



○ Berkshire Compact

FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

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When One Door Closes, Another One Opens

For Berkshire County, that old saying neatly sums up the transition we are currently experiencing. These are exciting times, because as the door has begun to close on old-line manufacturing jobs, ones of opportunity have begun to open in vibrant new employment sectors that promise to nurture new generations. Of course that transition will not be easy, but it is nothing Americans have not confronted and overcome before.

Thomas Friedman in his new book, *The World is Flat*, reminds us that a century ago the United States faced a similar challenge, and made a transition from an agricultural based economy to an industrial based one. The result was not only a higher standard of living for the vast majority of Americans, but the beginning of a new economy that was and is the envy of the world. His book raises and answers the question, “How did we do it?” The Berkshire Compact for Higher Education has raised—and begun to answer—the question, “How can the Berkshires do it?”

A brief look at how we got where we are is instructive. Historically dominated by large manufacturing companies providing an important source of well paying jobs, the economic base of Berkshire County has experienced a dramatic shift. As with so many “company towns,” the health of the County’s economy had been dependent primarily upon these industries. Families had access to steady, generational career paths where advancement and new opportunities could be realized through seniority and on-the-job training.

This is no longer the case—but take a look through the new doors that have opened.

Innovative and inventive small- to mid-size technology, specialty manufacturing, and healthcare businesses, to name just a few, are driving and transforming the new economy. Making this business environment even more unique and productive is the rapid expansion of the Berkshire’s traditionally rich cultural landscape. Berkshire County’s reputation as a premier cultural venue is driving jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, and is also one of our greatest assets in attracting new businesses and residents. It is a “one-two punch” not many local economies can match.

But how do we attract new employers and retain the ones we have to realize our vast potential?

A hundred years ago, as Mr. Friedman explains, the answer was at once bold and simple—Americans decided that everyone would have a secondary education. Now, as the Berkshires make the transition into the twenty-first century, there is little doubt that it is time for another bold,

far reaching vision. This emerging, increasingly collaborative economy calls for skills and educational levels different from those of earlier times. Businesses compete in a global arena, and workers must be able to think critically and adapt to changing situations and rapidly changing technologies. As Friedman puts it, “Everyone should have a chance to be educated beyond high school.” (290) While we have made strides toward attaining that vision, there is still work to do.

A report entitled, *The Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*, notes that across the nation “universities have done a wonderful job educating affluent kids since 1980. But they have done a terrible job of including those from the bottom half of the family income distribution.” In Massachusetts and in Berkshire County, there are similar problems; access to higher education can pose a financial burden for many resulting in too many residents lacking skills to compete, and too many employers looking elsewhere to fill job openings.

The Berkshire Compact for Higher Education was established to assess these and other problems and focus upon what this community must do educationally to transition successfully to this new century, to this new economy. We are convinced that our success is rooted in a strong educational continuum that encourages and rewards innovation, raises aspirations, ensures access, values lifelong learning, and takes advantage of the power of technology.

The Compact has reviewed the challenges, opportunities, and barriers that we face. We have used new and existing research to arrive at our conclusions; most importantly, we have identified four major goals whose achievement will ensure a bright and promising future for Berkshire County. Our hope is that the new doors of opportunity will be opened, or widened through these efforts.

GOAL ONE: Raise the aspirations of all Berkshire County residents to view 16 years of education, or greater, as the accepted educational norm.

We found that far too many county residents believe the attainment of a high school diploma to be their ultimate educational goal. Aspirations must change and be elevated.

To achieve this goal we must:

- change the culture that accepts a high school degree as the educational end-point;

- structure the K-12 educational experience so that more students aspire to higher education and more students are better prepared to make the transition to higher education; and
- provide students with more opportunities to understand that a solid educational foundation pays dividends in the world of work.

GOAL TWO: Improve access to education, training, and lifelong learning.

We found that there are many barriers—both real and perceived—to accessing education and training programs; among those barriers are transportation and childcare, cost and convenience, government/programmatic rules and regulations, as well as relevance to professional advancement or personal growth. We can begin to dismantle these barriers by:

- providing all residents with increased opportunities to attend college through the development of a Berkshire County Higher Education Passport.
- developing innovative ways to reach residents;
- allowing all residents to have greater access across the educational landscape in Berkshire County; and
- developing a targeted campaign with employers focused on working adults who have little or no higher education experience.

GOAL THREE: Make Berkshire County a competitive location for the new technology and knowledge-based economy; make Berkshire County residents among the most technologically educated population in New England.

Berkshire County can distinguish itself in the new economy by developing a population skilled in the integration and application of technology and, in so doing, become a competitive location for technology-based economic sectors and companies. We begin this by addressing the following:

- making county residents more aware of emerging and new technology-oriented economic sectors in Berkshire County, and the need for higher levels of technology skills and education,
- offering K-12 students more intensive technology-oriented learning experiences; and,
- establishing a more effective and county-wide technological infrastructure.

GOAL FOUR: Develop a new “social contract” among employers, employees, and educational institutions that encourages and promotes learning, earning, and civic engagement.

As the demographics across the county continue to change, the number one concern expressed by employers is access to a well-prepared, well-educated, innovative workforce. Berkshire County needs to think innovatively and boldly about integrating training and educational opportunities to meet the needs of employers and employees, including:

- increasing the pool of potential workers,
- increasing the skill levels and preparedness of the existing workforce, and
- promoting continuous learning, helping to match educational programs with changing/emerging employment needs.

Moving from Compact to Commitment

The road to success for Berkshire County travels through our educational institutions. There is no refuting that the more one learns, the more one earns, or that higher levels of education translate into higher levels of community participation, well-being, and self-sufficiency.

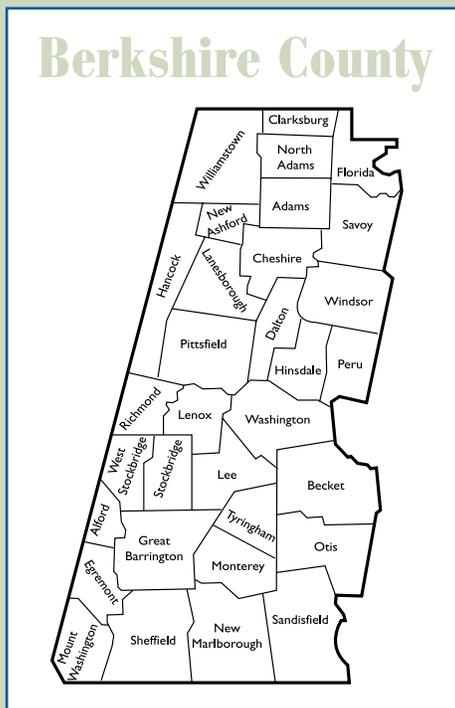
The Berkshire Compact supports the contention that to make progress we must invest in a strong educational continuum—one that encourages and rewards innovation, raises aspirations, ensures access, values lifelong learning, and takes advantage of the doors that can be opened, or widened, through the use of technology. To ensure our success, we have identified four primary goals and an array of strategies for realizing those goals.

These strategies, outlined in the report, are meant to sharpen our focus and to develop a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities. They serve to inform the important work that lies ahead as we find ways to meet our goals. The continued spirit of collaboration and creativity will serve the county well as we move forward.

A Call to Action—The Berkshire Compact for Higher Education

In his new book, *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman writes that the United States made the transition from an agricultural based society 100 years ago to an industrial based society, resulting in a higher standard of living for the majority of Americans. He raises the question, “How did we do it?” The answer is at once bold and simple—we made a decision that everyone would have a secondary education. As we transition into the twenty-first century, there is little doubt that we need something as bold, as visionary, and as far reaching. As Friedman puts it, “Everyone should have a chance to be educated beyond high school . . . JFK wanted to put a man on the moon. My vision is to put every American man or woman on a campus.” We want to do much the same in Berkshire County.

Although the challenges are profound, the residents and businesses in Berkshire County are committed to achieving this vision by working on new strategies that will ensure that every resident will be able to access a postsecondary education. In February 2005, the Berkshire Compact for Higher Education met for the first time to take up this challenge. Its mission is simple: **Every resident of Berkshire County should attain at least 16 years of education and training.**



Berkshire County’s new and emerging economy is no longer dominated by large manufacturing companies, but characterized by small- to mid-size businesses in technology, specialty manufacturing, travel and tourism, arts and culture, and healthcare, to name but a few. This emerging, increasingly collaborative, economy brings with it new opportunities and challenges that will demand skills and educational levels different from those that may have been a foundation for success in earlier times.

Businesses compete in a global arena, and workers must be able to think critically and adapt to changing situations and rapidly changing technologies. Berkshire County will be a leader in this new economy as we take steps to ensure that our workforce is among the most highly educated and expertly prepared. The Compact is certain that the work ahead is about much more than matching skills to need; it is about sustaining and strengthening communities and ensuring that all members are prepared for success with the opportunity to participate fully in their communities. The Compact supports the premise that, to be successful as employers, as a county, as a Commonwealth, and as a people, we must invest in educational programs and opportunities to support a lifetime of learning and growth.

The Compact was comprised of leaders from key employment sectors including the cultural institutions, healthcare, and specialty manufacturing, along with school superintendents, college administrators and faculty, municipal government officials, and representatives of nonprofit organizations. These leaders were joined by outside experts and the Berkshire Legislative delegation, which secured funding to support this effort. The Compact was charged with assessing the higher education and lifelong learning needs of Berkshire County residents and employers, and identifying new opportunities and strategies to better meet those needs.

The process of developing the compact included multiple meetings with key stakeholders from Berkshire County. The Compact met five times, organized working group sessions, held focus groups with business owners and major employers, educators, human, and social service agencies, and commissioned Market Street Research to conduct a sample survey of Berkshire County residents. In general terms, the meetings, survey, and focus groups were designed to help the Compact answer the following questions:

- What are the emerging education needs of Berkshire County residents?
- How do we forge more effective business-academic-community alliances?
- How do we enable an even greater percentage of Berkshire County students to access and complete degrees in higher education or pursue continuous learning?
- What new or better programs and/or collaborative delivery strategies would better attract students, leverage unique aspects of the Berkshires, and contribute to workforce opportunities?

- What new opportunities for collaboration can be found to create a more seamless offering of higher education services?
- What can we learn from models from other regions or states?

Professional organizations were hired to conduct research and to synthesize all relevant County economic and demographic information.¹ The research was intended to help the Compact achieve the following outcomes:

- a clear determination of higher education and training needs;
- a clear understanding of the barriers to higher education;
- a clear understanding of educational opportunities;
- a framework to strengthen the educational continuum and advance new opportunities; and
- a set of strategies for capitalizing on the opportunities.

This report summarizes the results of the research and proceedings.



Photo courtesy of Boston Symphony Orchestra - Tanglewood.

¹ The Compact also made use of research conducted by the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, Market Street Research, the Berkshire Regional Employment (REB), Berkshire Applied Technologies, the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition, the United Way, the Northern Tier Initiative, Mt. Auburn Associates, the Berkshire Regional Competitiveness Council (RCC), and others.

Why a Focus on Higher Education?

The growing importance of a skilled workforce and the critical role that higher educational institutions play in building this workforce have been well documented. As a recent study noted:

Given the economic realities of the 21st Century, providing opportunities for residents to prepare for, enroll in, and succeed in postsecondary education is vital to the health of our communities, our states, and our nation.²

As the following section illustrates, a postsecondary degree has now become an imperative both for an individual seeking economic success and for a region hoping to remain competitive.



A Highly-educated and Skilled Workforce is Essential to a Competitive Regional Economy

The factors that have defined a “competitive” regional economy have undergone fundamental change and will continue to evolve as the full implications of recent technological and demographic changes play out in the economic arena. One thing is clear—the single critical defining issue in any region’s economic future will be the quality and depth of its labor force. Increasingly, jobs will follow people. This means that the region has to be able to ensure that its existing residents have the skills needed to compete in this new economy. This is a major paradigm shift, from a focus on jobs to a focus on people. Investments in skills and higher education take on prime importance. This shift in focus requires a shift in how we regard funding for higher education as well.

The Republic of Ireland presents a good argument for this new reality. Ireland, which was one of the poorest countries in Europe, has experienced dramatic growth over the past decade. Unemployment was cut from almost 17 percent in 1987 to just over 4 percent in 2005. The average economic growth rate since 1990 has been seven percent. Today, referred to as the “Celtic Tiger,” Ireland has become a prosperous knowledge-based economy. While many reasons are noted for this transformation, most analysts agree that Ireland’s investment in education and skill development was the critical factor.

Additional evidence makes clear that a highly skilled workforce has significant economic payoffs in the global economy. The Bangalore region of India, for example, quickly has emerged as a hot-bed for software production and high-end engineering, principally because of the higher education and skills of its workforce. And, it is a mistaken impression that only low-wage, low-skilled workers are driving the Chinese economy. While true to some extent, the reality is that China graduates more engineers than the U.S., and the disparity between the number of people we graduate with math and science degrees versus China is increasing.

Clearly, an investment in higher education brings extraordinary economic benefits to any regional economy. And, in a period of increasing global competition, a region without a robust educational system and a highly-skilled workforce will lose its edge and most likely become a relic, rather than a force, in the New Economy.

² *The Governance Divide: A Report on a Four-State Study on Improving College Readiness and Success*, September 2005. The Institute for Educational Leadership, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, The Stamford Institute for Higher Education Research.

Higher Education is Essential to an Individual's Economic Success

The Maine Compact for Higher Education, formed to make Maine's residents among the best educated in the nation by 2019, found that:

Today's "Knowledge Economy" rewards people who have college degrees and punishes those who do not. Since the early 1970s, people with college educations have lived in a world of expanding opportunities and growing incomes. Many people without college educations have faced dead-end jobs and stagnant incomes. The road to the American Dream now runs directly through college—there's no way around it.³

If we look at earnings and education, we find an astonishing relationship between educational achievement and earnings. The report Education Pays 2004 provides strong evidence of the link between postsecondary education and economic success:

- In 2003, full-time workers with four-year college degrees earned approximately 62 percent more than full-time workers with only a high school diploma. Americans with high school diplomas earned an average of \$30,800 a year, while those with bachelor's degrees averaged \$49,900 per year.
- Earnings for those with master's degrees were almost twice as much per year as for those with high school diplomas, and those with professional degrees earned over three times as much per year as high school graduates.
- Even those with some college experience but no degree earned almost 16 percent more than those with high school diplomas only, and earnings of adults with associate's degrees were approximately 22 percent more than those of high school graduates.

The graph on the right illustrates the economic benefit of a higher education degree. The impact higher education has on the unemployment rate is equally dramatic.

In Massachusetts, we see a similar relationship between education and earning. A study conducted by the Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, *State of the American Dream, Massachusetts, 2002*, looked at trends in the median real annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers by educational attainment in Massachusetts over the past two decades. The report notes that, during the 1980s, workers in

³ Maine Compact for Higher Education.

Earnings and Unemployment Rate by Education Level

(Earnings for year-round full time workers 25 years and over, unemployment rate for those 25 and over.)

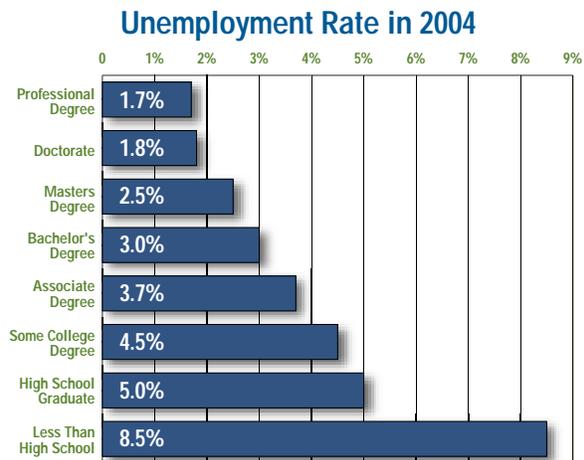
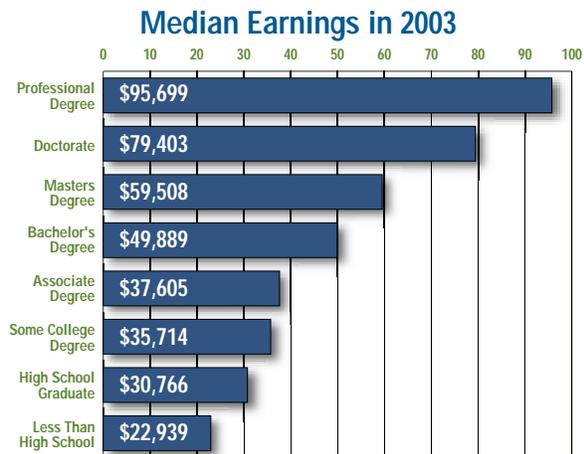




Photo courtesy of
North Adams
Regional Hospital.

Massachusetts in all educational subgroups, except those without a high school diploma, experienced income increases. However, during the 1990s, only those workers with a bachelor's degree or higher were able to improve their earnings. Workers without a high school diploma experienced severe decreases in income—a drop of 26 percent. By the year 2000, the study shows, “Workers with a master's or higher degree had achieved median annual earnings three times higher than their peers with less than a high school diploma.”

The same holds true for Berkshire County. In its 2004 report, *Treading Water in Quicksand*, the Center for Labor Studies found a strong link between the poverty rates of families and educational attainment within Berkshire County. While 17.7 percent of families headed by a householder with less than a high school diploma lived in poverty, and 8.2 percent of those with a high school diploma fell below the poverty level, only 6 percent of families headed by someone who had at least some college or an associate's degree had incomes below the poverty level.

A Postsecondary Education May be the Only Path to a Quality Job

Profound changes in the workplace have occurred over the last ten years. Fierce domestic and global competition has forced companies to adopt changes in the way they do business. The result is a dramatically different work environment, one that requires “high performance” from employees: teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, understanding systems, and effective written and oral communication. In this changing workplace, having a postsecondary education is increasingly important.

⁴ *Employment Outlook: Occupational Employment Projections to 2010*, Hecker, Daniel.

Recent data on workforce trends provides evidence of the growing importance of postsecondary education and training. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has estimated that by 2010, more than 42 percent of all jobs in the economy will require a vocational certificate, associate's degree, bachelor's degree, or higher. In 2000, only 29 percent of jobs required a postsecondary degree or vocational certificate. BLS also estimates that about 70 percent of the fastest growing occupations will require a postsecondary education.⁴ The BLS data also make it clear that most of the jobs for those without any type of postsecondary training will be low-wage jobs with limited opportunity for advancement.

There are Other Societal Benefits Related to a College Education

A February 2005 study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy, *The Investment Payoff*, provides evidence that there are numerous social benefits associated with having a large number of residents with a college degree. For example, 93 percent of individuals with a bachelor's degree reported being in excellent, very good, or good health as compared to only 82 percent with a high school degree. This study also found higher levels of volunteerism amongst college graduates and higher levels of political participation. The previously noted College Board study, *Education Pays*, reports that the federal government spends between \$800 and \$2,700 per year less on social programs for 30-year-old college graduates than for high school graduates of the same age, gender, and ethnicity. The incarceration rate of adults with some college education is about one-quarter of that for high school graduates.

What Are the Challenges We Face?

The National Picture

While there is growing consensus about the importance of a postsecondary education, there is widespread concern that significant barriers get in the way of completing a college degree. To succeed, an individual must:

- aspire toward college;
- be prepared for college;
- have resources to access college; and
- have the capacity to stay in college and complete a degree.

Nationally, minority and low-income students are disproportionately affected by these obstacles, leading to a growing disparity between middle-income and lower-income families when it comes to college completion rates.

In an op-ed piece in the September 25, 2005 edition of the *New York Times*, David Brooks cites a report on higher education recently completed by Thomas Mortenson of the Pell Institute. This report entitled, *The Study of Opportunity in Higher Education*, notes that “universities have done a wonderful job educating affluent kids since 1980. But they have done a terrible job of including those from the bottom half of the family income distribution. In this respect, higher education is now causing most of the growing inequality and strengthening the class structure of the United States.” Evidence suggests that given current trends, these disparities are only likely to increase (this has been a concern in Massachusetts given our ranking of being 47th in the nation in per capita spending on higher education).⁵

Even when students get to college, the challenges of remaining there are formidable. A recent report on K-16 reform notes:

*Nationally, 63% of students at two-year institutions and 40% of students at four year institutions take some remedial education. Only 34% of students who are required to take one remedial reading course complete a two- or four-year degree, compared with 56% of student who do not take a remedial course. About half of first year students at community colleges do not continue on for a second year. Approximately a quarter of first year students at four-year colleges do not stay for their second year.*⁶

This study concludes that it is the intensity and quality of the K-12 curriculum that is the best predictor of whether a student will go on to complete a bachelor's degree.

⁵ Investing in Our Future.

⁶ *The Governance Divide: A Report on a Four-State Study on Improving College Readiness and Success*, The Institute for Educational Leadership, The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, September 2005.

Even if the individual is able to overcome these challenges, he or she needs access to a K-16 system that must:

- have the resources and technological capacity to provide a quality education;
- have relationships with the business community and develop curricula to meet their workforce needs; and
- provide the supports needed to ensure that all students are able to succeed.

Significant challenges in Berkshire County may be constraining the economic success of the region and individuals who live in it.

The Picture in Berkshire County

In Berkshire County, we face a number of obstacles in achieving the goal of having every resident complete 16 years of education. Up to 35 percent of our labor force may lack even the most basic literacy skills necessary for the 21st century workplace. We are challenged by the out-migration of younger residents, lower levels of educational attainment, cutbacks in higher education funding, the arrival of new immigrant populations, and a workforce that exceeds statewide averages of those at or nearing retirement age.

The mismatch between the skills of local residents and the workforce needs of employers has meant that many good jobs are going unfilled. The Regional Employment Board reports current job vacancies, some of them professional, going unfilled due to lack of qualified applicants. In education, there are presently 22 teacher and 12 administrative positions unfilled; in manufacturing there are openings for 40 engineers, 25 machinists, and 40 technicians; and, in healthcare, the RN vacancy rate is 9.9 percent, the highest level in 14 years. As many as 3,000 jobs across the county, of varying levels of skill and compensation, are going unfilled. And, the changing structure of the Berkshire County economy puts new urgency into the need to raise the educational levels of its residents.

Let's take a more detailed look at how Berkshire County is faring in this New Economy, and in our efforts to respond to global challenges.

Berkshire County can do better with respect to higher education attainment.

A February 2004 report prepared by the Center for Labor Studies at Northeastern University entitled, *Assessment of Postsecondary Education Needs and Participation by Working Adults in the Berkshire LWIB*, indicates that Berkshire County residents are not keeping pace with the rest of the state when it comes to higher education degrees. The report notes that 42 percent of all working age, employed adults in the state of Massachusetts have a bachelor's degree or higher; in Berkshire County this figure is 30 percent. For lower-income adults, this figure is 12 percent.

Access to higher education presents a challenge for many Berkshire County residents.

A county-wide study conducted by Market Street Research showed residents perceive a primary barrier to higher education and employment training in the area to be a poor economy and limited employment opportunities. Forty-two percent of those interviewed for the study said financial constraints were a barrier—feeling that education and training programs carried with them costs that may be out of reach. Other factors cited were a lack of convenience and flexibility, child-care, transportation, and limited information/ counseling necessary to understand how one moves from high school or an adult basic education program to higher education.

Financial issues represent a particular challenge in Berkshire County because higher education simply may not be affordable to many residents. According to the Regional Employment Board of Berkshire County, average household incomes in Berkshire County are considerably lower than for Massachusetts as a whole. Over 28 percent of the households in the county earn less than \$25,000 per year, compared to approximately 23 percent for the state. At 83 percent of the Massachusetts average, wages in the county have not kept up with the rest of the state; the median household income in Berkshire County represents 77.3 percent of the state median. This figure fluctuates dramatically when one moves from north to south across the county, with a low of 54.7 percent of the state median in north county to 90.1 percent of the state median in south county.⁷

The Compact reviewed economic and demographic patterns in the region over the last 25 years, all of which indicate that the economy has been struggling. The decline of the county's manufacturing base has resulted in losses in population,

income, wages, wealth generating firms, and downtown commerce. Berkshire County thus ranks 11th out of the 14 counties in the state⁸ in terms of median income and poverty level.

Unemployment data are equally troubling, and this adds to the financial challenge. The unemployment rate for county residents in the 16-19 year old age group is 6.2 percent. And, while 31.7 percent of high school graduates are unemployed, the rate for individuals without a high school diploma is even higher, at 52.3 percent.⁹ While residents of some communities in Berkshire County are relatively prosperous, others are facing serious economic distress.

Too many Berkshire County residents lack a solid grounding in technology tools and technology skills, as well as an ability to apply those technology skills in the workplace.

Studies show that in healthcare and in education, employers are looking for workers who possess strong technical skills as well as advanced certificates and degrees. Similar to the rest of the nation, there is an increasing demand in Berkshire County for those with better math, computer, and engineering skills. In a survey of county employers by the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce and the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board, 50 percent of respondents agreed that employees need more training in computer skills. And the Market Street Research survey of county residents showed 50 percent of respondents expressing a need for additional training in technology.

Lack of technical expertise on the part of the workforce is compounded by certain deficiencies in the training sector. The Mt. Auburn review found that, while noting recent improvements, the K-12 school systems in some communities are perceived as lacking in technological sophistication. An additional weakness is a lack of access to post baccalaureate degrees in science and engineering.

With the emergence of new technology firms in software development, design, information technology, telecommunications, engineering, and animation, the need for workers with technology skills becomes even more important. The number of technology firms in the county grew from 77 to 154 between 1993 and 2000, and it now stands at 254 firms. During roughly the same period, employment in technology firms grew by 132 percent, from 507 employees to 1,177. To expand, these firms will require a pool of technologically-skilled workers from which to draw.

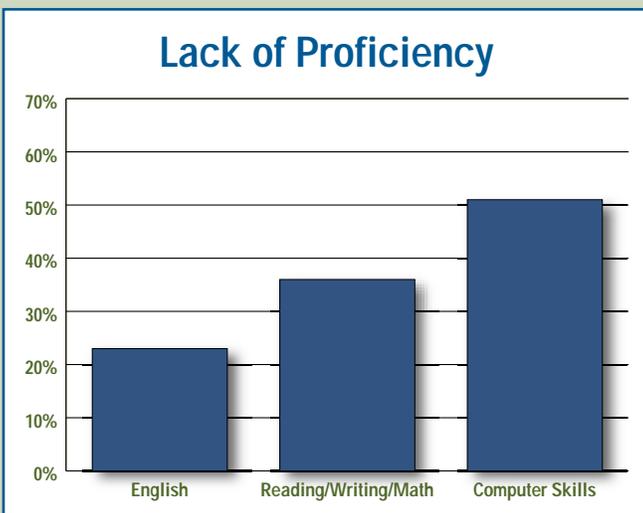
⁷ Lodestar II, page 2, U.S. Census 2000.

⁸ Source: Briefing Memorandum: Review of recent Berkshire County economic and workforce development plans (Mt. Auburn Associates).

⁹ Northern Berkshire County—The Community of Focus—Census 2000 Summary Profile by Miser.

Berkshire County employers are concerned that the local workforce lacks even basic skills.

The Berkshire Regional Competitiveness Council (RCC) found that employers are concerned that members of the workforce lack even the most basic of skills, including literacy. In a recent survey conducted by the Berkshire County Regional Employment Board and the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce of 100 county businesses, it was reported that many companies are having difficulty finding workers to match employers' current and projected needs. While, at present, this has not seriously affected their ability to remain in the region, over 40 percent of companies reported the inability to find qualified workers is likely to affect their ability to grow and expand within the county. The skills most reported to be lacking included reading, writing, math, and computer skills.¹⁰



Workplaces are not static—as industries change and technologies evolve, skill demand changes, too. A need exists in healthcare and education for more technically-trained and skilled workers and for workers with advanced degrees and certificates; the hospitality and retail sectors require individuals with better communication skills, customer service skills, and computer skills; the advanced manufacturing sector needs employees with better skills in math, computer science, engineering, and teamwork.¹¹

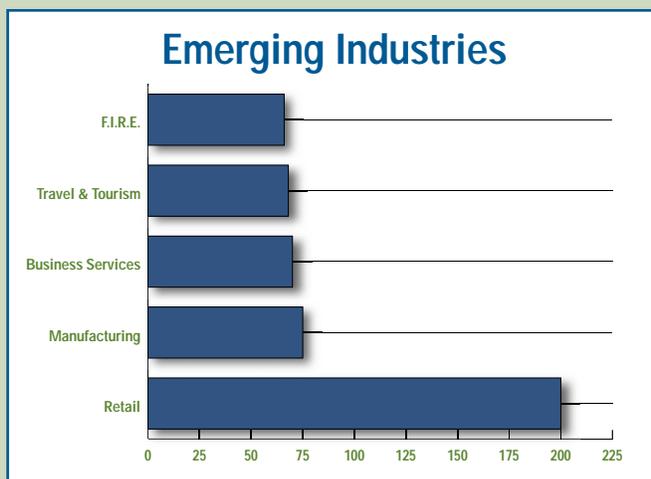
Largest Employers

- Berkshire Health Systems
- Berkshire Life Insurance Company of America
- GE Advanced Materials
- General Dynamics
- Crane & Co., Inc.
- Canyon Ranch of the Berkshires
- Country Curtains
- Williams College
- J.H. Maxymillian, Inc.
- MeadWestvaco
- Hillcrest Educational Centers, Inc.
- Jiminy Peak, The Mountain Resort
- Petricca Industries
- Northern Berkshire Health Systems
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- Schweitzer-Mauduit International, Inc.
- Simon's Rock College of Bard

Despite the difficult challenges listed, research shows great potential for growth and employment.

The REB reports that the largest employers, which represent about 20 percent of regional jobs, provide generally good paying jobs with opportunities for advancement.

The REB also projects increased employment opportunities in certain industries during the next 3-5 years. These include retail (electronics and appliance, sporting goods, hobby, book, music, and building material/garden supply stores); manufacturing (fabricated metal products, nonmetallic mineral, and chemical); business services (administrative and support services); travel and tourism (accommodation and food service); finance, insurance, and real estate.



¹⁰ Berkshire County Workforce—Berkshire County Regional Employment Board/Berkshire Chamber of Commerce Presentation, February 18, 2005.

¹¹ Briefing Memorandum: Review of recent Berkshire County economic and workforce development plans (Mt. Auburn Associates).

And the REB expects growth in a range of occupations. The following chart shows expected new jobs by 2012. Some are entry-level, but most require postsecondary training:

• Office & Administrative Support Occupations	9,770
• Food Preparation & Serving Related Occupations	7,735
• Sales & Related Occupations	6,891
• Education, Training & Library Occupations	4,630
• Management Occupations	4,174
• Healthcare Practitioners & Technical Occupations	3,290
• Production Occupations	3,105
• Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance Occupations	2,900
• Construction & Extraction Occupations	2,750
• Transportation & Material Moving Occupations	2,702

In keeping with the findings of other research efforts, the Compact recognizes that the “creative economy” in Berkshire County is an area of potential business and employment growth. The county is rich with artistic, literary, and other creative talent. The Berkshires are, in fact, one of the nation’s premiere cultural destinations, with more than a dozen world-class arts and cultural institutions, including the Clark Art Institute, MASS MoCA, Williams College Museum of Art, Tanglewood, Hancock Shaker Village, Berkshire Museum, Norman Rockwell Museum, Barrington Stage, Berkshire and Williamstown Theatre Festivals, and Shakespeare & Company, among many others. Berkshire County’s Creative Economy is responsible for the creation of a substantial number of jobs in both the private and nonprofit sectors. As this segment of the economy develops, it is important to ensure that Berkshire County residents have the skills needed to access creative sector jobs.

Educational institutions in Berkshire County need greater support to better meet resident and business needs.

Both the K-12 and the public higher education system in Berkshire County are challenged as they seek to create a system with the capacity to ensure that all students are able to complete at least 16 years of education. Success in this regard is critical to the county’s economic and civic future. However, as noted in a 2005 Gates Foundation, Manhattan Institute Study, our high schools are falling behind in preparing a majority of students for college. The study noted that, nationally, only 34 percent of all students graduating with the class of 2002 had completed the minimum coursework required for admission to a four-year college—in Massachusetts, the number was 38 percent.¹²

Many of the challenges faced in education are as a result of resource constraints. Massachusetts has not measured up when it comes to state spending on public higher education. In fact, it is the only state in the nation spending less on public higher education than it did a decade ago.¹³ Between 2001 and 2004, funding for public higher education in the state was reduced by 32.6 percent (adjusted for inflation), representing the largest decrease in state funding across the country. Closer to home, this has translated into cuts of nearly \$1.8 million for BCC, and \$2.5 million for MCLA.

Lack of financial support for public higher education has placed stress upon students seeking access to college and the institutions that serve them. Opening doors wider to find new ways to serve Berkshire County residents, the community and employers will require a new commitment—one that regards higher education as an investment, not an expense.

At the same time higher education spending has been cut, the K-12 system has also experienced shortfalls. Across the commonwealth, 64 percent of the school districts report receiving less aid now than they did two years ago. In Berkshire County, some communities report as much as a 20 percent reduction in Chapter 70 funding. There is also growing concern about the pending shortage of teachers to replace the ranks of those retiring. Superintendents in Berkshire County, already concerned with financial and staffing challenges, are confronting issues of deferred building maintenance, increased transportation costs, students with significant learning and social challenges, and escalating costs of health insurance, all coupled with greater demands for accountability and data reporting. These conditions, not exclusive to Berkshire County, cause concern about fulfilling a commitment to ensure that our children receive a high quality, future-oriented education, one that prepares them for success beyond grade 12.

¹² *Boston Sunday Globe Magazine*, August 28, 2005.

¹³ *Investing in Our Future: Report of the Massachusetts Senate Task Force of Public Higher Education*, March 2005.

Our Response: The Berkshire Compact for Higher Education

The road to success for Berkshire County travels through our educational institutions. There is no refuting that the more one learns, the more one earns, and that higher levels of education translate into higher levels of community participation, well-being, and self-sufficiency.

The Berkshire Compact supports the contention that to make progress we must invest in a strong educational continuum, one that encourages and rewards innovation, raises aspirations, ensures access, values lifelong learning, and takes advantage of the doors that can be opened, or widened, through the use of technology. To ensure our success, we have identified four primary goals and an array of strategies for realizing those goals.

These strategies are meant to sharpen our focus and to develop a shared understanding of challenges and opportunities. They serve to inform the important work that lies ahead as we find ways to meet our goals. We have challenged ourselves to be at once bold in our thinking and certain that we must develop approaches that result in long-term improvements that are sustainable and measurable. The status quo simply is not acceptable. However, while we respond to current, urgent needs, we must continue to focus on emerging needs and new possibilities. As Thomas Friedman reminds us, “We must find ways to absorb rapid changes in ways that do not overwhelm and do not leave people behind.” (46)

GOAL ONE: Raise the aspirations of all Berkshire County residents to view 16 years of education, or greater, as the accepted educational norm.

At the moment, far too many county residents have the attainment of a high school diploma as their ultimate educational goal. For the reasons clearly noted above, aspirations must change, and must be raised to a higher level. Consequently, we are encouraging all residents to aspire to a higher education degree as the new educational norm. To help us achieve that goal, we recommend the following strategies.



Strategies

1. **Change the culture that accepts a high school degree as the educational endpoint.** The focus of this strategy should be on all families and individuals in the county especially those with little or no exposure to, or history with, the higher education system. Those who are not familiar and comfortable with higher education frequently have the most difficulty aspiring to a college degree; they face too many unknowns and barriers, and these unknowns and barriers often act as a brake on aspirations. We can counter many of these adverse dynamics by focusing on the culture and taking appropriate actions. Examples of potential activities to change this culture include:
 - Develop a marketing effort focused on creating a culture of “lifelong learning” in Berkshire County. This county-wide education campaign would be targeted at families, current K-12 students, and individuals who have left the education system, stressing the value of higher education and messages such as: “The more you learn, the more you earn.” Enlist the leadership of key organizations in the county, such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Berkshire County School Counselors Association, to broadcast the message.
 - Target educational materials on lifelong learning to low-income and working class families. These materials would focus specifically on breaking down cultural barriers and fostering appreciation for what a college education can provide.



2. **Structure the K-12 educational experience so that more students aspire to higher education and more students are better prepared to make the transition to higher education.** In many ways, the educational aspirations of students are formed in the K-12 system. Those students who have the right motivation, access to the right educational supports and resources, and the experience at success along the way, are much more likely to further their education. Therefore, it is critically important to ensure a solid educational experience for Berkshire County students, and ample early-stage support and resources as they move through the educational continuum. We can enhance the K-12 educational experience by taking the right actions, including:
 - Establish Pre K-16 Councils for students, principals, teachers, counselors, and employers to address performance gaps and to develop strategies to raise achievement levels.
 - Expand programs such as Project Connect and Project Link that provide counseling, pre-college classes, and college credit for students as they transition from high school or Adult Basic Education to college.
 - Encourage aggressive action in schools, including remedial support and counseling, to strengthen the academic performance of at-risk students.
 - Support successful best practices based upon the national model, High Schools that Work. This includes Skills USA and Project Lead the Way.

3. **Give students more opportunities to understand the ways in which a solid educational foundation pays dividends in the world of work.** Another means of raising aspirations is to offer students concrete opportunities to learn how an education (the higher the better) translates into tangible benefits with respect to work and income. Therefore, we believe that exposing students, early and often, to the Berkshire County economy, to key sectors and employers, as well as to the kinds of careers that are available to them, will result in increased aspirations to further their education beyond high school. Examples of the kind of activities we hope to encourage are:
 - Strengthen and expand paid internship, co-op programs, and job shadowing opportunities, in which students can discover firsthand what opportunities lie ahead for them in the Berkshire County economy. From these experiences, students will also understand the breadth of the employers and sectors that make up the region's economic base.
 - Create more sustained business-education partnerships in which county employers take active and visible roles in the elementary and secondary schools throughout the county. Having employers participate, for example, in curriculum development, the creation of work-related academies, and the development of work-based learning programs, would give students a better appreciation for the relationship and interplay between education, work, and careers.
 - Develop teacher externships that place teachers in different workplaces and environments in the county. These experiences have proven to be valuable, both for teachers and students, because the experience helps teachers to better integrate "world-of-work" issues and knowledge into the curriculum.
 - Create programs that connect individual students with professionals in the workplace. Students can observe professionals in the workplace, and professionals can be brought to the classrooms. The summer program at Fairview Hospital and the STEM Project are local examples of intensive relationship building between students and professionals.

GOAL TWO: Improve access to education, training, and lifelong learning.

The Compact has identified barriers—both real and perceived—to accessing education and training programs. Included among them are transportation and childcare, cost and convenience, government/programmatic rules and regulations, as well as relevance to professional advancement or personal growth. Of the barriers, cost is amongst the most significant. Recent cuts in student aid programs make higher education more expensive, which is a substantial burden in a regional economy like the Berkshire economy, where wages and income are lower than other parts of the state. Competing demands on municipal budgets often mean less funding for schools, which has contributed to increasing and reinforcing the cost barrier. Although not an issue unique to Berkshire County, the compact must also work to advance strategies that help support increased funding for the P – 16 educational systems.

The first step, identifying the barriers, has been taken. Strategies to address these barriers follow.

Strategies

1. **Provide all residents with increased opportunities to attend college through the development of a Berkshire County Higher Education Passport.** Just as the geography of Berkshire County represents a challenge, it also represents a unique environment that can foster collaboration and creative approaches to problem solving. The public schools, business community, and higher educational institutions could develop an innovative effort that provides students with an iterative path leading to a postsecondary education. Students could achieve small steps along a pathway, get “credit” for these steps, and eventually receive increased financial support in their effort to attend college.
 - Establish a Berkshire County Higher Education Passport that could lead to both alternative tuition and fee structure for county residents as well as scholarships to attend college.
 - Formalize a 6th grade visitation program. Develop a well-coordinated, cooperative effort between all higher education and K-12 institutions across the county. Set aside one day per year where every 6th grader in the county visits a campus on the same day. Participating students would get the first “stamp” on their Passport.
2. **Develop innovative ways to reach residents.** Residents perceive that the poor economy and limited employment opportunities present barriers to higher education and employment training. They perceive that there is little, if any, relationship between professional development and career advancement. Many also consider higher education and employment training costs to be excessive, or they may lack even the most basic information about resources available and how best to access them. Increased education costs, combined with financial insecurity, create a strong perception that further education or training is out of reach.
 - Provide students with credits on their Passport for such activities as attending summer enrichment programs, attendance record at school, participation in college guidance activities, accomplishments/improvements on the MCAS exams, as well as other small, but important steps.
 - Create a *Welcome to College* website aimed at reaching adults without a college education. This website would be a comprehensive source of information on eligibility requirements, financial aid, and college preparation supports and resources that are available to help. This website would also include information on employment opportunities, the skills required to be competitive, and compensation levels.
 - Create a *Learn Close to Home* initiative that provides increased access to online learning, as well as classes held at local public schools. In a rural region such as Berkshire County, it is critical to address barriers associated with lack of convenience. Physical access points must be more broadly distributed across the county and technology must be used more aggressively. There is a high degree of interest in education or training that can be delivered through the combination of in-person and online classes, particularly among younger, minority, newer, and more affluent residents. Findings reveal substantial interest in training either solely online, via videoconferencing, or through an accelerated learning program. Residents also indicated they would consider it highly convenient if classes they wanted were offered at a local elementary or high school.



3. **Allow all residents to have greater access across the educational landscape in Berkshire County.** Berkshire County has a rich educational infrastructure. To meet the needs of all residents, it is important that students in the county have access to these resources no matter where they live.
 - Expand and strengthen the Dual Enrollment program in which high school students concurrently earn college credit and high school units.
 - Strengthen the Courtesy Student program at MCLA enabling local high school students the opportunity to enroll in a credit course at no charge.
 - Explore ways to better transition Berkshire County residents from BCC to MCLA through programs that guarantee admission, class selections, credit, and scholarships. Programs would encourage completion of the associate's degree with a seamless transition to the bachelor's degree.
 - Develop flexibility within the K-12 school day that would allow students to travel from one school to another for certain programs, allowing them to graduate from their home school districts.
4. **Develop a targeted campaign with employers focused on working adults who have no higher education experience.** The issues about access to higher education should not be limited to the region's youth. There are many residents of Berkshire County currently in the workforce who have not completed a postsecondary education. Expanding their access to higher education would not only improve their economic opportunities, but would also benefit Berkshire County employers, who often are unable to fill many positions requiring more advanced education.
 - Create incentives for employers to help Berkshire County workers earn a college degree through expanded tuition relief, reimbursement programs, time off from work for college, on-site counseling, bonuses for courses completed, increased distance learning opportunities, and stock options for earned degrees. Invest in scholarship programs for employees who enroll at MCLA and BCC.
 - Create opportunities for residents to gain credit for some life learning experiences. For example, expand, strengthen, and support Prior Learning/Experiential Credit, current programs offered by Berkshire County public higher education institutions that award academic credit for life and work experience.
 - Develop a skills certificate initiative in the county that would utilize assessment and evaluation of skills ascertained through employment, thus validating the skill base. This certificate could be part of the employee application for employment and/or a path toward higher education.

GOAL THREE: Make Berkshire County a competitive location for the new technology and knowledge-based economy; make Berkshire County residents among the most technologically educated population in New England.

Virtually every employer in this country requires an increasingly sophisticated set of technology skills. Companies depend on technology for everything from reducing costs to enhancing productivity and competitiveness. Also, nearly all jobs and occupations have a strong technological component, from simple computer use, to more advanced graphic design and data manipulation. They also depend upon a well educated, skilled workforce that is adept at problem solving and critical thinking, a workforce that uses technology as a tool to advance innovation and help secure a competitive edge. Berkshire County can distinguish itself in the new economy by developing a population skilled in the integration and application of technology and, in so doing, become a competitive location for technology-based economic sectors and companies. To help us achieve this goal, we recommend the following strategies.

Strategies

1. **Make county residents more aware of emerging and new technology-oriented economic sectors in Berkshire County, and the need for higher levels of technology skills and education.** Most Berkshire County residents realize that the manufacturing base, once the foundation of the region’s economy, has



declined considerably, no longer being the economic engine it once was. Many county residents, however, are not fully aware of the profound shifts that are taking place, e.g., how technology has transformed the workforce, and how technology-oriented firms and enterprises will be the new foundation of the county’s economy. We can inform residents of these new economic dynamics, and help them see the relationship between technology occupations and higher education, through programs and activities like the following.

- Develop a high-visibility information campaign directed to students, parents, teachers, and guidance counselors about occupations and careers in technology-oriented sectors, such as advanced engineering, healthcare (e.g., radiology, computerized billing systems), information technology, software development, and the cultural economy (e.g., animation and graphic design).
 - Structure internships for high school and college students in new technology-oriented firms in the county. The internships should be directed to giving students familiarity with the firms and technologies that are driving the new economy.
 - Provide employer-based technology learning experiences for teachers and guidance counselors within firms in emerging and new economic sectors. To the extent that teachers and counselors are educated about the changes in the county economy and the emphasis on technology, students will be better informed and prepared for jobs in the new economy.
2. **Give K-12 students more intensive technology-oriented learning experiences.** As noted above, the major economic drivers of the Berkshire economy make extensive use of technology in their operations. And all of them depend upon a workforce that is comfortable with and skilled in various forms of technology. In effect, the future of the Berkshire County economy will be linked inextricably to the technological talents and skills of county residents. This is why this strategy focusing on providing students with a good, solid foundation in technology education and skills development is so important. To implement this strategy, activities and programs like the following will be undertaken.

- Expand existing Academies to include specialized technology labs and programs that reflect emerging and new technology-oriented sectors. For example, broaden the National Academy Foundation programs in Pittsfield to include a focus on other technology sectors, and establish similar programs in other school districts in the county.
 - Create technology applications learning opportunities for middle school, high school, and college students in the county; also create multiple entry points for students to learn about technology, from the early elementary level to middle and high school and beyond.
 - Develop more collaborations and partnerships between the schools and colleges and firms in the emerging and new sectors. For example, encourage CEOs from firms in these sectors to be involved in curriculum development in the schools and colleges, as well as in the selection of technology and equipment that is used for teaching in the schools and colleges.
 - Use the Berkshire Wireless Initiative as a tool for learning technology and the application of technology in these new economic areas.
3. **Put a more effective and county-wide technological infrastructure in place.** Currently, the technological “infrastructure” in the county is uneven, that is, some cities and towns have broadband Internet access and others do not. Some school systems are “wired” and equipped with advanced technology while others lag behind. Many upper- and moderate-income homes have up-to-date computer technology while low income homes and families do not. We cannot expect current or succeeding generations of students to gain a higher level of technology skills if the “infrastructure” has so many gaps. Therefore, we suggest activities and initiatives, like the following, to strengthen the county’s technological capability.
- Build upon the success of Berkshire Connect to bring high-speed Internet access to individuals and businesses in communities, while further developing the telecommunications infrastructure so that access is uniformly available throughout the entire county. Where necessary, implement regulatory reform to require broadband access throughout the county.

- Significantly expand online learning opportunities for adult and postsecondary students so that residents in the county will become more comfortable and skilled in the use of technology, and access to higher education will become easier.
- Use the visionary and entrepreneurial approach of the Berkshire Wireless Initiative to bring computer technology into more low-income homes in the county. The same combination of corporate and public funds will be needed and, if successful, the impact upon technology use and skills among this demographic of the county could be profound.

GOAL FOUR: Develop a new “social contract” among employers, employees, and educational institutions that encourages and promotes learning, earning, and civic engagement.

As the demographics across the county continue to change, the number one concern expressed by employers is access to a well-prepared, well-educated, innovative workforce. We are challenged by the emigration of younger residents, lower levels of educational attainment, a reduction in higher education funding, new immigrant populations, and a workforce that exceeds statewide averages of those at or nearing retirement age.

Berkshire County’s new and emerging economy no longer is dominated by large manufacturing companies. Rather, the contemporary economy is characterized by small- to mid-size businesses in technology, specialty manufacturing, travel and tourism, arts and culture, and healthcare, to name a few. This emerging, increasingly knowledge-based and technology-oriented economy brings with it new opportunities and challenges, and will demand skills and educational levels different from those that may have been a foundation for success in earlier times.

Berkshire County needs to think innovatively and boldly about ways to better integrate training and educational opportunities to meet the needs of employers and employees. To help us achieve this goal, the following strategies are recommended.



Photo courtesy of Interprint, Inc.

Strategies

1. **Increase the pool of potential workers.** In a report recently released by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation, which examined the reliance of New England states on college and universities to sustain their populations and their workforce, the authors concluded: “We must understand college students as a key wellspring of our future population growth, forcing us to rethink and expand our conception of higher education institutions as not only sources of innovation and technology, but also as future worker attractors.”
 - In career fairs, include a component addressing skills and credentials necessary to prepare current residents for positions available in the county. Create a greater linkage with the public educational institutions to advise programs on pathways to address these skills (MCLA, BCC, BCREB, etc.).

- Identify sectors in the county that will experience the greatest shortage of employees. Charge a task force consisting of representatives from public higher education, secondary schools, the Chamber, the REB, healthcare, relevant academy programs, etc. with developing a plan to address timelines, resources, and educational requirements to fill these needs.
- Expand the National Academy Foundation in Berkshire County. Each academy has a “school within a school,” an industry validated curriculum, comprehensive staff development, paid student internships, and local advisory boards.

2. Increase the skill levels and preparedness of the existing workforce.

- Identify small, medium-sized businesses and develop strategies to help their businesses grow. Tailor professional development and training programs to their needs, which may differ from the needs of larger companies, while being respectful of limited time to release workers, small staff, and limited resources. The Berkshire Applied Technology Council provides an effective model worth emulating.
- Expand and strengthen initiatives that provide meaningful and comprehensive workforce training at the employment site, such as the Mead/Westvaco practices. Further enhance and continue to create “in-plant” university sites for training such as MCLA’s Life-long Learning program at General Dynamics.

3. Promote continuous learning—help match educational programs with changing/emerging employment needs.

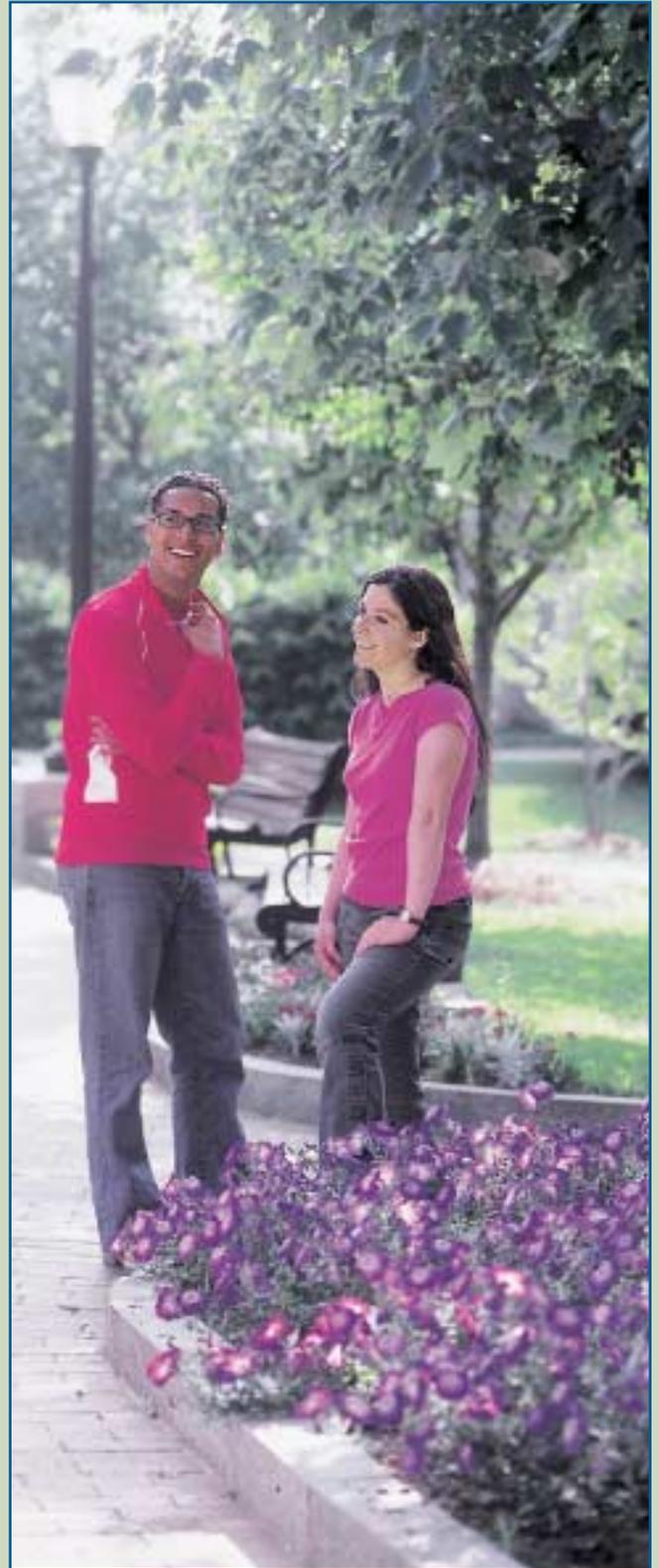
- Berkshire Employers can contribute to the “pipeline” by offering scholarship programs to MCLA and BCC, and developing paid internship programs that link to academy programs as well as higher education.
- Understand the needs of both employers and employees. Enhance collaboration between education and business institutions, creating a seamless “pipeline” from elementary school to employment.

Looking Ahead

The work of the Compact thus far has been essential to identifying barriers and opportunities; however, there is little doubt that there is much to be done. The Compact supports the premise that, to be successful as employers, as a county, as a Commonwealth, and as a people, we must invest in educational programs and opportunities to support a lifetime of learning and growth.

This report serves merely as a starting point. Now, the real work begins. The author Daniel Pink refers to our times as the age of “art and heart,” a time in which one of the greatest tools we have is our ability to work creatively. Not only must we work creatively, we must work collaboratively. This emerging, increasingly collaborative economy brings with it new opportunities and challenges, which will demand skills and educational levels different from those that may have been a foundation for success in earlier times.

The Compact has identified a range of strategies, now our challenge is to identify the means by which we advance these strategies and lay the ground work for success. Important next steps include developing action plans and tactics as well as benchmarks to measure our progress. The work ahead—raising aspirations, increasing access, advancing technology, and supporting the workforce—will take a renewed commitment to collaboration, it will demand new partnerships, and it will require an investment of resources. The work ahead is critical to securing a bright and sustainable future for the county and it promises to be both exciting and rewarding.



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(comprehensive)

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