these newly-targeted grant or loan forgiveness programs should have specific goals around student outcomes, including job placement, and should be required to collect data and report on these outcomes. Such a program could be modeled after Washington state's successful Opportunity Grant program.

Appendix I: Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board – Healthcare Initiative Final Report

[***Disclaimer***: *The following report is the work of Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board. The report was submitted to the GWDC by February 15, 2011 as required by Minnesota Laws 2009, Chapter 65, Sec. 2, Subd. 5. Views and recommendations expressed are those of Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board and not the GWDC.*]

Partners

Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties: Pamela McGowan
Department of Employment and Economic Development: Laura Nedved
Goodwill EasterSeals: Mohamud Hashi
Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council: Luke Weisberg
HealthPartners: Mary Russell
Presbyterian Homes: Dan Strittmater
Quality Career Services: Joe Crowe
Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board (RCWIB): Mary Jo Gardner
Ramsey County Workforce Solutions: Karyn Berg
Saint Paul Community Literacy Consortium: Tom Cytron-Hysom
Saint Paul College: Dave Manthey, Janell Westveer
Saint Paul Public Housing Agency: Connie Toavs
Saint Paul Public Schools Adult Basic Education (ABE): Karen Gerdin
Saint Paul Public Schools K-12: Kathy Kittel

Goals:

Build a collaborative model utilizing the talents and resources of the WorkForce Center System, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and community based organizations that can be reproduced for other training opportunities in healthcare and beyond, as the labor market evolves.

Actions:

The Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board's (RCWIB) Healthcare Initiative is an example of how funds were used to develop a comprehensive workforce development strategy that addresses both employer and jobseeker needs. The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative included 14 participating organizations that collaboratively developed a demand-driven solution that met the needs of low- and limited-skill workers within the context of employer needs. The diverse partners leveraged an existing wealth of knowledge and community resources that ensured the initiative addressed the needs of employers, job seekers, incumbent workers, and Adult Basic Education participants. Through the Medical Coding and Billing course, partners made collaboration a high priority and focused on problem-solving across systems

to ensure the best service and training was provided to the students. Ideally, this program can be replicated in other industries that experience a demand for specific occupations, supporting individuals with Adult Basic Education needs in their pursuit of responding to this demand. Funding from the Chapter 65 Local Collaborative grants and the initial round of FastTRAC grants as well as funds from various partners allowed the project to move forward.

The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative began in 2008 with an environmental scan of the business community to identify growth industries and the needed labor supply. The assessment was led by the RCWIB and conducted in partnership with Ramsey County Workforce Solutions and the Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council. Discussions were held with human resource and business leaders from HealthEast, HealthPartners, Fairview and Presbyterian Homes to determine their workforce needs. The information gathered, coupled with labor market data from the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), allowed the partners to determine the project scope. Identifying the specific healthcare job based on the employer interviews, the group moved forward exploring how they could best address the need to train and place Medical Coding and Billing students.

Outcomes and measures were identified by the RCWIB Healthcare Initiative partners that addressed the process (environmental scan, convening of stakeholders, development of a workforce strategy, funding, collaboration, etc.) and program outcomes (number accepted, trained and passing certification, placement rates, job retention, demographics, etc.), as well as employer and student satisfaction. The partners reviewed and discussed measures and progress toward outcomes on an ongoing basis.

Saint Paul College, the Saint Paul Community Literacy Consortium and Saint Paul Public Schools' ABE worked with the healthcare employers to develop curriculum. As the class was delivered, concerns were identified with the intent that the curriculum continues to evolve so that each time it is delivered, it best meets the current needs of the employers and students.

Updates on the Healthcare Initiative were provided to the RCWIB at committee meetings and to Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul through update meetings.

Outcomes:

Through the collaborative process, the partners in the RCWIB Healthcare Initiative developed a work plan that was used as a guide during the process. Given the nature of pilot programs, allowances were made as appropriate.

The first step of the project was to understand the needs of the local healthcare providers in order to identify the job position on which to focus. After assessing labor market information and interviewing the employers, the partners decided to focus on training individuals for the Medical Coding and Billing career. Medical Coding and Billing positions may also serve as significant entry-level jobs in the healthcare field, potentially broadening and deepening the pool of healthcare workers who may be trained to fill other relevant jobs that are in demand and pay higher wages. Healthcare providers offered guidance, curriculum review, job experiences and input to the Healthcare Initiative.

The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative partners worked to define the plan, funding and success measures for the project. Funding from the Chapter 65 Local Collaborative grants through the Governors Workforce Development Council, augmented by support from DEED through the FastTRAC grant, was used to develop and implement the initiative. Quality Career Services and Goodwill/EasterSeals provided funding to help cover the cost of tuition for the students.

Students were recruited to the Medical Coding and Billing class through Adult Basic Education, Saint Paul College, employers and community-based organizations. Information sessions were conducted for prospective students and provided the opportunity to meet with professional Medical Coders and Billers. Background checks were also completed on prospective students as there are offenses that would prevent someone from being eligible for this type of position.

The agreed upon assessment tool for the class was ACT WorkKeys. Classes started on November 2, 2009 with 19 individuals enrolled. Seventeen of the students successfully completed the first section, passing the Adult Basic Education Medical Terminology final exam. The second section of the class, Medical Coding and Billing, started on January 4 with 17 students and 15 students completed the Saint Paul College customized training course at the end of June 2010. The program also included job shadowing opportunities at several healthcare sites.

A series of review sessions were provided for the students in preparation for the national exam in August. Thirteen students took the exam with two passing. Additional preparation sessions were offered and eight students retested in September with one passing. It is important to note that the national exam is known to be difficult and it is not unusual for students to retest.

HealthPartners, Quality Career Services and Workforce Solutions each provided job readiness workshops to help the students with understanding the job market, job search and interviewing. Students were also encouraged to join the Medical Coder and Biller Professional Organization and were provided with several job opportunities websites that focused on these types of jobs. As job placement information is voluntary, the RCWIB Healthcare Initiative partners are aware of three students finding job placement in the medical field.

The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative Partners continued meeting to evaluate the project and develop the next phase of the Medical Careers Pathway plan. The evaluation process was based on the Outcomes and Measures developed by the partners. The items reviewed included the process of the initiative, program and outcomes, business/employer engagement and satisfaction and student satisfaction.

Additional funding through DEED's FastTRAC initiative was received. The next phase of the project moved the training from Customized Training to a credit-bearing curriculum and the first class began in January 2011. Partners continue to meet to utilize learning in the first class to benefit the next iteration of the initiative.

The RCWIB's Healthcare Initiative attracted attention from Senator Franken and the Center of Law and Social Policy and was the recipient of the Minnesota Workforce Council Association's Best Practices award. Additionally, the Healthcare Initiative is being used as the base project for Minnesota's participation in the Department of Labor's Career Pathways Technical Assistance Initiative. The next phase of the Healthcare Initiative and iteration of the Medical Terminology class will implement use of a new software feature added to LearnerWeb in 2010. This feature will support communication among teachers, learners, and

support providers within the LearnerWeb system, especially to help resolve barriers to successful participation by individual learners.

Recommendations on funding, system design, and statutory changes that are necessary to achieve the goals of subdivision 2:

To fulfill the intent of the legislation, the RCWIB brought public, private, and non-profit partners together to address employment, training, and education needs of low- and limited-skill workers within the context of employer needs. The "cross-silo" approach used in this work drew on the strengths and knowledge of each partner, in the broader context of community need. The process included identification of institutional and legislative changes that could better facilitate such workforce development and education needs in the future. The following subjects were identified as areas to consider changes in the system:

Demand-Driven

As publically funded entities are rapidly rethinking their ability to provide services, those that engage in FastTRAC modeled programming should show clear indicators that the training being provided is needed by local employers and has livable wage earning potential. Access to statistical labor market information as well as discussions with the local employers will provide the FastTRAC partners and students a clear understanding of the benefits of the training opportunity. Additionally, the programming needs to maintain business contact and input allowing for changes to curriculum and services to fit local needs as well as economic shifts.

Institutional Barriers

Long held work practices and legislative requirements can create institutional barriers that make collaborative processes difficult and expensive. An example is the amount of paperwork required to transfer funding to appropriate agencies for the FastTRAC process.

Assessments

A barrier for the collaborative process is the number of assessments that the students need to take to satisfy each agency's requirements (ABE, workforce system, and MNSCU). A review of the myriad of tests from participating agencies should be reviewed. The question to be answered is which test aligns needs with benefits for the students, the agencies and the program of study. By developing a more effective relationship between Adult Basic Education, MnSCU and the workforce system, relevant measures can be identified.

The Role of the Single Point of Contact (SPOC)

Maneuvering through the world of education can be a challenging experience. Low-skilled adults often need support systems that provide timely guidance to keep them in a position of being able to continue completion of homework and attendance in class. The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative identified the SPOC as important as that of a teacher and should be funded as such. The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative's SPOC is from a community-based organization.

Instructor Planning, Facilitation and Resources

The FastTRAC model requires that the students have the benefit of industry relevant learning while they simultaneously receive basic education instruction. Looking at the increase in adults with limited basic skills that will need access to higher education, the FastTRAC model opens doors that provide many with opportunities to get into livable wage jobs, but they need support. The co-teaching model in which the college instructor and the ABE instructor work together provides this support. It is important to note that this relationship can make or break student success. The two instructors need to be on the same page in order to provide the instruction and content support needed at a college level. Ensuring a successful relationship requires that the two teachers have full buy-in to the FastTRAC model of co-teaching before the class begins and that they are fully supported by the SPOC and additional parties throughout the class. Resources must be available to the instructors and the SPOC for the upfront and ongoing collaboration and planning. The students' outcomes include increased skill building, a better understanding of college expectations and completion of a college course.

Collaboration of ABE/College/Workforce System

The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative enjoyed a true interest from the partners in collaborating. As issues or roadblocks emerged, they were placed on the table and active problem solving would follow. The following is a list of challenges that hinder the effective and efficient flow of work and forward motion of a FastTRAC program and possible solutions identified through the RCWIB's Healthcare Initiative:

Multiple tracking systems are in place making it difficult to efficiently follow participants. The RCWIB Healthcare Initiative employed LearnerWeb, a tool that provides an avenue for communication flow. This tool is evolving as the initiative moves into its next phase. It shows promise of being an efficient connector of instructors, students and case managers.

Expectations of participants by various referring and sponsoring agencies can be confusing or conflicting. Partner agencies need to coordinate and simplify behavioral and outcome expectations so that they can be laid out for the students in a clear and concise manner.

Students who complete training through a FastTRAC program are very likely to need help finding employment in a timely manner. The MN Workforce System can play an active role in helping the students secure a new position. Flexibility needs to be provided to the Workforce System so that the students do not necessarily have to be enrolled in a WIA or MFIP program to receive active placement services.

Costs of the Collaborative Process

The cost of the collaborative process is high due to maintaining consistent interagency communication both electronically and in person, providing low-skilled people with the tools they need to get up to speed, getting the right people from the various systems at the table, developing the co-teaching model and, pulling the framework together. In the collaborative process, it is important to prepare for the unexpected and be willing to think differently to deal with issues and concerns. Partners need to be flexible and adaptable as well as be comfortable in challenging the status quo.

Appendix II: Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council – Training & Employment Skills Team (TEST) Final Report

[***Disclaimer***: *The following report is the work of Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council. The report was submitted to the GWDC by February 15, 2011 as required by Minnesota Laws 2009, Chapter 65, Sec. 2, Subd. 5. Views and recommendations expressed are those of Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council and not the GWDC.*]

Partners

DEED Job Service: Linda Yozamp
DEED WorkForce Development Division: Joan Danielson
DEED: Mag Patridge (ABE)
St. Cloud HRA: Louise Reis
Saint Cloud Area Public Schools: Jayne Greeney Schill, Scott Wallner (ABE)
Saint Cloud State University: Bernie Omann, Addie Turkowski, Tammy Anhalt-Warner
Saint Cloud Technical College: Joyce Helens, Sandy Fabian, Lynette Olson
Stearns County HRA: Bob Swanberg
Stearns County Human Services: Janet Goligowski
Stearns-Benton Employment and Training Council (SBETC): Kathy Zavala
Tri-CAP: Angie Theisen

Goals:

1. Find the financial support needed to assist each interested partner in getting the project established for their customers.

2. Compile data from all partners to report how many individuals took the NCRC testing, how many passed successfully and at what level.

3. Track how many individuals take the tests a second time and improve their scores by increasing to a higher level.

4. Market the product to local employers so they are aware of how it can positively impact their business.

Actions:

1. **Find the financial support needed to assist each interested partner in getting the project established for their customers.**

 Once information was received from ACT, it was determined by the Training & Employment   Skills Team (TEST) that during the duration of this initial project partners would refer to the WorkForce Center for the testing as well as access to KeyTrain. As demand for the testing increases, some of the partners may consider doing the testing as an individual ACT site (Tri-CAP,   St. Cloud Technical & Community

College, ABE, and St. Cloud State University), however, it does not appear that will happen in the next year. An additional grant awarded to SBETC by the Initiative Foundation did result in increasing the ability of Rural MN CEP and Central MN Jobs and Training along with SBETC to do the testing for both regular clients and universal customers and to offer KeyTrain. . Note: This $50,000 grant is the largest level of funding that the Initiative Foundation commits. This effort also expanded the "region" impacted by this project. Each of these entities is directly registered with ACT to provide this service.

2. **Compile data from all partners to report how many individuals took the NCRC testing, how many passed successfully and at what level.**

We started issuing the Certificate in June 2010. We have tested 156 individuals with 1 achieving the platinum level, 53 achieving gold, 81 achieving silver and 21 achieving bronze. We had 31 students access the Keytrain system in Summer 2010. They accessed this prior to testing for the NCRC. All 31 students achieved a National Career Readiness Certificate. Currently we have 31 students at Tech High School in St. Cloud who are working in the Keytrain system and are scheduled to begin testing the week of February 1st. We also have several of our partners taking the tests in February along with a few of their staff.

3. **Track how many individuals take the tests a second time and improve their scores by increasing to a higher level.**

We have had two individuals who accessed Keytrain after testing for the NCRC, but they have not re-tested yet.

4. **Market the product to local employers so they are aware of how it can positively impact their business.**

There was not sufficient funding in the Legislative Collaborative grant to do area wide marketing to employers. Partners who felt comfortable doing so have relayed the information in various meetings they have attended to let the public know the opportunity for testing was available. There were two marketing pieces that gave the project excellent coverage at no cost. The first was a front page article in the St. Cloud Times on January 9, 2011, a Sunday edition. The second was an eight page feature article in the IQ Magazine published quarterly by the Initiative Foundation and widely circulated in their 14 county service area. Both of these are available upon request.

SBETC was recently awarded a $20,000 marketing grant from the Initiative Foundation to market the National Career Readiness Certificate through a DVD and brochures directed towards employers and also another DVD and brochures directed at the job seeker. These products should be available for use by April 1, 2011. This grant serves the three WSAs – SBETC, Rural MN CEP and Central MN Jobs & Training Services.

Outcomes:

In the final evaluation of the project, partners involved in TEST indicated this project was very successful. In general, they liked the meetings that allowed them to share information about what was happening in their organization and learn about other services or programs that might be available in other member organizations. They felt the mandated partners as well as those not mandated, were a good fit for determining the project.

Almost 100% of those involved in the project have indicated a commitment to continuing on after the funding is done. There will be a merging of the TEST with another group who has similar interests. This will allow for information sharing, legislative updates, partnering on potential grants and marketing of the NCRC by a broader group

Testing for the National Career Readiness Certificate began in June 2010 once SBETC was registered with ACT to do the testing. Job Service also has the ability to do the testing, however, has not done any testing during this project.

Proctors for overseeing testing were trained by SBETC staff and include one from Tri-CAP and two from ABE. They agreed to help with proctoring tests as part of TEST.

NCRC testing was taken by all SBETC staff, the consultant, one DEED staff and one person from Tri-CAP. Before the end of February 2011 our partners have indicated one from SCSU will test, two more from Tri-CAP, up to nine ABE staff and our partner from District 742. Following a presentation to several school superintendents, some of the schools are starting out by sending one or two staff to do the testing and report back to them.

The St. Cloud Times article has triggered some interest and phone calls regarding the certificate. The Initiative Foundation IQ Magazine was just released in the last week and is already creating further attention to the NCRC.

SBETC is considering offering the NCRC to all Dislocated Workers who took the WorkKeys tests prior to the NCRC being available. A notice will be sent to those individuals going back one year. We have learned if they tested through WorkKeys, they can pay $16 and receive the certificate.

Recommendations on funding, system design, and statutory changes that are necessary to achieve the goals of subdivision 2:

In order to successfully move forward with both the testing for the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as well as engaging employers in the process by having them test their incumbent employees and new applicants and have their job positions profiled, funds are needed to become a WorkKeys Solutions Provider (WSP). ACT requires an entity to be a WSP if they wish to do profiling and employer testing. Both the fee to become a WSP and the cost to have staff trained to do profiling, as well as staff time to cover the first year, are necessary to keep this implementation moving forward.

Looking at the data for what is happening nationwide with other states and the NCRC, Minnesota is far behind in getting this made available for job seekers and high school students. The NCRC is a national credential that accurately reflects a skill level that is beneficial to both the employers and the job seekers.

The NCRC helps low skilled workers learn what areas they need to work on to improve skills for employment and then provides them with a way to improve using KeyTrain. It is a good, low cost credential for public assistance recipients who need to find work. It more accurately reflects the readiness of a high school student to enter the work force than the high school diploma does.

From an employer standpoint, results across the United States have shown employers feel strongly that is has reduced poor hiring decision, has helped employee turnover and has assisted them in learning what areas their incumbent worker need training. By profiling their current positions and testing current staff, they are able to assess training needs and see the potential of their employees. In addition, by indicating a preference for an applicant to have the NCRC they are able to quickly see where the candidate fits in their organization/business.

As high schools begin to do this testing, they are able to see areas a student may need to work on prior to graduation. This is particularly helpful for those students not planning to immediately enter college. The certificate directly relates to being job ready.

For community and technical colleges, this certificate adds a final piece to their diploma. For instance, if someone is ready to graduate in welding, the NCRC shows they are ready to work and have the ability to do so in real life areas of Reading for Information, Applied Mathematics and Locating Information—three crucial areas for almost any job.

While the certificate can assist the low skilled job seeker, it can also benefit the higher skilled job seeker by showing they have the preferred level on the NCRC to fit a position. For all job seekers, one other benefit it the ability to have the NCRC recognized and respected by employers across the United States. When the NCRC is implemented on a statewide basis, data becomes available to help recognize and develop training needs across the job seeking population.

While all the partners in TEST provided input and assisted in the success of the project, many are in a position where implementing the testing where they work is difficult because large institutions, state agencies and large organizations must go through a lengthy process to make this type of change. This is one situation where directives from the top down would be the fastest way to achieve the desired implementation. One state agency, MNDOT, is actually beginning to do this in a very limited way. Unfortunately, they are only paying for two of the three tests necessary to achieve a NCRC which will leave many job seekers without a transferrable credential. Hopefully all testing sites will let the individuals coming in for the MNDOT positions know there is one more test available to them if they wish to pay for it so they can have the actual NCRC.

It would be beneficial for someone to put together a study of what is being done in states where this has been embraced and to see what the positive impact has been for the job seekers and the employers. ACT is beginning to have some information available, but much more can be found through states web sites. TEST members see the potential value of this certificate to all levels of job seekers and employers. In order to successfully continue to offer the NCRC locally there must be some funding to give it a solid base.

Appendix III: Workforce Development, Inc. – Stackable Credential System Final Report

[***Disclaimer***: *The following report is the work of Workforce Development, Inc. The report was submitted to the GWDC by February 15, 2011 as required by Minnesota Laws 2009, Chapter 65, Sec. 2, Subd. 5. Views and recommendations expressed are those of Workforce Development, Inc. and not the GWDC.*]

Partners

Albert Lea ABE: Diane Hill
Austin ABE: Janie Mino
Caledonia ABE: Nancy Runnigen
Faribault ABE: Pat Wieseler
Owatonna ABE: Deb McDermott-Johnson
Red Wing/Wabasha ABE: Theresa Luther-Dolan
Riverland Community College: Jeff Miller
Rochester ABE: Julie Nigon
Southeast Technical College: Barbara Breza
Workforce Development, Inc.: Becky Thofson

Goals:

1. Expand employer awareness of the Career Readiness Credential (CRC) and how it can positively impact their business.

2. Better prepare CRC recipients to explain and "sell" their credential and skills to their current and potential employers.

3. Develop a communication plan and marketing activities to highlight the benefits and successes of a regional and/or statewide workforce credential system.

4. Expand the project partnerships to include more local and regional community members.

Actions:

WDI used the funding from this project to implement a strategic plan to raise awareness by business of the National Career Readiness Credential (NCRC). We also wanted to increase the awareness by business of the caliber of jobseekers we have coming through the Workforce Centers and their skill levels. Finally, we wanted to be sure our staff of counselors, marketers and regional Business Service Specialists were fully engaged in promoting the Credential to the businesses and jobseekers they work with on a day-to-day basis.

The goals and activities as outlined in our original plan were all completed and in a timely manner.

Outcomes:

This project resulted in a series of Employer Breakfasts held in Red Wing, Faribault, Owatonna, Albert Lea, and Austin. We were very satisfied with the attendance and the feedback we got from this series of interactions from business leaders in each community.

The breakfasts included a presentation of the regional economy by our Executive Director, Randy Johnson followed by an overview of the NCRC. A representative from ACT, Inc. who publishes the NCRC materials was available at each presentation to fully describe not only the credential but also the impact it can have on a business' workforce. The presentations were followed by small group discussions at each table and questions and answers for the entire group.

We have very positive feedback from every session. The events proved to be an effective tool in getting the word out to busy business people. We also have had a good response from employers recognizing the credential and what it means when people come to them with applications for employment.

We had several businesses who came forward at the breakfasts with questions about how to require the credential as a condition for hire. After much discussion with both our WIB and ACT, we decided that the business would need to work directly with ACT to facilitate that process.

At the same time this project was supporting the outreach to business, WDI was engaged in a project through FastTRAC to make the Key Train curriculum available through our area ABE centers. Key Train is available to increase the skills of people who want to improve their NCRC scores. Key Train has been incorporated into FastTRAC programming throughout the region.

Through several of the activities involving the NCRC, business people, job counselors, ABE instructors, and college partners have become more familiar with the credential and what it means. Job counselors have developed a brief workshop for jobseekers who complete the assessment to then be able to clearly explain what their level of achievement means.

Recommendations on funding, system design, and statutory changes that are necessary to achieve the goals of subdivision2:

The acceptance by business of the NCRC and what the credentials mean for the people who are applying with them for work takes time to develop. The relationships we have are important to building the acceptance. If the state were to endorse the NCRC as the approved credential within Minnesota, the resulting media coverage and raised awareness would be beneficial to our jobseekers. This nationally recognized credential is very important to raising self-esteem during a difficult job search and also being able to prove the level of skills before being hired.

Throughout the state, NCRC has been used to attract business and jobseekers to be able to communicate skill levels and requirements using the same "language". Continuing to align funding for NCRC, skill building among jobseekers and outreach to business is extremely important.

We found the NCRC to be the most "business friendly" of the current assessments used by our education partners. Both the CASAS and the Accuplacer are academic tools that do not adequately measure the applied skills required by business.

As we continue to use the NCRC and have more and more jobseekers with the credential, marketing and outreach efforts to business will always be required to build further awareness and acceptance of the credential.

Appendix IV: Twin Cities Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council – Working Learners Collaborative Initiative Final Report

[**Disclaimer**: *The following report is the work Twin Cities Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council. The report was submitted to the GWDC by February 15, 2011 as required by Minnesota Laws 2009, Chapter 65, Sec. 2, Subd. 5. Views and recommendations expressed are those of Twin Cities Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council and not the GWDC.*]

Partners:

Metro area Workforce Investment Board staff: Deb Bahr-Helgen, Patricia Brady, Barb Chaffee, Robert Crawford, Mary Jo Gardner, Mark Jacobs, John McLaughlin, and Jerry Vitzthum
Key industry partners: MN Precision Manufacturing Association, MN IT Workforce Collaborative
Metropolitan Workforce Council: Luke Weisberg, Cathy Weik, Carolyn Roby
Minneapolis Public Schools Adult Basic Education: Caryle Peterson
Minneapolis WorkForce Center: Kathy Carney

Goals:

1. Strengthen and build new relationships among practitioners and stakeholders across arenas in pursuit of more comprehensive service delivery.

2. Advance collaborative initiatives that bring ABE, Workforce, Higher Education, and other partners together in service to "working learners" particularly to serve populations in need.

3. Provide individual Workforce Investment Boards with program models, financial support, and leadership to strengthen partnerships within their own geographic areas.

4. Make recommendations via the GWDC to MN State Legislature and state agencies on policy or funding changes that would allow businesses and individuals to be better served.

Actions:

The Working Learners Collaborative began its work by convening stakeholders from across the metro on January 28, 2010. The purpose of this meeting was to identify existing cross-system relationships and activities to serve as the foundation on which further metro-wide collaboration could be built. Specifically, the meeting sought to determine the following: a) current points of collaboration; b) opportunity to build or strengthen collaboration; c) challenges or barriers to stronger collaboration; and d) resources or changes needed to move relationships from informal to institutional.

Insightful conversation and strategic thinking around these topics ultimately led stakeholders to identify three primary goals to pursue. These goals were not identified in a vacuum, but rather tied directly to work already underway in the metro, for which stronger partnerships and a more focused pooling of resources was needed. The three main objectives of the Working Learners Collaborative were as follows:

a) Develop a shared "assessment toolkit" among workforce, ABE, and MnSCU partners.

b) Strengthen professional development for career counselors to better serve learners and workers across the ABE, education, and workforce arenas.

c) Explore the viability of establishing industry-based "skills panels" from among existing advisory groups to serve as a single-point-of-contact for programs across the ABE, education, and workforce arenas.

Each of the three goals, and the action steps taken in their pursuit, are described in detail below.

1. Shared assessment "toolkit." The goal here has been to streamline assessment processes from the jobseeker/learner perspective to ensure that customers are not subject to duplicative or unnecessary testing. Recognizing that different assessments currently in use may serve different specific purposes, we wanted to explore ways to align the use of these tools across systems so that the customer experience would be more efficient (and therefore, more positive).

Assessment activity revolved largely around the existing pilot program in Minneapolis and Ramsey County to use the ACT Career Readiness Certificate assessment (and its companion, Work Keys); and how this effort fits with other assessment tools in use. Central to this initiative was the NCRC Pilot taking place in the Minneapolis and Ramsey County WorkForce Centers. The Working Learners grant provided $2,500 to help support the pilot, which ran from March 7 to May 31, 2010, and served 157 dislocated and unemployed workers. Of those, 116 earned the NCRC and 41 were referred to ABE or WFC staff for further development.

Further, progress was made between ABE and workforce partners to clarify referral protocols. Minneapolis Public Schools ABE have affirmed that they will provide instruction at a partnership site when:

- There is a larger initiative/program/training of which ABE is a part.

- The success of the initiative is of a significant level of importance to both the agency and to MPS ABE (directly related to the vision/mission and has widespread support) and on-site ABE is essential to its success.

- The ABE service is not a stand-alone ABE service hosted by the organization.

- Partner agency's investment of resources and management time is significant and sustained/sustainable.

A specific example of this has been the early steps to integrate ABE into the "Employment Readiness U" classes and Dislocated Worker Program at the South Minneapolis Workforce Center. We have been able to somewhat integrate ABE into the ERU classes at the south workforce center. As the ABE noted, support from the metro Workforce Council's collaboration grant helped advance their efforts: "I don't think we've cracked any secret code or anything, but I will say that we have made progress and that working with the staff at the WorkForce Center is becoming quite natural." The Greater Metro Workforce Council will continue to work with partners across the metro to facilitate this kind of clarification of protocol.

2. Professional development for career counselors. There is shared concern across the three arenas that career counselors are not provided adequate or consistent resources for current information or training to ensure their effectiveness. Grant partners agreed that we could better support career counselors, in both workforce development and educational settings, to have resources at their disposal to provide students/job seekers with up-to-date labor market trends and employment and training opportunities and information.

With its abundance of educational and employment related data, ISEEK was the logical foundation on which to build this effort. We met with ISEEK's Counselor Advisory Group, which includes professionals representing metro-area educational institutions, vocational rehabilitation programs, and WorkForce Centers, to identify ways to enhance the content and delivery of information to practitioners. Specifically, we explored the following questions with the advisory group: a) what are the primary sources from which counselors get information about labor market trends, and job opportunities?; b) what, if any, connections or relationships do folks have with their local Workforce Investment Board staff?; c) would a 'toolkit' be of value -- and if so, what would be best to have in it?

Another, related, development here was engaging ISEEK staff in discussion about ways to better reach the ABE community. Current ISEEK materials are written at a level that makes it difficult for adults with low levels of literacy to navigate.

This work has also included engagement with the Metropolitan Library Service Agency (MELSA), which is exploring ways to expand its capacity to provide employment counseling to a growing number of library customers. Less than half the people who seek service at a WorkForce Center are eligible for a publicly-funded program that allows for full person-to-person service provision. As a result, a significant number of jobseekers are utilizing online resources at WorkForce Centers while many more are turning to their public libraries (and other agencies) for online access to job applications and career information; as well as filing for unemployment insurance, writing a resume, or preparing for a job interview.

Our goal is to build relationships between libraries and WorkForce Centers, and the GMWC and MELSA are exploring cross-training staff so that librarians can 'triage' customers appropriately, ensuring they are not missing opportunities to avail themselves of WorkForce Center programs; and, so that WorkForce Center staff know what types of employment assistance are available at libraries in their region. A meeting of MELSA and metro-area WIB directors on this topic is scheduled for late February.

In addition, we see opportunity to utilize shared intermediaries — nonprofit service providers like Goodwill Easter Seals, HIRED, and others who have a presence in both WorkForce Centers and libraries. To that end, we are also exploring convening MELSA, WIB directors, and community-based providers to see how we might jointly work with and support their role in both worlds.

Finally, MELSA is presenting a national webinar in April, 2011, on the topic of providing workforce development services in the libraries. The webinar is titled "Working with Your Workforce Center" and is described as follows: "Workforce Centers operate with myriad funding streams to support the unemployed, but not every job seeker qualifies. Learn how this impacts your library patrons and what libraries can do to make appropriate connections for our customers." Anoka County Library staff will present their library collaboration with the Anoka County WorkForce Center as a model. Jerry Vitzthum will serve as the WorkForce Center presenter.

3. Skills Panels. There is concurrence among stakeholders in the metro region that while we have multiple efforts in which education and workforce service providers have strong connections to industry partners for specific projects, we could do this work more efficiently by developing cohesive strategies to respond to workforce development needs across arenas. With this recognition, the Working Learners Collaborative began exploring the development of 'skills panels' that could harness the existing participation of business leaders, while introducing some efficiencies and improvements to their involvement in workforce development planning and programming across schools and employment and training service providers.

We set out to explore the possibility of skills panels in one or more of three sectors – information technology, manufacturing, and health care. With recent and/or existing efforts in manufacturing, we worked with sector partners there to catalogue existing business advisory efforts. This resulted in a statewide 'map' that was created with and for industry partners, led by the Minnesota Precision Manufacturing Association, that was distributed through their network of members. In healthcare, efforts to explore common skills panels concluded without forward progress. Continued attention to the information technology sector has yielded the beginning of a shared project between industry leaders, education partners, and workforce partners to develop a career mapping tool that will engage partners along the IT career pathway – bringing together business partners who advise several programs ranging from 'awareness building' to specific education and training efforts serving the IT industry. Known currently as the ITWFC Marketplace, this is a set of web-based tools that:

- presents timely information, references, and analysis that are relevant to the people and the economy of Minnesota;

- provides a forum to foster engagement and dialogue among employers, educators, technology professionals, and persons engaged in career development;

- supports the employer, student, and career seeker to make informed decisions;

- becomes a trusted resource for objective news and analysis; and,

- supports Minnesota's economic development and vitality.

Some funds from our collaborative grant have been allocated to support this work going forward.

We also note that selected partners that came together, in part, through this collaborative effort are also moving forward with a broader "asset mapping" effort which will update the MN Inventory of Workforce Programs (often referred to as the 'Gunther Report') and create a specific, and deeper, look at resources in the Twin Cities region. The intention is to map existing efforts resources, and understand how those align with market need. It may well be that, with that information in hand, the GMWC and other partners are in an even stronger position to explore some efficiency-building with shared skills panels that might be formed.

Outcomes:

We identify the following outcomes from this grant-funded effort:

a) With regard to shared assessments, Chapter 65 grant funds provided partial support to a pilot project in the Twin Cities in which 157 dislocated and unemployed workers were served. Of those, 116 earned the NCRC (career readiness certificate) and 41 were referred to ABE or WFC staff for further development. Additional clarity was developed between workforce and ABE partners with regard to referral and partnership protocols.

b) Relationships were strengthened between counselors from MnSCU, ABE, and other arenas with Workforce Investment Board staff; and, metro area WIBs have jointly partnered with ISEEK Solutions to establish a metro 'channel' for career counselors and jobseekers. This channel will bring timely information and resources to career counselors and will be directly shaped by regional Workforce Investment Board leaders. Chapter 65 grant funds have been deployed to establish this channel.

c) Training resources for manufacturing were mapped and provided to industry partners (MN Precision Manufacturing Association) as a first step toward identifying efficiencies in industry guidance to manufacturing training programs.

d) The MN IT Workforce Collaborative, in partnership with Workforce Investment Board leaders, training providers, and others, will use Chapter 65 grant funds to develop an "IT Career Pathway map" as a resource for industry professionals, trainers/educators, and jobseekers interested in IT occupational clusters.

e) The Twin Cities Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council significantly grew and strengthened relationships among groups of elected leaders (Regional Council of Mayors), business leaders (manufacturing, IT, and healthcare sectors specifically), and among education partners at all levels.

Recommendations on funding, system design, and statutory changes that are necessary to achieve the goals of subdivision 2:

Based on this experience, the Twin Cities Greater Metropolitan Workforce Council offers the following observations and recommendations to the MN State Legislature:

A) The WorkKeys Readiness Indicator pilot undertaken at the Minneapolis and Ramsey County WFCs affirms a preference, among WorkForce Center staff, for the NCRC assessment tool over others on the market. The pilot demonstrated to WorkForce Center professionals that WorkKeys is more user---friendly for clients and provides greater information to employers than competing products.

Based on this trial, we recommend expanding use of the WorkKeys Readiness Indicator to all program areas – Dislocated Workers, MFIP, WIA Adults, and special projects. We also recommend extending the NCRC/WorkKeys pilot within the workforce system geographically (to Wright and Sherburne counties) and perhaps within specific programs/clusters in the region. We also suggest that lessons learned from the pilot be considered by the FastTRAC Alignment Committee, which will eventually make recommendations about which assessment tool/s, if any, the state should formally endorse.

B) We see a pressing need for more trained staff to serve unemployed and dislocated workers throughout the region. In keeping with the MN Workforce Council Association's 2011

recommendations, we recommend additional funding for Dislocated Worker programs; and, ensuring that any such funding is delivered through business---led, local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs). With WIBs as the local point of accountability, we can then work closely with partners in education, the library system, and elsewhere to cross---train and deploy staff, as needed, to meet regional workforce needs.

C) The initial gathering that led this grant---funded work was an interesting opportunity to connect individuals from workforce development, all levels of education, various business and industry sectors, nonprofit partners, and others. There were many existing relationships and connections; and many more to be made. We also recommend that, going forward, local Workforce Investment Boards be required by the state legislature to create local workforce needs service area plans through which state and federal resources in workforce development, education, economic development, and other sources flow to ensure a comprehensive strategy that maximizes resources and reduces duplication of effort. We also acknowledge that the Chapter 65 grants were very useful as 'glue money' to help bring parties together and advance the strategies and outcomes discussed here.

D) Finally, throughout our work, we were mindful that coordinating training, strengthening assessments, and developing new channels of information for career counselors and others is all useful only insofar as we have an economy in which jobs are available for those who are prepared to fill them. We further support the MN Workforce Council Association's endorsement of "emergency jobs legislation" that would support job creation efforts in key regions, industries, and for particular populations with the expectation that we can create more employment opportunities for the many unemployed, dislocated, and underemployed individuals in the metro region who are seeking a meaningful and productive place in the regional labor market.

Conclusion We are grateful to the MN State Legislature for the opportunity to deliver these grant---funded activities and continue to explore our cooperative relationships with partners in the region. We trust that our experience will be useful to legislators in the coming year and that we may see additional state support for regional collaboration such as this.

Endnotes

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[15] This type of advising, often called intrusive academic advising, "Differs from the more traditional prescriptive and developmental models of advising because advisors are not only helpful and encouraging of students, but they proactively make the initial contact with students, rather than waiting in their offices for students to schedule an appointment. Most students know they have an advisor but may be unaware of how and when they are able to contact the advisor or what the advisor can help them accomplish." For more information, see the http://www.academicaffairs.mnscu.edu/AccessandOpportunity/Best_Practices/Intrusive_Advising.html.

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[28] Johnson, J. et al. *With their Whole Lives Ahead of Them*. Public Agenda. Available at http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/theirwholelivesaheadofthem.pdf.

[29] For more information, see http://www.sbctc.edu/college/s_opportunitygrants.aspx

[30] Prince, D. and Jenkins, D. (2005). *Building Pathways to Success for Low-Skill Adult Students: Lessons for Community College Policy and Practice from a Statewide Longitudinal Tracking Study (The "Tipping Point" Research).* Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. Available at http://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Publication.asp?UID=204.

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