Meeting the Demands of a 21st-Century Economy
Indiana Needs a New Vision for its Economy and Workers

If Indiana is to realize its full economic potential, educational access must reflect the demands of a 21st-century economy and the realities of the 21st-century workforce. The following vision can shape Indiana’s workforce and education policies and investments to meet these 21st-century realities:

To realize this vision, the Indiana Skills2Compete Coalition is setting a goal of raising the skills of the Indiana’s workforce by 20 percent by 2015.

The Skills2Compete Coalition will be working towards policy recommendations that it believes will help Indiana reach this benchmark.

The 21st Century economy demands that every Hoosier have the opportunity to earn high-quality post-secondary education or training - leading minimally to an occupational credential, industry certification, or associate’s degree- to be pursued urgently and with dedication. Every person should also have the opportunity to attain the basic skills needed to pursue such education.
Key Policy Recommendations to Grow Indiana’s Economy

Indiana policymakers should adopt the following recommendations to meet the realities of the 21st-century labor market:

**State-Supported Sector Partnerships**

Encourage the development of additional regional sector or industry partnerships that consist of key stakeholders, including: businesses connected to an industry that is vital to a regional economy, local Workforce Investment Boards, postsecondary institutions, vocational and technical schools, the K-12 education system, trade associations, labor representatives, and community based organizations. Existing funds and other resources should be marshaled to support regional intermediaries to mobilize key stakeholders and identify skills gaps between a specific industry and its region’s workforce. Regional intermediaries and key stakeholders should create training solutions to connect workers with the industry–recognized credentials needed for high-demand, high-wage middle-skill jobs in an effort to fill immediate skill gaps, as well as create long-term plans for future industry growth.

**Measuring Credentials**

Create a plan for the accurate, complete, and continuous accounting of education and training attainment across all of the relevant state agencies. In order to establish a measurable goal for closing Indiana’s skills gap, we need to establish a new approach to counting Indiana’s degree, credential and basic skills attainment across the broad array of public programs. This will not only help Indiana to make progress toward increased attainment, it can also help provide valuable data for the future, allowing policy makers to respond more quickly to changes in the skill needs of the workforce.

Establish a policy that institutionalizes the practices of assessing prior-learning portfolios produced by adults with significant work experience, awarding academic credit for meritorious portfolios, accepting transfer academic-credit awarded through rigorous review by other institutions, and encouraging viable candidates to undertake the assessment process. Data show that many of the adult Hoosiers who did not complete their post-secondary studies actually began those studies immediately after high school. Now, whether it is just a few or a good many years after they “stopped out,” those adults may possess significant work experience, having mastered important knowledge, skills and abilities on-the-job. Earning college credit for that “prior-learning” is a way for adults to accelerate the completion of their studies, allowing them to by-pass courses for which they have already mastered the information. By completing a portfolio that includes samples of projects, writing, products or processes they have completed for employers, adults can receive graduation credit either free or at a greatly reduced cost. Studies show that adults who earn prior-learning credit are more likely to complete their post-secondary studies, to do so quicker, and at lower cost than their peers.

Continue the differentiation of services at our state’s higher education institutions. Just as remedial coursework and associate’s degrees have been appropriately shifted from four-year institutions to our community colleges, certain basic skills training and language acquisition ought better be pursued through adult education and community-based agencies.
Key Policy Recommendations

Employer-Sponsored Training Programs
Make Lifelong Learning Accounts (LiLAS) available to all Indiana workers for pursuit of training in high-wage/high-demand occupations. LiLAS are employer-matched, portable saving accounts that workers can use to finance education and training that boosts their current career or allows them to transition to a new career. LiLAs allow for co-investment in worker education and training by the workers themselves, their employers, and even third parties.

Maximize On-the-Job Training (OJT) Opportunities already available through federal funds by minimizing policy barriers that prevent more employers from utilizing the program. OJT programs are designed to help reduce employers' upfront hiring and training costs associated with new staff and enable these hires to “earn while they learn.” As Indiana recovers from the recession, OJT programs will not only help more Hoosiers resume employment and develop new technical skills, but will also ensure permanent job placement and career advancement opportunities?

Financial Aid and Supportive Services for Adult Students
Allow part-time students greater access to state financial aid to help more Indiana adult workers, many of whom are currently working and are faced with the need to upgrade skills or want the opportunity to advance in their chosen fields. Leveraging existing public investments would help more Hoosier workers pursue a degree or certificate at a college, university, or other approved training program in a high-demand, middle-skills occupation on a less than full-time basis or enroll in a non-credit middle-skill training program.

Continue to explore financing mechanisms to expand existing state financial aid dollars to serve the tuition and non-tuition needs of adult students, especially those pursuing a skills certificate and attending on a part-time basis.

Allow vehicles to be included in the uses for Individual Development Accounts (IDA) as the lack of adequate transportation presents a barrier to access and to completion for many low-income working adults.

Promote Middle-Skill Training and Occupations to Middle School and High School Students
Ensure that middle school and high school students gain the essential career preparation knowledge and skills to explore, plan and successfully transition to a high wage and high demand Indiana occupation. In order to do this we need to see what processes are already in place to accomplish this work and determine what if any gaps need to be filled.

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