

# INVESTING IN SYSTEMIC CHANGE FOR OHIO'S ECONOMIC SUCCESS

*A Strategic Action Plan for Ohio's Career Pathways System*

October 2011



SUBMITTED BY:  
Ohio Career  
Pathways  
State/Regional  
Team

PREPARED BY:



**Thomas P. Miller and Associates**  
*Building Assets through Knowledge & Innovation*



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This action plan would not have been possible without the leadership, support and technical assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Labor in partnership with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Education.

Thanks, also to Mary Clagett, Jobs for the Future, who served as Ohio's State/Regional Career Pathways Team Coach.

## OHIO'S CAREER PATHWAYS STATE/REGIONAL TEAM

In the Fall of 2010, a core group of individuals representing critical state and local organizations began to develop a strategic action plan to create a comprehensive career pathways system in Ohio. Their work culminates in this report and action plan. A special thanks to Gwen Ivory and Lisa Goetsch for their leadership of the State/Regional Career Pathways Team.

### State Team

Gwen Ivory	Program Manager, Career Pathways Initiative, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Tiffany Dixon	Workforce Development/SCSEP Administrator, Ohio Department of Aging
Stacia Edwards	Associate Vice Chancellor, Workforce Alignment, Ohio Board of Regents
Keith Ewald	Project Manager, Labor Market Information, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
William Finn	Section Chief, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Carolyn Gasiorek	Postsecondary Adult Career-Technical Education, Ohio Board of Regents
Jeffrey Gove	State ABLE Director, Ohio Board of Regents
Cathy Hill	Assistant Director—Community Colleges, Ohio Board of Regents
Julia Hinten	Governor's Workforce Policy Board Manager, Ohio Department of Development
Andrew Maciejewski	Executive Administrator, State Apprenticeships, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Kathy Maybriar	Bureau Chief of Employment and Training Programs, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Karen Scheid	Developmental Education Initiative, Ohio Board of Regents
Linda Stacey	Consultant, Shifting Gears
Brett Visger	Associate Vice Chancellor, Adult Education, Ohio Board of Regents

## Regional Team

Lisa Goetsch	Director, Workforce Development & Continuing Studies, Kent State Trumbull
Gene Babik	Business Resource Network Manager, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Christine Bok	Business Regional Team Healthcare Account Executive, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Eileen Borelli	Administrator, PA CareerLink
Jessica Borza	Former Chief Operating Officer, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Bert Cene	Director, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Kevin Clark	Program Coordinator, Columbiana County Career & Technical Center
Diane Dejulio	Director, Center for Workforce Development and Financial Stability, Compass, Inc.
Eileen Dray-Bardon	Director, Columbiana County Department of Job & Family Services, Inc.
Matt Falter	Regional Workforce Director, Ohio Department of Development
Frank Flaminio	One-Stop Supervisor, Trumbull County One Stop
Effie Gianoutsos	Business Regional Team Account Executive, Trumbull County One Stop
Michael Glonek	Program Developer, Youngstown State University Metro College
Donna Guerrieri	WIA Adult Services Coordinator, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Jack Hile	Columbiana County One-Stop Manager, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Diane Kloss	Director, Workforce Development and Continuing Studies, Kent State Salem/E.Liverpool
Mary Ann Kochalko	Chief Operating Officer, One-Stop, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Karla Krodell	Director of Metro Credit Department, YSU Metro
Rebecca Kusner	Work Advance Coordinator, Towards Employment
Terah Leonard	Trade Adjustment Act, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services
Dimitri Liogas	Business Regional Team Account Executive, Trumbull County One Stop, Inc.
Danita Logan	Career Coach - Healthcare, Compass, Inc.
Paul Magnus	Director, Senior Employment Center
Joe Matasek	Business Regional Team Manufacturing Account Executive, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Gloria Mathews	Communications, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Jacquie McCoy	Director, Project HOPE, Eastern Gateway Community College
Marilyn McDaniel	Chief Operating Officer, Mahoning-Youngstown Community Action Partnership
Mary Mihalopoulos	ABLE Instructor, Mahoning County Career & Technical Center
Kristina Miller	Workforce Development Coordinator, Humility of Mary Health Partners
Sacha Parks	One-Stop Facilitator, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Paul Parteleno	Supervisor, Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission
Judge Carol Robb	Municipal Court Judge, Getting Ahead in Columbiana County
Leigh Samargia	WIA Program Services Manager, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Kathy Schlarb	Adult Education Director, Mahoning County Career & Technical Center
Sharlene Senediak	Administrative Assistant, Mahoning & Columbiana Training Association
Ron Shadd	Coordinator, NEO HealthForce
Laura Shamp	Apprenticeship Service Provider, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services
Julie Sharrow	Coordinator, Workforce Development & Continuing Studies, Kent State University Trumbull
Sondra Sutherland	Academic Director, Special Projects Office of the President, Eastern Gateway Community College
Vicki Thompson	Adult Education Director, Trumbull County One Stop
Bill Turner	Administrator, Trumbull County One Stop
Denise Vaclav-Danko	Adult Education Director, Choffin Career Center
Kelly Weikart	Adult Education Director, Columbiana County Career & Technical Center
Neil Yutkin	Business Services Representative, Ohio Department of Job & Family Services

We also would like to thank the following people who contributed to our work by participating in one or more of our interviews, offering insight and suggestions.

Ron Abrams

*President, Ohio Association of Community Colleges*

Mekelle Armstrong

*Policy Analyst, Ohio Department of Development*

Bert Cene

*Director, Mahoning and Columbiana Training Association*

Tiffany Dixon

*Workforce Development/SCSEP Administrator, Ohio Department of Aging*

Stacia Edwards

*Associate Vice Chancellor, Workforce Alignment, Ohio Board of Regents*

Keith Ewald

*Project Manager, Labor Market Information, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*

Rich Frederick

*Workforce Development Policy, Office of Governor John R. Kasich*

Lisa Goetsch

*Regional Career Pathways Lead, Kent State University, Trumbull Campus*

Jeffrey Gove

*State ABLÉ Director, Ohio Board of Regents*

Nithya Govindasamy

*Assistant Director, Workforce Development, Ohio Board of Regents*

Cathy Hill

*Assistant Director, Ohio Board of Regents*

Julia Hinten

*Workforce Policy Board Manager, Ohio Department of Development*

Gwen Ivory

*Program Manager, Career Pathways Initiative, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*

Dawn Larzelere

*Assistant Policy Director, Economic Development and Transportation, Office of Governor John R. Kasich*

Kathy Maybriar

*Bureau Chief of Employment and Training Programs, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services*

Karen Scheid

*Education Consultant, Ohio Board of Regents*

Kathy Schlarb

*Director, Adult Education, Mahoning County Career and Technical Center*

Vicki Thompson

*Director, Adult Education, Trumbull Career and Technical Center*

Brett Visger

*Associate Vice Chancellor, Adult Education, Ohio Board of Regents*



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Ohio is facing a skills mismatch. With more than 80,000 currently unfilled jobs<sup>1</sup> and 534,000 unemployed Ohioans,<sup>2</sup> Ohio is facing a high-stakes imperative that demands a bold solution. Investing in Systemic Change for Ohio’s Economic Success provides a plan to create a true career pathways system—comprised of education, workforce development and economic development—with the agility necessary to respond to the ever-changing needs of businesses and the economy.

The vision of a statewide career pathways system is to promote economic growth by organizing the state’s multiple workforce, education and training programs and initiatives into a sensible system that is easy to navigate, meets the skill requirements of employers and enables all individuals to begin and progress along a pathway to obtain credentials, which lead to employment and advancement in high-demand occupations. This career pathways system must align policies and resources in a way that meets dynamic employer demands and workforce needs.

For the past year, a State/Regional Career Pathways Team has been working to develop a strategic action plan to build a comprehensive career pathways system in Ohio. Their work culminates in the following recommendations and includes characteristics of successful career pathways efforts in other states.

A high performing career pathways system must ensure more meaningful credentials that have added value in the labor market, assuring better investments of workforce funding and better and more relevant performance outcomes. Career pathways models must show clear and complete pathways from middle school up to and including credentials, certificates and degrees that support the most skilled positions as well as strategies to continually increase the skills of incumbent workers, including work-based learning.

A systemic approach to career pathways will allow Ohio to increase efficiencies and reduce redundancies of partner programs. It will provide more streamlined and aligned paths to credential attainment and return to the workforce, which means a better return on investments of taxpayer dollars.

A career pathways “model” is a sequence of education/training coursework and credentials. It indicates the steps on the ladder to move up a specific pathway. There are numerous examples of models that differ in layout and information

<sup>1</sup> OhioMeansJobs, search of all jobs, <http://jobsearch.ohiomeansjobs.monster.com/Search.aspx?tjt=&q=&cnme=&zip=&rad=20&sid=68> (accessed October 18, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Bureau of Labor Market Information, Employment Situation Indicators for Ohio, September 2011, October 21, 2011.

included in the pathway. One example is included in this report as Addendum B. A career pathways “system” is the operational framework and includes all of the Six Key Elements described later in this document. The career pathways system is “how we do business.”

This plan seeks to develop, analyze and improve a career pathways “system” and is recommending a focus on systemic change. Therefore, it does not cover specific, programmatic recommendations.

The policy objective of this plan is to meet the needs of employers and, therefore, is meant to be inclusive of the entire potential workforce—emerging, transitional and current. So, although many funded projects are narrowly focused on a specific population and prescribe specific eligibility, this plan is more widely focused and suggests these narrow definitions represent lost opportunity to reach incumbent and underemployed workers who do not meet “self-sufficiency” guidelines, but who could benefit from career pathways strategies and, in turn, meet the needs of employers. Innovative, systemic change will require investments in improving relationships with businesses as well as organizational relationships among agencies, institutions and other stakeholders.

## Provide Strong State-level Leadership

- Action: Create a Powerful and Unified Vision
- Action: Establish Career Pathways as the Context for the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board
- Action: Define Roles and Responsibilities and Embed the System

## Support Regional Excellence

- Action: Organize an Interagency Work Team with State and Regional Representatives
- Action: Identify a State-level Convener
- Action: Provide Resources for Creating/Improving Regional Career Pathways Systems
- Action: Create a Statewide, Inter-Agency Professional Development Strategy

## Invest in Coordinated Employer Engagement

- Action: Create a Process to Identify/Verify State and Regional High-Value Industry Sectors
- Action: Support Sector Partnerships and the Business Resource Network
- Action: Create shared responsibility by employers

## Develop a Communication Plan to Engage and Inform All Stakeholders

- Action: Increase Communication with Federal Agencies
- Action: Draft a Comprehensive Communications Plan to Support the Career Pathways System

## Set Goals and Foster Continuous Improvement

- Action: Create and Empower a Performance Committee of the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board
- Action: Create an Evaluation Plan to Analyze and Improve the Career Pathways System
- Action: Provide Tools and Professional Development to Regions Focused on Data-driven Decision Making
- Action: Create a More Meaningful and Accurate Consumer Report
- Action: Hold Agencies and Local Areas Accountable
- Action: Celebrate Success

## Create a Sustainability Plan that Integrates Career Pathways into Organizational Cultures and Includes Long-term Funding Strategies

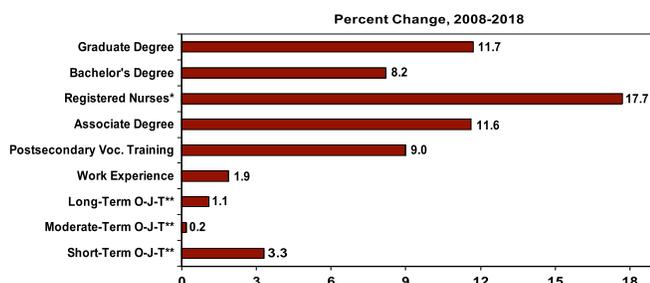
- Action: Align Existing Resources
- Action: Focus Efforts to Increase Workforce Funding

# IMPORTANCE OF CREATING AND SUSTAINING AN OHIO CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM



Never has the skills mismatch been more evident than it is today in Ohio. With more than 80,000 currently unfilled jobs<sup>3</sup> and 536,000 unemployed Ohioans<sup>4</sup>, Ohio is facing a high-stakes imperative that demands a bold solution.

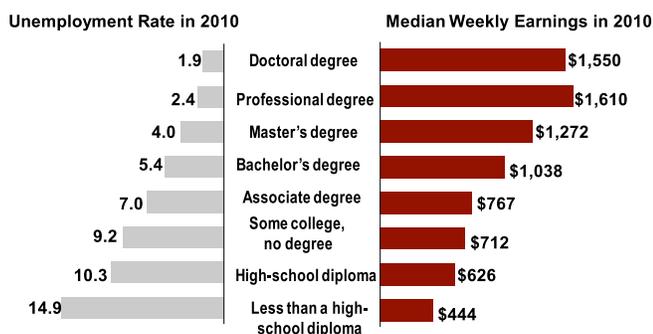
Most job growth in Ohio is expected to be in occupations that generally require some form of post-secondary training.



Despite the growth in occupations requiring higher levels of education and the economic benefits of higher education, Ohioans lag in educational attainment.

- Among younger adults in Ohio (ages 18-24), about half (48.5%) have no more than a high school education and have never attended college. Among the same age group, 16% have not graduated from high school.<sup>5</sup>
- Over two-thirds (68.6%) of the Ohio population ages 25 and older have less than an Associate degree. Twenty-one percent have some college without a degree.<sup>6</sup>

Those who invest in postsecondary education generally enjoy higher earnings and lower unemployment.



<sup>3</sup> OhioMeansJobs, search of all jobs, <http://jobsearch.ohiomeansjobs.monster.com/Search.aspx?tjt=&q=&cnme=&zip=&rad=20&sid=68> (accessed October 18, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Bureau of Labor Market Information, Employment Situation Indicators for Ohio, September 2011, October 21, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2009

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

- Ohio is 25th among the states in the percentage of adults 25 and older who have a high school diploma or equivalent, 30th among the states in adults who have completed some form of postsecondary degree, and 39th among the states in adults who have completed a Bachelor's degree.<sup>7</sup>

***Investing in Systemic Change for Ohio's Economic Success*** provides a plan to create a true career pathways system—comprised of education, workforce development and economic development—with the agility necessary to respond to the ever-changing needs of businesses and the economy. In order to be successful, it will demand strong leadership willing to address reality as it is and to instill a sense of urgency in all partners involved. Ohio must roll up its sleeves and rally around this opportunity to transform the way it does business in order to respond to the needs of business. All partners must first understand their charge, then set individual, organizational agendas aside and accept the mission at hand. At the same time, Ohio must capture the good work that has already been done, identify the critical ingredients for success and diffuse this innovation consistently around the state.

Workforce Development is a critical component of Ohio's job creation and economic recovery strategy. The vision of a statewide career pathways system is to promote economic growth by organizing the state's multiple workforce, education and training programs and initiatives into a sensible system that is easy to navigate, meets the skill requirements of employers and enables all individuals to begin and progress along a pathway to obtain credentials, which lead to employment and advancement in high-demand occupations. This career pathways system must align policies and resources in a way that meets dynamic employer demands and workforce needs.

A high performing career pathways system must ensure more meaningful credentials that have added value in the labor market, assuring better investments of workforce funding and better and more relevant performance outcomes. Career pathways models must show clear and complete pathways from middle school up to and including

credentials, certificates and degrees that support the most skilled positions as well as strategies to continually increase the skills of incumbent workers, including work-based learning.

The concept of career pathways is widely accepted as an efficient way to target limited funding to those driver industries that most impact Ohio's economy. By effectively engaging employers in a productive dialogue, education and workforce development can initiate an informed response, in terms of program development and resource allocation, to achieve the highest impact. A systemic approach to career pathways will allow Ohio to increase efficiencies and reduce redundancies of partners programs. It will provide more streamlined and aligned paths to credential attainment and return to the workforce, which means a better return on investments of taxpayer dollars.



<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



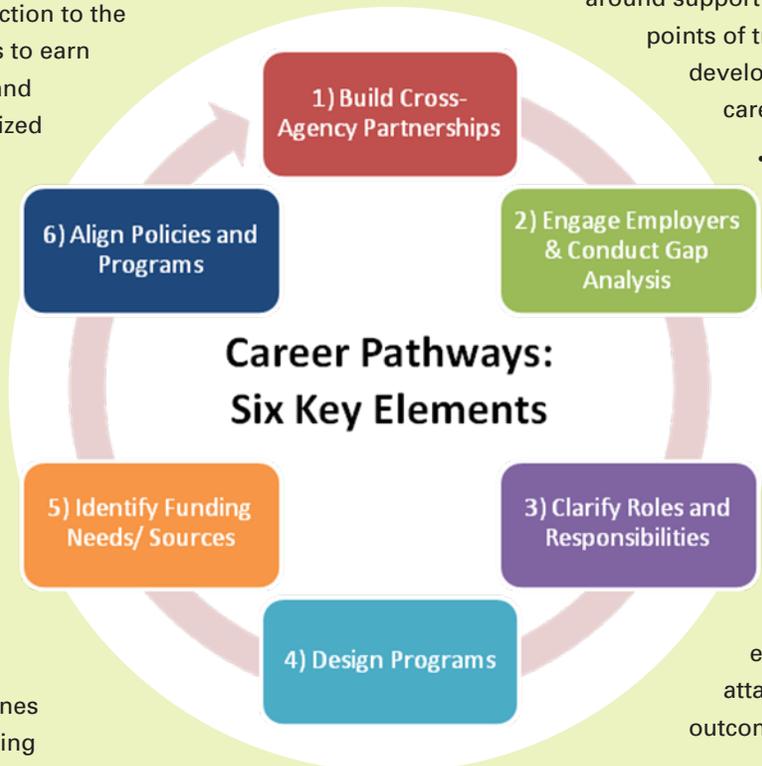
# WHAT ARE CAREER PATHWAYS?

## CAREER PATHWAYS:

- Are aligned with the skill needs of industries important to the regional or state economies in which they are located and reflect the active engagement of employers in targeted industry sectors regarding the skill requirements for employment or career progression in high demand occupations.
- Include the full range of secondary, adult education, and postsecondary education options, including registered apprenticeship, with a non-duplicative progression of courses clearly articulated from one level of instruction to the next, with opportunities to earn postsecondary credits and lead to industry-recognized [and/or] postsecondary credentials;
- Include curriculum and instructional strategies that make work a central context for learning (contextual learning) and help students attain work readiness skills;
- Include, as appropriate for the individual, integrated education and training that combines occupational skills training with adult education services, give credit for prior learning and adopt other strategies that accelerate the educational and career

- advancement of the participant.
- Lead to the attainment of an industry-recognized degree or credential, which may include stackable credentials of value in the labor market and that articulate progressively to higher-level credentials or degrees.
- Help a worker enter or advance within a specific sector or occupational field, regardless of their skills at the point of entry.
  - Include academic and career counseling, wrap around support services particularly at points of transition and support the development of an individual career plan.

- Are organized to meet the particular needs of adults, including childcare, accommodating work schedules with flexible and non-semester-based scheduling, alternative class times and locations and the innovative use of technology.
- Have the goal of increasing an individual's educational and skills attainment and employment outcomes.



Source: Career Pathways Framework, Career Pathways Technical Assistance Initiative

## What does a comprehensive career pathways system look like?

State and local teams working collaboratively to develop a career pathways system must facilitate and coordinate **Six Key Elements** in order to implement a comprehensive career pathways system. These elements often happen simultaneously, or are revisited as programs are developed and local, regional and state systems evolve.

The following chart highlights goals related to each of the six elements in a comprehensive career pathways system.

### 1. Build Cross-Agency Partnerships

Key cross-agency partners at the local and state levels are engaged to participate in the initiative

### 2. Engage Employers & Conduct Gap Analysis

Sectors and industries are selected and employers are engaged in the development of career pathways

### 3. Clarify Roles & Responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and formalized

### 4. Design Programs

Career pathway programs provide a clear sequence of education courses and credentials that meet the skill needs of high-demand industries

### 5. Identify Funding Needs & Sources

Necessary resources are raised and/or leveraged to develop and implement career pathway programs

### 6. Align Policies & Programs

Federal, state and local legislation or administrative policies promote career pathway development and implementation

Source: Career Pathways Framework, Career Pathways Technical Assistance Initiative

# ABOUT THE PROJECT

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## Background

In the Fall of 2010, Ohio received a grant of \$60,000 from the Department of Labor (DOL) and was one of nine states and two Indian and Native American entities invited to participate in the Career Pathways Technical Assistance Initiative (CPTAI) which supported the development of a comprehensive, statewide career pathways system for adult and dislocated workers. CPTAI—co-sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration; the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—leveraged the latest research and best practices to support the development of a career pathways system.

For the past year, a State/Regional Career Pathways Team has been working to develop a strategic action plan to build a comprehensive career pathways system in Ohio. Their work culminates in this action plan and includes characteristics of successful career pathways efforts in other states.

## Methodology

This report and action plan is based on the research and planning completed and strategies recommended through the CPTAI process. This was supplemented with an assessment conducted to determine Ohio's readiness to implement a statewide career pathways system and an inventory of existing career pathways-related initiatives in Ohio.

An interview framework was developed, in alignment with the six elements identified in the CPTAI *Career Pathways Readiness Assessment*. The primary goal of the interviews was to determine the strengths and weaknesses in Ohio's ability to implement a comprehensive career pathways program in a systemic way, which would become truly embedded in public agencies and institutions.

Questions were framed to gather both lessons learned and to create a vision for what is possible if barriers to success were removed. Stakeholders were encouraged to think beyond typical boundaries, and common themes emerged.

State and Regional Career Pathways Team members as well as other state-level stakeholders were interviewed. A total of 19 interviews were conducted.

Data also was gathered about various Ohio Career Pathways Initiatives. A summary is included as an addendum to this report. This is not meant to be a comprehensive list and does not reflect the many additional initiatives that can be found in virtually every region across Ohio.



# OHIO'S READINESS FOR CAREER PATHWAYS: FACING REALITY AS IT IS



## 1. Build Cross Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles

A committed team of agency partners participated in the CPTAI and developed this career pathways action plan for Ohio. State Team members included the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services, representing the Office of Workforce Development; Ohio Board of Regents, representing Adult Basic Literacy and Education (ABLE), Career & Technical Centers and Community Colleges; Ohio Department of Aging and the Governor's Workforce Policy Board. The Regional Team represented the geography of WIA Areas 17 & 18—Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana Counties. It is a large team with dedicated partners, including extensive representation from all public post-secondary education institutions (universities, community college, adult career and technical centers, workforce development, economic development, community-based organizations and business. (See list of team members included earlier in this document.)

The State and Regional Career Pathways Teams worked individually and collectively to develop common goals and a shared vision for establishing a career pathways framework, which are included as recommendations for statewide adoption. They also defined and agreed to a common set of definitions for career pathways and found it important to distinguish between a “career pathways model” and a “career pathways system.” (See definitions on page 14.) This will be important as many noted that although the term Career Pathways is mentioned frequently in many different contexts, there is not a common understanding, nor a collective awareness of roles and responsibilities.

Everyone interviewed saw the value in creating a true career pathways system; one termed it a “no brainer.” Yet, these same individuals noted that without dedicated resources or the state providing leadership in “figuring it out,” many said the day-to-day activity and program reporting requirements get in the way of big picture system change efforts—particularly in this time of austerity when most funding streams have experienced significant cuts and capacity is limited. Local agencies are just trying to keep their head above water. They acknowledged a career pathways system would be more effective, streamlining activity and maximizing resources. However, without the state providing an overall strategy and dedicated resources, they can't see how to get from here to there.

Frequent comments suggested Ohio stop recreating the wheel. Many suggested there are already proven tools out there, and we need to support what is already working and focus efforts on aligning, systematizing and embedding career pathways.

Another common thread identified in nearly every interview was the fact that Ohio has long been a state of local control. One noted this history of parochial control and local autonomy has become the culture. As a result, pockets of excellence exist throughout the state on a variety of fronts. So, while individuals could point to many examples across the state where exemplary work is being done—where people have figured it out and gotten it right, few mechanisms exist to collect and facilitate information sharing—particularly across agencies.

The focus on the budget as well as other less strategic priorities have crowded out the career pathways concept at the

state level. Those senior political and agency leaders in the state and region who have been presented with the concept of building a career pathways system have pledged overwhelming support. However, the concept has not yet been presented to many senior leaders. With workforce development now on the radar, many suggested now is the time to put Career Pathways in the forefront.

## 2. Sectors, Industry and Employer Engagement

Ohio is fortunate to have a strong Bureau of Labor Market information within the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The Bureau has developed many tools and resources, which are available to analyze data, identify high demand/high growth industries and assess demand and supply. Data is available to show fastest growing industries, projected openings and educational program completer data, and a new layer of real-time labor market information was recently added. However, the utilization of these tools is sporadic from region to region, and analysis requires a certain skill set.

The Ohio Department of Development identified high demand/high growth industries, yet sector and industry training needs still tend to be identified on a case-by-case basis. Ohio Skills Bank attempted to develop a process to align the available workforce with high demand occupations. However, the execution was flawed, and the process was not sustained.

All acknowledged the need for every step in developing a career pathways system to be employer-driven. That said, although employer input is absolutely critical to a responsive career pathways system, employer fatigue is a risk. Many cited various efforts over the years to solicit employer feedback and described employers as being tired of surveys and committees that do not lead to results. Some advisory committees required by educational institutions fall into this category.

The Regional Team members stressed the importance of being strategic in employer engagement, utilizing existing relationships and forums when possible. They were especially careful not to engage employers until they were completely prepared, asking employers to vet and validate information already gathered. They stressed the need for a solid plan to support employer engagement throughout all phases of the project—design, launch, operation and evaluation—and only to ask when prepared to take action quickly.

The Regional Career Pathways Team benchmarked their business services model of sector partnerships coupled with the Business Resource Network (BRN) and determined it to be the most effective of any they found and an overall strength of their Career Pathways System.

NEO HealthForce, an effective sector partnership has existed within the region since 2002. This industry-led collaborative established a foundation for strong partnerships within the region. At the same time, the BRN has been widely recognized as a state and national model, and those outside of the region who participated in this process gave endorsement to the unique approach and suggested replication as the key to ensuring high quality employer engagement throughout the state.

The Team emphasized that in order to engage employers, the approach must be relevant, simple and show the ability to make a significant impact. Taking this two-pronged approach—sector partnerships and the BRN—the Regional Team was able to gain the attention and earn the respect of a new Manufacturers' Coalition. The group admittedly would have otherwise been hesitant to align with any public group or institution. The breadth of the collaboration and the value of the career pathways model are what convinced the Coalition to engage fully with the Regional Team. Although some regions like the Mahoning Valley have developed effective employer engagement strategies, an overarching, statewide business outreach strategy or central points of contact have not yet been laid out.

## 3. Design Education and Training Programs

Ohio is initiatives-rich and systems-poor. Ohio agencies and institutions have participated in a myriad of initiatives related to career pathways. (See Addendum A.) The initiatives tend to be focused on improvements of various points along a pathway or within a particular program (i.e., improving transitions between Adult Basic Literacy & Education programs and postsecondary academic programs) or for specific populations (i.e., Ohio Department of Aging's Direct Care Workers initiative). While these initiatives allow agencies to dive deeply into areas that deserve attention and improvement, efforts have tended to be narrowly focused on specific interventions and isolated from the system as a whole. Many of the initiatives have focused on University System of Ohio institutions, but have not included economic development or workforce development, which some felt resulted in duplication of effort and more limited impact |

than would have otherwise been possible through full partnership.

There is not a widespread understanding of the goals and activities of many of the initiatives. Most of the initiatives have not resulted in sustainable, systemic change. Regional partners feel exhausted and are skeptical as each new initiative “comes from above.” In fact, the Regional Team banned the use of the word “initiative” when speaking of their career pathways efforts because they wanted to be clear in their aim for system change.

When asked to consider existing education and training program offerings, interviewees noted adult students in today’s economy face multiple challenges that need to be addressed in order for career pathways to be successful. Because of this, many said course offerings need to be flexible to align with schedules of working adults and suggested models like executive MBA programs and online offerings. Others noted typical career pathways maps do not have the dimension of time and are linear, which does not reflect reality. Programs are designed with multiple entry and exit points in theory, but they don’t identify potential road blocks and detours. Many agreed modularized programs would allow for smoother on and off-ramping. Yet, to organize curricula in modules, boundaries need to be challenged and funding streams need to include and promote collaboration.

Furthermore, while programs like CT2 (Career-Technical Credit Transfer) and CTAG (Career Technical Assurance Guides) have increased the number of articulation agreements, resources limit the number and speed of articulations being produced through this process. (See CT2 and CTAG profile in Addendum A.) Lastly, Ohio institutions need to identify better tools to determine credit for prior learning and award credit for non-credit credentials.

Support services for students are critical, especially in transitions. As part of their planning process, the Regional Career Pathways Team engaged a group of Youngstown State University students to assess existing systems and processes in training and educational institutions and the One-Stop Workforce Centers. In their study, *The Voice of the Consumer Informs Career Pathway Programming*, they identified the following obstacles and barriers: bureaucratic hurdles, confusing choices, limited counselor availability, poor advice from staff, delayed detection of costly mistakes and poor handling of conflicting demands. In their report,

included as Addendum C, they noted “Many non-traditional students in our focus group are in desperate need of career counseling and advice about how to explore their options.” Most felt the communication between the financial aid department and students regarding the processing of student loans “is inadequate, impersonal and confusing.” One student said, “This is all about business because they [the advisors and financial aid] prolong your education until you run out of money, then you are stuck with no degree and thousands of dollars in debt.” They suggested improved advising, assessment and placement are critical to program completion and suggested academic advisors should know more about community resources available for students. They also suggested visual “road maps” clearly showing options and requirements would be helpful.

Interestingly, those representing each of the agencies and institutions independently cited the need for professional development in their organization and throughout the system for instructors, advisors, counselors, case managers and other front-line staff in order to increase the system’s effectiveness. The Regional Career Pathways Team recognized advising and wrap-around support systems primarily exist in the core business of each agency, but support is not effective in the transitions as who “owns” the student becomes unclear. So, understanding the power of quality career coaching and development planning, the Regional Team identified improvements to career counseling, planning and assessment as one of their primary strategies and suggested creating a network to coordinate and elevate system-wide effectiveness in career counseling among partners of the public workforce system and training and education partnership.

Some workforce partners cited this as an opportunity to provide a valuable, intensive-level services that also would be more cost effective than long-term training. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) recognizes this in Guidance Letter 15-10 stressing the importance of building “the capacity of One-Stop and other frontline staff to help customers seeking training to invest their funds and time in programs that will lead to industry-recognized credentials for jobs in demand...” and to “help customers develop individualized career plans that help support an individual’s journey through the pathway.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Labor Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 15-10. (December 15, 2010) Increasing Credential, Degree, and Certificate Attainment by Participants of the Public Workforce System.

## 4. Identifying Funding Needs and Sources

The perceptions of many Federal agency officials do not accurately reflect the quality work being done in education, workforce development and economic development in Ohio. Plans created through the CPTAI seek to improve the reputation of Ohio's education and training system in the eyes of DOL, U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as they look for implementation of career pathways plans. Private foundations also have infused funding for various career pathways efforts in Ohio and, while in-process results have been positive, funders have been somewhat disappointed in the lack of success in impacting overall systems change. It is important to position Ohio well for future funding related to career pathways development and implementation.

The State/Regional Career Pathways Team identified funding needs for developing core components of the career pathway system and how to focus limited funds. Team members also overwhelmingly expressed the need for changes in funding policies to allow for collaboration and to encourage agencies and institutions to be advocates of each other. Central points of contact need to coordinate a systems approach to adult education tasked with boundary spanning and integration of funding fillers.

A few even suggested a centralized, independent, regional staff that would be responsible for providing career counseling and advisement and accessing and coordinating various funding streams into an overall financial aid package for students would be beneficial. They suggested this idea of an educational "financial planner" or education advocate would eliminate the natural tendency for schools to place students in their own intuitions when an entry point elsewhere in the pathways would be more appropriate and, therefore, cost efficient.

In this time of limited resources, it is more important than ever to target efforts to those where we can make significant impact. There was widespread agreement that focusing on sectors and industries most important to state or regional economies should be highly prioritized.

Some said they feel like they can make a difference at the regional level, but it is difficult to sustain without state support or external funding. As this report suggests systems change takes time and involves culture change at all levels—institutional, agency, regional and state. Therefore, funders need to be in it for the longer haul. Furthermore, due to the

many policies, programs, processes and initiatives involved, creating a career pathways system will require dedicated funding for someone to drive the effort full-time—at both the state and local level.

## 5. Align Policies and Programs

Several of those interviewed mentioned the importance of the "state" moving beyond "lip service" and being willing to address alignment of institutions, policies and funding. Some mentioned previous recommendations that were not acknowledged or addressed. "The 'state' needs to take this seriously."

A key tenant of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) is consumer choice; yet some said career counselors hide behind this as an excuse not to provide advice. There is still opportunity within the law to provide guidance to individuals about their suitability for training and the performance of available programs. WIA requires local areas to compile Consumer Reports. These are meant to provide information about the placement rates and wages for each training program and could equip career counselors with a powerful tool. However, the WIA Consumer Reports don't often reflect the true picture. Many local workforce areas rely on schools self-reporting. Recruiters can be very savvy in developing relationships with potential students and presenting information about their school that is inflated or inaccurate. In reality, these institutions are typically extremely expensive and do not result in the skills needed by employers or transferrable credit. As a result, many students go into debt and have a certificate that is essentially worthless. If the Consumer Report were accurate, this vital information could better assist individuals and guidance professionals in making wise investments in personal saving or taxpayers' dollars.

The economy also has dictated an emphasis on On-the-Job Training (OJTs) and short-term training because it is easier to see a tie to employment. While these can be effective approaches, they too, must be tied to career pathways in terms of supporting occupations in demand and ensuring the skills acquired will be recognized and valued by employers as individuals move up their career pathway. Some suggested that local workforce areas would be more apt to invest in individual training accounts if they had more accurate information about skills in demand and assurance that training programs are responsive to employer needs and result in employment.

Efforts have been made to identify the strengths of University System of Ohio institutions and to encourage schools to focus on what they do best, identifying gaps and developing programs accordingly in order to eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort. But, there is still room for improvement. At the same time, reductions in education funding tend to create an atmosphere conducive to competition instead of collaboration.

## 6. Measure System Change and Performance

Data to measure student gains, progress along educational pathways, credential attainment and employment outcomes are mixed and departmentalized. Work is currently underway to provide the longitudinal data necessary to measure true impact, which will be a significant opportunity to measure systemic change. While this will provide valuable information at the state level, some suggested the

importance of integrating existing systems to enable local administrators to access and analyze data more readily and regionally. This would allow for more in-process programmatic and system adjustments at the regional level. Others suggested agencies need to be trained on how to use data to make more informed programmatic decisions and improvements versus viewing evaluations as punitive.

The Regional Team found many of the best practices cited in the CPTAI were still limited to boutique programs within one or two institutions. Yet, the Regional Team is attempting to create a system and framework that includes two universities with five campuses, a community college and four adult career and technical centers along with two local WIA areas and many other workforce development and community-based organizations. They identified Massachusetts' SkillWorks initiative as one of the only examples of attempting to address systemic change with multiple workforce development and education partners and, therefore, studied their work at length.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Early on, the State/Regional Career Pathways Team defined and agreed to a common set of definitions for career pathways and found it important to distinguish between a “career pathways model” and a “career pathways system.”

A **career pathways “model”** is a sequence of education and training coursework and credentials. It indicates the steps on the ladder to move up a specific pathway. There are numerous examples of models that differ in layout and information included in the pathway. One example is included in this report as Addendum B.

A **career pathways “system”** is the operational framework and includes all of the Six Key Elements described earlier in this document and “how we do business.”

This plan seeks to develop, analyze and improve a career pathways “system” and is recommending a focus on *systemic* change. Therefore, it does not cover specific, programmatic recommendations. That said, many of the recommendations relate to recognizing and building upon the good

work that has already been done through many projects and initiatives in Ohio that have delved into specific education and service delivery areas of career pathways. This plan suggests a function of the system is to serve as a clearinghouse for those projects, gathering information and outcome data, determining barriers to success, identifying opportunities for wider adoption, suggesting programmatic and systemic changes that may be necessary and promoting successful models throughout the state of Ohio.

The policy objective of this plan is to meet the needs of employers and, therefore, is meant to be inclusive of the entire potential workforce—emerging, transitional and current. So, although many funded projects or initiatives are narrowly focused on a specific population and prescribe specific eligibility, this plan is more widely focused and suggests these narrow definitions represent lost opportunity to reach incumbent and underemployed workers who do not meet “self-sufficiency” guidelines, but who could benefit from career pathways strategies and, in turn, meet the needs of employers.

## VISION

Implement a statewide career pathways system to promote economic growth

## MISSION

Build a responsive workforce career pathways model with aligned policies and resources to meet dynamic employer demands and provide employment and advancement opportunities for individuals

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide Strong State-level Leadership

Support Regional Excellence

Invest in Coordinated Employer Engagement

Develop a Communication Plan to Engage and Inform All Stakeholders

Set Goals and Foster Continuous Improvement

Create a Sustainability Plan that Integrates Career Pathways into Organizational Cultures and Includes Long-term Funding Strategies

## 1: Provide Strong State-Level Leadership

While some specific career pathways and sector initiatives have been successful in influencing systems to be more responsive to the needs of industry, most individual agencies at both the state and regional level do not perceive themselves as having sufficient staff capacity or resources to engage in true systems change activities. Some regions and individual partnerships undertake these activities; however, they do so because they are driven by an individual passion and see it as the “right thing to do.” They know ultimately it will benefit their customers and be bared out in program performance, yet it is often still a sideline activity since it is not required by the funding streams and accountability measures that guide their work.

Innovative, systemic change will require investments in improving relationships with businesses as well as organizational relationships among agencies, institutions and other stakeholders. It will require research, information sharing, planning and thinking beyond traditional boundaries—perceived or real. These activities are not often funded in and of themselves, and the work is larger than any one existing funding stream. Yet, these activities are critical to transforming Ohio’s workforce system. Therefore, the direction and resources necessary to undertake such bold action must come from the highest levels of leadership.

The concept of career pathways needs to be embedded into statewide systems to ensure sustainability over time. Career pathways efforts should not be seen as “owned” by any particular administration or agency, so the good work is not interrupted by elections or personnel changes. Virginia was the first state to pursue a comprehensive career pathways system strategy.<sup>9</sup> The Governor, multiple state agencies and policy leaders accomplished this through a series of steps including executive orders, legislation and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs). The Governor first issued an Executive Order creating a Chief Workforce Development Officer and naming the Governor as such. A subsequent Executive Order established a Workforce Subcabinet to

“ensure Cabinet collaboration regarding workforce development” and delegated the powers and duties of the Chief Workforce Development Officer who would serve as a “chief advisor to the Governor.”<sup>10</sup> The order ensured the creation and implementation of a statewide strategic plan focused on true systemic change. They then empowered the Governor’s Workforce Investment Board (WIB) with the responsibility for leading the charge.

In Massachusetts, they initially created a Performance Standards and Accountability Task Force through state legislation charged with making recommendations for system improvements. Once the new Governor appointed a state WIB, they recognized it as a more effective mechanism to lead system reform. So, the Task Force was disbanded and the Governor’s WIB took on the responsibility of “providing oversight, vision and policies for performance management for the Commonwealth’s workforce development system.”<sup>11</sup>

The State/Regional Career Pathways Team suggest the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board as a logical body to oversee the statewide effort. The Board is business-led and also represents all partners necessary from workforce development, economic development and education. It is also well-positioned to create the “long view” for the state.

Governor’s Workforce Boards are most effective when cabinet-level officials actively participate and buy into the Board’s strategic plan as a unified, statewide plan to address all workforce issues—not just those that simply fall under the Workforce Investment Act. Kentucky is a good example of this. The Kentucky Workforce Investment Board undertook a very aggressive strategic planning process in order to improve the workforce “system” as a whole. Cabinet-level officials serve on the board, actively shape the strategic plan and work in tandem with fellow cabinet members to align individual agency efforts in order to accomplish the strategies set forth in the plan.

<sup>9</sup> Workforce Strategy Center, Bridging Business and Education for the 21st Century Workforce, December 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Commonwealth of Virginia Office of the Governor Executive Order Number Sixty-one, 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Minzner, Amy, Glen Schneider, Beth Siegel, Joshua Vaughn and Devon Winey, The Public Policy Component of SkillWorks, June 2009.

## ACTION: CREATE A POWERFUL AND UNIFIED VISION

- Set the guiding vision and a statewide expectation for increased alignment
- Require state agencies to follow suit, incorporating the career pathways vision into individual agency strategic plans
- Build in a mechanism for annual review

## ACTION: ESTABLISH CAREER PATHWAYS AS THE CONTEXT FOR THE GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE POLICY BOARD

- Ensure cabinet-level participation on the Governor's Workforce Policy Board
- Draft a new strategic plan for the Governor's Workforce Policy Board, which focuses on strategy rather than compliance and demonstrates a wider, more comprehensive view of the workforce system encompassing workforce development, economic development and education as related to career pathways

## ACTION: DEFINE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND EMBED THE SYSTEM

- Expand One-Stop Partnerships to include economic development, a critical partner in career pathways and workforce development
- Clearly define and agree upon roles and responsibilities of partners and incorporate into existing state-level MOUs
- Provide guidance and technical assistance to regions and encourage local partners to follow suit in local One-Stop MOUs as regions come on board
- Create formal industry partnership agreements that make clear the role of employers

## 2: Support Regional Excellence

Ohio must balance state leadership and direction with regional excellence. While state leadership is critically important to creating a career pathways system, it is within the regions where well-functioning partnerships can best meet the needs of local employers and individuals.

States can identify ways to make career pathways work easier by proactively identifying policy and programmatic roadblocks and opportunities for greater alignment in partnership with those who are closest to the work. We suggest an Interagency Work Team, comprised of the necessary partners from both the state and regional levels, be formed to guide the process of developing a career pathways system. This Work Team should include representation from all key agencies. It is important for Work Team representatives to be knowledgeable decision makers with a broad view of systems. They should be charged with ongoing planning and implementation efforts, which will inform the Governor's Workforce Policy Board—as well as the Federal agencies involved in the Career Pathways effort—of barriers, gaps and policy challenges. The Regional Career Pathways Team has archived and evaluated the process they've undertaken, which will be useful as the state looks to replicate in other regions.

This state-regional team model has proven to be very effective

in those states that participated in the Career Pathways Technical Assistance Initiative, including Arizona, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Virginia and Ohio. The state-regional team model incorporates feedback from regional implementation by giving regional representatives a seat at the table and provides state level decision-makers will real-time feedback to inform policy and guidance statewide. This model is currently being encouraged by DOL in the Workforce Innovation Fund grant opportunities.

Ohio was chosen to participate in the CPTAI effort because of the many career pathways-related initiatives currently underway (Shifting Gears, Developmental Education Initiative, Ohio Skills Bank, etc.). The reality of these initiatives is they are not aligned, and implementation is not well-coordinated. In the example of Ohio Skills Bank, regional best practices were not shared, and the effort did not emphasize systems change or sustainability. So, while pockets of excellence exist throughout the state on a variety of fronts, little has been done to identify and capture the critical elements for success. The state can play a greater role in fostering innovation and supporting excellence. An Ohio Career Pathways System should support regional efforts throughout the state, capitalize on the opportunity to learn from these models and facilitate information sharing and technical assistance working toward systemic change.

The states that are furthest along in their career pathways efforts have committed a state-level staff person. The best example of this comes from Oregon where their Pathways Director serves as a facilitator and organizer who assists in the “diffusion of innovation” by identifying early adopters, collecting and migrating ideas and promising practices from region to region and offering sustained professional development opportunities and information sharing across siloed systems. Massachusetts recognized the need for a state-level director and now cites the value for facilitating conversations, building consensus, cultivating relationships and managing through transition as people come and go.

Resources must be dedicated to support regional career pathways system building. This will provide a concerted and coordinated way to invest discretionary funding that will meet the Governor’s workforce priorities of being more strategic while at the same time meeting the needs of the industries and businesses that drive Ohio’s economy.

We suggest a voluntary and competitive grant process, starting with small number of regions. Again, based on the premise that Workforce Investment Boards are representative of key stakeholders, they must play a key role. The Governor’s Workforce Policy Board must be clear in its vision for regional career pathways “systems.” We suggest utilizing the Six Elements of a Career Pathways System as a framework to clearly describe the criteria for successful partnerships. The Board should identify practices of effective partnerships that can serve as benchmarks. The Board must be clear in articulating expectations and also be realistic in setting systemic change evaluation criteria, recognizing that systemic change doesn’t happen overnight. Program priorities and performance (placements, jobs, etc.) will come, but regions must have time for setting the framework for a career pathways system, leveling this understanding, trust-

building and planning. An evaluation of Massachusetts’ suggested outcomes should “emphasize:

- Promoting collaboration and understanding among stakeholders
- Sharing program investments and taking joint responsibility for the outcomes
- Balancing both demand and supply side considerations in workforce development
- Developing or solidifying a continuum of services that allows workers to advance in skills and resulting economic benefits
- Creating systemic changes among employers and service providers that will allow for positive outcomes beyond the time frame of the [initial] funding”

The Board and Pathway Director should provide strong support with regular opportunities for information-sharing and technical assistance. We also would suggest organizing professional development opportunities for non-grantees to participate and learn with the intention of growing the number of grantees each year, again, modeling after Oregon as an example of ongoing career pathways professional development.

Professional development must be made available in convenient formats and locations in order to reach all those involved in any aspect of career advising. The goal would be to ensure all front-line staff members who provide advice and counsel to students understand career pathways concepts and models, including the value of credentials and techniques to introduce and promote career pathways in customer interactions in order to promote lifelong learning. This would involve knowledge of proper assessment, placement, articulation agreements, collaborative funding and the best use of resources to achieve the highest return on investment of time and money for the student.

**ACTION: ORGANIZE AN INTERAGENCY WORK TEAM WITH STATE AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES**

- Inform and support the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board
- Provide policy recommendations
- Implement career pathways systems change within the team’s locus of control
- Monitor progress toward career pathways recommendations and plans

**ACTION: IDENTIFY A STATE-LEVEL CONVENER**

- Commit a state-level staff person to focus solely on career pathways
- Explore and promote innovative models of training and education
- Cultivate relationships and build support and consensus around career pathways
- Staff the Governor’s Policy Board, providing support for career pathways-related activity

## ACTION: PROVIDE RESOURCES FOR CREATING/ IMPROVING REGIONAL CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEMS

- Establish criteria, including the Six Elements of a Career Pathways System
- Set systemic change goals
- Establish a competitive and voluntary grant process
- Tie to Local Workforce Investment Boards

## ACTION: CREATE A STATEWIDE, INTER-AGENCY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

- Provide statewide professional development and technical assistance
- Organize an annual career pathways conference and a series of professional development opportunities throughout the year
- Identify the knowledge, skills and abilities for effective career counseling and develop cross-agency standards

### 3: Invest in Coordinated Employer Engagement

Under the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board, the focus should be on prioritizing the investment of both time and money. This report suggests this can best be accomplished by identifying high-value industry sectors most critical to the state and regional economies. For this to happen, we recommend a concerted effort to guide regions through the process of identifying, validating and targeting critical sectors. Much of this data is available and, through the Ohio Skills Bank project, an electronic tool was developed for such analysis so, this should not be a long drawn-out process.

Once priority sectors are identified, we are recommending a two-prong strategy for employer engagement that incorporates identified best practices.

The first strategy is to create or build upon industry partnerships where employers identify common industry challenges, trends and opportunities and drive the agenda while the workforce system—comprised of training/education providers, workforce intermediaries, community-based organizations and economic development organizations—is charged with responding with solutions. This creates a mechanism for ongoing dialogue to understand and incorporate the ever-changing needs of businesses. It also enables the workforce system and businesses to align resources and create shared solutions.

Many examples of successful IP’s exist across the country and in Ohio, and we suggest using existing best practices. Pennsylvania supports Industry Partnerships as a way of val-

uating industry needs for state-funded incumbent worker training. Kentucky recently issued a Request for Proposals to support the formation of industry partnerships. Massachusetts fostered sector initiatives distributed \$18 million to support multiyear regional sector partnerships throughout the state.<sup>13</sup>

A longer-term goal would be to align multiple advisory committees for the various institutions. State agencies should review policies to ensure sector partnerships meet requirements for advisory committees and encourage local institutions to align efforts. Coming together through industry partnerships will enable partners to dive more deeply into the issues and will result in a much richer and common understanding of the challenges they face and improvements needed than is possible through individual, quarterly advisory committee meetings. This strategy will better inform collective problem solving.

It is our contention that in order for employers to remain engaged, Ohio must work to meet the needs of the collective industry while on a parallel track also meeting the needs of the individual business. Therefore, the second critical ingredient to employer engagement is adopting a model such as the Business Resource Network (BRN). The BRN—now touted as a state and national model—utilizes a collaborative and systematic process to assist regional businesses to address their specific business challenges and opportunities by providing them with a single point of contact and creating an individual plan that includes the collective resources and services of One-Stop workforce,

<sup>13</sup> Abt Associates, The Public Policy Component of SkillWorks, June 2009.

education and economic development partners. The BRN also provides a mechanism for gathering regional business data allowing partners to identify trends and respond to needs.

Others have attempted collaborative approaches to business outreach. However, the BRN has several characteristics that make it unique. In order to set roles and responsibilities, partners must sign partnership and confidentiality agreements that clearly identify the expectations and philosophy of the BRN. It also provides a step-by-step process that provides consistency and accountability for all partners involved. The BRN uses technology and collaboration tools to share information and responsibility among the partners with total transparency, which is a key when building the level of trust necessary to accomplish such a working partnership. Partners use a variety of information sources in order to target the companies where partners can have the

most impact: those companies that are at risk or those that are poised for growth. Lastly, the BRN capitalizes on the strength of the partnership, allowing any partner to take the lead, based on existing relationships or industry knowledge.

In terms of career pathways, this two-pronged employer engagement plan—sector partnership and the BRN—can be used to select and approve priority industry sectors/occupations and verify demand, identify the knowledge, skills and abilities for critical work functions, review education and training programs and curriculum and identify gaps. It also will increase awareness and facilitate discussion regarding required competencies, skill credentialing, apprenticeship opportunities and clinical needs. The relationships formed by the BRN partners will be critical in placement of career pathway participants into clinicals, apprenticeships, on-the-job training and—ultimately—employment.

#### **ACTION: CREATE A PROCESS TO IDENTIFY/VERIFY STATE AND REGIONAL HIGH-VALUE INDUSTRY SECTORS**

- Reevaluate and build upon the Ohio Skills Bank process
- Provide technical assistance and support to regions
- Identify statewide industry sectors
- Together, with regions, identify additional regional sectors

#### **ACTION: SUPPORT SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS AND THE BUSINESS RESOURCE NETWORK**

- Set clear expectations, including required characteristics and existing best practices of sector partnerships and the BRN
- Tie to career pathways system competitive grant process

- Provide specific employer engagement professional development and technical assistance
- Align individual advisory committees

#### **ACTION: CREATE SHARED RESPONSIBILITY BY EMPLOYERS**

- Demonstrate value to employers to justify shared investments
- Assist employers in reevaluating existing employee development programs and investments

## 4: Develop a Communications Plan to Engage and Inform All Stakeholders

Developing an effective communications plan to engage and inform all stakeholders will be essential to the overall success of this effort. In order for systemic change to occur, all stakeholders must first be aware of the vision for creating a career pathways system. It will be important to emphasize this is a systemic change in the way we do business. The communications plan must demonstrate State-level commitment from the highest levels to a partnership among agencies and between state and regional partners.

A first priority will be to craft communications strategies to address internal stakeholders. These would include the Governor's Workforce Policy Board and State Agencies representing workforce development, economic development and education initially, then the local counterparts throughout the state. It will be important to invest sufficient time and effort to improve communication from the state level to the regions in order to get optimal buy-in. Local leaders should be involved in providing input and feedback from very early stages. This has proved an effective strategy with the WIA Directors' group. As an example, the Directors' group now provides early review and input into workforce policy. State and local officials acknowledge that this has resulted in stronger policy and decreased resistance from local areas.

Messages must make the effort tangible and should tie to the "end game," painting the picture of the benefits of a career pathways system to local areas. In order to effectively engage local stakeholders, it also will be essential to position this renewed focus on building an Ohio career pathways "System" as a system change and not another initiative for the reasons stated earlier in this document. Messages must also recognize the good work being done throughout Ohio and position this effort as a means to support and build on that work.

Internal communications plans also should include a mechanism to support professional development. The Regional Team created a web-based platform "in the cloud" that allowed for information sharing, captured sample materials and archived professional development opportunities. This type of online community would enable practitioners statewide to access and share process documents and information about best practices.

As the Ohio career pathways system progresses, we recommend regular reports to appropriate Federal agency partners in an effort to educate them about the quality work being done in Ohio. This should include submission of best practices to DOL communities of practice on [www.workforce3one.org](http://www.workforce3one.org) and other web sites such as the National Association of Workforce Board (NAWB) to showcase Ohio's excellence. Efforts also should be made to develop stronger relationships and maintain an open dialogue with Federal agency representatives.

Once the regional career pathways systems are in place, then the plan would turn to assisting the regions in communicating to external audiences. These audiences would include employers; individual job seekers, students and incumbent workers; local elected officials and other faith and community-based organizations.

To support the regions as they work to engage employers and partners, the communication plan should include assistance in communicating key career pathways messages. This will include education about credentials, promoting them as a common "currency" and language in the labor market. Employers need to better understand what they get with a person who has earned certain credentials.

The communications plan also must include a widespread community education component. This would include educating the community about occupations in demand, the value of credentials in hiring and promotion decisions and the importance of lifelong learning. Another important aspect will be to help individuals become better consumers of education, understanding how to get the best value for their money—which programs actually result in industry placements and high wages and which ones truly articulate to the next progressive training program, eliminating the need to repeat coursework.

One of the most important tools for communicating clearly about career pathways to a variety of audiences will be the creation of career pathways "road maps." If done correctly, these road maps should visually depict the opportunities within a particular sector, including the demand for the occupations and the average wages for each. The visual also should show the necessary training or education to qualify for each occupation and the regional education/training providers. They should show how stackable credentials lead

to career progression as well as on- and off-ramps. The road maps must be clear and simple.

A second set of road maps should be developed to assist career counselors and academic advisors. These versions

should include more detailed information about articulation agreements, credit transfer, credit for prior learning options, etc. to equip counselors with the information they need to provide quality advisement.

#### **ACTION: INCREASE COMMUNICATION WITH FEDERAL AGENCIES**

- Communicate successes
- Communicate policy barriers

#### **ACTION: DRAFT A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN TO SUPPORT THE CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM**

- Include key messages, strategies and media for internal stakeholders
- Include key messages, strategies and media for external stakeholders

- Assist regions in creating Career Pathways “Road Maps” for use with individuals
- Assist regions in creating Career Pathways “Road Maps” for use among career counselors and academic advisors
- Include real-life examples to personalize messages, showing individuals and businesses who have benefitted from career pathways

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## 5: Set Goals and Foster Continuous Improvement

Statewide, embedded policies and standards are necessary for creating sustainable, systemic impact. We further recommend the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board identify quantitative cross-agency goals, monitor progress toward these goals, celebrate results and hold agencies accountable.

As the Board considers goals and outcomes, it will be important to distinguish between system outcomes and program outcomes. The Aspen Institute’s System Change publication notes, “System change outcomes most often are qualitative and can be observed through such indicators as the creation of new relationships, the institutionalization of new processes among key actors, such as educational institutions or employers, enhanced organizational reputation or revised public policies.”<sup>14</sup>

System change outcomes should not be discounted or minimized. Essentially, system change lays the groundwork for improved program outcomes. System measures also can capture the impact of a career pathways systems approach. In the Social Policy Research Associates’ Career Pathways Toolkit: Six Elements for Success, they suggest system measures such as return on investment, credential attainment rates, effectiveness of collaboration among partners and achievement of sustained funding by institutional partners.<sup>15</sup>

In support of cross-agency performance measures, we recommend Ohio leverage efforts for cross-agency data collection and longitudinal evaluation that have resulted from the Data Quality Initiative, Shifting Gears and others. Taking it a step further, we recommend Ohio address the inconsistency of data reported. For example, non-credit training and credential attainment at community colleges and regional campuses is no longer reported to the Ohio Board of Regents...or to anyone for that matter. Therefore, the state is missing a large amount of significant data related to credential attainment. In order to the state and regions to see the full picture of talent supply and demand, the data collected must be comprehensive, consistent and accurate.

Work is also underway within the Ohio Department of Job & Family Services to develop a return on investment model. This should serve as a starting point for further cost benefit analysis.

We recommend the Ohio Governor’s Workforce Policy Board follow the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ model and create a Board Performance Committee. The authority of the Performance Committee and the Board should be strong and clear. The report Integrated Performance Information for Workforce Development: A Blueprint for States suggests, “There needs to be a champion of integrated performance information in order to make it happen, and

<sup>14</sup> The Aspen Institute, Systems Change, March 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Social Policy Research Associates, Career Pathways Toolkit: Six Elements for Success, October 2011.

most states have found that the clearer and stronger the authority that is established, the more likely it is to last and for the state to succeed.”<sup>16</sup>

In Massachusetts, legislation described the responsibility of the Board committee, “to evaluate existing programs receiving state funding in the areas of employment, skill, education, business and customer satisfaction impact for the agencies of the commonwealth that provide workforce development resources, education or training programs.” The law further required “all workforce development services and job skills training programs receiving state or federal funds” to submit an annual performance report to the board and various legislative committees.<sup>17</sup>

This model would provide Ohio with the baseline information needed to meet one of the Governor’s goals: to rationalize agencies and programs. At the writing of this plan, efforts were underway to identify all workforce programming within the State of Ohio. Nearly 50 programs

were identified. The next logical step is to develop common measures and standards to measure the impact of each and require agencies and institutions to provide data in a consistent, reliable format.

Eventually, as a bi-product of the process of creating a career pathways system, gaps in the system will be exposed. The quality of programs and partnerships vary greatly from area to area. Through this process, the high performing areas will excel and the weakest links will be revealed. The State/Regional Career Pathways Team identified that we have a tendency to be our own worst critics. Ohio has many strong elements of career pathways, but we set the bar high for ourselves. It’s ok to be dedicated to continuous improvement and not settle for less, but Ohio could do a better job at acknowledging and celebrating what we have and ensuring others—particularly those at the Federal level and other potential funders—understand the successes and foundational elements that exist.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, Bryan, *Integrated Performance Information for Workforce Development: A Blueprint for States*, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Part I, Title II, Chapter 23H, Section 11 Performance standards and accountability task force, <http://www.malegislature.gov/laws/generallaws/parti/titleii/chapter23h/section11> (accessed October 15, 2011).

#### **ACTION: CREATE AND EMPOWER A PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNOR’S WORKFORCE POLICY BOARD**

- Charge with reviewing performance of all existing workforce and training programs that receive Federal or state funding
- Charge with recommending policy changes to support system alignment
- Support with an Interagency Work Team

#### **ACTION: CREATE AN EVALUATION PLAN TO ANALYZE AND IMPROVE THE CAREER PATHWAYS SYSTEM**

- Set quantifiable goals and develop common measures and outcomes
- Require an annual report of the data needed to evaluate such measures from each existing workforce and training program that receives federal or state funding
- Leverage Cross-Agency Data Collection & Analysis
- Use career pathways metrics as the context in which programs are rationalized

#### **ACTION: PROVIDE TOOLS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TO REGIONS FOCUSED ON DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING**

- Create a culture of shared accountability among agencies and institutions at both the state and regional level

#### **ACTION: CREATE A MORE MEANINGFUL AND ACCURATE CONSUMER REPORT**

- Develop a reliable consumer report to inform customers of recruitment policies and placement statistics of local training and education providers

#### **ACTION: HOLD AGENCIES AND LOCAL AREAS ACCOUNTABLE**

- Include Career Pathways elements in the next phase of the One-Stop Gold Standard Continuous Improvement process; Evaluate the effectiveness of local workforce investment areas
- Provide technical assistance to low-performing areas
- Impose sanctions to those areas that do not respond to technical assistance

#### **ACTION: CELEBRATE SUCCESS**

- Develop a recognition program to recognize agencies and regions that attain excellence
- Focus additional resources on high performing workforce areas

## 6: Create a sustainability plan that integrates career pathways into organizational cultures and includes long-term funding strategies

To achieve long-term, sustainable improvements to the system, Ohio must create a central point where state and local agencies and institutions and partnerships know where to turn for guidance and assistance as they work to institutionalize successful innovations. We believe the Governor’s Workforce Policy Board, with staffing by the state-level convener, should serve in this role.

In order to become more strategic and supportive of career pathways, we also recommend the Board undertake a concerted effort to identify and align existing federal resources that can be used in support of sector-based career pathways efforts. Furthermore, we recommend the Board make recommendations to the Governor on the expenditures of the Governor’s WIA statewide discretionary funds and the statewide rapid response funds.

The Board must also identify any policy changes necessary to facilitated career pathways system-building. As an example, the Board may consider aligning the program and degree approval process to incorporate data gathered on a regional basis for demand occupations. When needs assessments conducted through employer engagement demonstrate demand in the region for a particular new program or degree, we suggest the approval process be expedited.

In many cases, innovation is not prohibited by policy, but rather, by limited resources. Funding is oftentimes a primary limiting factor for innovation and systems change. In times of shrinking budgets, the tendency is to retract to the basic funding stream requirements.

Recognizing this, the SkillWorks group in Massachusetts actively lobbied for additional workforce development funding from its very early days. This resulted in an initial \$6 million to support sector partnerships and, ultimately, legislation—the Workforce Solutions Act—which established an annual budget line item, the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund. The Trust Fund has provided significant, ongoing funding for sector career pathway projects.<sup>18</sup> In Ohio, workforce issues already have the attention of legislators as evidenced by the House of Representatives Workforce Study Committee. We suggest leaders seize this opportunity to put forth ideas for legislative action as another way to embed the system.

Grant funding is a good strategy to support systems change efforts. Yet, oftentimes multiple state entities, regions or local areas submit competing grant proposals. Moving forward, we recommend the state be more strategic in pursuit of grants and initiatives, including coordination of regional pursuit of Federal grant opportunities and prioritize those aligned with Ohio’s plan for Career Pathways System development.

Foundations also are a good source of potential support; it is particularly helpful to have non-public funds to foster agency reform and innovation. Due to the nature of previous, segmented initiatives funded by foundations, Ohio must demonstrate an investment in true systemic change moving forward in order to be considered for substantial funding. It must capitalize on funding opportunities by demonstrating a firm commitment to only those strategic efforts to advance career pathways systems change.

### ACTION: ALIGN EXISTING RESOURCES

- Identify opportunities to target existing program resources to targeted industries
- Recommend plans for expenditures of statewide WIA discretionary and rapid response funds
- Create an ongoing inventory of initiatives and require alignment
- Develop cost benefit analysis

### ACTION: FOCUS EFFORTS TO INCREASE WORKFORCE FUNDING

- Make a concerted effort to educate legislative leadership about career pathways
- Pursue federal discretionary grants more strategically
- Approach private foundations with a statewide career pathways systems plan
- Consider creating a career pathways system endowment as a sustainability strategy

<sup>18</sup>The Public Policy Component of SkillWorks. (June 2009.)



# ADDENDUM A: INITIATIVES SUMMARIES



# STACKABLE CREDENTIALS PILOT INITIATIVE

The Stackable Credentials Pilot was created to support the implementation of Ohio Skills Bank (OSB). The focus of the pilot was to create a way for adults to develop basic academic and work readiness skills as a building block for post-secondary education or industry recognized credentials.

## Goals and Objectives

- Support OSB to better connect workforce and education
- Improve transitions of students through post-secondary education around ABLE framework

## Approach

- Students with a career interest in a targeted industry (i.e. healthcare) were encouraged to participate.
- Participants were identified during the career exploration process.
- Three new certificates were created: basic skill, advanced skill and oral composition for English as a second language participants.

## Timeframe and Current Status

2008 – 2010/2011; project complete

## Funding Source

No dedicated, outside funding; federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Title II investment funds awarded to state and Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE)

## Partners

- Ohio Board of Regents – lead agency
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
- Ohio Department of Development
- Adult Basic Literacy Education

## Population Served

- Adult cohort/pipeline in ABLE
- Dislocated workers

## Outcomes

- Relationship with partners have been developed or enhanced
- Improved understanding among partners
- Increased efficiency of systems working together

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Expectations and desired outcomes need to be clearer up-front for better data collection.
- Credentials need to be employer-vetted.
- Changing political leadership and priorities are barriers to success.

## Career Pathways Readiness Elements Addressed

- Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers

# DATA QUALITY INITIATIVE

The US Department of Labor (DOL) Workforce Data Quality Initiative funds enable states to build or expand longitudinal databases of workforce data that also link to education data. Ohio has maintained a longitudinal database, managed by both the Department of Education and the Board of Regents for the last ten years. The Workforce Data Quality Initiative will allow the two programs to merge into one comprehensive system, providing the state with the ability to construct higher quality measures for workforce and education data. Ohio will use this information as a means of understanding shortcomings in workforce and educational systems which have led to a lagging economy and shortage of skilled workers.

## Goals and Objectives

- Build a Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) with education, workforce and health & human services data to track long-term paths and success
- Track long-term pathways and success
- Conduct research projects to demonstrate value and benefit to agencies involved

## Approach

Ohio State University will develop a longitudinal data warehouse

## Timeframe and Current Status

Research and development

## Funding Source

US Department of Labor (DOL)

## Partners

- Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS)
- Ohio State University
- Ohio State University Center for Human Resource Research

## Population Served

Internal agencies

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- A great deal of effort is required to establish buy-in and relationships.
- Confidentiality agreements/legal questions to extract data are barriers.
- Establishing an Executive Research Advisory Group comprised of Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (Workforce and Health and Human Services), Ohio Board of Regents, Ohio Department of Education, and Ohio Department of Mental Health

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Measure System Change and Performance

# GREEN PATHWAYS INITIATIVE

The intent of the initiative was to identify the energy efficiency and renewable energy industry and occupation sectors, as well as key green employers in each of Ohio's economic regions, around which Ohio will structure green workforce development. The project attempted to assess skills gaps for green jobs by evaluating current green job definitions and measures, mapping educational curricula assets, identifying curriculum gaps and disseminating green career pathways information.

## Goals and Objectives

- Identify the key businesses and industry clusters, by economic development region, that are leaders in the green economy and the consumers in need of green knowledge and skills
- Understand curriculum best practices related to green jobs
- Incorporate green career pathways within the labor exchange systems in Ohio

## Approach

- Review Ohio and national best practices
- Define pathways, parameters and numbers of green jobs
- Determine industry needs
- Create a database of green training programs in Ohio
- Organize regional forums to present findings
- Create a crosswalk of specific industry clusters

## Timeframe and Current Status

12/2009 – 5/2011; project complete

## Funding Source

US Department of Labor (DOL), Labor Market Improvement Grant

## Partners

- Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, Bureau of Labor Market Information
- Ohio Department of Development, Office of Workforce

Development and the Ohio Energy Office

- Ohio Governor's Workforce Policy Advisory Board
- Ohio Board of Regents
- Ohio Department of Education
- University System of Ohio: Ohio Skills Bank and Ohio Adult Workforce and Training Education Network
- Center for Workforce Learning
- The Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs
- Local Workforce Investment Boards

## Population Served

All those interested in learning more about green jobs in Ohio.

## Outcomes

- Defined what is meant by "green"

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- "Green" doesn't fit traditional occupational schemes
- Current economy and public policy will dictate the direction of the industry

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers
- Community College Success Points Initiative

# UNIVERSITY SUCCESS POINTS INITIATIVE

The Community College Success Points Initiative and the University Success Points Initiative focused on creating metrics and benchmarks—along with performance-based funding mechanism—that aligned with the University of Ohio Strategic Plan.

## Goals and Objectives

To improve levels of student success by rewarding institutions based on student momentum points in earlier stages of a student’s experience—not simply on degree completion

## Approach

- The Governor and Chancellor charged the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) and the Inter-University Council with aligning funding mechanisms with the University System of Ohio’s strategic plan.
- OACC and the Inter-University Council researched other models, such as the Washington State Incentive Funding Plan’s “Momentum Points.”
- The 2009 Budget Bill required further development of the funding scheme.
- Those involved took a comprehensive review of developmental education practices.

## Timeframe and Current Status

Performance-based funding is currently in place and is scheduled to increase as a proportion of overall state funding to institutions in coming fiscal years.

## Funding Source

N/A

## Partners

- Ohio Association of Community Colleges
- Inter-University Council

## Population Served

At-risk students

## Outcomes

- In Fiscal Year 2010, performance-based funding became the basis of distribution for five percent of state appropriations for community colleges. This is scheduled to increase to 20% in Fiscal Year 2014.
- Individual institutional behavior has changed; many have adopted best practices in developmental education.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Review evidence of greater improvement in student success in conjunction with each budget process to ensure these are the “right points” and adjust accordingly

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Design Education and Training Programs
- Identify Funding Needs and Sources

# ADULT TRANSITIONS INITIATIVE

The Adult Transitions Initiative seeks to contribute to strengthening the role of community colleges and career and technical centers throughout the United States in easing adult student transitions and improving academic performance.

## Goals and Objectives

- Increase completion and earn a valuable credential
- Improve success of transitions
- Create incentives for transitions
- Conduct professional development of key staff to facilitate better transitions
- Change funding policy and application

## Approach

- Adopt the philosophy that we need to educate and support adult students through transitions
- Articulate this initiative as a priority to policy makers
- Expand expectations and accountability of successful transitions

## Timeframe and Current Status

On going

## Funding Source

Federal grants, state matches, state general fund, private foundations, and Social Security Income (SSI)

## Partners

- Adult Basis Literacy Education (ABLE)
- Adult Workforce Education (AWE)
- Community colleges
- Regional campuses
- Career and technical centers

## Population Served

Adult students

## Outcomes

- New transition measures have been established

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Funding structures need to be more flexible
- A student's life doesn't start and stop with a program

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers
- Design Education and Training Programs
- Identify Funding Needs and Sources
- Align Policies and Programs

# DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Developmental Education Initiative builds upon the most promising programs developed through Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count, a multi-year, national initiative to boost graduation rates at community colleges, particularly among low-income students and students of color. Through the Developmental Education Initiative, the state of Ohio intends to create a new performance-based funding system that would reward community colleges for helping students progress through remedial education and subsequent college-level courses.

## Goals and Objectives

- Identify developmental education interventions that have been successful and provide data to all colleges
- Implement co-located ABLE/college pilot and refer people with low test scores
- Upon completion of ABLE program, refer student to a higher level of developmental education in college or to other post-secondary education

## Approach

- Kick-off session to introduce programs developed by colleges who participated in Achieving the Dream was held in January 2010
- A follow-up session was held in January 2011 to share progress and information about additional programs developed by other community colleges participating in the Developmental Education Initiative

## Timeframe and Current Status

June 2009 - June 2012; implementation

## Funding Source

Gates and Lumina Foundations

## Partners

- “Achieving the Dream” community colleges
- All other community colleges and branch campuses

## Population Served

45 community colleges and branch campuses

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- There is a strong commitment for colleges to have solid, mandatory placement policies.
- Champions are needed at the top.
- ABLÉ and community college developmental education progress need to communicate around curriculum development and avoiding duplication.
- A point person/liaison between ABLÉ and college needs to be in place.
- ABLÉ at Community College needs to “look like” college to the student.
- If ABLÉ directs people to some post secondary education, the program is successful.

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers
- Design Education and Training Programs
- Identify Funding Needs and Sources
- Align Policies and Programs
- Measure System Change and Performance

# CAREER-TECHNICAL CREDIT TRANSFER (CT)<sup>2</sup> AND CTAG

Under House Bill 66, CT<sup>2</sup> is a collaborative effort overseen by the CT<sup>2</sup> Advisory Committee. This new articulation and transfer initiative established criteria, policies, and procedures whereby students are awarded college credit for agreed-upon technical knowledge and skills in equivalent courses/programs that are based on recognized industry standards. Transfer of credit is described in Career Technical Assurance Guides (CTAG). CTAGs are advising tools that assist students moving from Ohio secondary and adult career-technical institutions to Ohio public institutions of higher education.

## Goals and Objectives

- Improve articulation
- Help more high school and adult career-technical students to go to college and enter with college credit
- Save students money and time, by entering with college credit
- Increase degree completion

## Approach

- Career and technical centers continually attempt to identify programs that may articulate to college credit.
- Program information is entered into established software system and submitted to the CT<sup>2</sup> Advisory Committee.
- The CT<sup>2</sup> Advisory Committee reviews submissions and approves articulation agreements that meet criteria.

## Timeframe and Current Status

2005 – present; ongoing

## Funding Source

Ohio Board of Regents

## Partners

- Ohio Board of Regents
- Office of Career-Technical Education of the Ohio Department of Education
- Public secondary/adult career-technical education institutions

- State-supported institutions of higher education

## Population Served

High school and adult career and technical students

## Outcomes

- Increased number of articulation agreements
- Some trades have contextualized curriculum-based learning for college credit.

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Students need to become more aware of articulation opportunities.
- Approval process is time intensive.
- Finding dedicated personnel at career and technical centers to submit program information for articulation approval is difficult and slows down the process; dedicating a state or regional person for this responsibility would be helpful.

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Align Policies and Programs
- Measure System Change and Performance

# OHIO'S SHIFTING GEARS INITIATIVE

Ohio's Shifting Gears Initiative aims to increase the educational attainment and earnings potential of lower-income working adults by widening their access to postsecondary workforce education, shortening their paths to degrees or credentials and speeding their progress with fewer interruptions.

## Goals and Objectives

- To broaden access to postsecondary occupational education for low-income adults
- To shorten their pathways to marketable skills and meaningful credentials
- To speed their progress with fewer interruptions and improved success
- To create programs in each of the five regions that may be replicated across the state

## Approach

- Research best practices within the University System of Ohio and externally
- Pilot selected improvements in five identified collaborations and facilitate conversations to foster improved cross-system solutions
- Promote successful contextualized curriculum and transitions models
- Facilitate dissemination, knowledge transfer and related training/professional development

## Timeframe and Current Status

- 6/2011-1/2012; implementation
- Joyce Foundation

## Partners

- Collaborations among ABE programs, Adult Career Centers and Community Colleges in five regions
- Population Served
- Low-wage, low-skilled adults

## Outcomes

Improved relationships among institutions

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Focusing on the common goal of the betterment of students helped to break down institutional barriers.

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Design Education and Training Programs
- Identify Funding Needs and Sources
- Align Policies and Programs

# OHIO SKILLS BANK INITIATIVE

To help drive Ohio's economic prosperity, the University System of Ohio worked to seamlessly link education, talent development, and the needs of business. Educators and workforce professionals work closely with Ohio employers to ensure the state's public universities, community colleges and adult career centers provide curriculum, programs and training aligned with industry demand.

## Goals and Objectives

To create an employer driven system, with career pathways, leading to high demand, high wage employment

## Approach

- Designated the original statewide sector strategy in a growing economy
- Created regional asset mapping
- Identified high demand occupations
- Built partnerships
- Solicited proposals focused on innovation, addressing an industry or multiple employers, identifying needs, developing training, and planning for sustainability (recent phase)
- 30 projects across the state

## Timeframe and Current Status

- 2007-6/2011; completed

## Funding Source

N/A

## Partners

- Educators
- Ohio Department of Development
- Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

- One Stop Workforce Centers

## Population Served

Dislocated and incumbent workers

## Outcomes

- Developed regional asset maps
- Built strong consortium of educators/workforce development professionals
- Created/expanded contextualized readiness programs
- Fostered innovation
- Currently evaluating quantitative return on investment for recent programs

## Lessons Learned and Recommendations

- Changing economy required a change in the focus of the initiative
- Need full-time coordinator to lead efforts

## Career Pathways Readiness

### Elements Addressed

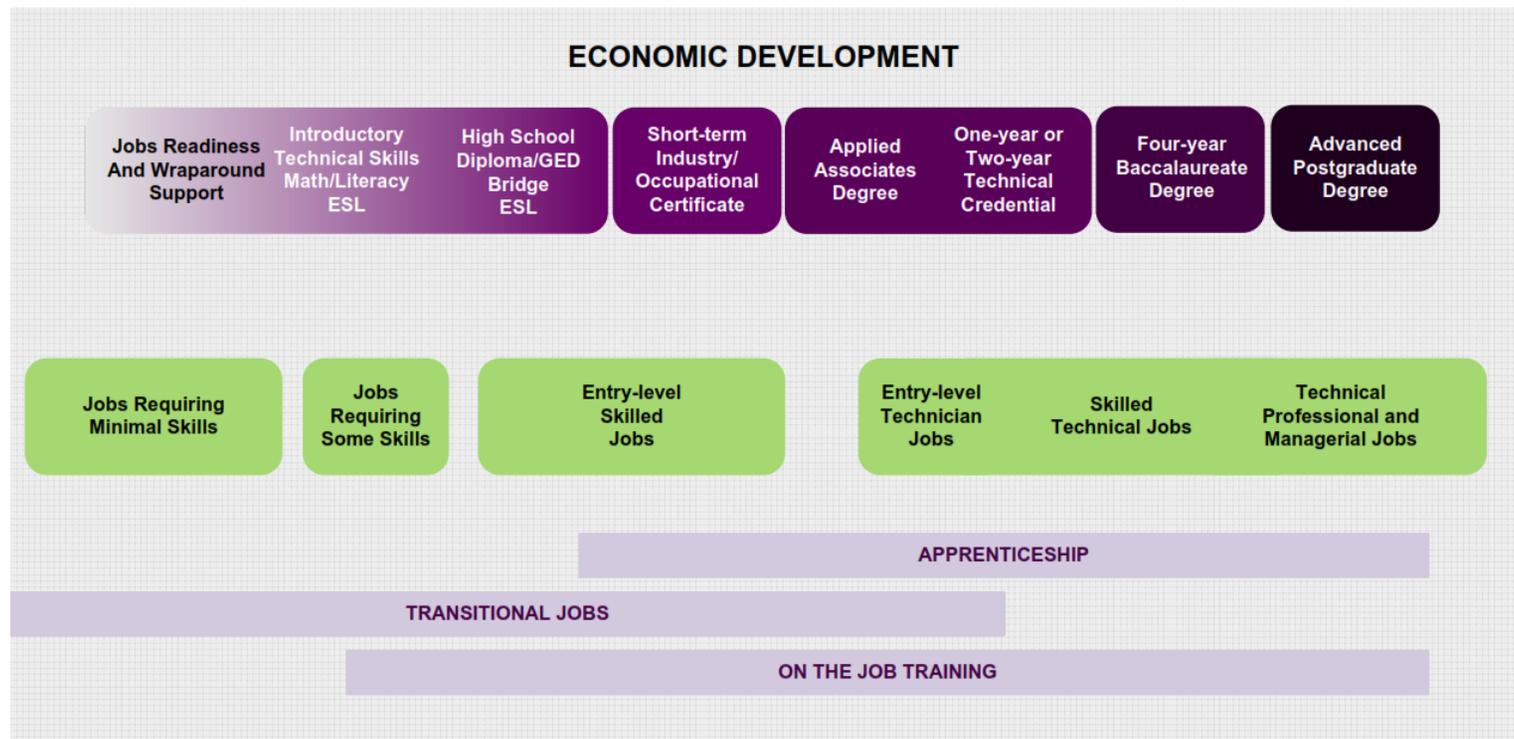
- Build Cross-Agency Partnerships and Clarify Roles
- Identify Sector or Industry and Engage Employers
- Design Education and Training Programs
- Identify Funding Needs and Sources

# ADDENDUM B: OHIO CAREER PATHWAY MODEL



## Ohio Career Pathway

Customer can enter system at any point based on skill need.



Source: Ohio Career Pathway Team



# ADDENDUM C: THE VOICE OF THE CONSUMER REPORT

## CAREER PATHWAY PROGRAMMING



Team members: Rebecca Banks, Brandy Bates, Deandra Edgerton, Margaret Gratz  
Written report by Margaret Gratz and Brandy Bates  
Spring/Summer 2011

### Introduction

A Career Pathway grant was awarded to MCTA and the State of Ohio in 2011. The purpose of the project is to improve the workforce development system, notably, the idea of Career Pathways as a mean of moving people from poverty to economic stability and/or helping dislocated people find work. The committee wanted to hear from the consumer and so funds were allocated to pay stipends to likely One Stop customers for their participation in focus groups, and to compensate a small group of students trained in Bridges out of Poverty/Getting Ahead to conduct these groups and evaluate the Career Path System from the point of view of the consumer.

We, a team of Y.S.U. college students, conducted focus group studies of current Y.S.U. students and One Stop customers based on obstacles and barriers that they are likely to encounter. Two students experienced the One Stop system as consumers and wrote about their experience.

The series of questions used in focus groups and considered during the evaluation of the One Stop services were based on the article “The Social Prerequisites of Success” (Amen and Rosenbaum, 2011) as well as background information about the effects of economic class on educational attainment. We passed out two Informed Consent forms to each participant. One form was signed and passed back in while the participants kept the other copy for themselves.

We then read aloud a description of ideal student and academic services, then asked a series of questions about each area. One person led the discussion while the other acted

as scribe. We kept the groups focused on solutions to gather information about what would be most helpful for those on Career Pathways. Feedback and ideas were given about what they think would work, how they wanted it to be handled, and the: who, what, why, when, and how. The obstacles and barriers include: *1. Bureaucratic hurdles, 2. Confusing choices, 3. Student-initiated guidance, 4. Limited counselor availability, 5. Poor advice from staff, 6. Delayed detection of costly mistakes and 7. Poor handling of conflicting demands.*

### RESULTS OF THREE YSU FOCUS GROUPS

Total of 27 current Y.S.U. students

Focus group 1- consisted of 10 non-traditional and under-resourced students that were currently enrolled in the *Investigations Into Economic Class In America*.

Focus group 2- consisted of 8 total students, both non-traditional students (6) and regular students (2) currently enrolled in the *Investigations Into Economic Class In America*.

Focus group 3- consisted of 9 non-traditional students, including 6 ex-offenders.

### Bureaucratic Hurdles

When discussing the enrollment and the scheduling process the majority found that it was easy to enroll in their first semester of classes. However a few stated that they got “the run around” complaining that they were misdirected over and over. Example: Placement testing takes place in a separate building from admissions. Also another example of this conflict is students being advised to take classes already taken or not needed for their degree.

We asked the students to describe their overall financial aid experience. Seven out of twenty-seven said that their

experience was friendly and very helpful. However, the remaining twenty felt rushed around, treated poorly, the staff was mean and didn't spend enough time explaining all the ins and outs of the actual aid and loan processes. Out of 27 participants, 23 participants felt like the staff wanted them to get their FAFSA complete and send them on their way. One student stated this, "I feel unwanted and like I am just a number."

## Confusing Choices

When discussing the "roadmap" to graduation presented by their academic advisors the majority of students have basic knowledge of the courses needed for graduation. A lot of these students acquired just a sheet of paper (curriculum sheet) when they asked for guidance about their major. They weren't automatically given a curriculum sheet upon registration. A few don't even recall receiving one. This curriculum sheet is a list of required courses only, and does not represent elapsed time as it relates to full time/part time scheduling, or how to fit in work or family obligations. When asking if the students had a major established; twenty students had a major and could list three jobs for that particular area of study. Seven didn't have a major established. When asked if the students knew which classes would allow them to graduate faster and cheaper, we found that one third of the students utilized outside resources such as online classes from a community college that were cheaper and then transferred them to Y.S.U. None of the students identified Adult Basic Literacy classes as a free method to increase basic skills and not have to take pre-college level courses that do not apply to graduation. One student stated, "This is all a business because they (the advisors and financial aid) prolong your education until you run out of money, then you are stuck with no degree and thousands of dollars in debt." The rest of the students didn't even know the cost of classes per credit hour or the cheaper or faster ways to graduate.

When asked about the way they chose particular classes and professors, the majority stated that they find out through other professors, advisors, and classmates. Some stated that they go on [ratemyprofessor.com](http://ratemyprofessor.com), while others said that they utilize the curriculum sheet. They stated that they felt like they were being steered down a one way street. They learned the hard way with withdrawing and changing classes at the last minute. This process was difficult because most students end up registering for classes not necessary for their degree as well as upper division classes that they were not able or supposed to take. Some just stuck with the classes that their advisors selected for them.

There has recently been greater effort to enforce Federal rules about Financial Aid, particularly the requirement of satisfactory academic progress, meaning the student must pass 75% of the credit hours attempted. When asked if the students were aware of what "unsatisfactory academic progress" meant, the majority knew it was some type of consequence for the student and that it could cause probation, prevent class registration, and indicated performance below standards of school policy. No student out of the 27 total knew of the rules pertaining to the suspension of financial aid due to "unsatisfactory academic progress." When asked about the student handbook/course catalog, the few people that did answer (10), stated that they never spent any time in the course catalog.

## Student-Initiated Guidance

A majority of the participants (18 out of 27) knew when they needed help and out of that majority more than half knew where to get it. Most, (20 out of 27) answered that the Center for Student Progress is the place that they would look to first in meeting their needs. One student signed up for Reading and Study Skills classes, another stated that they utilized the Career and Counseling Services. There were very few (approximately 5) that knew of the Writing Center and the Math Assistance Center.

When the participants were asked why they waited or why there was a delay in seeking help; time and frustration were the main causes. Also a lot of them thought they could do it themselves. One of the most surprising reasons was that the staff in that department had no idea how to help that student and didn't even know how to direct them to the help needed or required. One participant stated, "I know I don't know what I am doing, but if you are sitting behind the desk and you don't know, then how are you going to be able to assist me?"

## Limited Counselor Availability/ Poor Advice From Staff

More than half of the participants find it difficult to communicate effectively with their advisors due to differences in schedules. Out of these participants, most felt that the 10 minute appointment wasn't satisfactory. The other half did however have a positive relationship and successful meeting times with their Advisors. One participant stated, "My Advisor flew through things and it did not help very much." Another participant stated, "I have not had any problems with my Advisor." She thinks the Advisor did a good job of looking at her classes and letting her know what to take. As a result of lack of communication and effective advise-

ment the majority of the participants felt that they would run into financial crises and not be able to finish and obtain their degree. This is also a major cause of students dropping out, withdrawing, and decreasing retention rates.

## Delayed Detection of Costly Mistakes

One student commented, “When I went to the orientation my advisor never asked about my classes and just made out a schedule for me, so I just went with the flow and took what I was given.” A few of the students stated that no one explained the most efficient or appropriate way to choose classes and some were given classes that didn’t pertain to their degree. Out of 27 participants, one-third of them stated that during placement testing they were not given enough information on the remedial courses to take. It was also stated, “This is all a business, because they (the advisors and financial aid) prolong your education until you run out of money, then you are stuck owing the Department of Education thousands of dollars.” One of the ex-offenders that is returning to obtain a second degree stated that, “They get money out of you. They (the University) are pimping you the first two years,” meaning that students take courses not needed for their degree wasting time and money.

## Poor Handling of Conflicting Demands

We asked the participants what would be of value in helping them balance their academic, occupational, and family life. The responses ranged across the spectrum. Out of 27 participants two thirds felt that their advisor should know more about community resources that are available for students. The opinions were split 50 -50 in stating that their Academic Advisors should or should not know about their personal lives. The majority of the students in the groups had a hard time understanding the full purpose of an advisor and their job description and duties. The reason for the comments against sharing was that they felt that the Advisors really did not have genuine concern or compassion about their personal lives.

We asked about what changes the participants would like to see happen at Youngstown State University. The list is as follows:

- Effective communication in the financial aid department (regarding the loans and the processes)
- Effective and direct information about the services offered to students on campus (Map with a breakdown of what every place of service offers)
- All student services and resources in one area.

- Parking.
- Adequate meetings with Academic Advisors that will be time appropriated with both the student as well as the Advisor.

## Results of One Stop focus group

### TOTAL OF 8 CURRENT ONE STOP CLIENTS

We conducted a focus group study at the One Stop location in Boardman, Ohio. The questions focused on three main areas: barriers, job training and placement, and services. The series of the questions were formulated with the One Stop Manager in order to improve their programming.

### BARRIERS

When discussing the major barriers to obtaining employment, education, and job training assistance the majority felt that age (being older), gender (being female), education (lacking college degrees), and experience (lack of or too much) played a major role in their search for employment. One participant stated, “Working 20 years on a job and then they hire someone new who has a degree that makes things difficult.” A few other participants were in agreement that a major obstacle for them is the fear of new things and not even finding employment after going through the One Stop process. There was a concern about the economic status in this particular area. One participant stated, “The area is depressed, it’s not easy around here.” Other participants felt that without an education that the job search would remain extremely difficult.

### JOB TRAINING AND PLACEMENT

When discussing job training and placement obstacles the majority found that the Career Pathways Workshop was the most helpful in identifying transferrable skills and developing a positive outlook on job placement. One participant stated, “The questionnaire said I was qualified for jobs I have no interest in but some of the recommendations were correct.” Another participant said that they used it to verify their decision to change from a construction business to a computer technician. Even though some transferrable skills are useful a participant made the comment that without a degree you cannot get work. One participant discovered the need for CNC and machinists and that some companies have “on the job training” for entry level employees. One participant expressed the willingness to take a lower wage job with the promise of a wage increase after on the job training was complete.

## SERVICES

When discussing the One Stop process and the different classes, tests, and services provided after the initial registration, we first asked about the self assessment questionnaire. The majority of the participants felt that the only difficulty was that the assessment was lengthy and time consuming taking approximately 3 hours to complete. We asked participants if they were aware where to go after the assessment and most of them seemed able to recite the series of workshops, testing, and training. When participants were utilizing the services at One Stop they felt that both their immediate needs as well as their career goals were being met or at least addressed.

When asked about the TABE testing process, most of the participants felt that it could be used to remediate them in basic math, reading, and grammar. For some, the Math remediation was more basic and to others it was more advanced depending on previous education and different school systems. Clients in the focus group were very pleased with the classes. A participant suggested that they offer remediation in computer skills. Even though One Stop offers resume services some participants still don't have the skills to send their resume to potential employers. The most beneficial services according to the participants are as follows:

- Access to computers, fax machines, and printers.
- The environment is conducive to doing resumes and job searches.
- The ability to research employers.
- Remedial education classes
- Career Pathways workshops
- Caring staff who adjusted to the individual needs of clients

The majority of participants have all had a positive experience through One Stop. They all have faced some let downs and set-backs. It was suggested by a participant that they have monthly meeting to help with motivating each other and help keep each other stay positive during this difficult time.

## ANALYSIS OF THE ONE STOP PROCESS

Two Youngstown State University students participated in the One Stop experience --from the assessment through Career Pathways workshop. During the initial assessment phase, both felt that it was very time consuming and that the questions were not as clear as they could have been. The reason they felt that way is because in that type of setting, an organization works with a very diverse set of

individuals. Some may not have computer knowledge, skills, or adequate reading or vocabulary skills. The overall assessment was however very thorough and adequate for the programs, workshops, and services provided by the agency. The T.A.B. E. testing went well. It definitely showed both of the students where their weaknesses were as well as their strengths. There were retests available if needed as well as remedial classes to freshen up on skills. (Neither one of the students participated in the remedial classes.)

The Career Pathway workshop was very helpful and reminded us what transferable skills are. We learned a lot about how to look for a new job in today's economy. This experience of going through the One Stop has opened our eyes to all the services that are offered for people who are looking for a job. We found the staff to be patient, flexible, and knowledgeable. Staff was able to speak at the level needed so that they are understood. Over all this was a very positive experience. We would suggest that anybody who is looking for a job should make use of the services at the One Stop.

## Summary For Student Barriers

Many non-traditional students in our focus group study are in desperate need of career counseling and advice about how to explore their options on campus more adequately. Most students felt that the communication between themselves and the financial aid department regarding the processing of student loans is inadequate, impersonal, and confusing. The array of campus resources offered by department and location could be presented more effectively, perhaps using visual tools such as process maps or even physical location maps and pictures. The participants felt that the advisors on campus were too busy and rushed during many of the appointments and this created an impersonal atmosphere that interfered with the relationship building. At times the feeling of being misdirected created the negative feelings about their financial standing. Overall the conflict and confusion enabled students to feel disengaged, bringing them poor balance in their academics, occupations, and personal/family lives.

## Conclusion and Recommendations For Student Barriers

Effective communications between departments and the students at Youngstown State University, and likely any other institution is a priority need. Implementing these changes will alleviate conflicts and external pressures and reduce the perceptions that students' are a "number" or a "dollar sign."

“Roadmaps” to academic success should be shown in a more precise and serious manner. Students want a clearer curriculum structure and reinforcement, and again, might benefit from a visual representation.

Referrals to community resources such as ABLÉ or free on-line tutoring sources for academic remediation could benefit many, and reduce the cost of a college degree. Show how that effort will impact the curriculum sheet and progress towards graduation, and how it will save students time and money.

Meetings with Academic Advisors should provide adequate time for both the student their Advisors. Academic Advisors should monitor each student’s progress more closely to ensure the students are not in danger of “Unsatisfactory Academic Progress.”

## Conclusion and Recommendations For Occupational Barriers

The focus group study that was conducted at One Stop illuminated barriers as well as suggestions. Customer rated services rated very high at that particular location.

Overall the recommendations of the participants who are current clients of the One Stop reflected their satisfaction with services and the desire for additional social/emotional support as follows: They would like monthly support group meetings. Just knowing that they are not alone in this journey to get back to the work force, utilize transferable skills, and possibly further their education would be a great stress relief and aid for motivation. They would like motivational seminars and workshops. This would give the clients a visual on someone else’s experience, the path they took, and how they overcame specific barriers and obstacles in reentry to the work world. Finally they would like to see periodic surveys on services rendered and the need for any improvements. They all truly appreciated the One Stop experience that they had and are continuing to have and are also very grateful for the entire team and their continued research.

