

TALENT DEVELOPMENT

The shortage of qualified workers has become a top priority for many Greater Des Moines (DSM) companies. Increasing our competitive workforce involves “Cradle through Career” strategies to strengthen the emerging workforce pipeline, to retool the incumbent workforce and to access an international talent pool.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The Partnership supports increased federal investment in early childhood education programs coupled with strong accountability systems that measure results, ensure high program standards and expand the number of children served, including the creation of a voluntary federal preschool grant program.

America’s continuing efforts to improve education and develop a world-class workforce will be hampered without a federal and state commitment to early childhood education for three- and four-year-old children. In today’s world, where education and skill levels determine future earnings, the economic and social costs to individuals, communities and the nation of not taking action on early childhood education are far too great to ignore, especially when the benefits far outweigh the costs. The research is clear that the return on investment is linked to quality education. Simply increasing participation without ensuring program quality will not produce positive results. Not only does high-quality early childhood education make a difference for children, it matters to employed parents. Employers increasingly find that the availability of good early childhood programs is critical to the recruitment and retention of parent employees.

K-12 EDUCATION

With a steadily climbing poverty rate in Iowa, strengthening our economy depends on targeted investments to lift students out of poverty into the skilled workforce. The Partnership supports several federal programs designed to meet these challenges including:

- Adequate funding for Title I. Current funding levels already leave gaps while needs are increasing. Statewide, the percentage of kids who qualify for free or reduced lunch has gone from 27 percent in 2000 to 42 percent today. In Des Moines Public Schools, it has gone from 45 percent in 2000 to 75 percent today. The cycle of poverty can be reversed by giving these students the extra support needed to successfully enter the workforce.
- Adequate funding for Title II which provide efforts recruiting, retaining and training a high-caliber teaching force.

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- Funding for 21st Century After School Programs is used to provide job skills and computer training, as well as summer enrichment programs to increase students' success. Continuing this program is critical for helping the most vulnerable kids successfully complete an education.

To that end, The Partnership supports continued implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), with a focus on high standards, quality assessments and resources for schools in most need. Specifically:

- Provide for the fair and comprehensive participation of special needs and English Language Learning (ELL) students with particular focus on “at risk” students and high-needs schools.
- The reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act should retain local flexibility for school districts and retain the current formula grants.
- Oppose mandated joint applications from school districts and community colleges (currently permissible but not required).

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Growing the nation's economy and maintaining our global competitive edge in science and technology requires investing in post-secondary education. Access and completion are the keys – post-secondary education options need to be more available and affordable to meet those objectives. Increasing availability can be achieved by expanding delivery methods such as online programs, satellite campuses, dual credit courses for high school students and weekend and evening classes. Increasing affordability starts by reducing the absolute cost of post-secondary education to students and their families. It also includes supporting needs-based grants and work-study programs and improving access to loans with favorable terms and repayment options. Given the prominent federal government role in higher education policies and funding, The Partnership urges Congress to support measures to promote greater access to and completion of post-secondary education programs critical to success of our workforce and our national economy in the future.

As Congress considers re-authorization of the Higher Education Act and related legislation, The Partnership will support measures which align with the following specific objectives:

- Promote methods to help students and families be wise consumers of post-secondary options.
- Make post-secondary education accessible and affordable for all qualified students.
- Simplify and improve federal programs to maximize their utilization by all who need them.

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- Promote innovation in delivery methods to expand post-secondary participation and completion.
- Strengthen education/workforce development connections in key fields of economic priority.
- Promote innovation and competitiveness agendas that focus on enhancing the government's support for basic research and strengthening the nation's talent pool in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Encourage public/private and state/federal partnerships to achieve shared goals.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Partnership supports efforts to create a federal employment and training system that is driven by the actual needs of employers based on accurate and timely regional labor market data. Given the quickening pace of change in workplace technology and the growing demand for flexible, highly-skilled employees in all sectors of the economy, not even the most experienced workers can afford to rely on existing skills. To remain competitive, businesses must invest not just in the preparation and recruitment of new talent, but also the continuing development of workers at all stages of a career.

The Partnership supports investing in the workforce by:

- Passing the bipartisan Jumpstart Our Business Startups Act to expand Pell eligibility to short-term post-secondary certificates. Employers need more workers with short-term, middle-skill certificates, which are a stepping stone for entry-level and low-wage workers. Workers currently cannot access Pell grants for short-term certification programs.
- Promoting stronger connections between adult education and workforce, support career pathways and sector partnerships and serve people with barriers to employment by increasing funding of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to the FY 2019 authorized level.
- Ensuring that any infrastructure bill includes new investments in training partnerships, consistent with the bipartisan BUILDS Act. Proposed new investments in our nation's roads, bridges, and other infrastructure could create millions of new jobs in the coming years, but nearly half would require some education and training beyond high school. We will need to ramp up our support for apprenticeships and other skills strategies to keep up with demand.
- Passing the bipartisan PARTNERS Act to support industry partnerships. Many firms—especially small- and medium-sized businesses — lack resources to develop work-based learning programs on their own. Industry or sector partnerships reduce the burdens on businesses by convening local stakeholders to develop programs as well as the supports workers need to succeed.



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- Increasing investment and utilization of the USDA's SNAP Employment & Training program, a skills and job training program for SNAP participants administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service.
- Providing adequate federal funding for adult education and English as a second language. A total of 36 million adults have limited English, reading or math skills that prevent pursuit of middle-skill credentials, but just 1.5 million are served annually through federal programs. The Partnership supports increased funding for the WIOA Title II program.
- Passing the Community College to Career Fund Act to provide dedicated support for partnerships between industry and community colleges. Community and technical colleges could use these funds to support high quality training in partnership with local industries, workforce boards and other stakeholders.
- Passing legislation redirecting the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) to support apprenticeship and other work-based learning. Many businesses are investing in work-based learning to help entry-level employees advance, but WOTC does not reward employer investments after making a hire. The Partnership supports the need to shift these dollars to reward employers who make upskilling a priority.
- Reauthorizing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and passing legislation to lift current restrictions on TANF skills training. Fewer than 10 percent of adults receiving TANF have post-secondary education, an essential tool for transitioning to family-supporting jobs.
- Funding Wagner/Peyser Employment Service (ES) activities under Title III of WIOA at current levels to ensure job seekers can access these key labor exchange services and to support greater alignment between the ES and other federal workforce investments.
- Continuing the Career Pathways Innovation Fund, Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development, High Growth Job Training, General Education Development and ABE initiatives and enactment of the Strengthening Employment Clusters to Organize Regional Success Act to promote workforce development efforts.
- Continuing support for the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA), which helps workers, firms and others negatively impacted by trade.
- Continuing to fund the Senior Community Service Employment Program and the TAA to sustain federal training programs to ensure adequate parameters for serving older workers in an ever-changing global workforce. In today's economy, workers are likely to need frequent skills updating to remain competitive. Older workers will continue to need training, help with job placement and other assistance as individuals continue to be actively engaged in the workforce.
- Support FY 2018 and FY 2019 funding levels in the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Accessible and affordable child care options are critical pieces of workplace supports



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for working families. FY 2018 and FY 2019 funding levels will help states expand child care assistance programs.

- Continuing funding for the Corporation for National and Community Service. Programs such as AmeriCorps and the SeniorCorps provide opportunities for over 5 million Americans to volunteer, gain valuable career experience and share experiences.
- The Partnership supports ensuring that veterans receive comprehensive counseling and related services regarding all higher educational options, in addition to funding the Centers of Excellence for Veterans Success in the Higher Education Act.

IMMIGRATION

The U.S. benefits from the ability to attract international visitors, students and workers. The Partnership affirms that enabling talented and hard-working individuals to contribute to America will increase entrepreneurship, enhance international competitiveness and create more high-paying jobs for all Americans. It is critical that America remains competitive in attracting and retaining talented foreign nationals.

The Partnership supports immigration reform that provides national security and border control, while creating an effective and streamlined future flow program and legal status for unauthorized workers currently in the U.S. Specifically, The Partnership supports:

- Expansion and reasonable interpretation of the H-1B Visa Program for highly skilled workers. Employers in the U.S. must be able to hire the necessary talent to maintain and expand businesses and create more jobs and wealth for the U.S. economy. The H-1B program is important to U.S. economic competitiveness and technological leadership, as well as to the provision of health care and other critical services, especially in rural areas. Artificial caps on the category hurt U.S. competitiveness as U.S. companies continue to locate key personnel and projects outside the U.S. and as talented individuals move to countries that welcome such talent flow. The Partnership also supports reinstatement of the premium processing of the H1B program for cap-exempt industries and continuation and expansion of the existing Occupational Practical Training status for international students.
- Reasonable interpretation of the L-1 Visa Program for intra-company transferees. Restrictions on the L-1 intra-company visa category, a major conduit for foreign investment in the U.S. that creates millions of jobs, has the potential to jeopardize a significant part of the economy.
- Expansion of the Employment-Based (EB) Immigrant Visa Program. The overriding purpose of the EB green card system is to provide permanent residence to those individuals who add value to the U.S. economy. Many applicants utilizing the EB visa system are in fields related to science and mathematics. A large portion of these applicants are graduates of U.S. universities, accounting for over half of the post-graduate STEM degrees awarded in the U.S. Almost all employment-based green card applicants already live and work in the U.S. on temporary visas.



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These individuals are paying taxes, contributing to economic growth and recovery through innovations and job creation, purchasing property, investing locally and raising the next generation as Americans. In addition, due to an arbitrary cap on immigration from any single country, many equally qualified EB applicants from highly populated countries must wait significantly longer than applicants from countries with smaller populations (e.g., over a decade for individuals from India compared with a few years for individuals from Egypt). Furthermore, for this reason, it seems appropriate for companies to count employees currently being sponsored in the EB green card process as U.S. employees, as opposed to non-immigrants, since those individuals have expressed an intention to become permanent, productive citizens of the U.S.

- Continuing implementation of the EB-5 Visa program for foreign-born investors in businesses that benefit the U.S. economy and create or save at least 10 full-time jobs for U.S. workers.
- Creating a clear path for foreign-born entrepreneurs to create business in the U.S. and hire U.S. workers.
- Creating temporary visa programs for workers to fill essential non-professional roles for which U.S. workers are not available, but not limited to seasonal jobs.
- Passage of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act which provides legal status for thousands of young people who were brought to this country as children, have grown up as Americans and now face an uncertain future.
- The Partnership supports the resettlement of refugees to the U.S. and requests that the Office of Refugee Resettlement's budget be funded at a level that allows local service providers and communities to be prepared to receive these new lowans.
- The Partnership urges Congress to recognize the need and advocate for clear, thoughtful and predictable regulations of immigration laws. Programs such as the Conrad 30 waiver that allows J-1 medical doctors to apply for a waiver for the 2-year residence requirement upon completion of the J-1 exchange visitor program support the workforce needs of Greater Des Moines (DSM). The Partnership supports an increase in the number of slots per state and the creation of a pool for all unused visas to be made eligible to states with full slots.