

POSITION STATEMENT ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Lake Champlain Regional Chamber of Commerce, Workforce Investment Board (LCWIB) and GBIC support the expansion of workforce development and education opportunities in Chittenden County to meet the growing demands of our community. The LCRCC, GBIC and LCWIB support efforts to better integrate our economic development strategies with strategies that improve our workforce education and training delivery systems.

Overarching Recommendations

- Workforce training and education must become a primary goal for the Administration and General Assembly as a lead component of the state's economic development strategy.
- Establish an integrated partnership between the State Department of Education, the Agency of Commerce's Department of Economic Development and the Department of Labor.
- Target state resources to developing an environmental technology and renewable energy business cluster and an information technology cluster.
- Increase the inventory of affordable housing for working Vermonters and their families.
- Establish a Workforce Development Fund, similar to other states, i.e. Iowa, created through an annual appropriation in the General Fund or a bond within the guidelines established by the Capital Debt Affordability Committee.
- Support increased state funding through VSAC to support adult continuing education at all levels.

1. Actions to Improve Coordination of Workforce Development Education and Training Programs

The WDC together with the regional Workforce Investment Boards coordinates public and private partners in order to develop a highly skilled workforce. WIBs are currently under-resourced and need additional financial support in order to fulfill their mission of coordinating workforce development initiatives. The state should evaluate how the resources of the regional WIBs could improve collaboration and be better leveraged to serve as a clearinghouse for providers and employers to address labor pool and training gaps.

The State's workforce stakeholders must design a specific approach to assist current workforce education and training partners. The goal is to refine the current program design and implementation to better meet the needs of each region's key economic driver sectors. Actions should be focused on specific steps to assure that the required skills sets and workplace readiness skills are widely available to businesses for both the existing and future workforce. These action steps for the regional WIBs should include:

- Develop a web-based clearinghouse for employers and employees that provide job opportunities/listings, skill requirements and an application process. Education and training providers should be matched with employers through an interactive web-based database.
- Develop an integrated network of education and training providers including Department of Labor career resource centers and establish a "preferred provider list" or "WIB sponsored provider list".
- Track and coordinate the dissemination of, and assure access to pertinent labor market information.
- In coordination with the region's economic development strategy, perform regional needs assessments, establish priorities for regional workforce development
- Ensure the most effective use of funds by encouraging collaborative work on state budget preparation and grant proposals submitted by programs and providers through the Workforce Development Council.
- Encourage partnerships with businesses to develop new education and training to their needs.
- Engage actively with public and private higher education institutions who provide education and training opportunities and resources and who can assist in developing curriculum.
- Establish and maintain an inventory of businesses for potential alternate learning environments.
- Support entrepreneurship and small business' role with technical assistance and incubator space.

- The WDC should consult with WIBs, Regional Development Corporations, Chambers of Commerce and business and education partners to determine the effectiveness of initiatives, eliminate duplication and ensure collaboration of activities using measurement indicators related to wage, graduation rates, job retention and literacy rates, etc..

2. Actions to Improve Technical Education Opportunities including Adult Technical Education

Increasing access to technical education opportunities for secondary students and support for a regional technical education delivery system that includes regional governance, an improved funding mechanism and integrated academic and technical instruction is essential to addressing the needs of our region.

- Expand the availability of technical education opportunities to begin in the ninth grade or earlier, to prepare students for university level technical studies and for careers in the technical workplace.
- Re-invigorate technical education systems and provide comprehensive student services to assist adult, incumbent workers with upgrading job skills, technological changes and certification requirements.
- Support collaborative relationships with employers using workplaces as a significant part of the learning environment. Include employers in curriculum design and governance.

3. Actions Targeted to K-12 Students

- Expand access of curricula to high school students through distance learning tools, investment in hi-tech infrastructure and distance and on-line learning capacity throughout the state's high schools.
- Set up pilot offerings of engineering and technical curricula in 9th and 10th grades or earlier.
- Support K-12 school-to-work efforts, co-op opportunities, apprenticeships and internships by developing closer connections with private/public institutions and expand these programs statewide.
- Create a statewide mentoring program. Promote best-practice guidance for existing mentoring programs.

4. Actions in Higher Education

- Identify a sustainable funding source for scholarship money for Vermont high-school seniors, which would be awarded to students who go to Vermont (public or private) colleges.
- Provide loan forgiveness to students who attend Vermont (public or private) colleges and stay in Vermont following graduation.
- Expand funding to improve access for adults in need of continuing education for degree and non-degree programs at all levels, i.e. single courses, professional certificates, undergraduate and graduate degrees.
- Encourage the expansion of environmental, engineering and energy technical degree programs.

5. Actions in Continuing Education/Adult Learning

- Continue to support, evaluate and consolidate Workforce Education and Training Programs.
- Expand specialized training programs.
- Support additional advanced skills training and specialized education and training to create more "knowledge workers" to support emerging industry sectors in our state.
- Support statewide collaboration and investment of Vermont's workforce through education and training opportunities that assist individuals with cultural differences, disabilities, or other barriers that prevent them from achieving meaningful employment.
- Maintain strong financial support for the Vermont Training Program.

Position Statement adopted by Lake Champlain Workforce Investment Board Executive Committee on November 1, 2006, LCRCC and GBIC Executive Committees on November 13 and LCRCC Board on November 15, 2006.