

Why Workplace Education Should Be the Top Item on Governor-elect
Patrick's Workforce Development Agenda
Speech before Workforce Development Transition Team
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By
Lloyd David, EdD.

According to the Mass. Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services, as of yesterday there were 5,614 adults on the waiting list to enroll into Adult Basic Education classes and 16,198 adults for ESOL classes.

At its November 28th meeting the Board of Education approved an increase in funding to Community Adult Learning Centers, ABE for Incarcerated Adults, and Primary Instruction with Volunteers programs. The source of the increase in state funding is from both the Adult Basic Education Line Item and the Economic Stimulus Bill. The funds from the Economic Stimulus Bill must be used to increase and expand services in order to reduce the waiting list. The goal is to serve an additional 1,400 students this fiscal year. This means that there will only be 20,412 people on the waiting list, which I want to point out is ever changing and probably increasing.

I also want to point out that the even though the funds are from the Economic Stimulus Bill there is no allocation for workplace education. However, the Department of Education has a request for proposal for workplace education for next year. This will fund no more than 6 new projects in 2007.

Although I have no knowledge of the employment status of the more than 20,000 people on the waiting list, I feel comfortable in stating that a large percentage is probably employed. Holding classes in the workplace offers certain advantages:

In terms of logistics:

1. The person is already at work so that transportation issues are lessened.

2. Classroom space can usually be found
3. The curriculum can be contextualized to include items from the workplace so as to be more meaningful and relevant to the student.

The benefits to both the worker/student and the employer were described in the study by the Conference Board of Canada entitled *Turning Skills into Profits*. This report was based on the results found by the US Department of Education from the National Workplace Literacy Programs. Workers reported they had increased confidence and improved ability to listen, understand and communicate in English. They could also read and understand and use documents at work, use computers, read and write better, and were able to use numbers that were required for measurement and other calculations needed on the job. They also were better able to work in teams and were not so fearful of changes in the workplace. The classes in the workplace probably had a major impact on their daily lives in dealing with doctors, schools, government agencies and just going shopping.

The study listed 22 benefits described by the employers including: Improved employee morale, Improved quality of work, Improved capacity to solve problems, Improved capacity to cope with change, Improved capacity to use new technology, Improved labor management relations, Improved results in job specific training, and Improved effectiveness on the part of supervisors.

The workers who attended workplace education programs also demonstrated an increased capacity to handle on the job training and also produced more products and/or services. They had a higher success rate in promotions and a higher success rate in transferring within the organization. They also had better health and safety records.

Among workers who were in the classes there was reduced waste in production, reduced absenteeism, reduce time spent per task, and quicker results from job training. Finally, as a result of the workplace education programs the companies indicated there was an increase in profitability, an increase in customer retention, and an increase in employee retention and less turnover.

The question remains with all these benefits, why are more companies not offering workplace education programs in their organization? Although I have not seen any research on this subject, from my own years of experience the answer is clear but somewhat surprising. In a capitalistic/free market society it appears business requires government incentives to offer these benefits to the workforce it employs. Certainly the human resource people are aware of the problems caused by an uneducated workforce even if the top management might not. Nevertheless, business is unwilling to commit funds for such purposes and needs a push from the government. The MassINC 2001 research report, *[New Skills for a New Economy](#)*, identified 1.1 million workers in Massachusetts who are not adequately prepared for New Economy jobs I believe that now is the time for the Patrick Administration to begin to deal effectively with this problem in ways that help all sectors of our society. The investment in workplace education can have immense rewards for all.

Thank you