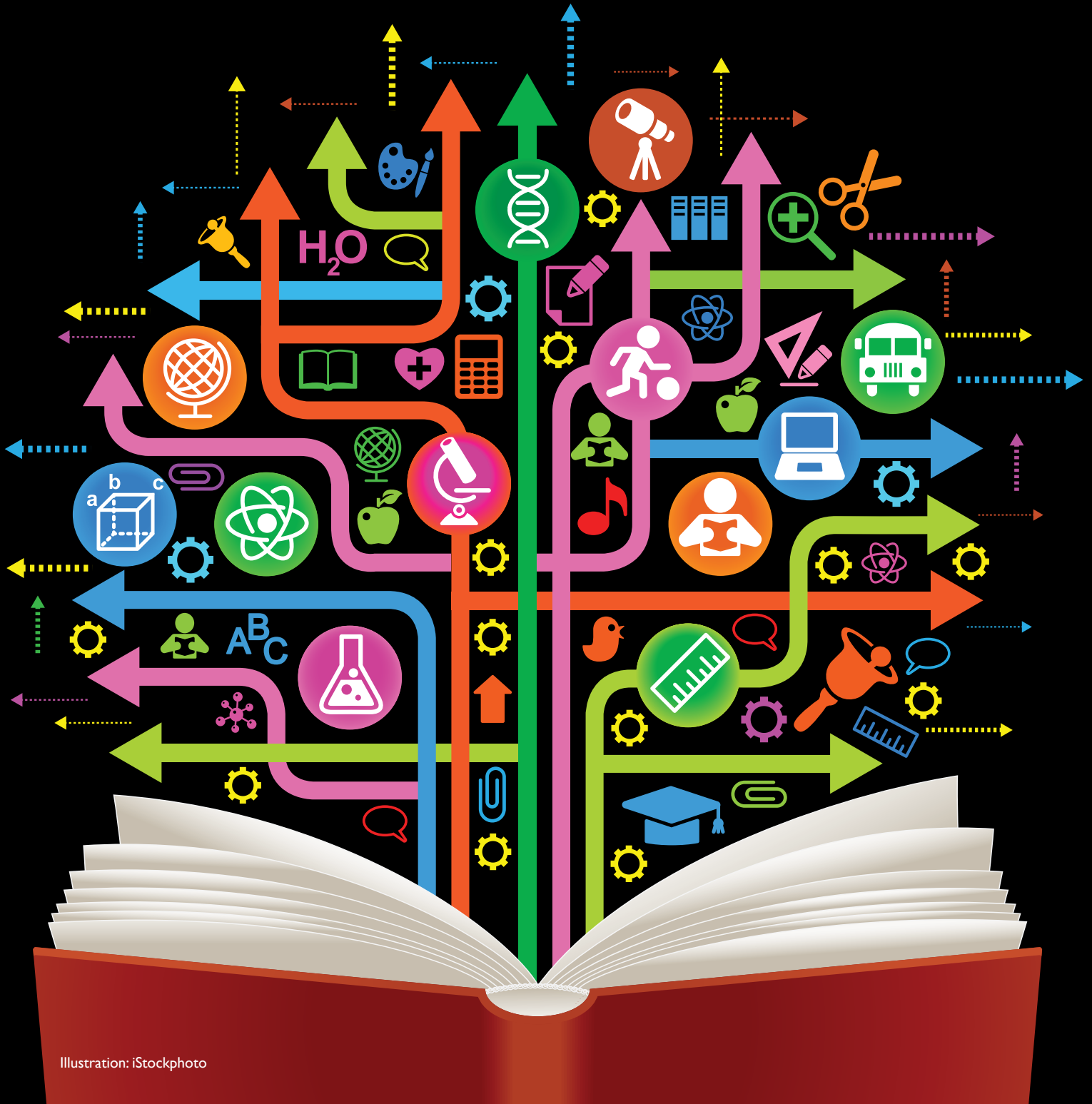


# Educating New England's Workforce for the Future

by Jerry Rubin, Jewish Vocational Service



Karen, a longtime employee at Children's Hospital Boston, had put her dreams of going to college on hold after having her first child. But in 2010, at age 50, she entered Bridges to College, a college-preparatory initiative. The program, which includes academic preparation and coaching, is offered by Jewish Vocational Service (JVS), an adult education, training, and employment organization. Karen matriculated at Bunker Hill Community College, and as of this writing is completing her prerequisites for a nursing program, with a goal of becoming a nurse at Children's Hospital. She has been promoted to patient account supervisor there, and her future looks bright.

Thanks to Bridges to College, Erickson's future looks bright, too. At the age of 12, Erickson fled the Democratic Republic of the Congo and entered a refugee camp in Zambia, where he lived for 16 years. He endured numerous hardships, including the deaths of two brothers and the paralysis of his mother. In 2009, he and his family were resettled in the United States. He was 29 and, with sole responsibility for his family's welfare, he was obliged to put his education on the back burner and pursue entry-level jobs. The good news is that last year Erickson successfully completed Bridges to College and, as of September 2011, began studying to earn a medical assistant certificate. He expects to complete the program this year.

Karen and Erickson's stories illustrate the major shifts taking place in the job market and labor force in New England. Traditionally, an educated and trained workforce has been the critical success factor for the region's economy. Education also has been the key to economic opportunity for residents. The wage premium for workers with some college education or technical training has grown rapidly over the past decade across the nation. And in New England, Massachusetts in particular, the growth of this wage premium is among the highest in the country. The concern for New England is that if, over the next decade, the share of working adults with some postsecondary education continues to lag behind other parts of the country, the whole region will lose ground.

### Impending Mismatch

In a recent report issued by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, "Mismatch in the Labor Market: Measuring the Supply and Demand for Skilled Labor in New England," economist Alicia Sasser Modestino projects

that the region is facing a significant imbalance between the demand for and supply of middle-skill labor, the kind that requires at least a year or two of college education. And according to the economic research unit of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 60 percent of all net new Massachusetts jobs created over the next decade will call for an associate's degree or higher. Nationwide, only 38 percent of all net new jobs will call for an associate's degree or higher.

New England already has lower rates of degree attainment at community colleges than the nation as a whole, and the Boston Fed projects that by 2019, the share of individuals in New England who have completed an associate's degree will decline because of a decrease in population and a growing

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percentage of immigrants who have lower-than-average educational attainment.

For many working adults, the gap between their educational level and what they need to get into college and succeed is nearly insurmountable. In Boston, for example, one-quarter of adults over 18 have only a high school diploma (compared with 31 percent nationally), and 16 percent don't have even that (compared with 13 percent nationwide). Approximately 200,000 Boston adults lack the education and technical training they need to secure middle-skill jobs. Despite programs such as Bridges to College and reforms at community colleges, the public systems that individuals turn to are not adequately funded or designed to help the large numbers of working adults prepare for and succeed in community college and beyond.

Most adults who feel the lack of adequate skills to progress in the labor market or pursue further education turn to the adult-education system or community colleges. The adult-education system, which provides English for speakers of other languages as well as academic remediation that can lead to high school equivalency, is delivered by a combination of community-based organizations, local school systems, and community colleges. Although it helps

millions of low-skilled Americans each year improve their English skills and sometimes gain a high school equivalency certificate, it is not really designed to prepare students for community college or any postsecondary education. Very few of its students take that path successfully.

Because community colleges are open-enrollment institutions (open to all), many adults and high school graduates go there even when they lack adequate academic skills. They enter remedial classes in large numbers, and more often than not, they drop out without getting a certificate or degree. They may not realize that remedial classes do not provide college credit, and by the time they are ready to take college classes, they may have used up their financial aid.

### Efforts So Far

Given the obvious importance of helping New England residents gain postsecondary education for their own economic success and that of the region, one might assume that the six states are focusing their policies and resources on the issue. Sadly, the record is mixed at best. Integrating the adult-education system with community colleges so that more working adults are prepared for college—while making both systems easier for students to navigate—may have received increased attention over the past decade, but the level of attention is far below what is needed.

The recent World Education survey of New England states' efforts to help adult students enter and succeed in college paints a worrisome picture.<sup>1</sup> Despite several pilot projects and successful models, there is little evidence that any New England state has achieved significant reform or improvement over the past decade. The study describes the adult-education system of one New England state as having "no state-level coordination with the postsecondary system." It describes another as having a "lack of alignment and understanding about where adult education ends and developmental education [remediation at the community college level] begins."

Massachusetts has recently increased efforts to address the issue. It has funded several projects to integrate adult education with community college, using the language of its adult-education funding requirements to emphasize preparation for some postsecondary education and creating forums to get adult-education providers and community colleges to collaborate on integration.

Such efforts are encouraging, but for the thousands of adults who need college and certificates and degrees but can't get them, it is too little.

A decade of successful program models and innovative policy changes in states such as Washington, Kentucky, Oregon, and North Carolina strongly suggest that there are effective ways to help low-skilled adults enter and succeed in college. State leadership, targeted resources, and policy advances can accelerate change in the key institutions. Successful approaches include:

- Developing more intensive adult-education classes, including bridge-to-college programs, that include college-preparatory skills specifically based on community college course requirements.
- Creating career pathways so that students can focus on specific academic and occupational education in adult-education programs while preparing for college and can transition into linked occupational programs once they enter college.
- Investing in coaching services that can keep students on track while they

are preparing for college and can help them successfully transition into college and graduate.

- Creating clear agreements between adult-education programs and community colleges so that they coordinate on necessary skill levels (for college acceptance), coursework, accountability, and state funding.
- Improving the ability of working adults to navigate college coursework more easily, including developing common entrance requirements for programs within and between colleges, and helping students to transfer and "stack" their classes into marketable certificates and degrees without having to retake courses.

As New England climbs out of the deepest recession since the Great Depression, a highly educated and skilled workforce is critical. The region will not succeed if it excludes a significant and growing segment of its population from higher education and skilled jobs. Its stagnant population growth, increasing reliance on immigration

for its labor force, and its traditional competitive advantage in education, technology, and innovation all point to the importance of maximizing every worker's abilities. Fortunately, there are clear and demonstrably successful models and policies that can help solve the education and skills gap if state leaders are willing to embrace them.

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#### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> "Postsecondary Success of Young Adults: System Impact Opportunities in Adult Education" (white paper, National College Transition Network, World Education Inc., Boston, September 30, 2010), <http://www.collegetransition.org/docs/Gates-Executive%20Summary.pdf>.

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## FINANCIALLY HARMED IN THE FORECLOSURE PROCESS?

The Federal Reserve and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency have initiated enforcement actions against a group of mortgage servicers because of deficiencies in the servicers' foreclosure processes. The regulators are encouraging borrowers who were financially harmed in the mortgage foreclosure process in 2009 and 2010 to request an independent review. After the review, servicers may be required to provide compensation. You have until July 31, 2012, to submit your request.



Details at <https://independentforeclosurereview.com>

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