

**PENNSYLVANIA WIB
CAREER READINESS CREDENTIAL TASK FORCE
WHITE PAPER**

I. BACKGROUND

The Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board established its Career Readiness Task Force to develop a white paper examining (1) what efforts to create a career readiness credential are underway within Pennsylvania and in other states, (2) what options Pennsylvania should consider regarding a career readiness credential, and (3) what steps should be taken before the state makes a final decision on whether and how to adopt a state career readiness credential.

II. CAREER READINESS CREDENTIAL OVERVIEW

A. Definition of Career Readiness Credential

A Career Readiness Credential has been defined in various, though generally similar, ways. For purposes of this paper, a “career readiness credential,” sometimes called a “career readiness certificate” or “work readiness certificate,” is a portable certification that demonstrates to employers that the individual has attained the core skills and abilities required for most industries and occupations. (Definitions used by a sampling of other states and initiatives are set forth below.)

The core skills required for most jobs include so-called “hard skills” used to perform basic duties, such as applied math, reading, writing, and finding information. They may also include equally important but less quantifiable “soft” employability skills used to approach work effectively like punctuality, communication, ability to work with others, problem solving, and willingness to accept supervision. The extent to which a career readiness credential attempts to identify, assess, and demonstrate attainment of “soft skills” varies among credentialing models.

A credential process generally consists of three components:

1. Identification of the skills needed to perform most entry-level jobs in the workplace.
2. Development of a valid test or other assessment tool that can determine whether an individual has attained the necessary career skills.

3. The issuance of a certificate or other credential that provides proof that an individual has attained the necessary career skills.

In addition, many believe that a good credentialing process must include a system of providing additional training and other assistance to those who do not pass the test or assessment tool. While this assistance does not appear to be widespread yet, it is in place in a few places, such as in Virginia.

Examples of Career Readiness Credential Definitions

Virginia Career Readiness Certificate

The Career Readiness Certificate is a portable credential that promotes career development and skill attainment for the individual, and confirms to employers that an individual possesses basic workplace skills in reading, applied math, and locating information – skills that most jobs require.

Michigan Career Readiness Certificate

The Michigan Career Readiness Certificate (MCRC) is a portable credential that signifies to a potential employer that an individual has achieved acceptable levels in the foundation skills necessary for success in the workplace.

North Carolina Career Readiness Certificate

The Career Readiness Certificate is an employability credential that reflects an individual's attainment of certain core employability skills required across many industries and occupations.

Louisiana Work Ready! Certificate

The Louisiana Work Ready! Certificate is a portable credential that signifies to an employer that an individual has certain fundamental skills necessary for success in the workplace, according to three subject areas: Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information, and Locating Information.

Equipped for the Future Work Readiness Credential

The work readiness credential is a certification of work readiness for entry-level work as defined by employers. It is the first national standards-based assessment for entry-level workers to provide a universal, transferable, national standard for work readiness.

B. Rationale for Considering a State Career Readiness Credential

Interest in a career readiness credential has arisen because of the recognition in both government and the private sector that a skills gap exists between those skills required on the job and those exhibited by many potential and existing workers. Many employers report that they have great difficulty in hiring people who have basic employability skills and who are therefore trainable for specific jobs.

States adopting a career readiness credential and other proponents of the concept suggest that there are several benefits of a credential:

- For employers: a credential helps employers identify and articulate what core skills are needed by their workers and measure whether job applicants can meet that skill level. It can improve the hiring process, cut recruitment costs, and give employers greater assurance that job seekers have the necessary skills to perform the job.
- For students and workers: a credential helps them determine whether they have the skills necessary for entry-level jobs and, once the credential is attained, allows them to clearly demonstrate their ability to do the job.
- For educators and training providers: a credential helps them tailor their programs to fill skills gaps that currently prevent their students from being employable, focusing on helping students and workers develop the skills that are currently in demand in the workplace.
- For a state's economy: a credential that becomes a recognizable indicator of workforce competitiveness can be an effective economic development tool to attract business and jobs to a state.

In short, career readiness credential proponents contend that a portable credential that is easily and universally understood and valued by employers, educators, students, and workers can help underachieving Pennsylvanians find and retain jobs and help employers fill their vacancies with qualified applicants. Such a credential can supplement a high school diploma, a GED or post-secondary credential or degree.

C. Rationale for Waiting to Adopt a State Career Readiness Credential

While many states and locales have moved forward with implementation of a career readiness credential, not every state or locale has done so. This can be due in part to a lack of awareness of such a credential and its benefits, but in researching the issue, other reasons for hesitation have surfaced. These include:

- Employers have not yet broadly and fully embraced credentials in most instances. As a result, the demand for the credential is not developed to the point worth the state's/locale's investment.
- Some employers have already developed their own assessment for identifying work-ready applicants.
- Despite the demand for employees with soft skills, there is still a high level of skepticism regarding the ability of any test to adequately assess and quantify soft skill competencies.

- States have not yet overcome the challenge of coordinating secondary and post-secondary systems, employers, and workforce investment boards to adopt and fully implement a career readiness credential.
- The ease of using and navigating the credential process is not yet to the point of making such a credential universally attractive.
- Resources are not available to develop, market and implement a work readiness credential statewide.

A consistent issue emerging in conversations regarding a career readiness credential is the concern that the movement to adopt such a credential is not employer-driven, and therefore, does not have adequate demand for it to fully succeed as a means for enhancing the quality of the state's workforce. In other words, there is concern that employers are not clamoring for states to bring a career readiness credential to them.

III. EXAMINATION OF EXISTING CAREER READINESS CREDENTIAL MODELS AND RELATED ACTIVITIES

Though the concept of a career readiness credential is a relatively recent development, there are numerous career readiness credential or similar activities underway within Pennsylvania and in other states. A matrix of all the models discussed below can be found in Attachment 1.

A. Career Readiness Credential Activities in Other States

Most states that are actively pursuing a career readiness credential are concentrating their efforts on one of two national models: (1) Equipped for the Future's Work Readiness Credential and (2) the ACT WorkKeys Career Readiness Certificate. However, a third model, Work Certified, is being adopted in a handful of local areas.

i. Equipped for the Future's Work Readiness Credential

The Equipped for the Future (EFF) initiative, directed by the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), is developing a Work Readiness Credential. EFF's objective is a national, portable certification of work readiness that certifies a worker's ability to "succeed in entry-level work in the 21st Century workplace." The Credential is to be based on a set of standards that identify what workers must know and be able to do for entry-level jobs in areas, such as the following skills: communication, interpersonal, decision-making, and lifelong learning. Individuals meeting the standards must be able to complete tasks such as:

National Institute for Literacy's Equipped for the Future

State Government Partners

- Workforce Florida, Inc.
- New Jersey Department of Labor and New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission
- New York State Workforce Investment Board, State Department of Labor and State Education Department
- Washington State Workforce Training, Education and Coordinating Board

National Partners

- National Association of Manufacturers
- National Retail Federation
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Institute for Educational Leadership
- National Skills Standards Board Institute
- National Governors' Association

- Acquiring and using information
- Using technology
- Working with others
- Problem-solving
- Avoiding absenteeism and maintaining proper grooming
- Completing work in a timely and accurate manner.

Thus, the EFF standards focus mainly on the "soft skills" necessary to succeed in the workplace, with some measurement of basic math, reading, and technology skills. A two-and-a-half hour assessment to determine attainment of the skills necessary for the Credential has been tested. The EFF implementation timeline calls for limited operation of the assessment in up to 50 sites around the country in September and full access to the EFF assessment and

credential (i.e., across the country) no later than the first quarter of 2007. As of April 2007, the National Work Readiness Council operated 45 assessment sites in 18 states including three in Pennsylvania.¹ According to the EFF partners, the development of the credential and the assessment tools were guided by the Uniform Employee Selection Guidelines (CFR 28.50.14) adopted by the EEOC, the Civil Service Commission, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Justice.

Proponents of this approach maintain that these basic employability skills are the skills most lacking for entry-level workers today. Skeptics of the EFF approach argue that these behavioral skills are the most difficult to quantify and assess, and question whether the EFF assessment tool (which has been tested but is not yet operating as of July 2006) will be a valid one. They also raise concerns that the focus on soft skills will move the attention away from the vitally needed hard skills like math, reading, and writing.

EFF has gained support from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and other national business groups. Four states - New York, New Jersey, Florida and Washington - have made significant financial contributions to the effort (ranging from \$350,000 to \$500,000 per state). The partners have recently formed a 501(c)(3) organization, the National

Work Readiness Council, to manage the credentialing process and promote the Work Readiness Credential.

ii. Career Readiness Certificate Based on WorkKeys

The other credential being backed by several states is the Career Readiness Certificate based on the WorkKeys system (WorkKeys is produced by ACT). The Career Readiness Certificate is considered to be more applicable to entry-level workers with slightly higher skill levels than EFF. In contrast to the EFF approach, WorkKeys focuses on measuring attainment of the following “hard skills”:

- Reading for information
- Applied mathematics
- Locating information

Also unlike EFF, the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) has more than one tier of certificate, with the tiers reflecting the level of difficulty of the skills mastered (i.e., as measured by the score on the WorkKeys career readiness assessment). For example, Virginia awards three tiers of certificate (Gold, Silver, and Bronze), while Indiana awards two tiers (Gold and Blue).

The CRC has gained acceptance in several states. At least 15 states are already issuing CRCs and approximately 17 states have joined the Career Readiness Certificate Consortium to assist each other in developing the credential and to pursue the goal of multi-state portability. In addition, 17 other states and local areas have adopted or supported use of the WorkKeys system to various degrees, without actually adopting it as a single statewide credential. Unlike the EFF process, however, the CRC does not seem to have attracted support from major national employer groups.²

Virginia is one of the states at the forefront of the CRC movement. At least 7,900 workers have attained a Virginia CRC thus far. In addition, the Virginia system includes assistance for those who are not successful in attaining the certificate. Targeted training and education is available through the Community Colleges and One-Stop Career Centers for those who do not initially achieve the certificate.

Career Readiness Certificate Based on WorkKeys

States Issuing CRC

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Florida
- Georgia
- Indiana
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Michigan
- Missouri
- New Mexico
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- Virginia

Building on its partnership with these states, ACT launched a “national career readiness system” on September 15, 2006. Under this system, an individual who earns a state CRC designation will have the option to obtain a national certification in addition to their state certification. The national certification seal will then be added to their state certificate.³

Proponents claim that case studies and anecdotal information show the CRC to be a valuable tool. They also believe that it is best positioned to become a portable credential reaching across states because it is more widely used and tested than any other credential to date.

Critics contend that the CRC’s primary focus on hard skills ignores the other skills that employers say are lacking in many job applicants. They also believe that, despite its use in several states, the business community has not widely backed it and that its use is not employer-driven. Finally, skeptics note the absence of concrete outcomes and other empirical data about its effectiveness.

The CRC partners maintain that the WorkKeys model is compliant with equal employment opportunity and has never been challenged in court since its development 15 years ago.

iii. Work Certified (Treasure Coast, Florida)

There are numerous other career readiness systems in place on a local level in other states. One model that has shown promise based on the outcome data that have been gathered is the Work Certified program, developed by the Treasure Coast and Palm Beach workforce development regions in Florida. Designed using employer focus groups, with the assistance of the National Skills Standards Board, the Work Certified training and assessment cover reading comprehension, mathematics, business writing, use of computer and business tools, customer service, work maturity, and other skills.

Work Certified in the Treasure Coast and Palm Beach regions claims to have the endorsement of more than 50 employers, who give preference to Work Certified applicants. In addition, Work Certified is one of the few initiatives with some outcome data. Ninety-two percent of Work Certified applicants find employment within 30 days. Eighty-six percent of those employed are still employed six months later and 27% received promotions. In addition to Treasure Coast and Palm Beach, several local workforce boards elsewhere in Florida, as well as in Illinois and Texas, have adopted Work Certified.

B. Career Readiness Credentials Activities in Pennsylvania

There are several career readiness programs and activities underway in Pennsylvania, including both skill standards and certifications. The Task Force heard presentations on several of these efforts.

i. YES (Your Employability Skills) Certificate

The Your Employability Skills (YES) program was originally developed in York County for adults, but was expanded later to high school students. The YES certificate requires:

- 120 hours of the YES training curriculum (which was developed by a business consortium led by Harley Davidson and encompasses both soft skills and hard skills)
- 95% attendance in training classes
- A high school diploma or GED
- Passing of drug screens
- Passing scores on the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) math and reading aptitude and the Wonderlic Personnel Test for problem-solving aptitude.

As of early 2006, more than 100 employers in the York County area were supporting YES, according to its sponsors. In the first phase of YES, which served adult workers, over 1,430 adults met the requirements and were awarded the YES certificate, with more than 1,200 (84%) securing “improved employment.”

There is interest in adopting YES outside of York County. For example, as many as five high schools in Erie County expect to pilot the YES program in the 2006-07 school year.

ii. Youth Work Ready Competencies

The Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, and the Philadelphia Youth Network developed the Work Ready Competencies for youth employment programs. The Work Ready competencies are designed to give youth employment programs a uniform listing of the basic competencies that youth need to qualify for entry-level jobs in their region. The development process included focus groups with employers. The competency areas covered include:

- Basic reading, writing, speaking, listening, and math skills
- Basic jobs seeking skills
- Basic job retention skills, such as responding appropriately to supervision, demonstrating dependability, respecting diversity and understanding teamwork
- Basic technology skills
- Basic life skills, such as time management and personal financial management
- Basic personal skills, such as critical thinking skills and demonstrating self-discipline and honesty.

The Youth Work Ready Competencies give direction to youth employment providers on how it should be preparing its youth participants. The Competencies can also be used to assess the effectiveness of programs.

iii. Ready Program

The Readiness Employment Ability Development for You (READY) program is a 91-hour training program designed to improve the employability skills of unemployed and underemployed adults. READY was developed by the Greater Hazleton Partners in Education, a consortium of business and education leaders. York's Your Employability Services (see above), Utility Business Education Coalition, PLL Utilities, and other area business assisted in the development. READY trains workers in basic and advanced math, computer skills, time management, teamwork, and other skills identified as necessary by local employers. Students must complete the course of study in order to receive the READY certificate.

There is heavy business involvement and support for READY. Participating businesses share the program costs. READY has also been adapted for specific employers. For example, READY worked with Simmons mattress manufacturing to develop a 100-hour READY curriculum for that manufacturer's needs. The Greater Hazleton Partners in Education reports that nearly 90% of workers completing the program have retained their employment.

iv. North Central WIB Work Readiness Credential

The North Central Workforce Investment Board (WIB), working with its six-county region Employer Consortia (which is made up of over 150 employers), has developed a Work Readiness Skills Standards and Credential. It began by setting forth the skills that employers across all industries want to see in their entry-level workers. The North Central WIB and the Employer Consortia adopted 20 skills standards. From that list, they focused initially on six Tier I skills to be covered by a Work Readiness Credential:

- Displays Responsible Work Behaviors
- Teamwork
- Safety
- Reading
- Mathematics
- Writing.

After reviewing various assessments used to gauge attainment of the six Tier I areas, the North Central WIB and the Employer Consortium reached agreement on the appropriate

criteria for demonstrating attainment of the Tier I skills. North Central is contracting with high schools, community colleges, technical schools, and universities to provide the work readiness skills standards as part of their current offerings.

Persons achieving all six of the Tier I areas can receive a Work Readiness Skill Standard (WRSS) Credential card. A program consisting of 11 modules, 68 competencies, and 98 hours of instruction is in place. Participants completing all 11 modules and scoring at least 80% on a certification test are eligible to receive the WRSS credential. The first WRSS credential was recently issued to a displaced homemaker in Clearfield County.

Development of a Work Readiness Skills Standard Credential encompassing the remaining 14 skills standards areas is underway. The North Central WIB is working with a consultant who helped develop the Work Certified program for the Treasure Coast and Palm Beach WIBs in Florida (see above). The ultimate goal is a 3-tiered credential targeting all 20 skills identified by the North Central WIB and Employer Consortia.

v. Keys2Work

Keys2Work is primarily a career development and job matching system based on WorkKeys that is targeted to high school students. It provides a "common language" or tool that can match students' actual skill levels to various occupations and earning potential. Through Keys2Work, high school students take the WorkKeys assessment to match their abilities with workplace skill standards. The assessment measures student skills in three "WorkKeys" skill sets — reading, applied math, graphical interpretation — that employers deem most important to them.

Using the Keys2Work system, students can discover the careers and occupations for which they have the interest and skills. They can also identify gaps in their skills so they can improve the skills they need for the kind of jobs they want. Based on their WorkKeys profile, the students receive information on employers, colleges, and other higher education institutions that fit their skills and interests. Since it is based on the WorkKeys system, Keys2Work can also support a Work Readiness Certificate for specific occupations.

Keys2Work started in a nine-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania, but is also used outside of Pennsylvania in areas like Jacksonville, FL and Syracuse, NY. Keys2Work reports that it serves over 60,000 students and job seekers and over 500 employers nationally.

vi. ABLE/PA WIN Workplace Foundation Skills Framework

In the last several years, the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic Literacy and Education (ABLE) has invested considerable energy and resources on work-related basic skills activities to support Pennsylvania's workforce development initiatives. As part of this work, it created the Pennsylvania Workforce Improvement Network (PA WIN) to

support the approximately four-dozen local ABLE-funded programs in providing workplace education services.

PA WIN developed a Foundation Skills Framework, modeled after the EFF standards, to provide a common language and understanding of the basic skills, knowledge, and competencies adults need to obtain or maintain jobs and advance to higher paying jobs.

The Framework, illustrated by a workplace standards wheel (see Attachment 2), divides essential skills into three categories:

- Basic Workplace Skills, including applied math, reading with understanding, writing clearly, speaking clearly, use of technology, and locating and using information and resources
- Basic Employability Skills, including problem-solving, working in teams, interpersonal skills, and self-management
- Basic Workplace Knowledge, including working within an organizational structure and understanding finances.

The Framework is not currently used as the basis for any certificate or credential, but is used to guide incumbent worker training and other workplace training programs funded by ABLE.

IV. OPTIONS FOR PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania has three primary options regarding career readiness credentials: (1) a laissez faire approach, not pursuing a statewide credential and allowing local approaches to develop their own certificates if they choose, with or without direct state financial or technical support; (2) a state-driven approach, establishing a single, official statewide career readiness credential; or (3) a middle ground “accrediting-type” approach, in which the state accredits, approves, or otherwise recognizes local certificate efforts.

A. Laissez Faire Approach

In light of the preexisting career readiness activity on the regional level and the uncertainty over whether states around the country will coalesce around a single credential approach (such as EFF or the WorkKeys CRC), Pennsylvania may choose to take a laissez faire approach that sets little or no direction for establishment of a standard statewide career readiness credential. In pursuing this approach, the state would leave development of career readiness credentials or similar products to local WIBs or other partnerships.

California’s Workforce Investment Board and State Youth Council examined Workforce Readiness Certificates, but chose not to take any concerted state action to establish or adopt any statewide credential at this point.⁴ Instead, local initiatives in several parts of the state (e.g., Mendocino County, Sacramento, and San Diego) have produced work readiness

assessments and/or credentials.⁵ Some of these initiatives (e.g., Sacramento) include use of the WorkKeys tool.

Even if the state took a laissez faire approach by not adopting, supporting, or promoting a single statewide credential, it could choose to support local efforts in various ways. For example, the state could:

- Fund or provide training and technical assistance to help local partnerships develop and implement a credential model.
- Work with local partnerships to help promote a credentials approach for businesses and other key stakeholders.

This approach has the advantage of flexibility, which may be particularly important at a time when the value and acceptance of a career readiness credential remains unclear and the ultimate approach most states and employers will take remains uncertain. If it chooses to go in this direction, Pennsylvania could monitor and even support the credentials concept, but leave the specific credential models to the local markets.

The risk in not being more directive is that the state will have no assurance that enough local markets will take any action or, if they do, will adopt effective credentialing approaches. In addition, Pennsylvania could end up behind the curve if one of the national models actually reaches a critical mass and becomes a truly portable and widely recognized credential across much of the rest of the country.

B. Statewide credential approach

Pennsylvania could establish a single statewide career readiness credential. It could follow states like Virginia, Kentucky, and Indiana to establish a single statewide career readiness certificate based on WorkKeys or partner with states like New York and New Jersey to create a Work Readiness Credential based on the Equipped for the Future (EFF) framework. The establishment or adoption of a statewide credential can be achieved in several ways:

- Adopting by law or executive order a specified credential.
- Funding and other incentives to local WIBs and other partners to implement the adopted credential.
- Promoting the importance and benefit of the adopted credential statewide to employers and workers and/or supporting local promotion efforts.
- Officially identifying the adopted credential with state government and its authority, such as by having the Governor and Workforce Board Chair's signatures on the credentials (as is done in Kentucky).

- Creating and maintaining data systems to track and monitor the credentials that are issued and related information.
- Imposing requirements on local WIBs to incorporate the adopted credential into its activities.

This more directive approach has some potential advantages. It may be more likely to spur action across the state. It would establish some standard of quality for the credential that is ultimately adopted. It should ensure more uniformity across the state, making the adopted credential more portable and more widely recognized across local markets than would be the case with localized versions of credentials.

On the other hand, there is the risk of choosing one single tool that fails to gain the endorsement of the business community across Pennsylvania. Similarly, there is the risk that the rest of the field throughout the country will go in the opposite direction of what Pennsylvania decides (e.g., Pennsylvania chooses a WorkKeys approach and the EFF model gains wide currency everywhere else, or vice versa). The state must be confident that it can develop a process that ensures that the best and most acceptable credentialing tool is selected. Finally, a recent decision by the U.S. Department of Labor (U.S. DOL) may create an added obstacle for national recognition of a work readiness certificate such as the Equipped for the Future's Work Readiness Credential and the ACT WorkKeys Career Readiness Certificate, at least as to youth. U.S. DOL recently made the decision to reject a work readiness certificate as a valid measure for determining performance of services to youth under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), at least for the time being.⁶

C. Middle-ground approach

Finally, Pennsylvania could take a middle-ground approach. Under this option, the state would not adopt a single statewide credential, but would do more than merely leaving it to the local markets to decide. Instead, the state would not only support local activities to develop credentials, but also create a mechanism by which the state accredits, approves, or recognizes local credentials based on specified criteria. In other words, Pennsylvania could give local credentials the state seal of approval, assuring potential users that the credentials are valid and worthy of support and recognition.

This avoids the risk inherent in selecting a single credential, but provides some quality assurance for locally developed tools. However, this responsibility could be a potentially labor intensive and cumbersome process if not developed properly. Our research has not identified any state pursuing this approach for career readiness, though the Texas Skill Standards Board (TSSB) recognizes skill standards and certifications for specific occupations. If Pennsylvania decides to pursue career readiness credentials using an adoptive approach, the TSSB process could be used as a template for Pennsylvania. But it must be emphasized that this is a potentially complex endeavor.

V. FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED IN MAKING A DECISION

A career readiness credential, whether statewide or regional, will be of little value unless it is “portable” (i.e., transferable geographically and across industries) and has “currency” or “credibility” (i.e., recognized and valued by both employers and workers, but especially employers).⁷ To date, there is insufficient data to demonstrate that the leading national approaches – EFF or WorkKeys – have developed widespread currency among employers. Ultimately, such buy-in by the business community, in the form of public endorsements and a genuine willingness to make hiring and compensation decisions based on the attainment of a career readiness credential, will be the primary barometer of a credentialing system’s success.

So, what are some of the factors that would be necessary for the business community and other stakeholders to embrace a particular credentialing process, thereby giving it currency and credibility?

- The credential must encompass those hard and soft skills that most employers genuinely recognize as being essential for performing most jobs. One of the major challenges in settling on the proper skills will be to reach agreement on the appropriate threshold academic level (e.g., should the credential reflect a basic 8th grade academic competency or a more rigorous 11th grade competency).
- The credential or credentials must be developed or adopted with the input of the public education community so that it is as closely aligned as possible with K-12 standards. The credential must be seen as a supplement to a high school degree, rather than a replacement for it.
- The credential must be easy to understand and administer, i.e., it cannot be so complicated or burdensome that employers will find it impractical to use in the real world.
- The credential must be heavily promoted in a language that the business community will understand and relate to.
- The cost of administering the credential must be reasonable for employers and workers alike.
- The credentialing process must be accompanied by some mechanism for those who initially fail, to get assistance in attaining the necessary skills.
- Even if part of a directive, state-endorsed credential model, implementation of the credential should be voluntary, allowing for some local flexibility.
- The credential must be crafted in such a way as to provide equal access and opportunity for all students and workers, and must be compliant with Equal Employment Opportunity laws.

VI. RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

As Pennsylvania examines its options for career readiness, there are several steps that it can take to inform its final decision. Primarily, these steps arise from the question of how to best gauge the interest of the Pennsylvania business community in a career readiness credential:

1. The state, using the existing Career Readiness Task Force, should conduct focus groups and interviews with business leaders, representatives of business associations such as Chambers of Commerce, and individual employers to elicit their views of the potential value of a work readiness credential. This White Paper, if approved by the Task Force, could be used as the starting point for discussion and questions.
2. The state, through interviews and other research, should more closely examine “best practice” outreach efforts used by states adopting WorkKeys, EFF, or other credentialing models to gain business support for and actual utilization of a work readiness credential. This examination should also include ongoing discussions and information sharing with workforce development leaders in states like Colorado and Texas, which, like Pennsylvania, are closely monitoring developments across the country but have chosen not to adopt a single credentialing model to date.
3. The state should continue attempts to identify concrete outcomes or return on investment information from the ongoing efforts in the other states.

ATTACHMENT 1
CAREER READINESS CREDENTIAL MODELS AND RELATED ACTIVITIES
National and Non-PA Models

	WorkKeys Career Readiness Certificate	Work Readiness Credential
Purpose	Portable credential that certifies that an individual has attained the “core employability skills required across multiple industries and occupations.”	National credential certifying that an individual can meet the demands of entry-level work and learn on the job.
Outcome	Career Readiness Certificate certifying core employability skills required across industries and occupations	Certification of work readiness for entry-level work
Originator/Sponsor	ACT	Equipped For the Future (EFF); 4 investor states – FL, NJ, NY, WA
Locations in Use	AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, IN, LA, VA, OK, NM, MO, NC, MI	Being developed by 4 states: FL, NJ, NY, WA
Skills Assessed	Applied Math, Reading for Information, Writing, and Locating Information	Communication, Interpersonal, Decision-making and Lifelong Learning skills. Tasks are organized based on SCANS categories
Method of Assessment	WorkKeys assessment of skills; provides up to 3 levels of certificate based on assessment score: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bronze: possesses skills needed for 30% of jobs ▪ Silver: possesses skills needed for 65% of jobs ▪ Gold: possesses skills needed for 85% of jobs 	Web-based system 2½ hour assessment that covers four modules: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Situational judgment ▪ Oral language ▪ Reading with understanding ▪ Using math to solve problems
Business Involvement	Varies depending on state	Supported by U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Center for Workforce Preparation, the National Association of Manufacturers’ Center for Workforce Success, and the National Retail Federation Foundation.
Targeted User	Adults and high school students	Individuals seeking entry-level work
Years in Operation	Since 2004. National certificate being launched in September 2006	Standards and benchmarks developed by 2002. Soft launch of assessment and credential scheduled in up to 50 sites in September 2006
Comments		

	Work Certified
Purpose	Regional, employer-driven Work Readiness Certification for incorporation into One-Stop System
Outcome	Work Readiness Certificate
Originator/Sponsor	Treasure Coast Workforce Development Bd., Workforce Alliance (Palm Beach), Indian River and Palm Beach Community Colleges (also, National Skill Standards Board was an original sponsor)
Locations in Use	Treasure Coast, Palm Beach, South Florida Workforce, and Brevard County Workforce Development regions in Florida; local workforce boards in Illinois and Texas
Skills Assessed	Hard and soft skills, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading comprehension ▪ Mathematics ▪ Business writing ▪ Use of computer and business tools ▪ Customer service ▪ Work maturity
Method of Assessment	To earn the Certificate, candidate must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Successfully complete 90 hour training ▪ Master 50 competencies ▪ Score 80% or better on certification exam
Business Involvement	Designed using employer focus groups. Now endorsed by more than 50 employers, who give preference to Work Certified applicants.
Targeted User	Entry-level job seekers
Years in Operation	Since 2003
Comments	Ninety-two percent of Work Certified applicants find employment within 30 days. Eighty-six percent of those employed are still employed six months later and 27% received promotions.

Models in Pennsylvania

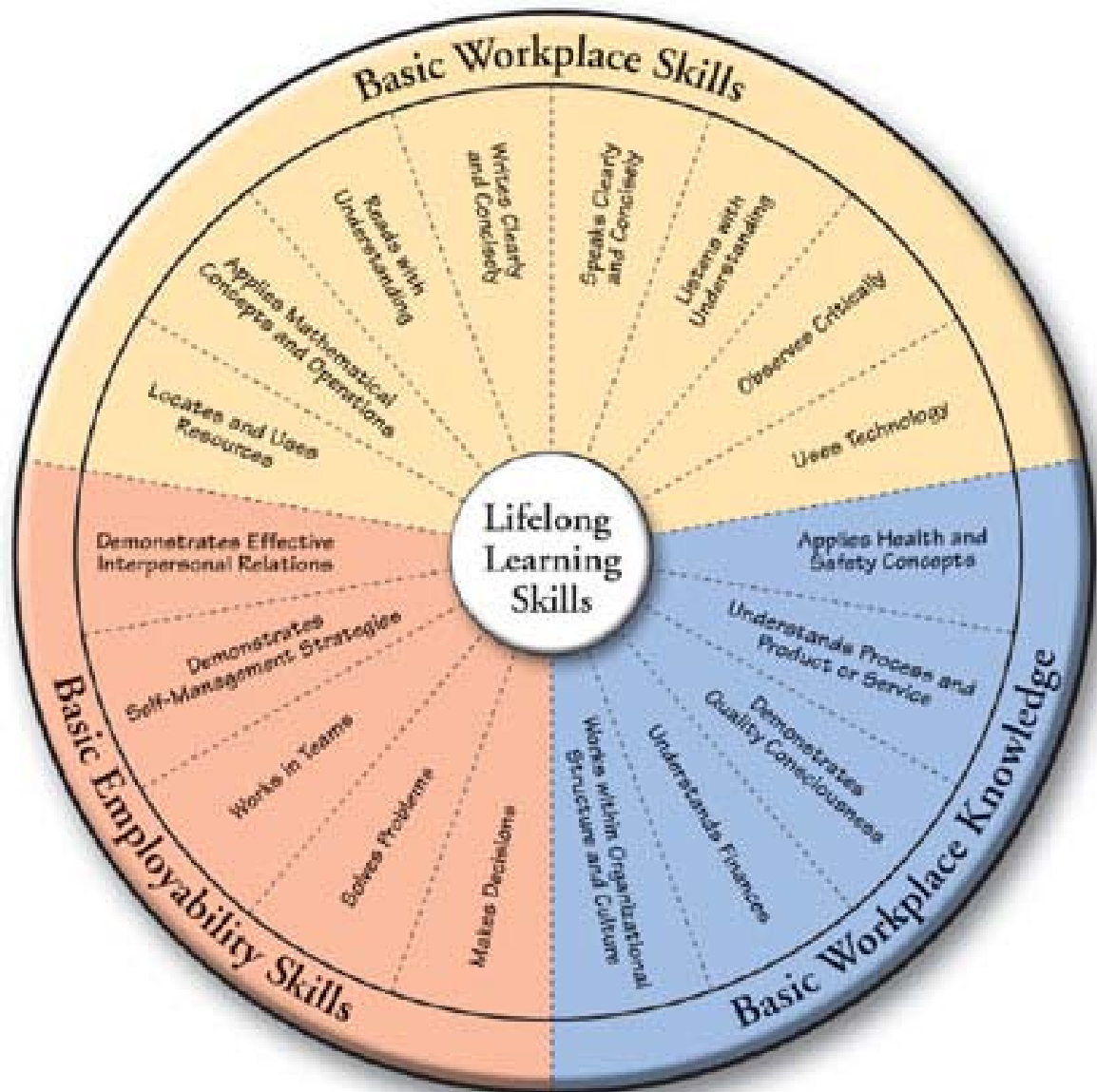
	YES (Your Employability Skills) Certificate	Youth Work Ready Competencies
Purpose	Improve adults' working skills; prepare youth for the workplace	Developed for youth employment programs to give them a uniform list of the basic competencies that youth need to qualify for entry-level jobs.
Outcome	Certificate	Performance measures for providers
Originator/ Sponsor	Manufacturers' Ass'n of South Central Pennsylvania; York County Alliance for Learning	Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board, the Philadelphia Youth Network
Locations in Use	York County	Philadelphia and Allegheny County
Skills Assessed	<p>Hard skills, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Math ▪ Reading ▪ Writing <p>Soft skills, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problem-solving ▪ Communicating with others ▪ Working in teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic reading, writing, speaking, listening, and math skills ▪ Basic job seeking skills ▪ Basic job retention skills, such as responding appropriately to supervision, demonstrating dependability, respecting diversity and understanding teamwork ▪ Basic technology skills ▪ Basic life skills, such as time management and financial management ▪ Basic personal skills, such as critical thinking and demonstrating self-discipline and honesty
Method of Assessment	<p>Requires:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 120 hours of the YES training, ▪ 95% attendance in training classes ▪ High school diploma or GED ▪ Passing drug screen ▪ Passing score on TABE math and reading ▪ Passing score on Wonderlic Personnel Test for problem solving aptitude 	Various, including performance based
Business Involvement	Recognized/supported by 100+ York County employers	Competencies have been vetted through corporate partners in Philadelphia and Allegheny County
Targeted User	Adults and high school students	High school students and out-of-school youth
Years in Operation	Adult program started in 1996; youth program started in 2001	Approved in March 2005
Comments	Taught in high schools as elective for seniors	

	Readiness Employment Ability Development for You (READY) Program	ABLE/PA WIN Workplace Foundation Skills Framework
Purpose	Improve the employability skills of unemployed and underemployed adults.	Provide a common language and understanding of basic skills, knowledge, and competencies adults need to obtain or maintain jobs and advance to higher paying jobs.
Outcome	Certification of readiness based on completion of 91-hour training program	Tool to guide incumbent worker training and other workplace training programs funded by PA Bureau of Adult Basic Literacy and Education.
Originator /Sponsor	Greater Hazleton Partners in Education (PIE), a consortium of business and education leaders (York County's Your Employability Services (YES) program assisted in development)	PA Bureau of Adult Basic Literacy and Education, through the PA Workforce Improvement Network (PA WIN)
Locations in Use	Hazleton area	ABLE-funded programs across PA
Skills Assessed	Basic and advanced math, computer skills, time management, teamwork, and other skills identified as necessary by local employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic Workplace Skills, including applied math, reading with understanding, writing clearly, speaking clearly, use of technology, and locating and using information and resources ▪ Basic Employability Skills, including problem-solving, working in teams, interpersonal skills, and self-management ▪ Basic Workplace Knowledge, including working within an organizational structure and understanding finances
Method of Assessment	N/A	N/A
Business Involvement	Utility Business Education Coalition, PLL Utilities, and other area business assisted in the development. Participating businesses share the program costs.	N/A
Targeted User	Unemployed and underemployed adults	Adult workers
Years in Operation	Since 2000	Since 2000
Comments	PIE reports that nearly 90% of workers completing the program have retained their employment	Based on the Equipped for the Future (EFF) standards

	North Central WIB Work Readiness Credential	Keys2Work
Purpose	Certification demonstrating attainment of skills that regional employers across all industries want to see in their entry-level workers.	Career development and job matching system to help high school students discover the careers and occupations for which they have the interest and skills, and identify gaps in their skills.
Outcome	Work Readiness Certificate	Skills profile; also basis for Work Readiness Credential for specific occupations
Originator/ Sponsor	North Central WIB and Employer Consortia	Keys2Work, a nonprofit project of Smart Futures
Locations in Use	North Central WIB region	Keys2Work started in a nine-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania, now also used outside of PA in areas like Jacksonville and Syracuse
Skills Assessed	Initial six skills assessed are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Displays Responsible Work Behaviors ▪ Teamwork ▪ Safety ▪ Reading ▪ Mathematics ▪ Writing Ultimate goal is 3-tiered credential targeting 20 skills.	Online assessment measures students' skills in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reading ▪ Applied math ▪ Graphical interpretation
Method of Assessment	Assessments in six skill areas adopted by NCWIB and Employer Consortia	The assessment measures student skills in three "WorkKeys" skill sets: reading, applied math, graphical interpretation
Business Involvement	Employer Consortia (made up of over 150 employers) developed the Work Readiness Skills Standards and Credential	Keys2Work reports that it works with over 500 employers nationally.
Targeted User	Entry-level job seekers	High school students
Years in Operation	Since 2003	Since 1998
Comments	North Central WIB is working with consultant who helped develop Work Certified for Treasure Coast and Palm Beach WIBs	Keys2Work reports that it serves over 60,000 students and job seekers nationally.

ATTACHMENT 2

FOUNDATION SKILLS FRAMEWORK WORKPLACE STANDARDS WHEEL



¹ National Work Readiness Credential Update: April 2007.

<http://www.uschamber.com/icw/strategies/nwrcupdate.htm>.

² CRC News from Individual States, updated August 9, 2007. <http://www.crcconsortium.org/state-news.htm>

³ National Career Readiness Certificate FAQs. <http://www.act.org/certificate/faq.html#relate>

⁴ Blansett, Susan J. and Gershwin, May C., “Developing a Statewide Work Readiness Credential in Colorado: A Preliminary Assessment,” A Report to the Colorado Workforce Development Council (October 2005).

⁵ “A Review of Work Readiness Credential Models,” Report of the Youth Council to the California Workforce Investment Board (February 2005).

⁶ Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 17-05, “Common Measures Policy for the Employment and Training Administration’s (ETA) Performance Accountability System and Related Performance Issues,” U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, February 16, 2006. <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05.pdf>

⁷ Blansett and Gershwin (October 2005).