



REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT BOARD
OF HAMPDEN COUNTY, INC.

Your Connection to Workforce Development

Strategic Workforce Development Plan for Hampden County 2011-2013



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For a complete list of REB Board Members please go to:

http://www.rebhc.org/pages/membership_committees.html

For a roster of REB Staff, please go to:

http://www.rebhc.org/pages/about_reb_professional_staff.html

I. Who We Are: Our Vision and Mission

Since 1980, the Regional Employment Board (REB) of Hampden County, Inc. has been the region's primary planner and convener to address workforce development issues. Established by Federal and State legislation, the REB is a business-led, non-profit corporation that engages its members from business, education, labor and community-based agencies to set public policies that will build a better workforce.

Our only business is workforce development. In partnership with government, business, labor and education and training providers, we coordinate, fund and oversee all of the region's publicly funded worker training and job placement programs. We are also conveners and brokers, constantly researching local labor market demands and developing appropriate strategic alliances among employers and training vendors to meet those needs.

We are uniquely positioned to be the "voice of the local labor market" because we have a One-Stop Career Center system where most of the local labor exchange happens, via FutureWorks, Inc. in Springfield and CareerPoint, Inc. in Holyoke. Through these One-Stop Career Centers, we have first-hand information on job seekers and job openings, labor supply and demand, and local hiring trends. The REB's public workforce development system annually serves over 20,000 job seekers with an approximate \$12M budget of Federal (60%), State (35%), and Private (5%) funds.

In 2008 the REB was one of the first to receive the distinguished status of being certified as a "High Performing Workforce Board" by the Governor of MA. Being designated is one thing; ensuring we maintain those standards requires continuous effort at improving the quality of our work. Therefore, in undertaking this new strategic planning process the REB embraced a renewed commitment to our fundamental *values* of *collaborative leadership, innovation, data driven* and to *diversity* which serve as the basis for our Vision and Mission.

VISION

The Regional Employment Board leads a dynamic, efficient and integrated workforce development system that promotes economic development and community growth, and is rooted in the principles of equity and increased access to workforce development services for employers and job seekers.

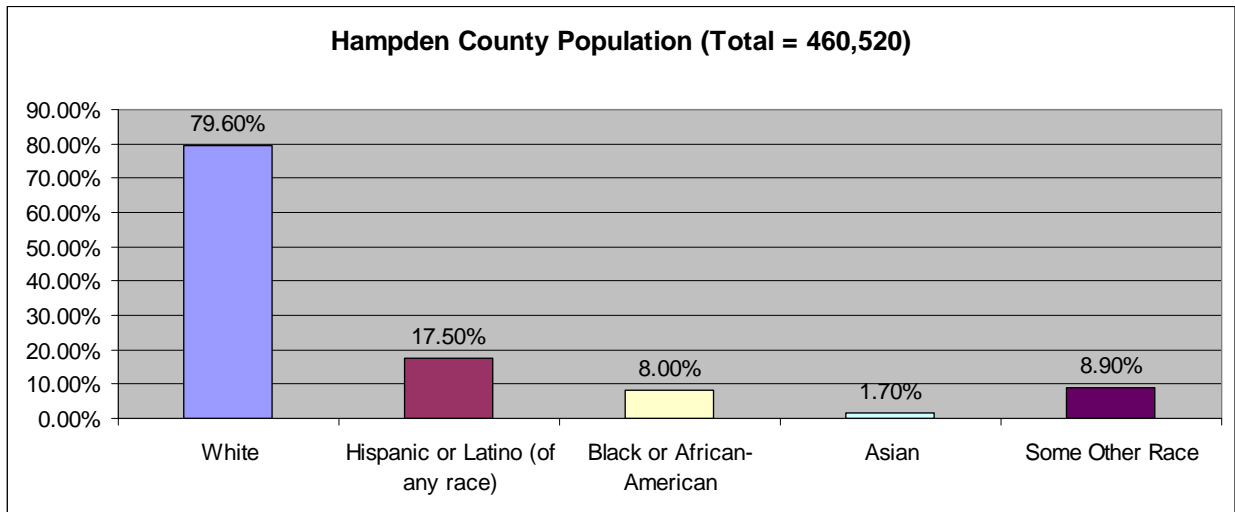
MISSION

The Regional Employment Board plans, coordinates and oversees the growth and effective use of public and private investment in workforce development initiatives for quality jobs. The Board provides leadership in creating strategic alliances with business, government, education and community organizations to provide access to education, training and employment opportunities for all workers, especially for low income adults and youth, disadvantaged minorities and newcomers, dislocated workers, incumbent workers, and their families.

II. State of the Region's Economic Outlook and Workforce Trends

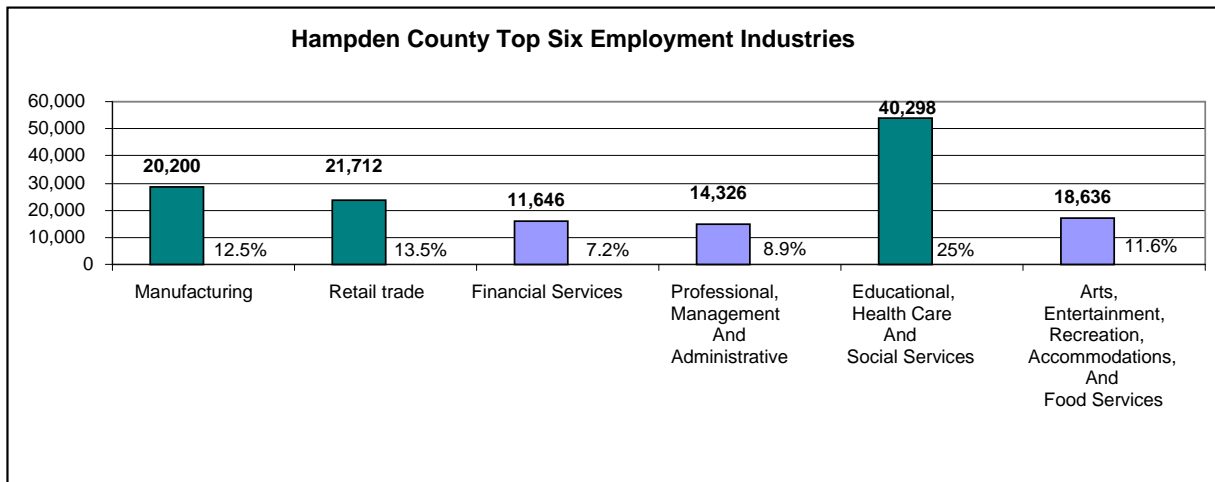
As we begin to come out of one of the most difficult economic downturns since the Great Depression, as of January 2011 we are clearly still experiencing slow job growth and persistent high unemployment. While Hampden County has a diverse labor force of 226,427 individuals aged 16 years of age or older as of the 1st Quarter of 2010 (from the total population as shown below by ethnicity) this is a net increase of only about 1.4%. Therefore another factor we face is relatively flat growth of our labor force, which is consistent with statewide averages.

Economists have indicated that the unemployment trend has been both cyclical and structural. Cyclical unemployment more traditionally tends to rise or fall commensurate with the natural growth or decline in the economy. However, current unemployment is more structural in nature and is dragging on our economic recovery primarily due to advancements in technology which require fewer, but higher skilled, workers. Also, a more global marketplace creates greater price pressures and competition for American workers. All of these factors are resulting in slower local job recovery compared to the State and Nation as a whole as well as skills gaps for the jobs that are available.



Source: US Census Bureau; 2006 (2010 Census data not yet available at a sub-state level)

Future job projections are only available at a statewide level but we do have three year estimates of the top six industry employers in Hampden County:



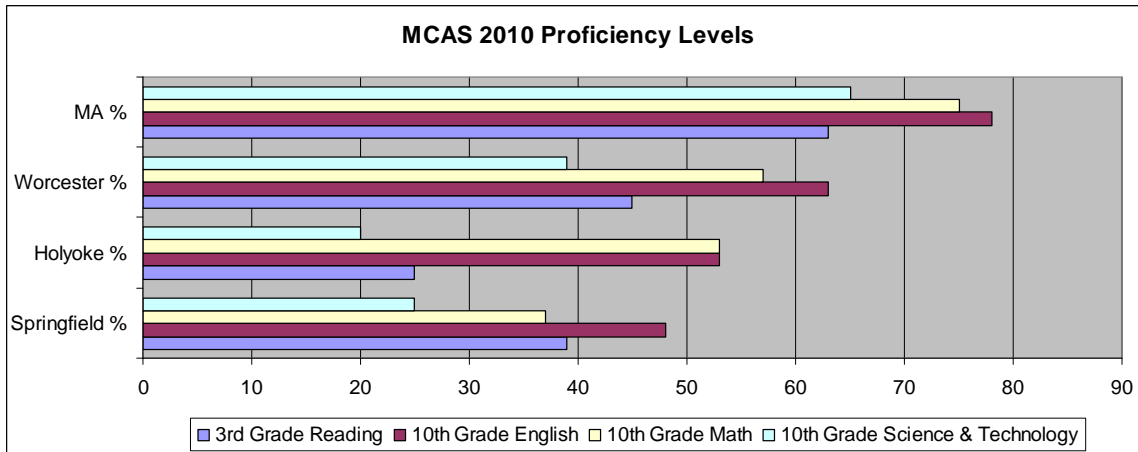
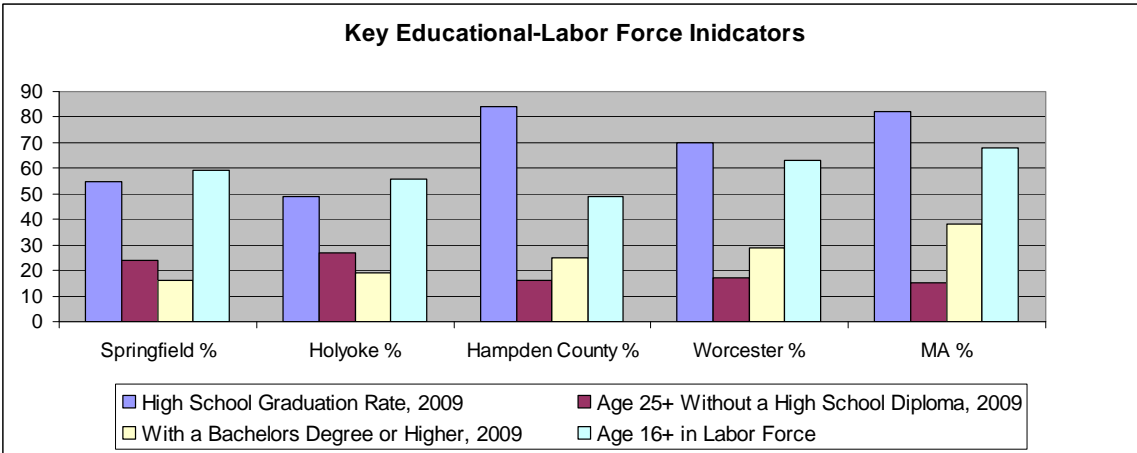
Source: 2009 Quarterly ESO-202

The three largest sectors, Educational, Health Care and Social Assistance, Manufacturing and Retail Trade comprise more than 40% of all jobs in Hampden County. Employment growth corresponds to statewide trends which indicate the only significant growth areas as being in educational and health services, with continuing declines in light manufacturing but a stable advanced manufacturing sector that requires increased skill levels. We see an incumbent workforce, particularly in these sectors and financial services, which is highly skilled, agile and adaptive to changing market and business conditions. However as outlined in the next section, there are also challenges to other segments of our population that are being left behind.

For detailed information on our regional economy and local labor force, please visit our website at: <http://www.rebhc.org>.

III. Identifying the Major Challenges

There are interrelated challenges of inadequate educational attainment, labor force participation rates and poverty in our region, particularly in our larger urban core cities.



Source: US Census Bureau; Massachusetts Department of Early and Secondary Education

Our two most distressed cities (Springfield and Holyoke: 2 of the 24 State designated “Gateway Cities”) lag other major cities in the Commonwealth (i.e., Worcester MA, which is the 2nd largest city ahead of Springfield) in high school graduation rates, advancing students towards a 4 year degree and having a sufficiently robust labor force.

The MCAS proficiency levels show gaps in reading, math and science and technology – all critical to the types of future available jobs that will require “STEM” (science, technology, engineering and math) skills. Research shows that 74% of children who read poorly in 3rd grade have a drastically reduced likelihood of graduating from high school. Clearly, our region has a pronounced challenge ahead to eliminate achievement gaps. The lack of a sufficient quality pre-kindergarten on a more universal basis puts many of our most vulnerable children at even greater risk of educational deficiency.

This education gap feeds the cycle of poverty and disadvantaged status that is increasingly limiting the capacity of our workforce to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Holyoke has the highest poverty rate in the Commonwealth and its neighbor, Springfield, has the 4th highest rate. There is a direct correlation between the skills gap and poverty rates. *Because low income residents tend to have higher dropout rates with lower levels of academic achievement, education and job training are all the more critical in our region for closing the skills gap and building a better workforce.*

Per the Mauricio Gaston Institute for Latino Community Development and Public Policy, another clear trend nationally and in our region is the need for English language skills because of the significant increase in the Latino/Hispanic population. This trend puts further stress on our delivery system of Adult Basic Education and English for Second Language Learners and expands our waiting lists of learners. At the same time, funding for English language programs remains flat.

In 2010, over 20,000 residents sought jobs at our One-Stop Career Centers (Future-Works in Springfield and Career Point in Holyoke); yet, less than half were able to secure employment. At the same time, the persistent skills and education gap continues to leave good-paying jobs unfilled, particularly in the high growth industry sectors of health care, human services, advanced manufacturing, and financial/business services.

Education and training will play an increasingly prominent role for both current and future job seekers. Statewide projections show that more than half (60%) of all new jobs related to growth will require an Associate’s Degree or higher. While a Bachelor’s Degree may be preferable, it is important to recognize that some form of post-secondary education will be essential for those seeking a rewarding career path with good pay and upward mobility.

In summary, significant challenges threaten our ability to build a better workforce:

- An increased need for universal Pre-K and other “out-of-time” learning opportunities to improve reading proficiency rates by at least 3rd grade and beyond,
- High school drop-out rates exceeding regional, State and national averages,
- Low literacy rates due to the changing demographics and failure to complete school, and
- Low community college graduation rates heavily attributable to high rates of 1st year students (up to 70%) requiring remediation before taking college-level courses and the inability of many to afford to stay in school.

We are also mindful of the systemic threats to workforce development:

- Uncertain Federal commitment to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) legislation,
- Potential cuts to the WIA funding due to soaring budget deficits, and
- State budget shortfalls exceeding \$1.5B which threatens our major state funding resources.

To address these challenges and systemic threats, our Strategic Plan includes building our base of constituents and stakeholders to bolster support for workforce development as an essential tool to boost economic recovery.

IV. Emerging Trends, Assets and Opportunities

In the Commonwealth and in our region there is increased recognition of the importance of workforce development for overall economic development. As a result, employers, business associations and economic development agencies at the regional and state level are more open and adept at participating in partnerships with education and workforce development entities. There are several emerging positive trends, assets and opportunities we can channel to move our goals, objectives and strategies forward.

- There is a well established industry cluster strategy such as in advanced manufacturing, health care and in emerging green jobs sectors as an approach to workforce development that is becoming more aligned with economic development approaches to business expansion. The location of a Green High Performance Computing Center in Holyoke will spur the development of an Innovation District for job creation.
- Springfield Technical Community College (with a primary focus on technical skills) and Holyoke Community College (with a primary focus on business skills) have established a more collaborative approach to each other and the REB in the delivery of so-called “middle skills” (skills for jobs that require more than high-school diploma but less than a 4-year degree) that are becoming more in demand.
- There is broader cross-border collaboration within the “Knowledge Corridor”, which runs south to the greater Hartford CT region and north to the Franklin-Hampshire counties. There are 32 educational institutions of higher learning which exist around core urban centers and linked by a robust fiber optic highway.
- There is a renewed focus and investment in education reform which addresses low performing public schools and provides “Race to the Top” grants to local districts. This includes a focus on STEM skills which youth need to be successful in a 21st century economy and contextualized learning imbedded in ABE/Literacy programs.
- New opportunities are emerging for the REB to provide collaborative leadership, in concert with economic development agencies, business organizations, organized labor and government partners, to remove silos and collectively address complex challenges.
- Initiatives like “City to City”, promoted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, and “Promise Neighborhoods”, designed by the Harlem Children’s Zone, have taken root in our region with a clear focus on the importance of workforce development for residents.

V. Developing the New Plan

This new three year Plan builds off of the REB’s first Strategic Plan of 2001 which was subsequently updated for 2006 through 2010. The methods utilized to create these strategic goals for 2011 – 2013 included:

- Researching existing and new workforce development programs, like cluster strategies, and funding models to identify unmet needs,
- Identifying successful initiatives, e.g., family literacy, that must be expanded,
- Conducting a REB Board retreat along with follow-up focus groups to revise the existing Plan goals and objectives,

Regional Employment Board of Hampden County, Inc.

- Defining methods to create structured career pathways along the workforce development continuum of life-long learning,
- Identifying current job vacancy rates and projected hiring needs and gathering other initial labor market data, and
- Incorporating the findings of an assessment of the REB’s external and internal strengths and challenges as conducted by Western New England College Professors Peter Hess and Julie Siciliano. Twenty business, education, and community organization leaders, as well as all REB staff, were interviewed for this assessment which produced the following findings.

External Stakeholder Assessment

Strengths:

- Having a regional focus
- Widely-recognized credibility
- Strong understanding of available and potential resources
- Significant commitment from employers
- Highly capable and committed staff

Internal Staff Assessment

Strengths:

- Shared passion for the mission
- Organizational flexibility/responsiveness
- Strong credibility within the community
- Professional/committed staff; balance of strategic/operational thinkers; value teamwork and continuous improvement

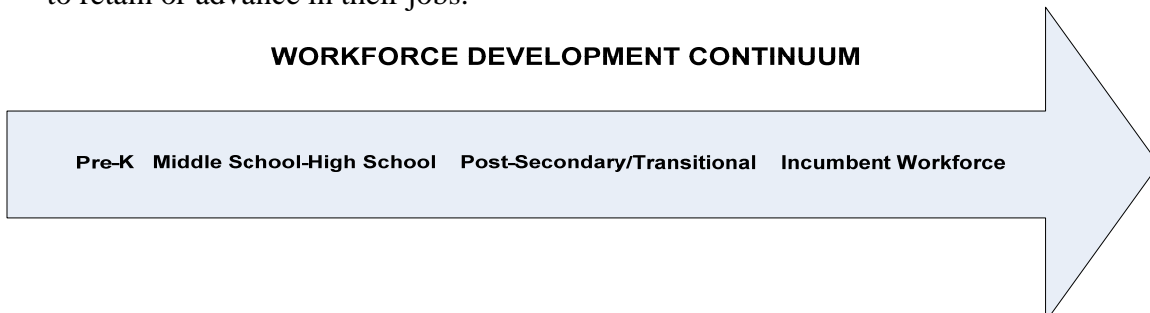
Areas Recommended for Further Improvement:

- An enhanced understanding of “big picture” workforce development issues
- Need to convene key stakeholder partners for presentations/briefings on issues, best practices, etc.
- Enhanced communication to facilitate collaboration and the alignment of efforts (initiative mapping, current statuses of initiatives, information on unmet needs, grant opportunities, etc.)
- Increased involvement in policy development at state level
- Greater business involvement and co-investment
- Expanded approach to cluster strategies for other industry sectors
- Enhanced understanding of the REB’s role in the community and economic development
- Focus on collaborative leadership as an essential strategy for community engagement

Based on the REB’s dedication to promote lifelong learning, included in the new Plan is a commitment to develop a continuum of strategies that address all segments of the workforce.

- ***The Emerging workforce*** of in-school and out-of-school, particularly Pre-K and at-risk youth aged 14-21, who are or will be the newest entrants into the workplace, and who need education, career guidance, job readiness skills, and support services.
- ***The Transitional workforce*** of unemployed or underemployed workers who need retraining and job search assistance to move into new jobs, including ex-offenders, and disconnected older youth.
- ***The Incumbent workforce*** of employed workers who need additional education and training to retain or advance in their jobs.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CONTINUUM



VI. Strategic Plan Goals, Objectives and Strategies

Each of the four goals within this Strategic Plan is rooted in a core value imbedded in the REB's Mission. Each one of these four core values will be briefly described as a preface to each one of the four goals.

Core Value 1: We must be data driven.

This requires the REB to have current, reliable information about employer needs and the available workforce. We must know how to analyze and use that information to apply best practices and develop innovative programming that is research-based. We must measure the results and the return on investments in order to secure on-going support for the workforce development system.

Goal 1: Be the Leading Source of Regional Labor Market Information and Innovative Ideas for Advancing Workforce Development

Objective A) Provide accurate and timely information on current and future employer hiring and training needs and the readiness of local workforce to fill those needs.

Strategy A1) Convene business and labor organizations, planning and economic development agencies, as well as higher education and state and other research entities, on a periodic basis to secure regional data.

Strategy A2) Conduct timely analysis of the data, reports and best practices related to our region's workforce needs, with a focus on targeted industry sectors and occupational skills common across industries and disseminate key findings via multiple channels, re: REB website, media communications, etc.

Strategy A3) Manage a clearinghouse of information, reports and best practices.

Objective B) Maximize the alignment of resources with identified labor market and job seeker needs.

Strategy B1) Use timely data to prioritize and allocate resources for adult and youth programs and career center services.

Objective C) Increase the implementation of innovative practices that are demonstrated to improve the workforce system.

Strategy C1) Research, pilot and disseminate promising practices.

Strategy C2) Scale up, increase and/or improve excellent programs, practices and service delivery mechanisms.

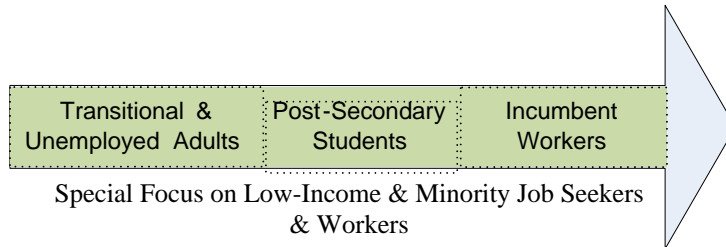
Core Value 2: *We must link technical training with adult basic education.*

Our focus must be on “up-skilling” our workforce at all levels. This includes basic literacy and so-called “middle skills” for those who have more than a high school diploma but can improve their economic self-sufficiency by attaining a credentialed certificate, a 2-year degree or

competency-based on-the-job and/or apprenticeship work-based learning. We must also focus on the 2/3’s of the workforce already employed but who can benefit from advanced training to move up the career pathway continuum.

We must focus on job creation and retention efforts and on increased access for our growing minority populations. To achieve this we must form cluster-based industry sector partnerships in high growth areas where there are employment and advancement opportunities and ensure a strong service delivery system through our One-Stop Career Centers.

Goal 2: Improve Education and Employability Skills of Adults for Quality Careers



Objective A) Increase capacity of adult literacy, ESOL, transition to college and workplace education programs to integrate work readiness skills and contextualized learning.

Strategy A1) Promote promising practices among literacy, transition to college and workplace education providers.

Strategy A2) Convene collaborative groups of business, education and workforce development stakeholders to identify ways to increase this capacity.

Strategy A3) Align resources to incentivize providers to integrate these best practices.

Strategy A4) Provide alternative supports to individuals waiting for literacy services to become available.

Objective B) Fill the identified gaps between employer needs in priority occupations and supply of qualified workers.

Strategy B1) Convene collaborative groups of business, education and workforce development stakeholders to define models for how to advance adults along a career pathway continuum.

Strategy B2) Develop and implement innovative education and training programs, especially sector-based and cross-sector skill-based strategies in growth industries along those pathways.

Strategy B3) Align resources to support the development of quality career pathway opportunities.

Strategy B4) Implement alternative “transition to work” programs such as OJT, internships, apprenticeships, etc. to increase work-based learning opportunities.

Objective C) Increase capacity and support for the One-Stop Career Centers to meet the needs of workers and employers.

Strategy C1) Disseminate key data, information, promising practices, innovative approaches, etc. to increase tools available to the Centers.

Strategy C2) Improve the utilization of assessment tools to better match worker skills sets to a viable career plan.

Strategy C3) Increase and align resources to the Centers to help them improve service delivery mechanisms.

Strategy C4) Work with MA Division of Career Services to improve data management systems to improve the evaluation of programs, and facilitate the matching of job-seeker skills with employer needs.

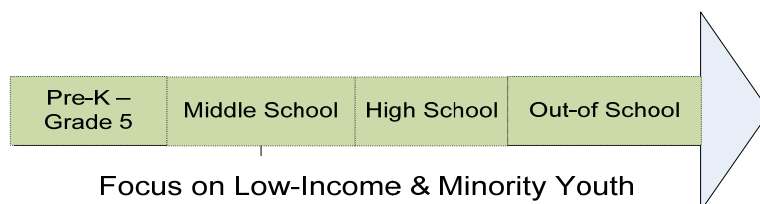
Objective D) Expand resources to respond to barriers facing adult learners and jobseekers to ensure continued success.

Strategy D1) Establish a collaborative case management process that builds on the strength of CBOs, case managers, education and training providers, employers and OSCCs to increase access to needed support services to address barriers to success.

Core Value 3: *Youth employability development is essential to our future workforce.*

We must attend to the development of skills early and often along the continuum. We must develop the STEM skills and the common core of skills such as communication, critical & systems thinking, problem solving, developing interpersonal relationships, etc. to ensure youth are ready for college, work and life in the 21st century. Special attention must be placed on those youth most at-risk and especially to minority youth and those disconnected from both work and school. Finally we must continuously collaborate with education and community-based youth providers to build an increasingly effective delivery system.

Goal 3: Develop 21st Century Youth Education and Employability Skills



Objective A) Prepare youth to be ready for college and careers.

Strategy A1) Convene collaborative groups of business, education and workforce development stakeholders, through the REB Youth Council, to advocate for and support educational curriculum development that integrates 21st century skills and contextualized learning.

Strategy A2) Design, advocate for, and expand innovative programs for Pre-K, family literacy and out-of-school time learning.

Strategy A3) Increase REB participation on advisory groups for curriculum development in key growth sectors with career pathway advancement potential, particularly to improve STEM skills.

Strategy A4) Increase drop-out prevention and recovery interventions, including alternative educational career pathways for older and out-of-school youth.

Strategy A5) Increase wrap-around services to support youth along a lifelong learning, career pathway continuum.

Objective B) Increase the capacity and support for One-Stop Career Centers and all youth service delivery agencies to meet the unique employability needs of youth, particularly out-of-school and unemployed youth.

Strategy B1) Increase and enhance programs focused on placing youth into employment, especially in growth industries.

Strategy B2) Increase coordination among the youth-serving entities, e.g., schools, CBO/FBOs, REB youth vendors, etc.

Strategy B3) Expand youth work readiness programs, including internships and work experiences in growth industries.

Objective C) Increase engagement and capacity of employers to provide youth with work-based learning and career advancement opportunities.

Strategy C1) Convene collaborative groups of business, education and workforce development stakeholders to further develop the workplace readiness curriculum training and to define how to advance youth along a career pathway continuum.

Strategy C2) Develop new work-based readiness training geared towards employers and supervisors of youth.

Core Value 4: *Engagement in collaborative leadership at all levels is essential to success.*

We must find new and better ways to engage in collaborative leadership that generates investments and shared accountability for results. Solving the increasingly complex social and economic issues in our community will require new shared approaches and joint funding from both public and private sectors. This style of leadership requires coalitions that are less hierarchical and requires us to sometimes exercise influence without authority.

Because of increased complexity of the seemingly intractable social problems in our urban core, it is imperative that we develop these skills; there is really no other choice because no one organization can affect the scale of the charge as needed. We must also promote the essential connection between workforce development and economic development. Both are inextricably linked to build the economic and social fabric of the community.

Investment in the skills of the workforce is an economic necessity. Investments in K-12 and higher education are crucial, but workforce training investments are equally critical. It's widely recognized that most jobs require education past high school; but for every job that requires a four-year degree; nearly twice as many require a middle-skill credential. We must support new and creative investment strategies for workforce development to promote recovery and long-term growth.

Goal 4: Be the Leading Advocate, Planner and Convener to Promote and Fund Regional Workforce Development

Objective A) Seek out and actively engage key stakeholders to develop, market, and support the critical importance of workforce development to our regional economy.

Strategy A1) Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify and prioritize specific stakeholders based on their ability to support the work of the REB.

Strategy A2) Develop a communication strategy tailored to key stakeholders for how to support and market our system and promote collaborative leadership principles.

Strategy A3) Engage key stakeholders in the work of the REB and in participation of REB sponsored events on workforce development issues.

Objective B) Align the REB's regional workforce development goals with the strategic plans of key economic development and educational organizations.

Strategy B1) Convene collaborative groups of business, education and workforce development stakeholders to lead strategic planning efforts for addressing critical workforce development issues.

Strategy B2) Ensure objectives and strategies in Goals 2 and 3 are reflected in other partners' strategic plans.

Strategy B3) Promote and further the implementation of key priorities within the City of Springfield's Workforce Development Plan.

Objective C) Actively engage state and federal legislators for increased funding and support for workforce development.

Strategy C1) Conduct legislative briefings, events and forums on specific workforce development issues.

Strategy C2) Promote support for key funding line items related to workforce development, including increased direct contact by board members and stakeholders with legislators.

Objective D) Acquire increased partner co-investment, and alternative public and private sector investment, in the workforce development system.

Strategy D1) Increase leveraged resources from partners/stakeholders.

Strategy D2) Seek consistent annual funding from local Foundations.

Strategy D3) Identify and obtain new foundation and corporate funding from entities whose priorities align with the REBs.

Strategy D4) Sustain the investment in our One-Stop Career Centers.

Strategy D5) Increase other private fundraising efforts.

VII. *Measuring Progress*

The REB understands these goals are ambitious and broad in scope; however without raising the bar we, as a region, will continue to lag other areas in the state and our challenges will continue to be a persistent barrier to growth. We will prioritize which strategies we will move forward with in 2011 and build on that over the next three years. We intend to keep a log of metrics to measure our success towards each of these goals and objectives over the next three years. Progress will be tracked within the following framework:

Goals 1-4:			
	Who	Investments	Metrics
Objectives:			
Strategy 1)			
Strategy 2)			

To view our progress, visit us on our website for periodic updates at http://www.rebhc.org/pages/about_reb_strategic_plan.html.

For more information on our Strategic Plan, contact our REB Chair, Joe Peters, President of Universal Plastics 413-592-4791 or petersj@universalplastics.com or REB President and CEO, John William (Bill) Ward at 413-755-1357 or bward@rebhc.org.