Enclosure 2a
February 27, 2014

RHODE TO WORK

A LEGISLATIVE ACTION PLAN

JANUARY 2014

MEETING THE TRAINING NEEDS OF TODAY'S UNEMPLOYED & TOMORROW'S WORKFORCE

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INTRODUCTION

Rhode Island's unemployment rate presently stands at 9% (November 2013), two percentage points higher than the national average, and indicative of the painfully sluggish pace of the state's economic recovery.[1] Many unemployed Rhode Islanders find themselves shut out from job openings because they lack the skills and experience employers are looking for; others have been out of the workforce so long that their skill set may now be dated or obsolete. Concurrently, in-state employers are reporting a growing inability to find the skilled workers they need.[2] Addressing this immediate jobs crisis is the Rhode Island Senate's number one priority.

Tens of thousands of Rhode Islanders are currently out of work. While some of these individuals may not yet be prepared to return to employment, most are ready but have critical gaps in their skill sets (or job histories) that stand in the way of gainful employment.[3] A committed effort to connect these unemployed individuals to training and work-like experiences that satisfy employer demand will not only decrease the number of unemployed, but could lead to a cycle of additional job creation.[4] While some new resources may be necessary for this effort, the state must first ensure the most effective use of the roughly $55 million (in combined federal and state funds) it spends annually on adult education and workforce training programs.[5]

Beyond this immediate need, the state faces another considerable challenge: a projected long-term shortage of skilled workers. Rhode Island, along with the rest of the nation, confronts a structural skills shortage that may fundamentally threaten the economy long after the short-term effects of the 2007-2009 recession have faded.[6,7] Failure to close this "skills gap" between tomorrow's available jobs and the supply of qualified candidates may mean persistently high unemployment, significantly reduced economic competitiveness, and a hindered ability for companies to grow and expand.

Successfully connecting currently unemployed Rhode Islanders to today's jobs and preparing future workers for tomorrow's jobs will require effective leadership, coordinated action, and a recognition that incremental change and gradual improvement are not enough. While numerous efforts are already underway by organizations including the Governor's Workforce Board, the Department of Labor and Training, the Community College of Rhode Island, and several industries, commerce, and educational organizations, state policy must reflect a greater sense of urgency and a need for better collaboration.

This report attempts to answer the question: **What can state lawmakers do to get Rhode Islanders back to work today, and prepared for the changing job market of tomorrow?** The report provides an overview of selected workplace supply and demand data; describes some initiatives currently underway to prepare workers for job openings; and presents action items intended to get Rhode Islanders back to work. These action items do not reflect all options available to decrease unemployment and/or increase economic growth. Additional initiatives are certain to be proposed, vetted, and reshaped during the 2014 legislative session. This action agenda describes a series of urgent steps – in 2014 and beyond – that state policymakers can take to help resolve the state's jobs crisis.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document takes a comprehensive look at the present and projected condition of the Rhode Island workforce. The report was developed in response to two separate but related problems: an inability of unemployed Rhode Islanders to find jobs that fit their skills, and concerns that the state's workforce is not prepared for the demands of tomorrow's economy. To address these problems, the following seven strategies and related actions are proposed:

1. EMPOWER A SINGLE, SEAMLESS, AND COHESIVE WORKFORCE TRAINING SYSTEM FOR RI

- Codify the Governor's Workforce Board in statute and reaffirm its role as the sole coordinator of *all* workforce development policy in Rhode Island;
- Institute single-point coordination of the disparate statewide career pathways and training systems; and
- Increase the number of *industry-recognized* credentials available in Rhode Island.

2. MAXIMIZE USE OF RHODE ISLAND'S JOB DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- Exempt the Job Development Fund from the state's Indirect Cost Recovery and funnel freed-up resources toward immediate training and job-attachment programs *for the state's unemployed;*
- Require greater transparency and accountability of workforce development expenditures; and
- Maintain enhanced funding for innovative workforce training programs.

3. SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND THE NUMBER OF INTERNSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS IN RI

- Open the bRIdge.jobs program to high-school students and partner the program with the State Apprenticeship Council; and
- Strategically expand the state's current Apprenticeship tax credit.

4. TRANSFORM ADULT EDUCATION

- Commit appropriate resources to eliminate waiting lists for unemployed or underemployed adult learners;
- Require that Adult Education resource decisions at the Department of Education give priority to those programs that:
    - Minimize waiting lists by increasing program capacity;
    - Reflect the state's economic and workforce priorities;
    - Are most effective at attaching participants to the workforce;
    - Include a digital literacy component;
    - Provide enhanced transparency of program expenditures and outcomes; and
    - Provide wraparound services for adult learners at the lowest levels of performance.
- Include a business member of the Governor's Workforce Board as a member of the Board of Education;
- Embrace strategies employed by leading states to help Rhode Island's TANF population return to work; and
- Authorize an innovative, optional savings mechanism to help adults save for lifelong training expenses.

5. REIMAGINE CAREER & TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) IN RHODE ISLAND

- Immediately identify a one-time $1 million incentive to begin a disruptive system-wide reimagining of Career and Technical Education;
- Require that RIDE's allocation of CTE resources align with the state's workforce priorities; and
- Integrate state-of-the-art CTE programming in teacher preparation and professional development.

6. ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO ATTAINING HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA-EQUIVALENCY

- Reduce costs for high school equivalency test-takers; and
- Restore the Fee Waiver for low-income high school equivalency test-takers.

7. BRIDGE STATEWIDE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAPS

- Require that the Board of Education prioritize Adult Education, CTE, and quality credit and non-credit programs at CCRI;
- Continue to build upon the state's investment in outstanding programs that support learning, including pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, and summer learning;
- Utilize competency-based learning models to free-up additional class time for students who are already proficient in a foreign language; and
- Introduce a proven mentoring and coaching program for students at risk of falling behind.

High Growth, High Wage, High Skill-IT in RI

Information Technology (IT) is a critical segment of the Rhode Island economy and a strategic resource to small and large businesses across the state. IT is considered a 'cross cutting' industry in that it spreads across several other industries (i.e. Finance, Manufacturing, Healthcare). Most IT workers are actually employed *outside* of the IT industry.[8]

Several occupations within the IT sector have a high number of projected annual openings in Rhode Island. These include: computer support specialist (150 per year), computer systems analysts (85 per year), software developers (79 per year), and computer programmers (71 per year).[9] In fact, three of the top ten fastest growing occupations in Rhode Island are in the IT field.[10]

IT careers are typically high-wage. According to occupational data provided by the Department of Labor and Training, the mean hourly wage for computer support specialists in 2012 was $24.84, for software developers (applications) - $45.39, and for computer systems analysts - $37.56.[11] These wages compare to the statewide average across all occupations of $23.31.

IT careers are also predominately high-skilled. With limited exceptions, most careers in the IT sector require a college degree or greater, and often a specific technical certification beyond that.[12]

Capitalizing on the Rhode Island Manufacturing Renewal

With rising overseas labor costs, relatively stable US energy costs, increased US productivity, and global supply chain management issues, several economists[13] suggest that the United States may be on the verge of a manufacturing industry renewal. Yet a lack of skilled labor could limit the potential of this manufacturing renaissance as a source of Rhode Island jobs.

According to a 2011 report by the RI Manufacturers Association and Bryant University, "Quality jobs in manufacturing require certain skill sets, particularly including skills in such critical areas as math, science and computer technology. There is always a shortage of qualified workers for such jobs in Rhode Island."

The Providence Business News (11/11/2013) echoes this concern, stating: "opportunities in manufacturing are going unfilled, not only because of an identified 'skills' gap, but because of a gap in interest."

Other studies have found similar 'interest' and 'perception' gaps facing manufacturing and the trades. A 2009 study conducted by Deloitte and the US Manufacturing Institute found that 52% of 18-24 year olds surveyed had little-to-no interest in a career in the trades, and 61% said they would rather pursue a more 'professional' career.[14] That same study found that just one out of three parents surveyed would encourage their child to enter the trades.

WORKPLACE DEMAND

According to the Governor's Workforce Board's (GWB) Biennial Report, Rhode Island will have added 52,372 jobs between the years 2010 and 2020, and employers will have to replace an additional 115,000 workers who leave their jobs. [15] More than 50% of jobs in 2020 will require some form of post-secondary education or training (Table 1). Growth in middle and high skilled jobs is projected to be slightly greater than the growth in the very-entry and entry level jobs, consistent with a shift toward a higher-skill economy.

Table 1. RI OCCUPATIONAL GROWTH PROJECTIONS BY EDUCATION/SKILL LEVEL, 2010 - 2020

Employment Category By Skill and Education Levels	2010 Employment Estimate	2010 % of Total	2020 Employment Projection	2020 % of Total	# New Jobs	% Change
Very Entry Level (less than high school)	114,273	23.40%	128,841	23.80%	14,568	12.70%
Entry Level (high school diploma)	120,393	24.70%	129,983	24.00%	9,590	8.00%
Middle (post high school to Associates Degree)	149,756	30.70%	164,671	30.50%	14,915	10.00%
High (Bachelors Degree or Higher)	103,756	21.30%	117,055	21.70%	13,299	12.80%
TOTAL	**488,178**	**100.00%**	**540,550**	**100.00%**	**52,372**	**10.70%**

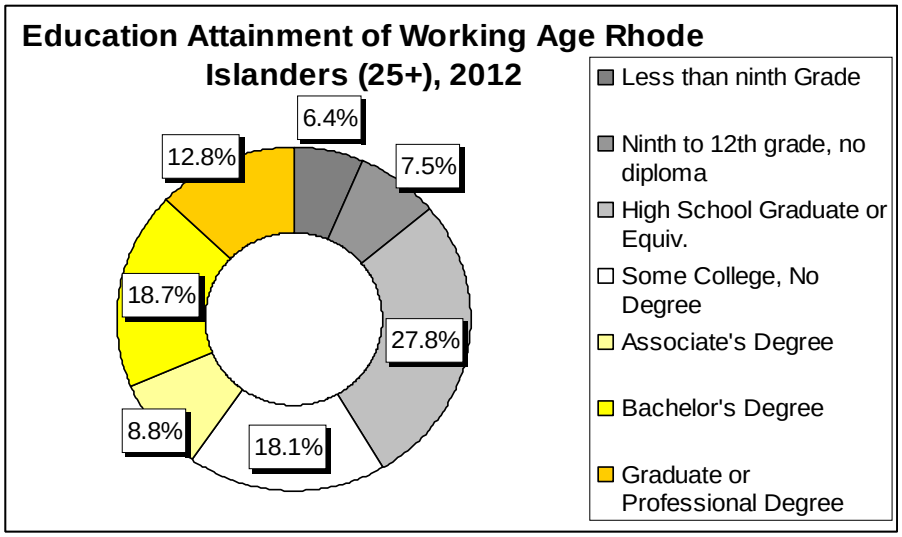
Source: RI Department of Labor and Training, Labor Market Information Unit, 2012, with analysis by the Biennial Plan Advisory Group to establish the employment categories

What cannot easily be seen in these data is the unrelenting shift across nearly all occupational categories toward higher skill requirements. Productivity demands in the global economy mean employers must require more from their employees in terms of skill and ability. In fact, the skills of even the most entry-level job today rival what was required of some middle-skill jobs thirty years ago.[16] Regional employers already recognize that many high school graduates come to work alarmingly unprepared, lacking crucial career skills such as work ethic, interpersonal communication, personal responsibility, and organization.[17]

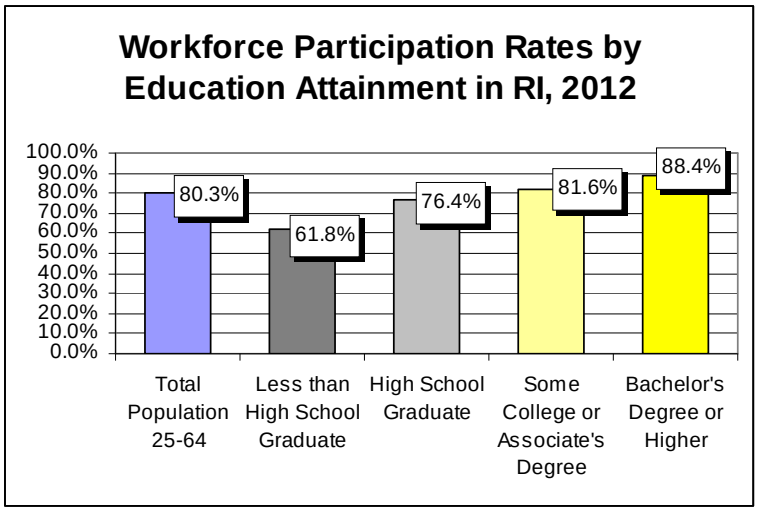
WORKFORCE SUPPLY

RHODE ISLAND'S WORKFORCE OF TODAY

The skill level of a state's workforce reflects its overall education level and career preparedness. The data on today's workforce in Rhode Island read much like "A Tale of Two Cities." On the one hand, the percentage of Rhode Island's working-age population with a Bachelor's degree or greater (categorized as "High" skill level) is roughly 31% (based on 2012 Census data), over 2 percentage points higher than the national average.[18] Rhode Island also ranks 10th nationally for the percent of its working age population with a Graduate degree or better.[19] While simply possessing a college degree does not necessarily indicate that an individual is career-ready (nor that the degree is in a field that meets employer demand), workforce participation data nonetheless demonstrate that employment prospects improve significantly as education attainment increases.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey. 1 Year Estimates.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey. 1 Year Estimates.

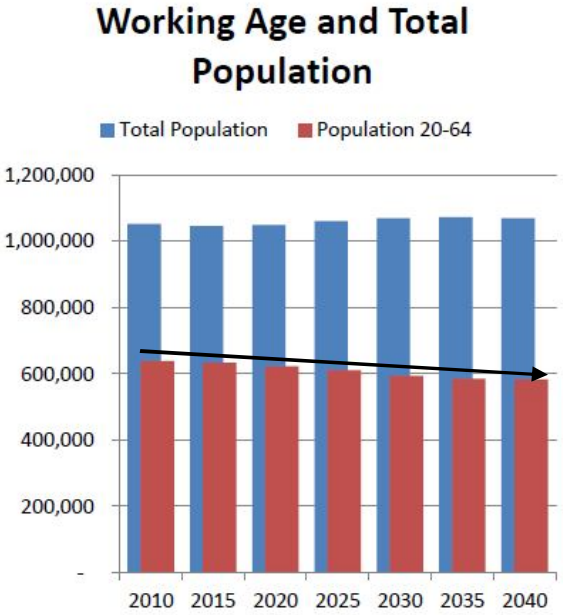
On the other hand, the share of the state's working age population without at least a high school degree is almost 14%, ranking Rhode Island well into the bottom half of states on this measure.[20] In addition to education attainment, English language proficiency has a strong impact on skill level and employability. According to the Governor's Workforce Board, in 2012 a total of over 45,000 working age Rhode Islanders lacked some level of English proficiency.[21]

RHODE ISLAND'S WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW

Rhode Island is projected to experience negligible growth in its population over the next few decades, but will become older and more diverse –two facts that will significantly reshape its workforce.[22]

Age

The state's workforce is aging as a result of low fertility rates (among the lowest in the nation) and a high median age (at 39.2 years, 9th highest in the nation).[23,24] Over the next 30 years, the state is expected to witness a steady decline (10.7%) in the number of working age Rhode Islanders, a figure that reflects the exodus of the 'baby boomer generation' who will take an unprecedented level of education, experience, skills and work habits from the workforce as they retire. [25,26] This shift means that the social and health costs of caring for an increasing number of older Rhode Islanders will likely be borne by a decreasing number of working-age Rhode Islanders, and potentially even fewer workers with the rich skill set of previous generations.



Source: "Rhode Island Population Projections 2010-2040" Rhode Island Statewide Planning Program. April 2013

Race/Ethnicity

Rhode Island's population growth is being driven almost entirely by the Latino population, whose share of the total population is expected to rise to 17% by 2020, up from roughly 12% today.[27] Without this anticipated growth in Rhode Island's Latino population, the state's total population would be projected to *decline* significantly over the next several decades, and the shrinking and aging of its total *working age* population would be even more pronounced.

Unfortunately, educational attainment currently varies dramatically across racial and ethnic populations. Among the state's demographic groups, Whites and Asians have the highest rate of degree attainment (47% have earned an Associates Degree or higher). Blacks and Native Americans have achieved at lower rates (around 30% and 25% with Associates Degrees or higher, respectively) and Hispanics/Latinos have, in general, experienced the least academic success (roughly 16% with an Associates Degree or higher).[28]

Organizations such as the Latino Policy Center at Roger Williams University and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education point out that unless the state figures out how to raise the education and degree attainment of *all* students, projected demographic shifts and educational attainment gaps suggest that the state's workforce of tomorrow could include fewer members with a college degree, and more members with less than a high school diploma.[29,30] With 50% of all new Rhode Island jobs projected to require some form of postsecondary credential, such a reduction in workforce capacity would seriously jeopardize the state's economic interests.

The Skills Gap

An aging overall workforce, the retirement of the baby-boom generation, and education disparities within Rhode Island's changing demographics will all have a profound impact on the state workforce of tomorrow. Combined with the following factors, these trends threaten to amplify the projected skills gap:

- **Increasing skill demands** - Competency with technology has become necessary to complete all but the most rudimentary of work tasks. At the same time, sweeping technological change and a new generation of automation is beginning to replace more than just traditional manual labor.[31] Concurrently, an increasing share of Rhode Island's projected job growth will be in industries that demand the highest skills.

- **An uncertain pipeline of future workers** –

  - While striving to provide a high-quality basic education to all Rhode Islanders, the education system is challenged to meet the increasingly-urgent need for graduates in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields, mitigate a middle skills gap, and address concerns about the career-preparedness of high school students. [32,33,34,35]

  - Rhode Island's youth unemployment rate (ages 16-24) was roughly 17.2% in 2012, with the rate for very-early youth (ages 16-19) over 25%.[36] These young people are not experiencing important early work responsibilities that are essential to future work-readiness.

- **A loss of skilled workers** - Beyond the retirement of skilled workers, Rhode Island faces the ongoing challenge of local college graduates leaving the state.[37]

The chart to the right demonstrates the risks to Rhode Island's future workforce if the state is unable to close racial and ethnic achievement gaps. Absent success in closing such gaps, the workforce of 2020 could be less skilled than it is now.

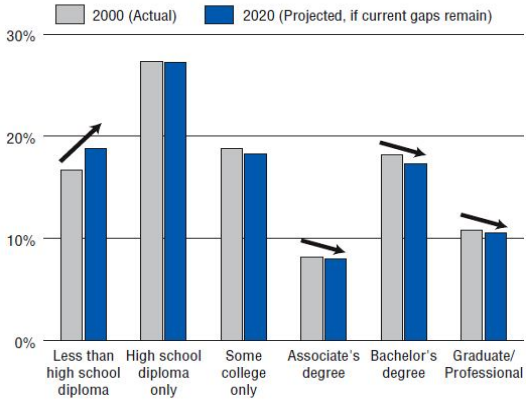
These concerns are reflected in a 2009 report issued by the National Skills Coalition which warned that the Rhode Island workforce of 2020 may include a greater share of 'low skilled' workers, and comparatively lower share of 'middle' and 'high' skilled workers, than today. The data below are taken from that report.

Projected Change in Rhode Island Workers' Educational Attainment

	2005	2020	Change
Low-Skill	24.3%	34.3%	10.00%
Middle-Skill	41.0%	37.5%	-3.50%
High-Skill	34.7%	28.2%	-6.50%

Source: 'Rhode Island's Forgotten Middle Skill Jobs.' The National Skills Coalition. October 2009.

Educational Levels of Working-Age Population (ages 25 to 64) in Rhode Island.



Source: "Education Level of Rhode Island's Workforce Projected to Decline." National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. November 2005

CURRENT EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN RHODE ISLAND'S WORKFORCE

Over sixty percent of the Rhode Island workforce of 2020 is already currently working.[38,39] This population is generally removed from the traditional education pipeline. For these individuals, workforce development programs that empower workers to train, retrain, learn new skills, or upgrade current ones, are essential.

The workforce development system in the Ocean State provides a breadth of opportunities through a wide network of services, programs, and investments of state, federal, and private dollars, committed across a range of agencies and educational institutions.[*] Many fall under the direction of the Governor's Workforce Board – a workforce policy body that is distinct from the Department of Labor and Training (DLT), which is an executive agency with a range of responsibilities that include, but are not limited to, training and workforce development. As the state's lead agency for labor and training issues, DLT administers many programs to retrain and up-skill the workforce. While these programs need to be coordinated within a larger strategic policy framework, in a time of limited resources, the Department has set training, and connecting Rhode Island's unemployed to jobs as a priority.

Industry-Driven Solutions

Numerous industry groups in Rhode Island have taken the initiative to address the skills gap. Two of these are:

The **Rhode Island Manufacturers Association**'s Manufacturing Skills Initiative is designed to serve as an advisory group to policymakers; re-introduce students, parents, and educators to today's manufacturing environment; and educate state leaders about the workforce needs of the manufacturing industry. They have begun a partnership with CCRI for training and certification.

The **Rhode Island Hospitality Education Foundation** has created successful partnerships with over 65 community based organizations to develop "soft" and "hard" skills training which focus on professional behavior, teamwork, accountability, problem solving, and hospitality skills.

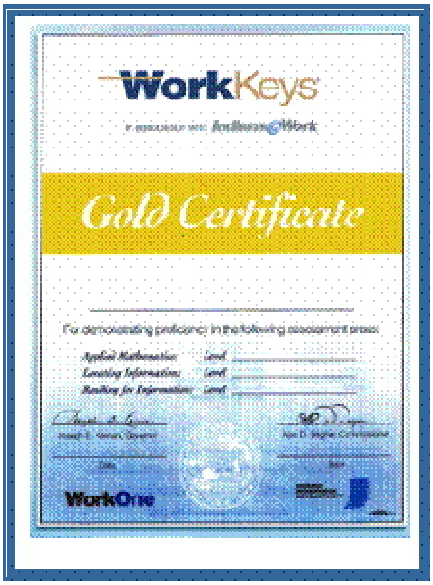
The following are examples of evidence-based efforts underway throughout Rhode Island by state government and private industry that are designed to address the gap between the skills of existing workers and the state's job needs. Notably, these programs and initiatives are governed by a number of different entities and are not always aligned with one another nor share a unified set of defined goals and intended outcomes. The state's continued high unemployment rate and the projected shifts in its workforce require a careful examination of the effectiveness, capacity, scale, level of coordination, utility to businesses, and linkages to high-demand occupations, of these programs.

Career Pathways

Career pathways are defined by the Rhode Island Career Pathways System Task Force (CPSTF) as: "A series of connected education and training programs and support services that enable individuals to secure employment within a specific industry or occupational sector, and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector."[40] Career pathways emerge through discussion within industries and provide individuals with a "road map" of the skills and training they will need to enter and advance in that field. With input from businesses, and interconnectivity with education and workforce development partners, work on career pathways is currently underway. The first pathways efforts will focus on four industries – health care, information technology, manufacturing, and hospitality & tourism.

[*] This report does not seek to catalogue all of the workforce programs available in the state. Such information may be found in the Unified Workforce Expenditure and Program report, viewable at: http://www.gwb.ri.gov/pdfs/UEP1113.pdf (Dec 2013)

Work Readiness Credentials



Example of Work Readiness Certificate
Source: Indiana Department of Workforce Development

In response to growing concerns from businesses about the skills and preparedness of job candidates, Rhode Island is joining a number of other states in the development of a work readiness credential. With a high school or college degree no longer an absolute guarantor of a job-ready and trainable candidate, the work readiness credential helps employers more easily identify well-prepared individuals. The credential is earned based on a national standard for assessing an individual's ability to meet the demands of an entry-level job. With a work readiness credential, not only can employers be confident that a new candidate is ready for work and prepared to learn the specific technical skills the job requires, but workers can be assured they are sufficiently prepared to meet the demands of the entry-level job market.

Rhode Island's work readiness credential is being tested and a limited roll-out has begun. A nationally recognized assessment has been selected to evaluate an individual's level of reading, math, problem solving, customer service, and communication skills.[41] This work-readiness assessment may be combined with employer-verified work experience (in paid or unpaid employment or on-the-job training) to gain a credential. For this work readiness credential to be successful, it must be meaningful to, and have the endorsement of, the business community - particularly small to medium-sized businesses whose limited training resources mean they need workers who are close to job-ready from day one.

Industry Partnerships

Industry Partnerships represent a central component of the Governor's Workforce Board's (GWB) strategic plan to identify the specific skills needed by workers within industry sectors. With their first-hand knowledge of the specific needs and challenges of each sector, private industry partners collaborate with the GWB on strategies to reduce and/or eliminate skill gaps within eight specific industry sectors.[42] As an example, the GWB's Construction Trades Skills Gap analysis (2008), which resulted from the Board's Industry Partnership program, identified "motivation, accepting the demands of the industry culture, and literacy & math" as that industry's paramount challenges as it relates to the skills gap.[43] Industry input and analysis such as this help inform the Board regarding the specific skills gaps and workforce challenges that businesses face when trying to find skilled labor.

Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE) should play a crucial role in developing Rhode Island's future workforce. CTE offers students an opportunity for career preparation and provides them with academic and technical knowledge and work-related skills. By design, CTE spans the high school to college years, providing a pathway for students interested in exploring career options prior to graduating from high school. Active involvement in apprenticeships and hands-on opportunities with business and industry partners are common within quality CTE programs.[44]

In March 2012, the Rhode Island Board of Regents approved new career and technical education regulations.[45] The new CTE regulations are intended to transform existing programs into new career preparation pathways in critical and emerging industries. The Rhode Island General Assembly included $3.0 million in the FY 2013 budget to provide additional resources to help meet these new goals. RIDE distributed 90% of the FY2013 funding to existing CTE programs in 19 schools and districts in areas including HVAC, culinary arts & hospitality, and cosmetology. RIDE distributed only 10% of the funds competitively to seven high schools and districts, to support start-up programs in state priority sectors that include Information Technology, Medical/Healthcare, and Pre-Engineering.[46]

In addition to providing an additional $1.3 million in the state budget to fund new and innovative workforce training programs, in 2013, the General Assembly passed a number of successful legislative initiatives related to improving the preparedness of the state's workforce. Among them were:

Youth Manufacturing PreApprenticeships - allows 16 and 17 year-olds to participate in manufacturing pre-apprenticeships and internships to provide career-relevant training for students.

Dual Enrollment - requires the RI Board of Education to establish a dual enrollment policy allowing high school seniors to take classes at the community college. Dual enrollment would assist students in getting a jump-start on their college education or certificate in postsecondary career and technical programs.

Help Former Students Finish Their Degree – encourages the Board of Education to expand programs in state colleges and universities to target former students who left school before graduating, and offer guidance and support in attaining their degree.

Reverse Transfer of Credits – directs the RI Board of Education to establish a "reverse transfer" policy for public institutions of higher education; to enable credits earned toward a 4-year degree to be counted toward the awarding of a 2-year Associates degree. This will provide students who are unable to complete the 4-year requirements with an essential degree.

Expedited Licensure for Veterans - directs state examining and licensing boards to accept military education, training and service by an individual applicant toward qualifications to receive a related license or certification.

The CCRI 21st Century Workforce Commission

Created through legislation enacted in 2008, the CCRI 21st Century Workforce Commission made a series of recommendations to strengthen CCRI's position as a key institution in preparing the state's workforce for high-wage job opportunities in a knowledge-based economy.[47] While the College has made some commendable progress, more work is needed to fully operationalize its new mission- including proactively engaging businesses and determining their needs, and providing the range of high quality technical training and industrial certifications that Rhode Island's workforce demands.

One area of progress is the college's recently-launched Pathways to Advance Career Education (PACE) program.[48] Funded by a US Department of Labor grant, the PACE program is designed to develop streamlined, industry-recognized credentials training to move Rhode Island's unemployed and dislocated workers back into the work force. The two career pathways offered through the PACE program are health care and information technology. Participants in the PACE program receive support and guidance from PACE staff and from tutors who work in conjunction with classroom instruction. PACE also works alongside industry partners to certify that job openings exist and to address any skills gaps that may be present.[49]

Internships

Employers are looking for candidates that not only have sufficient training and requisite skills, but also adequate work experience that shows the individual can meet the demands of the job. Paid and unpaid internships are an excellent way for candidates to obtain practical work experience, strengthen their resumes, and learn "soft skills" such as punctuality and teamwork. Internships are also a powerful tool to connect college graduates with the job market and retain them in the state. Studies indicate that students who participate in internships are considerably more likely to receive a job offer after graduation than those who do not.[50]

Two recently-launched initiatives are designed to increase the number of quality internships in Rhode Island. bRIdge.jobs is a web portal operated by the Rhode Island Student Loan Authority (RISLA) that helps thousands of college students find internships at participating local companies (and conversely, helps local companies find interns). The program is the result of a strategic public-private partnership between the Governor's Workforce Board, the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, RISLA, the state's eleven public and private colleges and universities, Rhode Island's Chambers of Commerce, and local businesses.

A second program, included in the FY 2014 budget, is the Rhode Island Work Immersion program - designed to provide subsidized work experiences for Rhode Island-based college students and unemployed adults. The program supports the expansion of paid internships for college students by providing a 50-percent wage subsidy to participating eligible businesses. The program also provides a 50-percent wage subsidy to eligible employers that provide a 200-hour paid work experience to unemployed adults. In each instance, employers that permanently hire the student or the unemployed adult at the completion of the internship are eligible to receive bonus funding.

Apprenticeships – Traditional and Nontraditional

Apprenticeships have historically served as strong pathways to the middle class and a step toward a rewarding career in the skilled trades. Over the past few decades, the number of apprenticeships in the United States has declined and is now concentrated predominately in the construction trades.[51] Recently, however, a growing number of states are revisiting apprenticeships as an effective way to address the skills gap in a broad array of sectors, as well as to develop important "soft skills" that tomorrow's workers need, such as punctuality, communication, and teamwork. [52]

Rhode Island currently has more than 1,400 active apprentices.[53] As with most states, these apprenticeships are predominately located within the construction trades - bricklaying, tool and die, painting, pipe-fitting, and roofing, among other occupations.[54] In 2011, the Department of Labor & Training reached out to industry organizations across the state to expand apprenticeships into non-trade sectors.[55] In response, a technology company, Atrion Networking, worked with the Department to begin the *Internetworking Associate* Apprentice Program. This program combines on-the-job training with classroom instruction, and allows apprentices to learn the practical and theoretical aspects of the IT industry.[56]

Rhode Island continues to strive to expand its portfolio of available apprenticeships beyond the traditional trades and into new industries. The FY 2014 budget passed by the General Assembly included funding for additional non-traditional apprenticeship programs. The Governor's Workforce Board is directed to annually award funding to at least one (1) new initiative developed and operated by one of the Board's Industry Partners that meets the state and federal apprenticeship standards, is approved by the State Apprenticeship Council, and expands the portfolio of apprenticed occupations beyond the traditional trades. [57]

Rhode Island is also one of only eight states that offers a tax credit to employers to help defray the cost of taking on an apprentice- however, the tax credit is currently limited only to qualifying machine tool and metal trade apprenticeships or plastic process technician apprenticeships.[58] According to recent analysis by the Division of Revenue no taxpayers have applied for the credit in recent years.[59] The tax credit is equal to 50% of the actual wages paid to each qualifying apprentice, or $4,800 [whichever is less]. This figure is comparatively generous relative to the $1000 credit offered in states like South Carolina and Louisiana. [60]

Education Reform & Its Impact on Workforce Development

A series of broad education reforms that have swept across Rhode Island over the past five years have the potential to support the state's efforts to elevate the skills of its workforce. These externally and internally driven initiatives have focused on providing K-20 students, including those who enter the workforce or a non-degree program directly from high school, with a more rigorous education.

In 2010, the federal Race to the Top program provided Rhode Island with $75 million to reinvigorate the state's standards, solidify statewide data infrastructure, and create a strong pipeline of support for teachers throughout their career. The state's $50 million award through the 2011 Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Fund stimulated the development and alignment of early childhood program standards, addressed the workforce development needs of early childhood educators, and laid the groundwork for an early childhood data system that will integrate with the state's K-12 infrastructure.

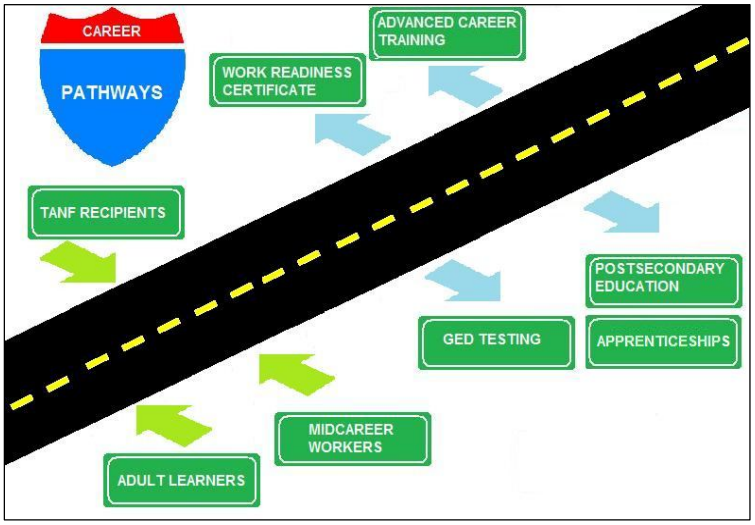
In 2012, the General Assembly reshaped education governance by merging the Board of Regents and the Board of Governors for Higher Education into a single board, with the goal of creating a cohesive education system that prepares K-12 students for success in college and careers.

Proposals for Action by State Policymakers

The following proposals were developed after reviewing current workforce development and education programs offered in Rhode Island, comparing these programs with those of leading states and national trends, and contrasting all items against the state's workforce needs. In this section, the report attempts to answer the question raised in the introduction: **What can state lawmakers do to get Rhode Islanders back to work today, and prepared for the changing job market of tomorrow?** Each of the seven broad strategies are followed by a number of narrower action steps, which fall within three main categories - Funding, Governance Structure, or Policy. Priority has been placed on actions that will quickly enhance the effectiveness, responsiveness, and efficiency of the workforce development system, at a time of limited resources.

1. EMPOWER A SINGLE, SEAMLESS, AND COHESIVE WORKFORCE TRAINING SYSTEM FOR RHODE ISLAND

Aligning and coordinating the many training and career pathway initiatives unfolding across the state into a single statewide system are essential to reduce duplication of effort, eliminate confusion, and maximize available resources. Since unifying the mandates of separate state and federal workforce bodies into a single Governor's Workforce Board, requiring a Unified Workforce Development Expenditure and Program Report, and requesting a Biennial Statewide Employment & Training Plan, the General Assembly has sought to bring cohesion and coordination to the state's workforce training system. Through a number of recent innovations and structural changes (such as the creation of an Employer Advisory Committee), the Governor's Workforce Board has been progressing in this area, and the General Assembly can provide the tools necessary to take this coordination and strategic vision further. [61]



In the visualization to the right, while each specific program may serve as a different "on ramp," the individuals they serve should share a mutual set of training opportunities. Each distinct agency could administer an "on ramp" that best fits the population they serve, but once an individual is engaged, the various pathways should be viewed as "lanes" of a broader connected "highway" coordinated by the Governor's Workforce Board. Rhode Islanders of all training levels would be able to get on and off as needed. The goal is to ensure that all candidates, whether they are TANF-recipients looking to access early skills training, or unemployed individuals interested in obtaining a new industry certification, have access to the full breadth of job training and career advancement opportunities available in Rhode Island, regardless of where they enter. To maximize the impact of the state's workforce development resources and develop a training system in Rhode Island that best prepares tomorrow's workforce, the following actions should be taken:

- **[Governance Structure] Codify the Governor's Workforce Board in statute and reaffirm its role as the sole coordinator of *all* workforce development policy in Rhode Island-** The authority of the Governor's Workforce Board is currently derived from a 2005 Executive Order which combined the responsibilities, and funding streams, of Rhode Island's federal and state level workforce bodies into one entity.[62] To better empower the Board in setting the state's workforce development priorities and goals, directing resources to meet those goals, measuring results, enforcing accountability, tearing down program silos, and responding to the changing needs of employers, the Board's structure and responsibilities should be fixed in statute. *All* workforce-development related programs, regardless of where they are administratively located, would be coordinated by, and, when appropriate, subordinated to, the Workforce Board. Even in instances where, pursuant to Federal or State requirements, certain programs must remain autonomous, administering agencies would still be required to submit their policies, programs, and activities for review by the Board to ensure they adhere to, and help to further, the Board's established workforce priorities and goals.

- **[Policy] Institute Single-point Coordination of Career Pathways and Training System-** With the preeminence of the Governor's Workforce Board over state workforce policy set in statute, the Board should then be authorized to designate the appropriate entity (including the Board itself) to serve as the operational nucleus of all workforce programs in Rhode Island. The designated entity would be authorized to map the entire state workforce system, including, but not limited to, the various programs administered by the Department of Labor and Training, the Community College of Rhode Island, RIDE Adult and Career & Tech Education programs, the Department of Human Services, and the state apprenticeship council, and oversee the operation of these programs into a seamless and coordinated approach that reflects best practices, makes effective use of performance-based funding, elicits and receives constant feedback on employer satisfaction, and responds to employer demand. This entity would operationalize the Board's goals and priorities and be charged with removing or overcoming program silos to ensure that individuals and businesses have access to the entire range of training programs they may be eligible for, no matter what agency served as their point of entry.

- **[Policy] Increase the number of industry-recognized credentials available in Rhode Island**- "Stackable, industry-recognized credentials" compose a model in workforce training that holds the potential for addressing the middle skills gap and concerns about career readiness. While work-readiness credentials help employers identify career ready candidates in a 'general' sense, stackable industry credentials are more specific to the industry and position being filled.[63] To succeed, these credentials *must be trusted and endorsed by employers,* and must be accessible by students. The credentials are designed to allow job-seekers to quickly earn shorter-term certifications that have real value in the labor market, and then build on them to access more advanced training and jobs. The Governor's Workforce Board should work with regional employers and CCRI to determine those credentials that would best meet the needs of the Rhode Island job market. If certain credentials cannot be offered using available resources, the Board and CCRI should present the General Assembly with options for meeting identified needs.

2. MAXIMIZE USE OF RHODE ISLAND'S JOB DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The Governor's Workforce Board (GWB), the state's single workforce policy body, receives funding primarily though federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and, to a lesser degree, the state Job Development Fund (JDF) and other state sources.[64] Despite broad support, federal funding for workforce training has been repeatedly reduced over the past few years, with further reductions projected. [65,66]

The Job Development Fund is derived from an assessment on Rhode Island businesses of 0.21% of the taxable wage base (an evolving figure) per employee.[67] When the fund was first established in 1988, the General Assembly found that "the rapidly changing economy requires that the Rhode Island workforce be able to adapt to emerging needs of the workplace" and that "the competitiveness of Rhode Island businesses is dependent on a well-skilled, literate, and productive workforce." (RIGL 28-42-82)

Beginning in 2011, the JDF assessment was increased to .51% of taxable wage base. This .30% increase is used solely for the purpose of repaying principal and interest on federal loans the state had to borrow to maintain the solvency of its unemployment insurance trust fund. This special 0.30% assessment is set to sunset in tax year 2015 when, based on department projections, these loans will be fully repaid. At that point the JDF assessment will revert back to the original .21%.[68] With a return to the intended purposes of the JDF, the state should:

- **[Funding] Exempt the JDF from the state's indirect cost recovery** - Under RIGL 35-4-27, an indirect cost recovery assessment of 10% is paid to the General Fund from revenues included in state restricted receipt accounts. Some accounts are exempted. Exempting the JDF from the assessment in FY 2014 would have shifted an estimated $1.2 million from general funds to job and skill training.[69] The General Assembly should exempt the Job Development Fund from the indirect cost recovery, with the provision *that these additional funds be used immediately and exclusively to expand programs that are already in place and have been proven effective in connecting and training the state's unemployed to meet the demands of current job openings. No less than 50% of new 'seat' capacity in these programs should be reserved for those who have been unemployed for 26 weeks or longer.*

- **[Policy] Require greater transparency and accountability of workforce development expenditures** – Simply injecting more money into job training programs will be of no help unless such programs are proven to be effective at getting participants back to work and meeting employer demand, at the lowest cost. Aggressive oversight over expenses, including administrative costs and overhead, and more robust information on program return-on-investment, overall performance, and affirmative statements from the business community that programs are meeting their training needs will help ensure state workforce funds are having the greatest impact possible. To that end, Rhode Island General Law 42-102-9, which mandates the development of a Unified Workforce Development Expenditure and Program Report, should be amended to require such comprehensive performance and cost information on workforce programs, on a timeline that is as aggressive as Governor's Workforce Board resources will allow.

- **[Funding] Maintain enhanced funding for innovative workforce training programs-** The FY 2014 budget included an additional $1.3 million to fund innovative workforce training programs, including a statewide work immersion program, the non-trade apprenticeship development program, a Back to Work Rhode Island job training program, an Enhanced Child Care program to assist parents with young children to participate in job training, and an enhanced job match system to better match job needs to the unemployed. The performance of these new programs must be monitored and the General Assembly should make sure that any proven success is not interrupted and funding is maintained.

3. SIGNIFICANTLY EXPAND THE NUMBER OF INTERNSHIPS AND APPRENTICESHIPS IN RHODE ISLAND

The value of internships and apprenticeships as effective training and job-attachment tools is well documented.[70,71,72] With current resources such as the bRIdge.jobs web connector and the ongoing development of new non-trade apprentice programs, along with new tools such as a revamped apprenticeship tax credit, Rhode Island should commit itself to a significant expansion of apprenticeship and internship offerings over the next three years. To help achieve this goal, the state should consider the following:

- **[Policy] Open the bRIdge.jobs program to high-school students and partner the program with the State Apprenticeship Council-** The bRIdge.jobs internship portal connects employers and interns with one another. The single-point matchmaking role that it serves is critical and has been proven effective in other states.[73] Currently the bRIdge program only serves college students. But with the documented concern of employers about the lack of work readiness and 'soft skills' of high school graduates, opening the bRIdge program to Rhode Island high school students would connect potentially thousands of future workers to this useful training tool. In addition, the bRIdge program could be a significant asset to the state's apprenticeship program, especially as more non-trade apprenticeships are created. Apprenticeships are not the same as internships and come with considerably more administrative and resource requirements, but these differences can be overcome. The opportunity to connect students and interested companies to internships and the state's expanding portfolio of eligible apprenticeships, all in one-stop, should be embraced.

- **[Funding] Strategic expansion of state Apprenticeship tax credits** - Apprenticeships are not a no-cost proposition for employers. They require patience, relationship building, and an investment of time and resources. The current apprenticeship tax credit that Rhode Island offers as a means to defray these costs is limited only to certain machine tool, metal trades, and plastic process technician apprenticeships. Eligibility for this credit should be reviewed to include only those industries and occupations determined to be state priorities by the Governor's Workforce Board.
  For such occupations, where an apprenticeship program is, or can be, established, a tax credit incentive should be made available for prospective sponsors to entice them to take on apprentices. The credit can be limited to a time necessary to bring the apprenticeship program to scale. Like all tax incentives, the credit should be regularly assessed to ensure it is meeting its desired purpose and whether it should be continued, amended, or eliminated.

4. TRANSFORM ADULT EDUCATION

Adult Education programs in Rhode Island provide literacy, English language instruction, career training, and traditional classroom education to adult learners- skills that are critical to improving career prospects and strengthening upward mobility.[74] Currently, adults who wish to enroll in these programs may have up to a one-year waiting period, depending on the program.[75] As of the writing of this report, Rhode Island's Adult Education waiting list includes approximately 700 English language learners; 500 adults in need of basic education (currently at very low levels of literacy); and 100 adults that are at or near the high school level.[76]

RIDE has authority over adult education and distributes funding to over 35 agencies that administer adult education programs.[77] Beginning with a pilot program in 2009, the funding allocation for adult education has been determined through a performance-based calculation that incorporates federal performance indicators, including the number of students who obtain their GED, the number who enter postsecondary education or training, and the number who enter employment. [78,79] RIDE is in the process of setting benchmark goals for adult education programs regarding students who go on to enroll in postsecondary education after earning their GED.[80] To maximize adult education as a workforce development tool, policymakers could:

- **[Funding] Commit additional resources to eliminate waiting lists for unemployed or underemployed adult learners-** There are a number of factors that result in an Adult Education waiting list of over 1,300 Rhode Islanders. Expanding program capacity by hiring more instructors; offering more afternoon, evening, and weekend classes; and expanding the number of sites and facilities available for Adult Education would significantly reduce, or eliminate, this waiting list. With an average cost of $1,500 per student, and with a current waiting list of roughly 1,300 individuals, the additional cost of doing so would be approximately $1,950,000.

- **[Policy] Require that Adult Education resource decisions by the Department of Education give priority to those programs that:**

    - Minimize waiting lists by expanding program capacity;
    - Reflect the state's workforce priorities as identified by the Governor's Workforce Board;
    - Are most effective at attaching participants to the workforce;
    - Include a digital literacy component;
    - Provide enhanced transparency of program expenditures and outcomes; and
    - Provide wraparound services for adult learners at the lowest levels of performance.

- **[Governance Structure] Include a business member of the Governor's Workforce Board as a member of the Board of Education-** The perspective of business and industry must be integrated at all stages of preK-20 education policy-making. State statute can be revised to ensure that a seat on the Board of Education is reserved for business and industry, and that there is a clear and close relationship at the highest levels between education and workforce policy in Rhode Island.

- **[Policy] Embrace strategies employed by leading states to help Rhode Island's TANF population return to work-** The US Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program ("TANF") provides temporary cash assistance to families based on eligibility criteria. Under the federal TANF program, states receive block grants to develop and operate programs, partially designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. Effectively preparing TANF recipients for work and careers will increase the pool of skilled talent in the RI workforce. "RI Works" is the state TANF program. The US Office of Family Assistance monitors each state's rate of work-related activities that TANF participants are involved in (called the "work participation rate"). Across the US, the average rate of all families in TANF programs who are engaged in eligible work activities is 29%. In RI, that rate is 12%.[81] Despite this, there are some very promising initiatives underway throughout Rhode Island that can be brought to scale. There are also proven models in other states that can guide Rhode Island in helping TANF recipients return to work. Such best practices include the following:

  - Increasing the use of "employability" and "career readiness" certificates;
  - Providing support services to help recipients stay in school and obtain certificates or degrees; and
  - Developing career pathways to connect low-skilled adults to careers in high-demand occupations.

The Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative (ACPI)

Arkansas has established a successful career pathways program.[82] Started in 2003 as a pilot, the program is funded entirely with federal TANF dollars. The cost of the pathway program is $1,500 per student per year for tuition, support services, tutoring and counseling for up to 18 months.

Critical to the success of career pathways, each student is assigned a case manager who coordinates comprehensive support services, including child care and transportation, and works with state agencies. Financial incentives are offered to community colleges that meet established performance outcomes, which resulted in Arkansas community colleges becoming more employment oriented.[83]

More than 74.5% of the TANF-eligible students who participate in the ACPI program obtained some type of degree or certificate, the vast majority of which are Employability Certificates. **In FY11, approximately 60% of those who completed a degree or certificate obtained a job.**[84] *(Note: Arkansas TANF work participation rate is above the national average at 34.1%.)*

A critical component of career pathways for the TANF participant includes academic and career counseling, child care, and transportation. Successful pathways initiatives coordinate adult education, job training, and college degree programs, and connect these programs to the workforce needs of local employers.[85] The pathways framework is student-centered, providing each recipient with the training needed to pursue a specific career path.[86]

The RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) could continue to assist the Department of Human Services, which administers the RI Works program, in re-inventing the program's education and training activities to conform to the best practices outlined above. As EOHHS has recognized, a greater amount of Federal TANF funds to RI should be used for activities should focus on increasing basic skills, training for real job opportunities, and meeting high standards for performance outcomes.

- **[Policy] Authorize an innovative and optional savings mechanism to help adults save for lifelong training expenses –** With limited state and federal financial assistance for adult workers outside the traditional education pipeline who want to learn a new skill or upgrade a current one, some states are introducing innovative education and training savings accounts called 'LiLAs' (short for Life-Long Learning Accounts).

  LiLAs are voluntary, employee-owned savings accounts held for future training expenses. The accounts are entirely optional and, although it is not a requirement for their success, many LiLA programs include an employer-match up to a certain amount.[87,88] LiLAs fill an important gap left by other government savings programs (e.g. 529 College Savings plans, Lifetime Learning Tax Credits).[89] Much like 401K retirement plans, LiLAs are owed by the individual worker and follow them wherever they go. Since LiLA contributions usually receive beneficial state tax treatment, individuals have an incentive to save for future training costs.

  In 2012, the Washington state legislature empowered the state's workforce board to work with industry partners to establish industry-specific LiLAs.[90] Rhode Island could duplicate this model with little, or no, state funds.

5. REIMAGINE CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) IN RHODE ISLAND

The current Career and Technical Education (CTE) system in Rhode Island – including its framework, structure, and programming -- fails to address and anticipate the state's workforce needs. This gap cannot be allowed to continue, as secondary and postsecondary CTE must be a key part of Rhode Island's economic strategy. At this point, incremental change is not enough. CTE in Rhode Island must be intentionally disrupted, reshaped, and rapidly redeployed. To establish the world-class 21st-century Career & Technical Education system that Rhode Island needs, the state should:

- **[Funding] Immediately indentify a one-time $1 million incentive to begin a disruptive system-wide reimagining of Career and Technical Education** - Using Worcester Technical High School's proven model as a template, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) should be required to restructure career and technical education at the secondary level. The break-the-mold Worcester model features a rigorous education that results in a high school diploma and high quality, industry-recognized credentials for all students, as well as vibrant partnerships and mutually-beneficial relationships with business, industry, higher education, and other outstanding organizations. This process for reimagining CTE should span no more than three years, beginning fiscal year 2015. In FY 2015, RIDE can develop its new model of CTE in Rhode Island and mount a competitive program that would allow a public school district or charter school to pilot the approach. The pilot would roll out during FY 2016, allowing the new model of CTE to be vetted and improved. RIDE and other CTE schools in the state would then implement the new approach to CTE at scale, statewide, beginning in FY2017.

- **[Funding] Require that RIDE's allocation decisions of limited, current CTE resources align with the state's workforce priorities** - RIDE's CTE regulations should be revised to reward schools and districts whose CTE programs reflect and address state workforce priorities (as identified by the Governor's Workforce Board) and that include apprenticeships, high-quality high-demand professional certificates, and connections to postsecondary CTE opportunities. The regulations should result in a new reallocation of CTE categorical funds. To date, RIDE has spent the great majority of CTE categorical funds on traditional high-cost programs, rather than addressing state-identified workforce priorities and CTE best practices.

The Potential Skilled Trades Shortage

ManpowerGroup's 2013 Talent Shortage Survey[91] found that, for the fourth consecutive year (2010-2013), the hardest segment of the workforce for US companies to hire for was the skilled trades.

In Rhode Island about two-thirds of the state's skilled trade workforce is over the age of 45 (ranking Rhode Island second worst on this measure behind Connecticut) and more than one-in-four is age 55 or older.[92] Perhaps due to the more physical nature of work, once skilled trade workers reach retirement, they are more likely than members of other professions to stop working.[93]

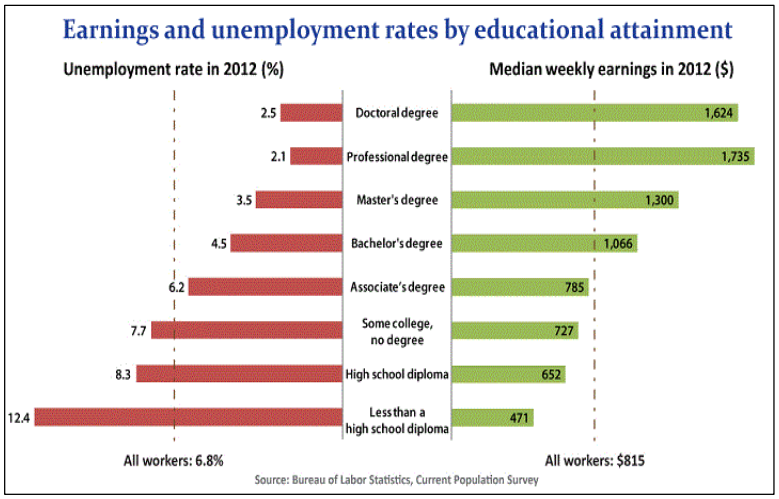
- **[Policy] Integrate state-of-the-art CTE programming in teacher preparation and professional development** - Require the Rhode Island Department of Education and the state's three public institutions of higher education to collaboratively develop a three-year program of exceptional CTE professional development for all secondary CTE teachers and administrators in the state, for provisionally-certified CTE teachers, and for relevant faculty at the three public institutions of higher education. The professional development series should focus on creating challenging CTE programs of study, increasing academic excellence, integrating technical education, building effective relationships with business, industry, and other partners, and connecting secondary and postsecondary education and training. RIDE will make participation in this professional development a requirement for schools and districts to apply for and receive CTE categorical funding. The Board of Education will ensure the full engagement of the state higher education institutions.

Helping College Students Make More Informed Career Decisions

Getting information about the career prospects of certain majors and overall job placement data of recent graduates into the hands of incoming college students can help guide their enrollment decisions and help them make more informed choices about their future. Students would still have the latitude to choose whatever academic or career track they wish, but will have a better understanding about the job prospects they will face upon graduation.

Obtaining such information is not always easy. The quality and accuracy of current survey methods, difficulties in maintaining contact with recent graduates, and differing terms and definitions across colleges can make it hard to draw conclusions from the information. Nevertheless, a number of colleges and universities across the country are beginning to collect this information and provide it to students and policymakers to help guide their decision-making. Keene State College in Keene, New Hampshire is one such example. The College eventually plans to provide a comprehensive report that will include information on job placement success, starting salaries, and other important career outcomes. The current version of the report, still in its infancy, lists the proportion of recent graduates in employment, as well as information regarding whether the graduates' jobs are closely or at least somewhat related to their field of study.[94]

6. ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO ATTAINING HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA-EQUIVALENCY



Roughly 80,000 working-age Rhode Islanders are without a high school degree, and thus unprepared for the workforce.[95] While some form of postsecondary degree is important for future career success, lacking at least a high school degree makes such success nearly impossible.[96]

Rhode Island relies on two programs to provide adult learners with a diploma or a diploma equivalency: the National External Diploma Program (NEDP) and the general educational development test (GED).[97,98] The NEDP is an applied performance assessment system that evaluates the high school level skills of adults and out-of-school youth, in areas including reading, writing, math, and workforce readiness skills.[99] The cost of this program is $1,300, with $300 paid by the applicant and $1,000 paid by RIDE.[100] Enrollment in NEDP preparation is capped by both funding and capacity.

Rhode Island is also one of several states offering the GED. Prior to January 2, 2014, the GED test cost $55 to take, with an additional $4 for each section that needed to be retaken.[101,102] Rhode Island previously allowed some students facing financial hardship to waive the testing fee. Beginning January 2, 2014, GED takers in Rhode Island must use a new assessment that will not only measure high school equivalency, but will also provide information about a test-taker's career and college readiness, and will be entirely computer-based.[103,104] The cost for this test *will more than double* from $55 to $120, with section retakes increasing from $4 to $24.[105] RIDE high school equivalency regulations that became effective April 13, 2013, contain no provision for a waiver from this fee for low-income individuals.[106] As many struggled to pay for the previous lower-cost test, this increase will almost certainly serve as a barrier to low-income or unemployed adults seeking to improve their academic attainment and earning capacity.[107] To better support the adult education system, state policymakers should consider the following:

- **[Policy] Reduce costs for high school diploma equivalency test-takers** – Partly in response to the significant increase in cost for taking the GED, a number of states have developed lower-cost alternative tests that perform the same function of the GED and remain aligned with the Common Core State Standards. New York, for example, will launch a new High School Equivalency Test called TASC (Test Assessing Secondary Completion) to replace the GED test beginning in 2014. The Iowa Testing Program, HiSET will also be launching in 2014 and will allow applicants to demonstrate proficiency and college/career readiness through a number of testing formats. Four states have joined on to the HiSET test, including New Hampshire. As soon as possible, RIDE should select an alternative equivalency provider that is nationally-recognized and adheres to state academic standards, but is offered at a lower cost.

- **[Funding] Restore the Fee Waiver for low income high-school equivalency test takers-** The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should create criteria to identify adults who can prove a financial hardship, estimate the costs of providing the waiver from testing fees to such adults, and present the General Assembly with options for funding the restored waiver, in time for potential inclusion in the FY 2015 budget.

7. BRIDGE STATEWIDE EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAPS

For the state to ensure a continued pool of skilled workers, it must better meet the educational needs of all students, including the growing minority population. On a broader level, a synergy between workforce development and education must be realized whereby work skills and training are embedded within classroom instruction and traditional classroom education is embedded within workforce training programs. To help close education attainment gaps in Rhode Island, state policymakers should consider the following:

- **[Policy] Require that the Board of Education prioritize Adult Education, CTE, and quality credit- and non-credit programs at CCRI.** The clear priorities of the Board of Education have reflected traditional K-12 and college-going populations. Rhode Island cannot afford to continue to support a system of public education that ignores the needs of the large proportion of learners who pursue CTE, come back as adult learners, and waste precious time swirling through dead end courses and programs. There is an unacceptable loss of human potential in Rhode Island that takes place when adults languish on waiting lists, when young people can not move forward in their training, and when learners successfully complete a program only to find that their knowledge and skills do not align with employers' needs. The Board should prepare a plan that positions CTE, adult education, and CCRI as meaningful components of the state's public education system and as key nodes in its workforce development efforts.

- **[Funding] Continue to build upon the state's investment in outstanding programs that support learning throughout primary and secondary levels, including pre-kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, and summer learning and jobs programs for youth** – The positive impact of high-quality early childhood education programs and prekindergarten on closing learning gaps, and improving academic and career outcomes, is well documented.[108,109,110] Continued investments in such programs, coupled with stronger links between high quality early education programs and K-12 schools, can profoundly benefit Rhode Island's future workforce. Summer learning programs help prevent losses that can set struggling learners further behind. Summer work programs such as those funded by the Governor's Workforce Board provide young people with education and soft skills training that are embedded in part-time, wage-earning jobs. The state has several strategic summer youth programs that have been mutually rewarding to youth and participating businesses, but funding has consistently been a challenge.

- **[Policy] Using competency-based learning models, allow students who already speak a second language to demonstrate proficiency, satisfy foreign language requirements, and free up classroom time for additional tutoring or AP course enrollment** – Several states have enacted legislation allowing competency-based learning and flexibility in the way credits can be earned or awarded.[111] New Hampshire, for example, is reviewing the option of replacing a portion of its time-based learning system with a competency-based system in subject areas including algebra, history, art, music, and foreign languages.[112] A competency-based model for foreign language in Rhode Island would allow students that already speak a second language the option of demonstrating this proficiency to a satisfactory level for school foreign language requirements, freeing up hours of classroom time that could be used to help the student catch up or advance in other areas such as mathematics, science, or English.

- **[Policy] Introduce proven mentoring and coaching programs for students at risk of falling behind -** Strategic one-on-one mentoring and coaching roles within schools have been shown to increase workplace skills, college-readiness, and postsecondary success for students of all ages and abilities. Research shows that supportive and authentic relationships with a specific individual within a school helps students of all backgrounds thrive in school, but are especially critical to the success of Black and Latino students.[113] High school students benefit when they are supported by coordinated, consistent, and caring adults who provide focused personalized attention and deploy early warning systems and other tools to identify students' needs and provide the right support at the right time.[114,115] High school and college students with access to individualized coaching are better able to connect their daily activities to their long-term goals, develop solid time management and studying skills, and persist in their programs.[116] And adult basic skills students have been shown to succeed at rates that far exceed expectations when they have access to counselors and other embedded support.[117,118]

CONCLUSION

Rhode Island faces a number of challenges to its economic health. Addressing the job and skills gap represents a vital, yet challenging, component in the state's recovery. Given Rhode Island's evolving workforce supply and demands, any solution must include a focus on the capacity of the human talent pipeline. By ensuring a pool of workers who are ready to meet the labor needs of today and tomorrow, the Ocean State can expand and attract the businesses and opportunities all Rhode Islanders need for a prosperous future.

This effort will not occur by chance. It will involve the direct, collective and sustained efforts of public and private partners. State policymakers can help create the conditions for economic growth by prioritizing the re-skilling of the state's workforce; directing focused financial incentives to back up their leadership and vision; fostering collaboration; and holding organizations accountable for meeting desired outcomes.

Sources and Websites referenced throughout the text include:

[1] http://stats.bls.gov/lau/home.htm
[2] http://www.wpri.com/news/local/providence/providence-skills-gap-raises-trouble-in-job-market
[3] Ibid.
[4] In addition to increased consumer demand and greater buying power of the employed, jobs within certain industries, such as Manufacturing, beget the creation of additional jobs in support and other positions; http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/cued/CUED_Manufacturing_Jobs_May2013.pdf
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Rhode Island Senate
'Rhode to Work' – A Legislative Action Plan
January 2014