



## **HASBRO SUMMER LEARNING INITIATIVE JOINS THE REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD**

**HSLI and REB to create natural partnership between workforce development and youth literacy**

PIONEER VALLEY, January 29, 2010

The Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative (HSLI) and the WestMOST Network announced today that it is joining with the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County Inc., creating a natural partnership between workforce development and youth literacy and learning.

The Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative (HSLI) is designed to stem summer learning loss by improving the quality of and access to summer opportunities for low-income children and youth in western Massachusetts. More than 2,000 children and 40 programs have participated in the initiative. As the project moves into its fifth year, the WestMOST Network will merge with HSLI to strengthen the efforts of both organizations. The new organization's mission is *to create equity in opportunity for all youth through expanded learning experiences throughout the year*. The newly merged organization looks forward to aligning with the work of the Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, while continuing its partnership with the United Way of Pioneer Valley.

In the best of all worlds, every young person should be able to fill afternoons, weekends and summer with experiences that broaden their horizons, with time to learn, be outdoors, and be engaged in positive relationships with peers and adults. HSLI/WestMOST provides programs with engaging curriculum so youth can explore the world of music, theater, the engineering design process, and fitness and nutrition. Area programs have embraced the resources that are provided for training and technical assistance for staff. The result has been that staff find the work to be more creative, and youth have fun while learning and at the same time, build their literacy skills. The initiative has produced promising results for participating children to help close the "opportunity" gap between higher and lower income children.

The United Way of Pioneer Valley initiated and nurtured the HSLI and has transitioned the program to the REB while continuing its strong support. United Way officials will serve in a close advisory capacity. The United Way believes the transition to the REB is happening at the right time and with the right affiliation, said Sylvia deHaas-Phillips, UWPV Senior Vice President for Community Impact. The United Way will stay connected to the HSLI in an advisory role and in sharing information and collaborating on the best practices in building greater literacy for youth in the Pioneer Valley, she said. "The United Way of Pioneer Valley is about connecting the right talent and resources to meet community needs," said deHaas-Phillips. We are proud to see the program grow to where it is today with great promise for the future."

The Initiative has also received strong support from the Hasbro Corporation, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, the Irene E. and George A. Davis Foundation, the Bank of America, Mass Mutual, Berkshire Bank, TD Bank North and the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts.

"We are excited about this new partnership with the REB as a regional leader in youth and workforce development," said Susan O'Connor, HSLI/WestMOST director. "Our goal with the REB is to continue to advance the potential for afterschool and summer programs to insure that all youth are ready by age 21

to be healthy, connected, and productive members of our community. Linking the work of HSLI/WestMOST with the REB will create great synergy in developing an overall strategy from birth to adulthood to strengthen the chance of success for all.”

The REB, which has broadened its scope to include a focus on universal pre-kindergarten program as well as expanded family and adult literacy programs and education and skills training, is a perfect fit for the Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative. “The REB has recognized literacy as a priority in preparing youth for the workforce,” said J. William Ward, REB executive director. “We believe the Hasbro Summer Learning Initiative, as a nationally recognized model for improving the achievement gap, is vital to our region’s workforce development,” said Ward. “Increasing reading and literacy skills is one of the most important outcomes we can mutually achieve.”

The REB's Literacy Works Committee tracks transitions from adult education programs to higher education and the workplace and, with a variety of the region's top businesses, supports a summer youth jobs program, offering young people a bridge to the working world. The board, this past year, provided summer jobs to 1,982 young people.

Linking the after-school and summer learning experiences with early childhood, teen jobs, adult literacy and workforce development will create a strong continuum of support that will build the economic development of the region.

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