

# OCCASIONAL PAPER 3

## **BUILDING A BETTER ST. LOUIS: THE HOPE AND THE PROMISE OF THE REGIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND WORK**

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Dr. Schmitz's paper was presented at the official launch of the Regional Center for Education and Work (RCEW).

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What is the greatest hope of every citizen of St. Louis? Every person wants a high quality of life for themselves and for their family.

And, what is the prerequisite of a high quality of life? Surely, it is a thriving economy.

And, what is the prerequisite of a thriving economy? A plentiful and highly qualified workforce!

And, what is the prerequisite of a plentiful and highly qualified workforce? Clearly, it is a high quality post baccalaureate system.

And you guessed it! What is the prerequisite to a high quality post baccalaureate system? A high quality PreK-12 system.

And the prerequisite to a high quality PreK-12 system? You know the answer - good teachers, counselors, principals . . . good educators!

A thriving economy, probably more than any other factor, undergirds a region's high quality of life. Thriving economies depend on an abundant and well prepared workforce. With 52 percent of Missouri's business payroll, the St. Louis region's economic health is critical to Missouri (Peirce Report 1997). Political leaders and urban planners alike have recognized the need for the St. Louis bi-state region to find ways of working together to benefit the entire metro area. The 1997 St. Louis Peirce Report placed widespread regional collaboration at the top of the list for success in workforce development.

"The first question is whether the whole region -- including the city and all 11 counties -- can agree on one path, instead of flying off in multiple directions in that all-too-familiar St. Louis way."

This multiple direction approach leads to inaction - the so called "St. Louis way." Let me give you some examples of the "St. Louis way:"

1. Independently developed data that are used solely for workforce development, economic development, or education discourages collaboration. These data produce different results due to different criteria, and the information is seldom shared.
2. Inconsistent use and interpretation of data causes isolation in the workforce development planning process. There has always been plenty of data, but because of complicated formats and lack of training on how to use and interpret the information, it becomes useful only to a limited audience.

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**Pre K-12 education is the largest and most powerful workforce development system we have.**

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3. Workforce development and PreK-12 education are often viewed as two unrelated systems. Both systems are blamed for all the unprepared employee problems, and both end up blaming each other.
4. "Turf protection" and changing politics discourage any consistent forum for workforce development.
5. Changing and differing political affiliations stretch a virtual "tightrope" for workforce planning groups to walk when applying for state and federal funding.
6. There has been a continuous struggle for "who" will have the "oversight" in workforce and economic development, and even education. The more productive and cost efficient alternative is to use the existing experts -- from executives to production workers -- in a team approach to address core issues. It is also the most difficult because it involves a change from the status quo to a more consensus building approach.

Pre K-12 education is the largest and most powerful workforce development system we have. As the largest producer of new teachers in Missouri, the College of Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis has taken a leading role in fostering regional collaboration in workforce development. In doing so, the College is taking action on one of the St. Louis Peirce Report's strongest recommendations. "The region needs to enlist the region's best minds, starting with the universities. The deepest vein of underused resources in the St. Louis region lies in its colleges and universities. Collectively, with their 5,000 faculty members and 150,000 students, these institutions ought to have enough firepower to perform intellectual surgery on the region's problems, and then take an active role in the cure."

It is really quite logical for UM-St. Louis be involved as a catalyst to link workforce development with education because we supply the MOST teachers and other education in the region AND we also supply the largest number of employees with degrees WHO REMAIN in the region -- both undergraduate and graduate. This fall, a \$1.4 million grant to the UM-St. Louis College of Education from the Department of Labor will formally create the Regional Center for Education and Work (RCEW). A \$350,000 grant from the State of Missouri also supports this new Center. The nucleus of the RCEW builds on the University's intellectual infrastructure and unprecedented community partnerships that the University and its College of Education have created in recent years.

Partners in the RCEW are many and include regional representatives from Workforce Investment Boards; the St. Louis Regional Education Park housed at UM-St. Louis; the St. Louis School-to-Work Network; the St. Louis RCGA's Workforce development team; the state sponsored Labor and Education Market Analysis Project; the University's Public Policy Research Center; and the State Literacy Resource Center's Workplace Literacy Project.

The RCEW offers a wealth of intellectual resources and technological connections to promote information sharing. With a philosophy of "think globally and act locally," the Center is designed to produce widely accessible resources and services for workforce development professionals throughout the bi-state region. It offers a neutral forum where these groups can come to agreement on:

1. Deriving standardized workforce development data and information
2. Creating ways that information can be used to benefit both local and regional development
3. Determining multiple methods to deliver workforce development information in modes that benefit each of the constituencies in workforce development

The RCEW is part of the region's new Workforce Development Policy Group, co-facilitated by the Regional Chamber and Growth Association and the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council. This group constitutes a genuine, far-reaching association of experts who represent a critical piece of workforce development that has the potential to become a truly collaborative endeavor in setting policies that lead to an abundant, well prepared workforce for our region. With its fresh approach to promoting cooperative workforce development, the RCEW is poised to serve the Policy Group's effort with multiple resources and expertise.

Most would agree that previous attempts at workforce development planning for the region have been relatively limited and often have reflected the fragmented nature of the St. Louis metro area. Political leaders, pollsters, and urban planners alike have recognized the need for the St. Louis bi-state region to find ways of working together to benefit the entire metro-area. Some, such as the Peirce Report, placed widespread regional collaboration at the top of the list for the region's future progress.

The Workforce Development Policy Group constitutes a genuine, far-reaching collaboration as suggested by the Peirce Report. Each of its members represents a critical piece of workforce development -- transportation, education, economic development, job training, social services, business, labor, government and more. Each partner has an equal voice in the Policy Group's decision making. And every representative brings to the table critical workforce development resources to be shared for results that will far exceed what members could accomplish unilaterally.

The Workforce Investment Act recognizes and reinforces the unmistakable connections among government, economic development, workforce development and education. Jointly developed by the US Department of Labor and the US Department of Education, the act firmly ties workforce development directly with education -- including K-12 education. As a collaboration, the St. Louis region's Workforce Development Policy Group reflects these important associations. The significance of its broad based membership is outlined below.

As the region's Metropolitan Planning Organization the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council brings important perspectives from the region's local elected officials as well as extensive resources and expertise in regional planning and transportation.

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The Regional Chamber and Growth Association brings the voices of business and labor to the table. Its work in expanding business in the region brings resources from economic development professionals at the state and local levels. The Work Keys work skills assessment and job analysis system, used throughout the nation, provides a means for matching skills to jobs.

The Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) in the region come to the planning table as the true workhorses of workforce development. They are the units that provide the services to put unemployed people in jobs. As part of their goal to avoid duplication of programs and services, the WIBs have met over the last year and a half in a Regional Skills Consortium, with the RCGA, UM St. Louis College of Education, UM-St. Louis Public Policy Research Center, the St. Louis Labor Council, and others to develop a comprehensive Regional Skills Gap Analysis. Their analysis will develop a database for collecting information that will be used by the Regional Workforce Development Policy Group, and become available for all organizations, schools and individuals with a need to know which work skills are in high demand in the area.

The group benefits from a wealth of resources, research capabilities and expertise from the University of Missouri-St. Louis College of Education and the University's Public Policy Research Center, which focuses its research on the bi-state area. As the largest producer of new teachers in the state of Missouri, the College of Education has taken a leading role in connecting education with work.

The UM-St. Louis College of Education and its partners in the RCEW will produce widely accessible resources, data, forums and services for workforce development professionals, educators, counselors and job seekers throughout the bi-state region.

Complementing both the RCEW and the Policy Group, the UM-St. Louis Public Policy Research Group is currently developing an innovative Workforce Information System. Supported by both the City and County of St. Louis, this project will produce and maintain a region wide, interactive, single source data base for employers, employees, trainers, and educators. The web based data base will be available to users by next Spring. The system will also track important changes in the regional economy and highlight important regional policy issues in such areas as transportation, education, culture, etc.

The RCEW will be scheduling more intensive meetings in the future to explain the various initiatives in more detail and seek input from stakeholders and partners, and explore where there might be appropriate links or opportunities to share more information and create win-win situations.

This I know! Under the leadership of Chancellor Touhill, the University of Missouri-St. Louis WILL BE a major partner in workforce development and workforce enhancement for this community, the St. Louis we all love so much. Let us take stock today. Collaboratively, we CAN make a difference in the quality of life for the St. Louis community. Let's work together to create a 21st Century St. Louis that will have no equal.

In the final analysis, is there any compelling reason why we would not work together for the betterment of OUR St. Louis? Let history reveal, collaboratively, we will fulfill the dream. How could we do anything less than our best to fulfill the promise of St. Louis.

One hundred and eighty some years ago, Lewis and Clark made St. Louis the "Gateway to the West." Let's work together to make St. Louis the "Gateway to the World," the "Gateway to the Future."

Look out world. This is the St. Louis century!

**LIVABLE communities don't just HAPPEN.  
They are CREATED by the PEOPLE who LIVE in them.**