



The Republican.

Adult basic education an investment in future

Tuesday, April 17, 2007

Massachusetts has spent billions on public education since the landmark Education Reform Act of 1993 to prepare Bay State children for the workplace of tomorrow.

That's a good investment in tomorrow, but hundreds of businesses across the Pioneer Valley are looking for skilled workers today.

Many business leaders say there are too few workers with the basic math, reading, writing, language and analytic skills to meet the needs of today's workplace.

Gov. Deval L. Patrick proposed only \$29.5 million for adult basic education for the fiscal year that starts July 1, an 8.7 percent cut in current funding.

The House leadership proposed even less funding, only \$27 million.

This is a huge disappointment for a region that is increasingly dependent on a workforce sorely in need of education and language skills.

The governor and legislative leaders need to find places in the budget to make cuts because the state is facing a \$1.3 billion deficit, but adult basic education is the worst possible area to reduce funding. If the governor and lawmakers want to stunt economic growth, this is the place to do it.

The Bay State's economy cannot grow unless it has a skilled workforce. In Hampden County alone, there are 1,000 people on waiting lists for adult basic education. Lawmakers representing cities and towns in the Pioneer Valley should support an amendment sponsored by Rep. Denise Provost, D-Somerville, which would provide \$40 million for adult basic education.

The cities of Holyoke and Springfield have among the lowest graduation rates from public schools in the state, producing scores of people seeking a General Education Diploma or training to avoid a life of poverty or crime.

In addition, there are large numbers of legal immigrants with severely limited English-speaking abilities who are eager to gain language skills so they can become skilled workers.

Literacy and education are tickets to success for adults who don't have the skills needed in today's workplace.

Lawmakers should provide it for them by supporting Provost's amendment.

©2008 The Republican

© 2008 MassLive.com All Rights Reserved.