



CAPITAL WORKFORCE PARTNERS TESTIMONY – MARCH 11, 2014

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

My name is Jim Boucher and I am speaking on the behalf of Thomas Phillips CEO of Capital Workforce Partners (CWP), a regional Workforce Investment Board serving 37 communities in north Central Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about contextualized learning and one of its models IBEST. We appreciate the leadership and support of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee on the critical adult literacy issue.

Connecticut now has an important opportunity to broaden its support of contextualized learning in a **meaningful and measurably impactful way**. Meaningful would be moving from successfully documented pilot projects to a more scaled up systemic statewide approach, and supporting an updated state plan with additional resources through regional planning processes led by the State's five Workforce Investment Boards.

As discussed, contextualized learning refers to accelerated skills training linked to academic basic skills development that targets available occupations in growth industries. IBEST is one of the better known models of contextualized learning, where co-teaching of technical skills instructors with adult education instructors on focused industry occupational skills development accelerates the gaining of a certificate. **CWP and the other four WIBs have had direct experience in supporting this programming, especially the last two years with a philanthropically funded successful IBEST construction industry pilot project in our region and Jobs First Employment Services funded IBEST pilot programs statewide.**

The time has come for *scaling up contextualized learning and models like IBEST to better prepare more low literate adults to be competitive in the labor force, which is the consensus of key providers and stakeholders in CT.*

- *The research in CT supports this.*(CA Advancement Report and #1 Priority)
- *The infrastructure through WIBs has been built.*
- *The State leadership priorities support this.* (Refer to their earlier statement before the session convened)
- The business community highlights (i.e.: CBIA report) ***talent development as the businesses #1 priority.*** More and more job openings are seeking individuals with middle skills (i.e.: post-secondary industry-recognized certification).
- **Return on Investment** studies show increased tax revenue, economic purchasing of goods and service stimulation and decreased public safety net expenditures.
- **Individuals upended by a tough recession** would benefit from accelerated skills development.
- **Low literacy** older youth and younger adults would gain the academic basic skills development simultaneously.

As acknowledged by the Department of Higher Education and the Legislature in 2012 with Public Act 12-40, we are not achieving the outcomes we desire with our current educational strategies.

**Funding for our current adult literacy services delivery system is fragmented,** distributed across several systems, and facing limited resources, and thus not positioned to address this challenge.

New contextualized learning legislation will align and support the coordination of **workforce development, adult education, higher education and economic development** to support more

individuals trained in middle skills We would recommend amending the language of SB 5493 to include the following:

**New Language:**

1. ***Defines Contextualized Learning to help clarify instructional strategies, standardize program elements and develop metrics.***
2. Requires ***a statewide contextualized learning and career pathways plan*** by Connecticut's 5 Workforce Investment Boards.
  - Regional plans will be developed which in composite will represent a statewide plan, for implementing, evaluating, scaling up or improving upon programs funded under this legislation as well as existing contextualized learning programs and career pathway programs.
  - Plan will target middle skill job openings available in the **manufacturing, health care, construction and green industries** and other emerging sectors of the state's economy.
  - Plan shall include a proposal to fund such programs *with leveraged federal, state, private and philanthropic dollars.*
  - The Plan shall include clear outcomes, metrics, assessment and evaluation
3. The state legislative budget shall make available in the FY2015 budget the following:
  - **\$2,500,000** in new funds for contextualized learning, which includes IBEST, and career pathway programs.
  - A planning grant of **\$100,000** supporting the development of the Workforce Investment Boards' Plan.

- Workforce Investment Boards to be lead in implementing the programs in collaboration with the state’s adult education providers and regional community technical colleges.

Today’s public hearing testimonies on contextualized learning and IBEST also clearly address the current and future talent recruitment needs of our region’s employers, and puts our work on the “front lines”facing the most serious economic and demographic challenges of today. With a significant percentage of our workforce retiring in the next decade, and a less prepared, less educated, and simply “just” fewer workers to take their place, effective work and learn strategies like contextualized learning are an imperative to economic vitality in the years ahead.

We appreciated the time to share with you some of our thoughts about proposed contextualized legislation, as we are confident that proposed legislation remedies could provide solutions for matching job seekers with employer needs for the good of the community.

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