

Connecticut
Career Ladder Advisory
Committee

Legislative Report

February 2007

Acknowledgements

The Office for Workforce Competitiveness would like to thank the following members of the CT Career Ladders Advisory Committee for their ongoing support of this effort.

Committee Members:

Leslie Gabel Brett, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

Joseph Carbone, The Workplace Incorporated

Gail Champlin, Career Counseling Center, Hartford College for Women

Dona Ditrio, New Opportunities for Waterbury

Paul Flinter, CT Department of Education

Norma Gyle, CT Department of Public Health

Mary Ann Hanley, Office for Workforce Competitiveness

Kim Hostetler, CT Hospital Association

Kyra Nesteriak, CT Business and Industry Association

Darlene Ragozzine, CT Charts a Course

Marie Spivey, Capital Workforce Partners

Roger Therrien, CT Department of Labor

Karen Wosczyne-Birch, College of Technology

For more information about the Career Ladder Advisory Committee and its work, contact Dr. Alice Pritchard at the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) who serves as consultant to the Initiative.

Table of Contents

Overview of Enabling Legislation	2
Health Care Pilots	4
Early Care and Education Pilots	9
Technology Pilots.....	11
Recommendations	13
Conclusion	15

Overview of Enabling Legislation

Public Act 03-142, An Act Concerning Career Ladder Programs was enacted in June 2003 establishing a Connecticut Career Ladder Advisory Committee (CCLAC). The Committee was charged with developing a three year plan for the creation or enhancement of career ladder programs for occupations with projected workforce shortages for the next five years and to report to committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matter related to higher education and employment advancement.

Committee's Membership and Activities

The Career Ladder Advisory Committee, chaired by the Office for Workforce Competitiveness and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, is comprised of required members including: the Commissioners of Education, Higher Education, Public Health and Labor or their designees as well as workforce development representatives, including those with expertise on training for women as well as health care, early childhood education and information technology, employer representatives for these industries, and a labor market analyst from the Connecticut Department of Labor. The Committee is staffed by the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF).

Career Areas Explored

In its first year of operation, the Career Ladder Advisory Committee explored the areas of health care, early childhood education, and information technology. Experts in the fields were asked to make presentations outlining the current shortages in the industries, challenges to recruiting and retaining workers, and possible strategies for creating career ladders in these fields. Presenters drew upon years of experience in analyzing the labor market needs of employers in these areas as well as the education and training needs of possible workers. They offered information on models that have been proposed or implemented in this and other states and the experiences of those initiatives. They provided valuable insights, offered a wealth of information and raised concerns as the Committee considered proposals for the three-year plan. In February 2003, the Committee presented the plan to the state legislature outlining the challenges to creating and expanding career ladders in these workforce shortages areas and offered potential solutions to address these issues.

Based on those recommended solutions, the Career Ladder Advisory Committee has supported two rounds of pilot activities with youth and adults to expand awareness of career ladder opportunities in health care, early care and education and technology fields and help to address career advancement challenges for current and future workers in these fields.

These pilot projects have provided valuable lessons on what academic and personal supports youth and adults need to pursue employment and career advancement. They have developed new courses needed by workers and employers; improved workplace culture in long term care facilities and helped entry level workers take their first steps toward college degrees. The goal of this report is to provide the legislature with an update on these activities and recommendations for future career ladder investment and initiatives.

Health Care Pilots

A number of recommendations were made in February 2003 Career Ladder Advisory Committee report related to the health care fields. Pilot projects were designed in response to the following recommendations and address obstacles to creating/pursuing career ladders in these fields.

Pilot Initiative: Bridges to Health Careers Program

The pilot program is designed to provide a 'bridge' for Certified Nurse Aides (CNAs) to prepare them for continued study in a more advanced health care field. The pilot is guided by an oversight committee comprised of the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund, Capital Workforce Partners, Capital Region Education Council and Capital Community College.

After a successful first round of activity, the pilot program is being replicated this year to provide a new cohort of 24 nurse aides with assistance in transitioning to college. Students participated in a 'Pre-Bridges' summer program, designed to introduce them to college and also a pre-college developmental math course. Twenty two students (92%) have recently completed their first semester of English and math courses and are preparing for the spring semester and the next level of coursework. Overall, more than 86% of students have academically progressed beyond the entry level of comprehension in English and math since entering the program, which is faster progress than the last cohort. Three students in English and three in math were able to bypass the final developmental course and enroll in credit courses this spring.

Intensive case management has enabled the students to expand their interests and possible career advancement in health care fields. The case manager, who was identified by the first cohort as an integral part of their success in the program, is now being supported full-time by the grant to provide academic and personal support for the current and the first cohort. CWEALF was able to secure a grant from the Annie Casey Foundation to provide additional tuition support for both cohorts that have been involved in the project.

The Bridges to Health Care Careers project has demonstrated that with the right personal and academic supports, in particular the provision of intensive case management, working adults can successfully make the transition to college.

Pilot Initiative: Online Perioperative Nursing Course

In the summer for 2004, Career Ladder Advisory Committee members held a focus group discussion with human resource staff from hospitals across the state. The representatives identified the need for training of operating room/perioperative nurses. Although current vacancy rates for these nurses aren't high (5% or 60 nurses according to the CT Hospital Association's 2005 vacancy rate study), they are expected to rise as the workforce retires. Associate and Bachelor's degree programs do not provide enough training in this area to prepare new nurses for these experiences. In addition, because hospitals often only have a few potential students, colleges have been unable to address their needs because of the small class size.

In order to maintain a pool of qualified operating room nurses to address the future critical nursing shortage, Charter Oak State College (COSC) in collaboration with the Connecticut League for Nursing (CLN) and the Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) is offering an online perioperative nursing course for nurses who want to move into this field.

The online course has been developed and training has been conducted for the hospital administrations. Ten students have been recruited and the pilot is underway. Slots for the pilot were offered to the hospitals of the administrators who served on the advisory committee and then slots were opened to all others within CHA. The course slots are full and there is a waiting list, which suggests that the pilot is fulfilling a need. The enrollment in the pilot has demonstrated that it is conducive to meeting the needs for perioperative training without the constraints of location. The online course is also much less expensive than the on ground course and provides continuity to the training statewide, yet allows the individual hospitals some flexibility in the on site training component. After the pilot phase, and any recommended improvements have been incorporated, the project will reach out to hospitals statewide to participate in the training program. It is expected that hospitals will cover the cost of tuition for this program in the future as well as selecting their participating nurses. COSC has received multiple requests from hospitals who would like to enroll students in the next semester of classes.

This project highlighted the ability and willingness of higher education to solicit and meet the workforce needs of employers and employees. This modest investment now allows hospitals and nurses statewide with online training in perioperative nursing to meet future labor market demands.

Pilot Initiative: Culture Change in Long Term Care

In an effort to provide ongoing professional development for nurse aides on basic skills improvements, communication, problem solving and decision-making skills, the Career Ladder Advisory Committee contracted with B&F Consulting, national experts in culture change, to facilitate a project with long-term care facilities. The pilot has several goals for the participating facilities:

1. to improve the workplace culture so that each home is a better place to work.
2. to improve opportunity for front-line staff at each home by instituting a career ladder opportunity with additional responsibility, expertise, and higher wages.

The hired consultants have completed their work in 2006 with Mansfield Nursing and Rehabilitation Center and St. Camillus Home. The current emphasis is on creating internal career ladders for entry level employees.

At Mansfield, the existing career ladder process within the building is a team leader program. This program existed on paper but hadn't been examined, updated or supported for a long time. The consultants met with the current team leaders and management to examine the program and provide training for team leaders that Mansfield can use in the future. Staff serving as team leaders are comfortable in their roles and have the support they need from each other, their supervisors, and management to function effectively.

At St. Camillus, fifty-five (55) low wage workers are participating in ESoL classes, which are held two days a week for two hours. This class is free for students and the arrangements and funding for the class has been covered by the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund, with help from the local Workforce Investment Board (The Workplace, Inc.) and Norwalk Community College. St. Camillus is paying its employees for one hour of the two they spend in class and management has worked hard to ensure that work is covered and staff is free to go to class. Participants in the ESoL classes at St. Camillus have been thrilled with the opportunity to take courses at work. Many also took advantage of career and educational counseling services and some are advancing in their educational pursuits.

Staff at both nursing homes reported to evaluators that they now have better places to work, and that the atmosphere at each home is more respectful and inclusive. Managers reported to evaluators that the lessons they have learned about being leaders are lasting lessons and have changed the way they manage.

Pilot Initiative: Culture Change in Long Term Care: Labor Collaborative

Based on the positive experiences at the two initial pilot sites, the Career Ladder Advisory Committee has contracted with B&F Consulting and partnered with 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund to work with a collaborative of nursing homes to promote culture change and career ladders. Three unionized homes have been chosen to participate in the pilot.

The project's goals are to improve the workplace culture and to create a climate that will support a career advancement opportunity within each home. The objectives are to increase management's capacity to create a better workplace environment in which staff feel and are respected and included, to build the capacity of each site's labor-management team to work well together, and to build the capacity of the sites to have workplace education for its low wage workforce.

The front-line staff at each home has been able to voice what they are experiencing about their work life through on-site meetings and an employee survey. Management at each home is learning how to make their committee process more open, shared and equal.

The facilities are all at different places when it comes to meeting the pre-determined goals. One home is excited about the opportunity the collaborative provides for them to work together and learn more about each other. They have discovered that only through true participation they were able to achieve a high response rate. The second home has worked through some difficult challenges and is working hard to develop better communication. The approach of the pilot has been customized to work in tandem with the 1199 Training and Upgrade Fund staff and support from the corporate staff person, who are attending the weekly team meetings as coaches. The third long term care facility has worked on recognizing the need to work as a functioning team rather than a team in name only. In addition, the consultants have helped them to enlarge their committee in order to be able to have the reach they need for their scale. In all the ways that this is playing out differently in the three homes, the common denominator is that all involved seem to be responding well to collaboration.

The newness of the project makes it hard to generalize about its effectiveness. However, it is clear that interest exists in improving the workplace for both workers and employers.

Pilot Initiative: Summer Internship Program for Student Nurses

The goal of this pilot was to provide more comprehensive clinical training to advanced nursing students throughout the summer and to better prepare new nurses entering the field. Nurses typically enter the field and are immediately responsible for acutely ill patients, sometimes having a high number of patients to care for, which increases anxiety. In addition, nurses often wait at least a year before working in a specialty area. This program was developed to help prepare nurses for the work environment they will be entering and provide them with additional clinical experiences.

This is the second year the program has been funded to serve a new cohort of nurses. This year, the ECHN Summer Internship Program for Student Nurses was able to accept 9 students from a pool of 30 applicants from 10 schools of nursing. The program was comprised of 10 weeks of work/study running from June until August. The internship program is offered along with the student's coursework and is worth three credits. The internship consists of time in the classroom and two days in the field.

The interns worked 32 hours a week, working 16 hours per week as a student nurse and 16 hours spent as a nurse aide. The interns elect to participate in the summer experience even though it is beyond the requirement for their course of study. To alleviate the financial burden of the course tuition for the interns, ECHN reimbursed half the cost of tuition. In addition, ECHN paid the interns \$12 an hour for all hours worked, including the two days per week when the interns worked in their student capacity.

Students completed a skill self-assessment rating at the outset of the internship experience and again at the end of the experience. The intern's preceptors were also asked to complete the same instrument to assess the students' skill levels at the beginning and end of the internship. Overall, the average assessment of the students' skills improved, both from their and the preceptor's perspective.

This pilot has provided additional training for nursing students and given them more experience when hired into the field. The pilot has met the needs of both students and the hospitals which get their labor as summer employees and the opportunity to recruit them for employment after graduation. With nursing programs teaching a broader range of topics in a condensed time frame, this summer opportunity is a real asset to students.

Early Care and Education Pilots

A number of recommendations were made in the February 2003 Career Ladder Advisory Committee report related to the Early Childcare Education (ECE) field. Pilot projects were designed in response to a number of recommendations and address obstacles to creating/pursuing career ladders in this field.

Pilot Initiative: ECE Career Ladder Initiative

The pilot program has been developed by Connecticut Charts-A-Course to meet specific goals. The first is to ensure ongoing training and professional development opportunities for child care professionals including providing subsidies to centers to offset tuition costs for college credit-bearing courses. The second goal is to enhance opportunities for basic skills training so that child care workers can enhance their skills and ease the transition to higher education programs.

Some of the main components of the program were to offer scholarships, tuition, and payments for books and/or assessment fees. Participants were required to complete a certain amount of coursework during a prescribed contract period and after completing educational benchmarks, participants are eligible for increased compensation in the form of educational bonuses. To participate in the program, participants honor their commitment to stay at their child care program or the field for at least 6 months.

Currently, 45 students are enrolled in the pilot program and are working on their Child Development Associate certificates (CDA), one year certificate, Associate or Bachelor's Degree.

After one year of coursework, 13 students have received their CDA, 11 have completed the one year certificate program, 2 students have completed their Associate degree and 1 finished their Bachelor's degree. The remaining 18 students are continuing to accumulate credits towards their certificates or degrees.

Individual education plans were designed for each student and are continually revised and discussed to ensure they remain focused on their goals. Some students are having difficulties in making the transition from their entry level training to college courses and many are being required to take developmental courses before they can enroll in credit courses. Tutors have been hired to work with students and support them in their educational endeavors. They work on basic reading, writing, grammar and note taking skills to assist students with their studies and give them a sense of confidence necessary to complete their academic coursework.

As students are accumulating credits, they are gaining confidence in their abilities to take college level coursework. The success they have experienced throughout this year has given them incentive to continue their education.

The Career Ladder Advisory Committee is committed to evaluating the pilot activities taking place under the ECE Initiative. Therefore, the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund contracted with the United Way of Connecticut to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the program. The evaluation seeks to assess the success of this pilot, identify the challenges to implementing and sustaining this model and provide the findings back in a report to help inform the future implementation of the program.

The pilot has grappled with the challenge of providing education to low wage workers. Individuals in the early care and education setting have few incentives to pursue education when wages remain low, despite educational advancement. This project's goal was to build in educational supports, particularly offering onsite and online educational programs, and financial bonuses for completing benchmarks. Case management and educational coaching has been key to the students' success.

Pilot Initiative: ECE Leadership Training & Capacity Building

The Connecticut Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC) in collaboration with CT Charts-a-Course (CCAC) play a key role in supporting leadership development in the early care and education field. Through this career ladder initiative, they had two goals:

- Offer the one week overview course to Early Childhood Education Directors who must complete the Connecticut Director's Credential to meet the new NAEYC Accreditation program administrator's increased training requirements.
- Development of a statewide reporting and information system enabling state agencies to track career ladder status and advancement of every child care staff member and as a repository for child care licensing information, educational resources and career ladder information.

The delivery of ECE 206, Administration and Supervision in the Early Childhood Program was completed in November, 2006 at Naugatuck Valley Community College. The course served twenty participants who successfully completed the requirements for the course and were awarded the 3 credits necessary to obtain the CT Director Credential. Participants

also received vouchers for the application fee for the CT Director Credential. Their applications were submitted to Charter Oak State College by CCAC and each participant is working directly with COSC to complete the paperwork requirements to secure the credential. The application fee is valid for two years, while participants obtain transcripts and acquire additional credits to advance on the career ladder.

While serving these twenty individuals the waiting list has continued to grow. Currently over 100 individuals remain on the list for future courses. CCAC is offering two sections of ECE 206 in March 2007. This training is a valuable opportunity for ECE Directors to advance their training and provide stronger services for children.

Technology Pilots

One recommendation in the February 2003 CCLAC report related to creating and expanding career ladders in technology fields was to provide real-world experience and achieve a well-rounded technical workforce by strengthening industry involvement in educating and training information and technology students.

Pilot Initiative: Work and Learn Model

In order to improve outcomes for youth who are involved in the juvenile justice system, in crisis or expelled from high school, Street Smart Ventures has implemented a Work and Learn model program with new Haven Adult Education (NHAE). The goal of this project is to give high school students an opportunity to build academic and occupational skills in technology and health care related fields. The Work and Learn model integrates learning, mentoring and work experience and creates a portfolio of work opportunities for youth. The heart of the model is the team of adult and older youth models who support the youth. In addition to high school graduation, project goals include increasing students' social and workplace skills, self-esteem and successful completion of work experiences leading to full-time employment after graduation.

This project was completed this fall with continuation of activities coming from the State Department of Education and NHAE. Half of the participants who were eligible to graduate in June did and the other half are expected to graduate this year. According the NHAE staff, the program motivated students to re-engage in education while getting on-the-job experience and job coaching. For those with little or no experience in the workforce, the one-on-one coaching and case management provided a safe and protective entry to employment. The program staff agreed a notable result from this program has helped them find better ways to engage students so they value education. It also

provided opportunities to promote employment and career education and enabled NHAE to look for new ways to incorporate employment readiness within their facility and also to leverage community resources to enhance the educational experience.

The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund staff has been meeting regularly with Street Smart Ventures to identify ways to share the lessons learned in this project. In particular, meetings have been scheduled with the Workforce Investment Boards and the State Department of Education to connect these efforts to those of the youth and adult initiatives taking place statewide.

This project demonstrated the types of activities that can be developed to promote high school completion and labor market attachment for at risk young adults. Hands on work activities serve as a motivator for youth who struggle with educational goals. This model inspires and connects youth to the education and workforce pipeline and their communities.

Recommendations

Based on the experiences of the past three years, we recommend an additional investment of \$2,000,000 in career ladder initiatives. These initiatives will address the labor market needs of Connecticut's health care, technology and child care employers, improve the skills of entry level workers, and align academic programs to provide a seamless transition up career ladders in these fields.

1. Most individuals who participated in these Career Ladder Initiatives are already working in the health care or early care and education field and need the support of their employer to increase their skills. **It is recommended that scholarship funds in the amount of \$1,250,000** be available through the Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and CT Charts-a-Course to help employers actively engage in the career advancement of their employees. The WIBs should play a key role in the delivery of both professional development and workforce training with long term care employers. In addition, because of the success of the summer nurse internship program a **set-aside, competitive pool of scholarships (\$25,000)** should be made available to hospital intern programs to offset the cost of tuition for the summer course to compliment the resources for salaries and supervisors paid by employers.
2. **With an allocation of \$500,000**, the Bridges to Health Care pilot project is ready for replication statewide with the establishment of partnerships between the Regional Workforce Investment Boards, adult education providers, public and private colleges and the 1199 Training and Upgrading Fund. The Career Ladder Advisory Committee recommends a planning process in advance of replication that addresses the academic and personal supports necessary to assist individuals in transitioning from their entry level health care job to post-secondary education and career advancement.
3. **With renewed Career Ladder resources of \$200,000**, the Office for Workforce Competitiveness will continue its work with state agencies and Regional Workforce Investment Boards to standardize entry level health care and child care training statewide and develop or strengthen articulation agreements that link different levels of training and education, such as credential and associate level training with bachelors and graduate degree programs, so that individuals can progress seamlessly up their chosen career ladder.

4. Based on the positive experience from the perioperative nurse training, Charter Oak State College should solicit the state's hospitals and other health care providers to determine the training needs of their current workforce which can be addressed through online learning. Once this is determined, **a new allocation of Career Ladder resources of \$25,000** can be used to support curriculum development and piloting of course materials with employers and workers statewide.

5. *Note:* The Work and Learn model has shown early success in implementation with New Haven Adult Education. **The legislature and State Department of Education should continue targeting adult education resources** currently available for replication of this project with other adult education providers who are serving young adults without their high school diploma.

Conclusion

The Career Ladder Advisory Committee has worked diligently to identify and support model programs that assist individuals in gaining the skills they need to advance in their careers. These models are ready to be shared and replicated statewide with ongoing support from the Committee and the pilot project partners. We encourage the legislature's continued support of the Career Ladder Initiatives and the partnerships that have been forged over the past three years.



Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund
135 Broad Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06105
www.cwealf.org
860.247.6090

Information & Referral Service
1.800.479.2949