SENATE . . . . . No. 2206

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Twelve

An Act establishing a middle-skills council and the creation of regional skills academies in the Commonwealth.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1. A middle-skills council is hereby established to make recommendations to increase the readiness for and success of working adults and other non-traditional students in education and training for jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree. The recommendations shall focus on how to increase the number of adults with these middle-skills and middle-skills credentials that meet the commonwealth's long-term labor market needs.

The council shall establish baseline data on the commonwealth's "middle-skills gap", the gap between the skills held by the commonwealth's workers and the skills needed by its employers for jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree. The council may draw upon the work of the vision project of the department of higher education and other data sources as appropriate.

The council shall examine the feasibility and impact of making changes to adult basic education, developmental education and student support services to increase adult and non-traditional student success in middle-skill education and training. Specifically, the council shall make recommendations for minimizing remediation by developing a system-wide plan to better align adult basic education and pre-college programs with post-secondary institutions. The council shall examine the feasibility and impact of all relevant strategies, including but not limited to, ways to: leverage and shape adult skills training to maximize responsiveness to industry needs; streamline or restructure developmental education to enable faster and increased rates of skill and credential attainment, including more clearly delineating the roles and responsibilities of community colleges and adult basic education providers; establish a uniform system for transferring course credits between community colleges to promote faster and higher completion rates; evaluate the efficacy of current college placement tests and, if appropriate,

24 recommendations to replace them with standard competency-based assessment tools and
25 improved methods for placement in post-secondary education; and increase the retention, skill
26 and credential attainment rate of non-traditional students in post-secondary education and
27 training. The council shall coordinate with existing efforts of the department of elementary and
28 secondary education, the department of higher education the department of labor and workforce
29 development, the state workforce investment board and the Massachusetts community colleges
30 executive office.

31 The council shall consist of 17 members, the secretary of labor and workforce
32 development, or a designee, who shall serve as chair; the secretary of education, or a designee;
33 the commissioner of elementary and secondary education, or a designee; the commissioner of
34 higher education, or a designee; the president of commonwealth corporation, or a designee; the
35 executive director of the Massachusetts community colleges executive office, or a designee; a
36 representative of the local workforce system to be appointed by the secretary of labor and
37 workforce development; 2 of whom shall be appointed by the speaker of the house of
38 representatives; 2 of whom shall be appointed by the senate president; 1 of whom shall be
39 appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives; 1 of whom shall be appointed
40 by the minority leader of the senate; a representative from the business community to be
41 appointed by the secretary of labor and workforce development; the president of the
42 Massachusetts AFL/CIO or a designee; the director of the Center for Labor Market Studies at
43 Northeastern University or a designee; and a representative of adult basic education or non-
44 traditional college students in the commonwealth to be appointed by the secretary of education.

45 The council shall conduct its first meeting not more than 90 days after the effective date
46 of this act and shall conduct not less than 3 public hearings in geographically diverse regions of
47 the commonwealth. Not later than 18 months after the effective date of this act, the council shall
48 submit a report of its findings and recommendations together with proposed legislation, if any, to
49 the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate who shall forward the same to the house
50 and senate chairs of the joint committee on higher education and the chairs of the house and
51 senate committees on ways and means.

52 SECTION 2. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, during the first
53 year after the effective date of this act, commonwealth corporation shall develop 5 to 7 regional
54 skills academies. In subsequent years, regional skills academies shall be developed in each
55 workforce investment area of the commonwealth, as established by the Workforce Investment
56 Act of 1998, 29 U.S.C. § 2801, et seq.

57 The regional skills academies will address the gap between the skills currently held by
58 the commonwealth's workers and the skills needed by its employers for jobs that require more
59 than a high school diploma but less than a 4-year degree. The regional skills academies will also
60 align to the commonwealth's economic development strategy to meet the needs of employers in

61 high growth sectors, including but not limited to, health care, life sciences, information
62 technology and advanced manufacturing.

63 Regional skills academies shall be geographic clusters of community colleges,
64 vocational-technical high schools, community-based organizations, labor unions and employers.
65 Each cluster shall designate 1 entity or organization as the lead partner for each cluster.
66 Regional skills academies shall increase the number of Massachusetts residents with middle-
67 skills and middle-skill credentials by carrying out activities that may include, but are not limited
68 to, providing programs accessible to working, unemployed or underemployed adults; defining
69 and establishing the process for students to transition from adult basic education programs to
70 college-based programs; providing stackable certificates and credentials, non-semester-based
71 modular programs and accelerated associate degree programs; providing sector-based training
72 including developmental education; providing student support services; using competency-based
73 placement assessments; leveraging regional resources, including shared equipment and funding;
74 partnering with 2 or more training organizations in a region; and partnering with 2 or more
75 employers in a region.

76 Commonwealth corporation shall award competitive grants from the Workforce
77 Competitiveness Trust Fund, established in section 2WWW of chapter 29 of the General Laws,
78 to the regional skills academies to carry out these activities. Commonwealth corporation shall be
79 responsible for conducting an evaluation on the outcomes of the regional skills academies and
80 presenting its findings to the middle-skills council established in section 1.

81 SECTION 3. The secretary of labor and workforce development, in consultation with the
82 secretary of the executive office of education the secretary of housing and economic
83 development and the president of commonwealth corporation, shall define regions in the state on
84 which to base a review of local and regional labor market information and to develop regional
85 plans to coordinate training and education activities to target employer needs and to meet the
86 commonwealth's demand for middle-skill workers. Upon designation of the regions,
87 commonwealth corporation shall ensure that the workforce investment boards established by the
88 Workforce Investment Act of 1998, 29 U.S.C. § 2801, et seq assist in convening meetings in
89 each of the regions to undertake the review of labor market information and develop the regional
90 plans.

91 The meeting participants shall include representatives from each workforce investment
92 area, established by the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, 29 U.S.C. § 2801, et seq and, at a
93 minimum, the presidents of any of the region's community colleges; the principals of any
94 vocational-technical high schools; the executive director of the appropriate workforce investment
95 boards; the fiscal agents for workforce investment act funding; labor, education and industry
96 leaders and the director of the regional skills academy, if applicable. Commonwealth
97 corporation shall aggregate these findings and report them at least annually to the middle-skills
98 council established in section 1.

99 SECTION 4. The regional skills academies shall be funded at a level of one million
100 dollars each from a combination of sources including the consolidated budget surplus.
101 Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, after complying with clause (a) of
102 section 5C of chapter 29 of the General Laws, the comptroller shall dispose of the consolidated
103 net surplus in the budgetary funds for fiscal year 2012 and each year thereafter ending in 2015 by
104 transferring up to $8,000,000 from the General Fund to the Workforce Competitiveness Trust
105 Fund established in section 2WWW of chapter 29.

106 SECTION 5. Subject to appropriation, the regional skills academies will be funded by the
107 Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund, established by section 2WWW of chapter 29 and
108 managed by commonwealth corporation on behalf of the executive office of labor and workforce
109 development.