

**Shifting Gears: Minnesota FastTRAC
Systems Leadership Team
Meeting Minutes – March 13, 2009**

Team members present: Inez Wildwood, chair, Linda Lade, Sharon LaComb, Beverlee Mountain, Brenda Norman, Bryan Lindsley, Anne Olson, Jane Samargia, Ann Sessoms, Barry Shaffer, Kathy Sweeney, Pat Thomas, Steve Wagner, Judy Mortrude. Guests: Julie Strawn (CLASP, on phone), Neil Ridley (CLASP), Kira Dahlk (Lukeworks, LLC). Staff: Mary Schmidt, Anne Marie Leland.

The **staff update** March 12, 2009, was distributed (see attachment 1).

Barry Shaffer presented the Minnesota **FastTRAC vision**. The team agreed to support the vision as amended in attachment 2.

Inez Wildwood facilitated a discussion of policy changes needed in Minnesota's education and training systems to improve access and completion rates for low income adults. Key policy issues that need to be addressed are summarized below.

1. **Academic credit issues** that impede accelerated programming for adults combining occupational and basic education of short duration (such as less than one-year duration and perhaps as little as 4 weeks) and culminating in a credential. Currently, there are disincentives to MnSCU institutions around offering a stackable credential model. Among the disconnects between what is available and what is needed (i.e. supply and demand):

- Barriers to transferring credits from one institution to another. Barriers of getting credit toward a credential for state registered apprenticeship, or previous technical training, including "customized training". The frustration is compounded when credit is not awarded even when the training/course used similar/identical curriculum and instructor.
- Disincentives for MnSCU institutions to offer more short-term trainings because of the performance measures, accreditation, and funding that do not reward colleges for serving non-degree-seeking students (i.e. students who take just one or two classes and do not get a degree, diploma or certificate).

Suggestions:

- Investigate feasibility of "chunking" coursework at MnSCU for purposes of transfer and articulation at entry level courses.
- Investigate feasibility of creating a FastTRAC prefix in the MnSCU system which would aid financial aid eligibility (hence funding).
- Consider requirement that every MnSCU institution offers a stackable credential program in a high demand occupation within a given timeframe, with the understanding that such programming needs to be coordinated with local Adult Basic Education programming.
- Need to explore further causes and possible solutions to overcoming transferability from institution to institution.

Possible Policy Objectives:

- Identify and address credit issues that impede (disincentives) the stackable credential framework.

- Request MnSCU establish a process for recognizing and rewarding institutions for development stackable credential programming for non-traditional students within the credit-based system.
- Recommend MnSCU establish a system-wide standard process and incentives for institutions to assist FastTRAC enrollees in getting credit for previous post-secondary education, work or volunteer experience whenever feasible (e.g. apprenticeships or industry obtained certification).

2. Financial Aid and Student Support Services are an essential component of the Stackable Credential framework.

Possible Policy Objectives:

- Promote the deployment of existing resources such as FSET, TANF, WIA, DWP, and MJSP to support adult students in financial need, including institutionalizing deployment through interagency agreements or Memoranda of Understanding.
- Review Minnesota State Grant program to support adults in short-term certificate programs that are part of FastTRAC stackable credential programming, i.e. coursework less than 12 credits.
- Request the MJSP Board make policy changes and/or seek legislative changes as necessary to allow for utilization of a percentage of Pathways, Low Income Worker grants and Dislocated Worker funds or supportive services to enrollees in MN FastTrac type programs.

3. Improving System Alignment -- ABE alignment with workforce center system, career and technical education (Perkins programs of study) and MnSCU. Programming would need to include:

- Soft skills – both employability and school-ability
- Sector based curriculum and programmatic focus
- Curriculum alignment – would require a policy around sharing curriculum in order to develop appropriate bridge curriculum between ABE and MnSCU programs

Suggestion:

- ABE could create a policy to designate that contact hours earned by ABE programs within the context of FastTRAC be repurposed into the next program year into the same or similar program as a strategy for sustainability

Possible Policy Objective:

- Require MnSCU FastTRAC programs to integrate ABE into stackable credential programs where appropriate.
- Create expectations for dual or concurrent enrollment – defined as blended instruction, courses co-taught by ABE instructor and college faculty, where lower level ABE students as defined by the ABE system (based on Education Functioning Levels) may enroll in stackable credential models provided by post-secondary institutions. (Accelerated programming example, I-BEST). The policy would need to include entrance criteria for dual enrollment (which is a characteristic of the stackable credential framework), such as, a GED or diploma, certain amount of English skills, a certain score on the Accuplacer, etc.
- Require every ABE consortium to provide an exit plan to students that contains information on career preparation and provide students with referral sources to the workforce center system, higher education and other employment training providers.

4. **Funding Priorities** – The discussion surrounded dedicating existing funding streams toward development and replication/expansion of stackable credential models.

Possible Policy Objectives:

- In order to support training priorities, funds from WIA Titles I, II and IV, along with Perkins could be used as dedicated funding sources to provide training through FastTRAC stackable credential programs; create a minimum investment/floor.
- Explore ways to get FastTRAC programs certified under the WIA Certification process.
- Dedicate resources to enable regional partners to define “high-demand” industries and/or clusters.

Next Meeting

The Systems Leadership Team asked staff to incorporate policy ideas generated today into the policy agenda, send out a draft, and set up a conference call on March 30 to discuss/finalize the policy agenda.

Attachment 1: **Shifting Gears: MN FastTRAC Training, Resources and Credentialing**
Staff update
March 12, 2009

Minnesota is in the eighth month of its one-year Minnesota FastTRAC implementation grant. Our goal during this one-year is to develop the policy agenda for creating a state-wide stackable credentials framework that integrates adult basic education, occupational training, and postsecondary degree and certificate programs that currently lack coordination and resource sharing.

1. **Incubator projects.** Staff and some executive team members have done field monitoring visits with five of the incubators; others are being scheduled. Staff has not discovered any issues of concern related to compliance or progress by incubators. Staff continues to look for opportunities to help ABE providers and MnSCU institutions strengthen their collaboratives, especially around funding. Interim reports are due on March 16 from incubators, as well as participant data into the data collection tool (i.e. common demographic, placement, employment, services, and other key data elements of incubator participants at the local level). Such information will help us understand the profile of stackable credential participants and data sharing barriers and opportunities across systems at the local level. This information will be integrated into the renewal grant to the Joyce Foundation.

2. Staff has supported the executive team in development of the **policy agenda and action plan** (staff will distribute latest version on March 13). Staff has been reviewing connections between FastTRAC and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act ("federal fiscal stimulus"), particularly under Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The **Student Support Services Team** met on March 9, 2009, to consider policy opportunities related to financial aid and comprehensive supportive services to help adults access and succeed in training and education opportunities. The team explored policy opportunities around the following: (i) modification of the Minnesota State Grant guidelines that disadvantage working adult students; (ii) creating an incentive for postsecondary institutions to work with workforce centers, nonprofits and employers to provide case management and support services to adults; (iii) designating particular number of slots in the Post Secondary Child Care Program for stackable credential participants; and (iv) expanding workstudy opportunities for low income working adult students enrolled in stackable credential programs at MnSCU institutions. The team decided to prioritize (ii) as other options were either too expensive or narrow in their focus, i.e. not broad enough to affect enough FastTRAC participants. The "generic" stackable credentials model developed by the **Stackable Credentials Team** was discussed and refined at the ABE Transitions meeting and the Student Support Services Team (see page 2).

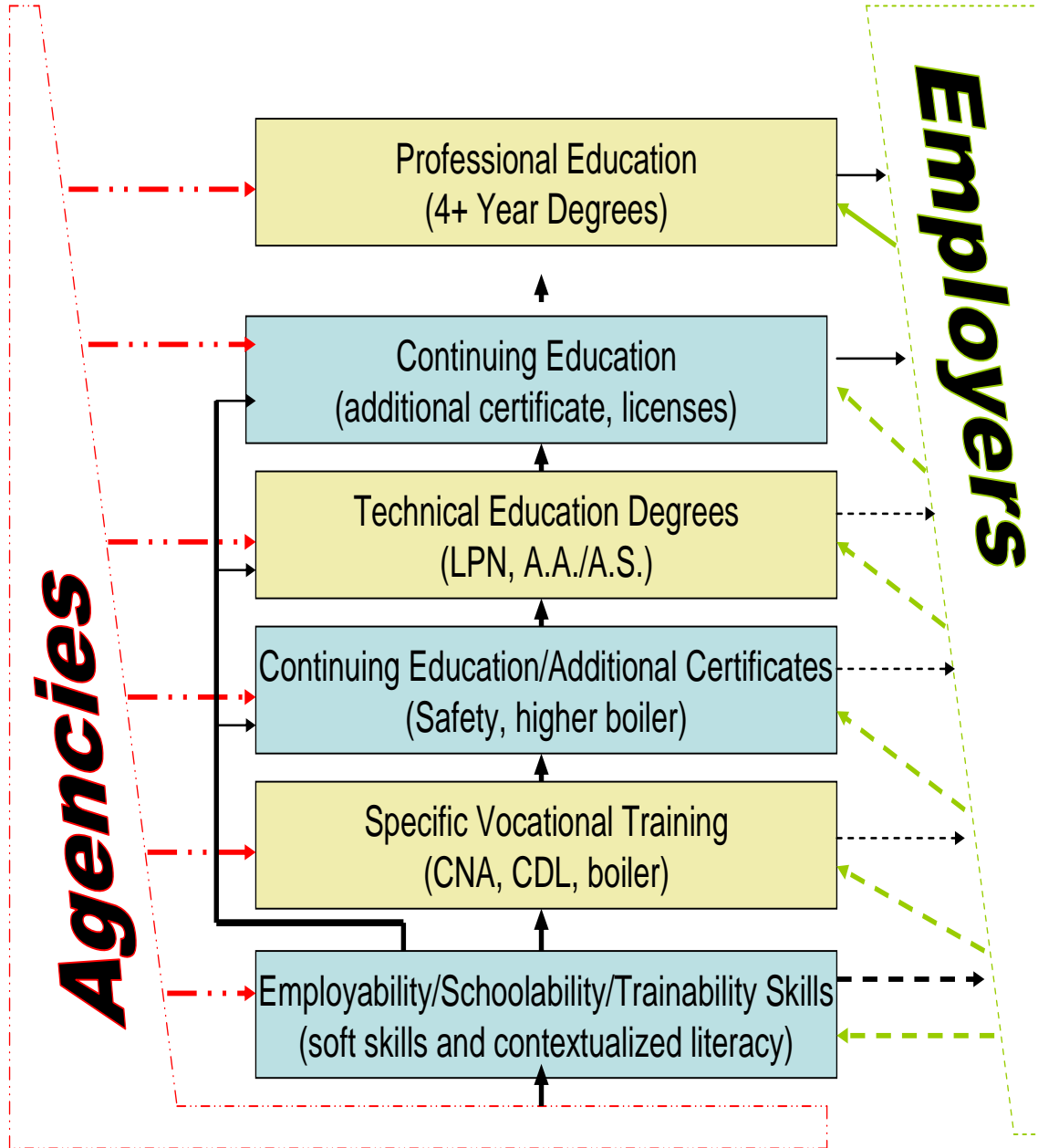
Next Steps

March 16 interim reports due from incubators

March 19 and 20 evaluation visit by Joyce Foundation consultants

April 13 proposal due to Joyce Foundation for renewal grant

May 5 and 6 cross state team meeting for Shifting Gears states in Madison, Wis.



Attachment 2: The Minnesota FastTRAC Vision (draft April 10, 2009)

The Minnesota FastTRAC initiative envisions *clearly identifiable, sustainable, and highly effective* stackable credential (career pathway) employment and training programs throughout the state that provide opportunities for low-wage, low-skilled adults to increase their basic and occupational skills and acquire credentials that bring a sizable payoff in the labor market.

- ❖ *Clearly identifiable* presumes that Minnesota FastTRAC programs will be branded and marketed as a unique set of stackable credential programs that have a common purpose, basic characteristics and operational processes.
- ❖ *Sustainable* means that requisite policy and system changes have been made so FastTRAC programs can continue without categorical or temporary funds.
- ❖ *Highly effective* refers to a set of proven, common program characteristics (e.g. counseling, support services, financial aid, bridge programming, multiple collaborations, etc.) that produce a return on investment for businesses, workers/students as well as the state as a whole.

The Minnesota *FastTRAC* initiative has identified the essential characteristics of stackable credential programs and continues to identify the policy and system impediments to their replication and sustainability. A *policy agenda* is being developed that will focus continued policy adjustment efforts on funding streams, instructional processes, Adult Basic Education (ABE) and the Minnesota State Colleges and University (MNSCU) system alignment, multiple support services and financial aid for adult students, and related data system enhancements necessary for program evaluation and analysis.

Elements of a Stackable Credential Program

- A. **Career pathway model** – a program that admits and supports students in a particular “roadmap” of education and skills training which lead to credentials at every major level of career advancement in a particular industry. Career pathways offer opportunities at all points along a continua of ABE/ELL basic skills, non-degree postsecondary occupational education and training with certification that may or may not require admission to postsecondary for-credit programs, and postsecondary education at the two and four-year degree level.
- B. **Fast-track programming** – accelerated attainment of skills and credentials through thoughtful instructional processes and content, e.g., high-intensity programs, dual enrollment options, so students can quickly enter and advance in careers.
- C. **Multi-level, industry-recognized credentials** – collaboratively developed, valued credentials created by business and the workforce education and training systems for in-demand, skilled jobs.
- D. **Contextualized and competency-based curriculum** – less rigid sequencing of basic skills and blending both core academic and technical skills.
- E. **Bridge programming** – explicitly link ABE and ELL instruction with preparation for postsecondary education and occupational skill attainment.
- F. **Flexible entry points** - modularized curricula developed into sets of courses with discrete employment outcomes enable students to enter and exit a degree or certificate program at specific points in their educational cycle rather than completing an entire program at once.
- G. **Connections to regional high-demand job needs** – credentials and bridge curriculum based on labor market analysis of employer demand and research on the skill sets business requires for various jobs within an industry.
- H. **Support services specific to adult students** – wrap-around student services that enhance student planning and informed decision making and increase student success and completion rates in achieving both academic and employment goals. This term refers to differentiated student support services that enable adult students--as opposed to say traditional age student--to successfully transition into and complete training and education programs that are part of a stackable credential model. Services like career and academic counseling, peer mentoring, tutoring, and transportation and childcare assistance are examples of wrap-around services.
- I. **Comprehensive data collection and evaluation** – collection and analysis of baseline data as well as student and program outcomes.