

***A Letter from Suzanne Bump
Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development***

Welcome to the first report on *Working Together*, The Massachusetts Regional Workforce Strategy Initiative, a statewide effort to close the skills gap in Massachusetts using regional strategies for workforce development. This is an ambitious effort to ensure that the current and emerging workers of Massachusetts are equipped with the skills they need to thrive in the changing regional economies that make up the Commonwealth.

Working Together is a three-stage initiative: it began in 2008 with research, convening and learning efforts, it is progressing to regional planning, skills sharing and leadership development in 2009, and it will conclude in 2010 with the creation of new regional initiatives to close the skills gap.

In its first year of work, *Working Together* has accomplished a great deal. In partnership with the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, *Working Together* produced Massachusetts' first comprehensive supply of high quality, region-by-region labor market data. Now every leader in the state has access to the kind of analysis that was rarely available previously. To achieve maximum dissemination of the research, the *Working Together* partners convened businesspeople, educators, elected officials and workforce developers – nearly 1900 leaders in all – in nine regional summits.

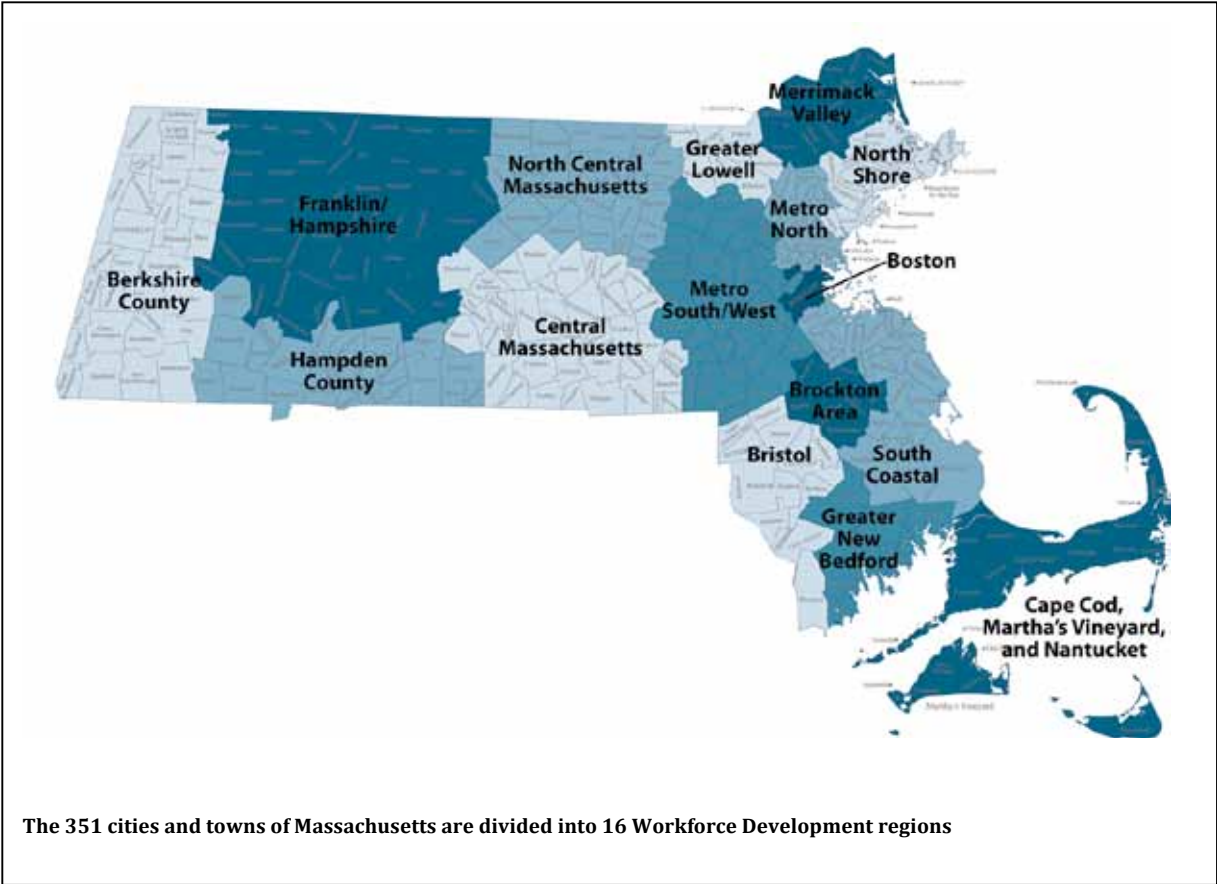
Phase Two of *Working Together*, underway now, is fostering working partnerships between workforce development, post-secondary education, and business across the Commonwealth. In 2009, *Working Together* is supporting the development of strong regional plans; developing new tools and learning resources; creating a leadership institute; and promoting an array of best practices already underway in some regions, many of which are profiled here.

This report appears at a moment of grave economic crisis in the nation and the state. We have an obligation to act wisely, but there is also an element of opportunity in our current situation. If we succeed in helping regional leaders to put strong plans in place to close the skills gaps that prevailed in the period prior to the economic downturn, regions across the Commonwealth will be positioned to make a more rapid and thorough recovery from the recession.

To all you have who have participated in *Working Together* already: Thank you. To any reader who is ready to partner with others to close the skills gaps in our state, I welcome you to this challenging, rewarding and consequential work!

Suzanne Bump
Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

April, 2009



Working Together: The Massachusetts Regional Workforce Strategy Initiative

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts faces a serious, multi-faceted challenge called “the skills gap.” Jobs in Massachusetts require increasingly high levels of education and training. In many regions of the state, employers are unable to find workers with the skills they require. Too often, graduates of educational and training institutions and certification programs have acquired skills and credentials which are not aligned with the needs of the emerging or growing industries in the economy of the region in which they live. Older working adults with limited education, young people in post-secondary training, and low-income, African American and Hispanic high school students at risk of dropping out are facing the worst of the crisis.

In the midst of these challenges lie opportunities. In industries as diverse as manufacturing, health care and professional and technical services, the state’s regional economies offer workers with the necessary skills the chance to secure high wage jobs and build careers. Public and private sector innovators and partners are creating pipelines that work: specific, targeted programs teaching people the skills they need to access jobs in the healthiest sectors of the regional economy. When leaders in industry, education and workforce development collaboratively align their training and educational efforts with regional career opportunities, workers of all ages can engage in a process of skill-building and advancement, employers can thrive, and Massachusetts can recover well from the current economic downturn and avoid long-term economic hardship.

Working Together: The Massachusetts Regional Workforce Strategy Initiative is a three-year planning and action project co-led by the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and Commonwealth Corporation. Its mission is to close the skills gap in Massachusetts by developing pipelines for workers to acquire the skills to fill jobs that are in-demand in each region of the state.

Nancy Snyder, President of Commonwealth Corporation, explains it this way: “The traditional approach to closing the skills gap is for policymakers at the state and federal level to drive reform efforts. These leaders deploy public grant initiatives to promote statewide solutions. In contrast, *Working Together* posits an alternative theory of change, predicated on the idea that closing the skills gap is a venture best undertaken by the leaders of multiple sectors *within each region*, backed up by the hands-on efforts of statewide systems of support.”¹

Working Together’s goals are to:

- Generate regional, high quality labor market data for use by regional leaders;

¹ All quotations in this report are drawn from interviews conducted by the principal author, in the period May 2008 – April 2009, or from email or written remarks authored by the person quoted.

- Convene and challenge regional leaders of companies, workforce organizations, educational institutions, and community and human service agencies to work together;
- Focus on closing specific skills gaps through regional strategic planning which enables leaders to create innovative, high impact programs;
- Build the leadership capacity of regional organizations and individuals, and
- Facilitate improved statewide interagency collaboration, tailored by region.

An Idea Hatched by Educators and Workforce Leaders

Working Together is the brainchild of the leaders of post-secondary education and of workforce development in Massachusetts. The idea was jointly conceived at an October 2007 statewide meeting of the presidents of public higher education institutions in. Then-Chancellor Patricia Plummer, then-Board of Higher Education Chairman Frederick Clark and MA Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Suzanne Bump cited economic data to highlight their shared feeling of urgency: workforce leaders and post-secondary education leaders must work together at a strategic, regional level in order for Massachusetts to compete in a global economy, and to provide pathways for Massachusetts youth and adults into high demand jobs in the knowledge economy.

Working Together's tasks are being accomplished in three phases:

- Phase One, 2008: Research, regional summits, learning, networking
- Phase Two, 2009: Regional plans, youth summits, leadership development
- Phase Three, 2010: Resourcing, launching, documenting regional plans

Multiple leaders make *Working Together* possible. They include:

- *Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD)* Under Secretary Bump, EOLWD is a strong advocate for regional strategies for workforce development;
- *Workforce Investment Boards (WIB)* These regional non-profit bodies serve as conveners, strategic planners, and program developers;
- *Employers in the Business, Non-Profit and Public Sectors;*
- *Civic Leaders, including Mayors and their appointees;*
- *Department of Higher Education, Post-Secondary Certification programs, Colleges and Universities, Training*

Programs, High Schools, and

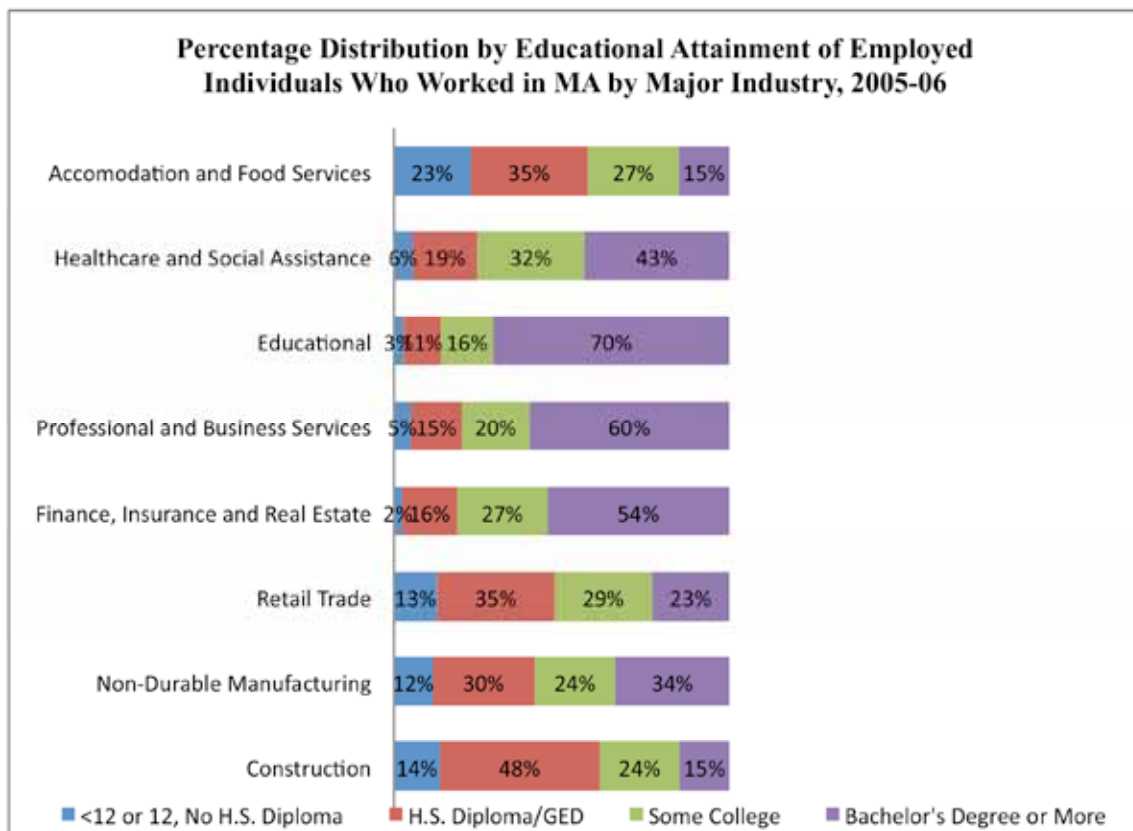
- *Commonwealth Corporation*, A quasi-governmental agency. Commonwealth Corporation assists EOLWD in implementing workforce development programs, grant making, technical assistance, research and support activities.

This report reflects on Phase One activities, undertaken in 2008. It summarizes the Center for Labor Market Studies' regional labor market research, describes the impact of nine regional summits, documents promising regional practices, highlights implications for the future, and frames current and future *Working Together* activity.

Documenting Labor Market Conditions in Massachusetts and its Regions

Thanks to the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, *Working Together* generated a wealth of current labor market data on the Commonwealth as a whole, and on each of its 16 regions. Key findings include:

- Less diverse than the U.S. as a whole, Massachusetts has a more rapidly growing immigrant population, and more women, older workers, immigrants and highly educated workers in the workforce in general.
- Major changes are underway in the Massachusetts economy – some sectors have dwindled sharply (manufacturing), others grown (education, health).
- Massachusetts’ industries demand an educated workforce – in high growth sectors (health, education, professional), 75% have completed some college.
- In the past decade, the number of associate (AA) degrees produced in Massachusetts has decreased while the number has increased in the U.S.; Massachusetts also lags the nation in the increase in undergraduate certificates and BAs
- The skills gap is exacerbated by a mismatch of jobs and graduates – degrees in “in-demand” health, professional, scientific and technical fields have decreased; degrees in low-demand areas have increased.



Regional Summits: Bringing Together Business, Education, Labor, Civic and Workforce Leaders

Working closely with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, regional workforce board, business and education leaders convened nine regional gatherings in 2008, drawing nearly 1,900 local leaders. Each half-day conference included a presentation of the newly produced data by Professor Paul Harrington of Northeastern University and the Center for Labor Market Studies, followed by break-out meetings, by sectors, for in-depth discussions of the implications of the data and its application to local work. Post-secondary educational leaders played a large role in the summits; indeed, post-secondary institutions hosted four of the nine regional summits, and many public and private colleges participated in the summits.

“The summit – which we called Building a Better Workforce – raised the profile of the sustainability issue, forcing us to ask ‘How do we develop an infrastructure for this work that can carry on over an extended period?’”

Bill Ward, CEO, Regional Employment Board of Hampden County

The summits achieved a high level of impact. In follow-up surveys and interviews, and in meetings to reflect on the impact of the summits, leaders from a wide range of regions reported that the summits had these common effects:

- Supplied the region with a large body of fresh and useful data
- Highlighted features of the region that are different or even unique
 - Focused the regional leaders on the shared challenges they face
 - Stressed the themes of interconnectedness and interdependence
 - Raised the profile of the conveners, especially Workforce Investment Boards
 - Attracted new players to the work who might not have had a prior role
 - Generated new ideas and possible courses of action
 - Fostered future partnerships, and heightened appreciation of the challenges

“The data from the summit gave us a sharp reminder of the critical issues facing immigrant workers in our region, and challenged the Career Center staff and community groups to tackle these issues jointly.”

Mary Sarris, CEO, North Shore Workforce Investment Board

The new research data and the summits stimulated continued efforts. Leaders of several of the workforce investment boards formed a “learning network” to pursue additional ideas and best practices, and a team of workforce administrators at Commonwealth Corporation piloted a “study group” model which began developing learning and teaching tools for making effective use of complex labor market data.

Best Practices: Proven Approaches from Massachusetts Innovators

This report features the work of many, but it especially profiles that of the North Shore Workforce Investment Board and the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, the Commonwealth's first two High Performing Workforce Investment Boards. Their many efforts include the following strategic approaches:

- Provide low skill, adult workers with pathways to post-secondary education that are occupationally specific, and linked to high demand industry needs
- Partner with early childhood education employers and post-secondary educators to enroll early childhood educators in college courses, enabling them to earn higher wages and boosting retention rates and child outcomes
- Enlarge nursing faculties and retain older, highly skilled nurses by enabling them to become faculty while retaining their current job and pay scale
- Offer skills enhancement courses to precision manufacturing employees, positioning workers for advancement and improving business practices
- Build a regional workforce through youth jobs, mentoring, academic support, and links to future employment, engaging multiple employers
- Build teams of education, business, and workforce leaders to close the skills gap, through data analysis, planning and partnerships

An Example of Promising Practices: Building Post-Secondary Faculties and Retaining Veteran Workers

Skills Gap Issue: One barrier to increasing the number of nurses is higher education's need for faculty. Many local experienced nurses are interested in new professional opportunities, such as becoming a faculty member and teacher, but they are keen to protect earnings and keep their clinical practice. Returning to school to obtain a masters or doctorate is time intensive and expensive.

Strategy: Expand post-secondary nursing program offerings by enlarging the pool of masters and doctorally-prepared faculty. Recruit bachelor-prepared nurses with an interest in teaching and support them with scholarships, faculty mentoring and employer support while they return to school and retain their current job.

Example: In Hampden County, the partners in the CAN DO project (Collaborating for the Advancement of Nursing – Developing Opportunities), including hospitals and schools of nursing, considered ways to offer experienced nurses meaningful professional development and learning opportunities. Together, they developed a plan to attract, develop and retain faculty, and to recruit accomplished local clinicians to become faculty. CAN DO sponsored a graduate support program that has already produced one new faculty person, who is now working in the profession in this new capacity, while also retaining her clinical practice.

**Contact Kelly Aiken, Program Director, CAN DO, (413) 755-1369,
kaiken@rebhc.org**

Opportunities for the Work Ahead: Meeting the Challenges

The obstacles to closing the skills gap tend to cluster into two related categories: 1) policies and system practices that will require changes and decision-making by multiple bodies, and 2) areas of work that *Working Together*, as a discrete initiative, can tackle right away.

Workforce leaders across the state articulate the following skills gaps challenges: expanding the role of community colleges in advancing the workforce and economic development of the regions; re-evaluating workforce system policies and funding mechanisms that limit the use of public funds for post-secondary programs of nine months' or a year's duration; improving systems for ensuring successful transitions of students at all levels of education; and strengthening the linkages between the workforce system and apprenticeship programs.

Implementing Phase Two

Phase Two of *Working Together* focuses on four key functions: convening leaders to drive alignment of strategies; disseminating data and crafting tools; developing the leadership of workforce boards; and forging a set of regional pilots.

Leadership convening will concentrate on institutions focused on youth, and leaders in post-secondary education. In the Spring of 2009, *Working Together* is co-convening five regional youth summits, focused on developing multiple pathways for struggling and disconnected youth to attain a secondary degree and prepare for employment and post-secondary education. Summits and follow-up work target K-12 leadership (superintendents, principals, guidance counselors), alternative education providers, workforce boards, career centers, community-based youth-serving organizations, community colleges and other youth development leaders. In a separate effort, in order to advance statewide alignment and coordination between post-secondary and workforce development systems at all levels, *Working Together* will continue to shape and implement regional workforce and post-secondary education strategies that are aligned or integrated.

To better *Disseminate Data and Create Tools*, Commonwealth Corporation is focusing on building its capacity to be an active supporter of regions as they try to leverage resources, make plans, and coordinate the work of multiple constituencies. Working with regional leaders, Commonwealth Corporation will be developing and deploying *Job Guides*. These web-based regional guides will give students, teachers, and workforce development staff concrete tools for planning an individual's post-secondary education course selection. The Job Guides will help educators and industry to create pipelines for specific job placement in targeted industries, and assist regional leaders to plan other workforce development, placement and training strategies. *Regional Labor Market Data Briefs* will use Center for Labor Market Studies data to cover each region of the state and to explore statewide trends. A statewide mailing of these new tools will reach key stakeholders, leaders and constituencies. Regional leaders will then turn the tools into online resources, conference handouts, Career Center reference documents, media tools, and planning documents.

The best way to develop a leader is to help that person cultivate new skills through meaningful work. A *Leadership Institute* for the board and staff leaders of workforce boards will dovetail with the ongoing workloads and commitments of the participants to:

- Clarify the role of workforce boards as catalyst, convener and partner
- Identify and address the leadership challenges that workforce leaders face
- Tailor leadership development opportunities to the needs of leaders
- Provide ongoing coaching to address persistent challenges

The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Massachusetts Workforce Board Association and Commonwealth Corporation are leading the development of the Institute.

By launching *Regional Workforce Strategies Pilots, Working Together* will partner three regions with Commonwealth Corporation to develop local strategic plans, map resources, analyze ongoing labor market trends and align resources for program funding and development. The goal of the Regional Pilots is to deepen participants' mutual understanding of the dynamics and capacities of effective partnerships, to craft pilots that will yield meaningful results, and to document that process and share it with other workforce regions and leaders.

Recognizing Economic Realities, and Pressing Onward

The severe economic developments of the past year are being felt in every region of the state, and will have repercussions well into the future. The leaders of *Working Together* are very clear, however, that the timeliness of their work is by no means diminished by the current crisis – in fact, they are convinced of its increased importance. As the data from *Working Together's* research makes plain, the time to recognize and meet the challenges of closing the skills gap in Massachusetts is *now*.

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