

8.E.1 Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) Overview

Nearly two-thirds of all new jobs projected to be created between 2000 and 2010 will require high levels of technical and problem-solving skills. Too many workers in the Midwest lack the skills and credentials to fill those jobs. For Midwest workers and employers addressing this mismatch is becoming an economic imperative.

A new, state-of-the-art approach to addressing this problem is gaining national recognition. Called “career pathways,” this approach connects education and training programs and support services to enable people to secure employment within a specific industry, and to advance over time to successively higher levels of education and employment in that sector. Reorganizing Midwest adult education to create effective career pathways for today’s workforce is the focus of the Joyce Foundation's Shifting Gears Initiative.

A two-year \$1 million Joyce “Shifting Gears” grant will help the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Wisconsin Technical College System (WTCS) marshal the staff resources, additional outside expertise, and new training curricula needed to bring promising “career pathways” models to the state. Regional Industry Skills Education (RISE) is a joint initiative of DWD and WTCS that will seek to make “career pathways” a core organizing principle for adult education and workforce development in key Wisconsin industries by striving to establish more effective connections between improved worker skills and higher wage jobs. RISE will support efforts to boost the skills and job prospects of low-income working adults by better aligning education and workforce services with employer needs.

Wisconsin's vision for the RISE initiative (See Attachment 1) and the initial steps to stimulate the change to career pathways-oriented systems began with a series of regional “discovery” meetings. The first of those meetings was held at the Southwest Wisconsin Technical College. The “discovery” meetings have revealed a wealth of resources already available and helped clarify the challenges facing a career pathways agenda. These include program silos, conflicting mandates and incentives, competition for funding, duplication of services, and the sheer complexity of programs confronting service providers, working learners and employers alike.

Meeting participants also noted specific institutional and financial obstacles to the flexible, modularized training at the core of the career pathways concept. Changes in institutional culture, attitudes towards change and approaches to cooperation across program areas will be needed. The most important aspect of these meeting; however, is the fact that representatives of the workforce development and technical College systems have engaged in discussions about current practices that will translate well into a career pathways strategy.

Amy Charles and Bob Borremans will present an overview of the RISE project and how it will relate to workforce development systems and SWWDB activities.