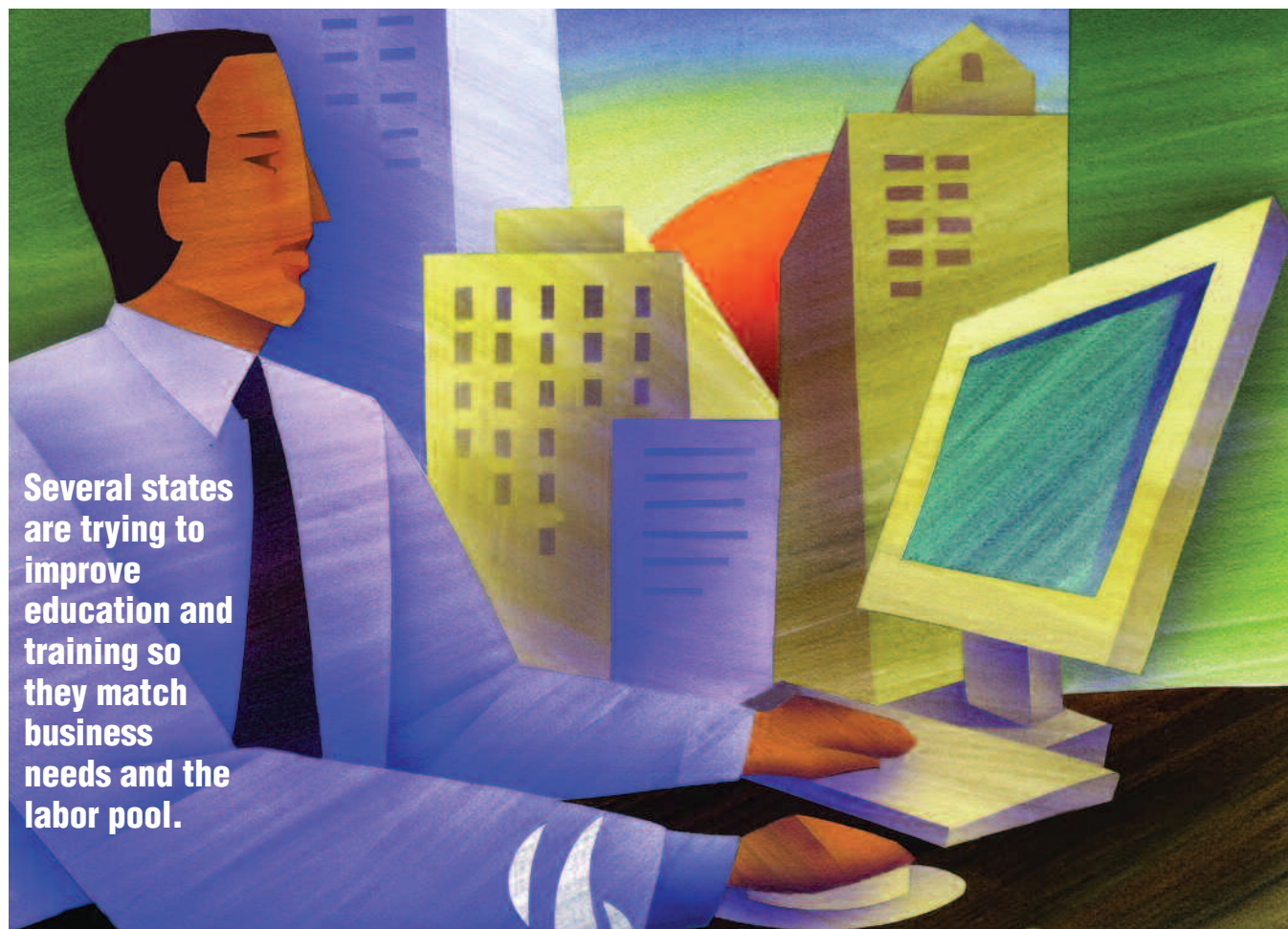


# STATELINE

## Link Investment in Education to Economic Health

BY KATHY CHRISTIE



Several states are trying to improve education and training so they match business needs and the labor pool.

In contrast to much of this year's frightening economic news, many states are investing in initiatives to strengthen local economies.

For example, a summer press release from **Illinois** Governor Rod R. Blagojevich's office touted that the new Batman film, *The Dark Knight*, brought nearly \$40 million in revenue to the Illinois economy, making it

the largest movie filmed in Illinois. According to the governor's office, filming the movie in the Chicago area created about 4,500 jobs in areas such as set construction, electrical work, truck driving, and acting. The Illinois Film Office, a division of the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, markets the state as an ideal shooting location for films, television shows, and commercials and promotes the training and hiring of Illinois residents who represent the diversity of the state's population.

In other action related to artistic endeavors, the

**California** General Assembly established the Digital Arts Studio Partnership and Workforce Program to train youth in digital technology skills (A.B. 2471). This should help meet the high interest of high school students raised on video games and electronic devices — plus expand the pool of trained workers for the state's film and other high-tech industries.

### Matching Workers to Business Needs

Several states recently addressed the need to ensure a match between business and the labor pool — and they're improving education and training so that stu-

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dents can find jobs. The California Green Collar Jobs Act of 2008 requires the creation of a council responsible for matching programs, strategies, and resources to workforce needs generated by growth in the state's "green" economy.

Similarly, the **Illinois** legislature asked its Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to identify current and projected shortages in critical occupations and specific skill sets and to devise strategies to alleviate any identified shortages. This study will build on a previous effort — the Critical Skills Shortage Initiative — which brought together private and public entities to identify growth industries and industry skills shortages, to determine root causes for the shortages, and to develop solutions to fill the skills gaps and worker shortages. A report is required by February 1, 2009.

Since 2005, **South Carolina** has been developing a curriculum organized around a career cluster system that will provide students with strong academics and real-world, problem-solving skills. Before the end of the second semester of 8th grade, 8th-grade students (and their parents) are supposed to select a preferred cluster of study and develop an individual graduation plan. South Carolina also has a career readiness certification system in place.

In **Oklahoma**, the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development will lead further development and implementation of the strategic plan that's been developed for a similar initiative, "Grow Oklahoma." The strategic framework proposes:

1. Increasing awareness of students, families, and educators of career options and opportunities and of how knowledge and skills development will meet industry needs and give Oklahoma a competitive advantage;

2. Increasing the skills and knowledge of young people entering the workforce;

3. Helping Oklahomans not now in the workforce to gain necessary skills;

4. Supporting workers in obtaining skills to transition from one job or career to another;

5. Investing in ongoing learning and skill development for existing workers, benefiting not only workers, but employers as well;

6. Informing employers of the availability of underused members of the workforce; and

7. Increasing the number of Oklahomans receiving highly technical skills and advanced degrees.

One of the strategic approaches is to use Career Readiness Certificates as a way to demonstrate skill attainment at multiple levels and with multiple populations.

### Strengthening Linkages Among Systems

Systems that are not aligned can make collaboration and improvement difficult for the pre-K-12 system, the postsecondary system, and economic development offices. **Virginia** Governor Tim Kaine notes the importance of having dynamic and substantive relationships between state systems of workforce development, P-16 education, and economic development. His Executive Order No. 61 states that strategies should "embody skilled training and education and the purposeful development of human resources." One goal of the aligned system is to annually evaluate all workforce programs, including apprenticeship, postsecondary career, and technical. Another is to support the development and implementation of a seamless and integrated, one-stop, workforce service delivery system.

**Louisiana** H.B. 1104 does away with the Department of Labor and transfers its duties to the State Workforce Commission (now called the Workforce



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Investment Council) with a goal of integrating job training, employment, and employment-related educational and training programs and of administering the state's unemployment and workers' compensation programs.

In **Connecticut**, Special Act No. 08-3 established the Youth Policy Council. The council is supposed to coordinate the mapping and analysis of local resources and youth services, improve collaboration and accountability of those services, focus pilot programs on public-private partnerships, and use pilot programs to test ideas and replicate successful programs.

### Access to Training

**Rhode Island** H.B. 7889 established the Community College of Rhode Island 21st Century Work Force Commission, charged with preparing a workforce for the high-wage job opportunities required by a knowledge-based economy.

And in **Vermont**, part of H.B. 885 requires the commissioner of education to outline and review how tuition is paid for students to attend regional technical center programs and to propose solutions to barriers that get in the way of encouraging students to attend — including scheduling issues, availability of classes outside the traditional school day and academic year, and financial disincentives. Also addressed are similar access issues for adults (with and without diplomas) entering programs at regional technical centers.

**Louisiana** H.B. 1018 established the Workforce Training Rapid Response Fund. Such funds can be used for various purposes, including basic education skills; continuing education; job readiness training; articulated programs that lead to initial or continuing licensure, certification, or associate degree level accreditation; and other education programs.

### What Else Might Matter to Families?

When the **Illinois** legislature passed H.B. 5285, it required continuation of insurance coverage for college students taking medical leave or reducing course loads to part-time status because of illness or injury. Through his power of amendatory veto, Governor Blagojevich added a provision that gives parents the option of keeping dependents on their health care insurance until their 26th birthday. (Those with dependents who are veterans can keep them on their plans until their 30th birthday.)

And Governor Blagojevich announced in September a partnership between eight credit unions and two state agencies that will protect Illinois college students

from the credit crunch that has paralyzed student lending in other states. Eight Illinois-based credit unions will invest \$100 million in securities issued by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission to finance low-interest, federally secured loans to Illinois students and their families.

In June, **Maryland** Governor Martin O'Malley announced a tuition freeze for higher education in Maryland for the third consecutive year.

**Louisiana** H.B. 1156 established the Grants for Grads Program and the Grants for Grads Fund, a program to assist college graduates in the purchase of their first home. Eligible graduates must be Louisiana residents who have received an associate, baccalaureate, master's, or other postgraduate degree and who intend to live and work in Louisiana for at least five years after college graduation or completion of a postgraduate degree.

**Idaho** established the Career Information System (CIS) as a centralized resource within the Department of Labor to provide current and accurate occupational, educational, and related career information. Before 2008, this system was spread among multiple agencies and organizations. One new piece of the system, CIS Junior, is an easy-to-use introduction to planning for high school, college, and work life. CIS Junior users transfer their course planning portfolio to eCIS, the online version of CIS, as they progress through school.

It is hoped that any federal efforts to repair economic conditions will — at a minimum — not interfere with initiatives such as these and — at best — provide resources to more deeply support state efforts. **K**

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