



## The Middle-Skills Solutions Act (Senate Bill 921; House Bill 2713)

### WHAT'S IN THIS LEGISLATION?

The Middle Skills Solutions Act would build upon existing resources to develop a more robust system to prepare adult, non-traditional students for employment in growing economic sectors:

**Section I.** Establish a middle-skills council or task an existing council to make recommendations that increase the readiness and success of working adults and other non-traditional students in education and training to increase the number of adults with credentials for middle-skill jobs. The outcomes will include establishing baseline data on the Commonwealth's middle-skills gap and making recommendations for a system-wide plan to better align adult basic education programs with post-secondary institutions.

**Section II.** Establish Regional Skills Academies or Partnerships aligned with the Commonwealth's economic development strategy, to address the gap between the skills currently held by the Commonwealth's workers and the skills needed by its employers for middle-skill jobs. The Academies are not new structures but rather provide a mechanism to incentivize greater resource coordination and innovation across agencies, departments, and schools to increase credential and completion rates.

**Section III.** Require the regular review of local and regional labor market information and the development of regional plans to coordinate training and education activities to meet Massachusetts' demand for middle-skill workers.

### WHO FILED THE LEGISLATION?

The **Middle-Skills Solutions Act** was filed in January 2011 by Senator Kenneth Donnelly and Representative Cheryl Coakley-Rivera, along with a total of 54 co-sponsors from both houses of the state legislature.

### WHO'S SUPPORTING THIS EFFORT?

The Skills2Compete MA coalition, which is led by the Workforce Solutions Group and SkillWorks and comprises a broad group of advocates from business, community-based organizations, labor, adult basic education providers, community colleges, and philanthropy, is spearheading the effort to pass this legislation.

### WHY DOES THE LEGISLATION FOCUS ON MIDDLE-SKILL JOBS AND CREDENTIALS?

Reports from the [McKinsey Global Institute](#), the [Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and others](#) have pointed out that middle-skill jobs, those that require at least some level of post-secondary training or a credential, comprise 40% of the Massachusetts economy and will continue to do so in the future. Yet, we have fallen behind in ensuring our workforce has the skills that businesses are looking for. If we want our Commonwealth to be competitive in attracting companies to locate and grow here, we need to invest in middle-skill job pathways and credentials.



Research consistently shows that people with post-secondary training, including certificates, Associate's Degrees, and other credentials, earn significantly more than residents with only a high school diploma, AND they are more likely to be employed.<sup>1</sup> A high school diploma is no longer enough to thrive in our economy; helping people get middle-skill credentials is an important way to help build the middle class.

## WHY DOES THE BILL FOCUS ON ADULT BASIC EDUCATION TRANSITIONS TO COLLEGE AND DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION?

Two-thirds of our future workforce is already in the workforce today, so we need to ensure that their skills and credentials keep pace with our economic needs.

If we are going to grow the number of middle-skilled workers, we need strategies to help working and job-seeking adults succeed in post-secondary training and education. Too often, working adults get stuck in developmental non-credit classes at many colleges; they use up their financial aid, get discouraged, and don't complete a degree or credential.

One study has shown that only 2 to 3 percent of students who start college in ESOL or adult basic education classes earn a certificate of one year or more or an Associate's Degree within five years.<sup>2</sup>

## WHY DO WE NEED A MIDDLE-SKILLS COUNCIL, AND WHAT WILL IT DO?

The Middle-Skills Council will examine and quantify the middle-skills gap in the Commonwealth. Currently, no agency or body collects information on all middle-skill credentials granted in the state.

The council will collect baseline data on credentials awarded and credentials needed by employers and would establish a process for regularly gathering and updating this information.

Several other states have embarked on this work, and a good model can be found in [Maryland's cross agency council](#) that collects and evaluates credential outcomes from community colleges, apprenticeships, private career schools, WIA occupational and incumbent worker training, vocational technical high schools and adult education matriculating to post-secondary credentials, and vocational rehabilitation, veterans training programs, TANF, and programs for criminal offenders.

The council will also make recommendations for minimizing remediation classes and increasing credential attainment rates of adults and non-traditional students by developing a system-wide plan to better align adult basic education and pre-college programs with post-secondary institutions.

## WHAT ARE REGIONAL SKILLS PARTNERSHIPS, AND HOW DO THEY WORK?

The Regional Skills Academies in this bill are inspired by the industry based partnerships of the [Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund](#) and the successful [Innovative Post-Secondary Education Models](#), which seeded innovative programming in our state's community colleges.

One of these programs, the [Academy of Health Professions](#) at Middlesex Community College, has become a national model for flexible programming for adults, offering "stackable" credentials that help



unemployed workers get back into the labor market more quickly and work towards a higher level certificate or degree.

This bill expands support for initiatives like the Academy of Health Professions, and provides funding to establish partnerships in regional industry sectors. The Regional Skills Academies or Partnerships are not strictly focused on community college programming; this bill would encourage greater partnership with education and training institutions like regional vocational technical high schools, ABE providers, career centers and WIBs, labor-management training funds, and community-based organizations.

The Skills Academies/Partnerships do not add another layer to the workforce training system; they encourage coordination and enhance existing institutions and resources to make credential attainment more accessible. The Academies will support a continuum of educational services that may start with adult education, include a bridge to college, require some post-secondary education (including pre-requisites) and integrate with industry to provide internships, co-ops or other forms of work/work experience.

The Skills Academies/Partnerships will be selected through a competitive grant process administered by the [Commonwealth Corporation](#) through the existing infrastructure of the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund.

## HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM THE VISION PROJECT AND OTHER HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM EFFORTS?

Commissioner Freeland's exciting Vision Project focuses on improving a range of outcomes across the Commonwealth's public higher education institutions. The Skills2Compete MA coalition supports the Vision Project and considers our effort to be supportive of realizing that project's goal of increasing overall college completion and credential attainment rates.

The community college reforms proposed by Governor Patrick would modify governance and funding formulas for the 15 community colleges. The Middle Skills Solutions Act would work with community colleges, vocational technical schools, community based organizations and labor unions to align skill training programs more rapidly with employer and industry needs.

## HOW MUCH FUNDING DOES THIS LEGISLATION NEED?

We are requesting \$8 million annually from the consolidated budget surplus or General Fund to support the Regional Skills Academies/Partnerships. All programs that are developed will leverage existing funding streams and financial aid.

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Center for Law and Social Policy and National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, June 2011

<http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/NotKidStuffAnymoreAdultStudentProfile-1.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The Boston Foundation, *Massachusetts Community Colleges: The Potential for Improving College Attainment*.

[http://www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/tbforg/Utility\\_Navigation/Multimedia\\_Library/Reports/CommunityCollege.pdf](http://www.tbf.org/uploadedFiles/tbforg/Utility_Navigation/Multimedia_Library/Reports/CommunityCollege.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> MA Department of Higher Education, October 2009.

<http://www.phenomonline.org/images/documents/2009earlyenrollmentreport.pdf>

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