

# CONNECTION

THE JOURNAL OF THE NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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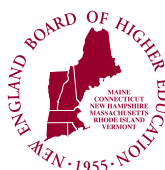
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The New England Board of Higher Education is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized, interstate agency whose mission is to promote greater educational opportunities and services for the residents of New England.

NEBHE was established by the New England Higher Education Compact, a 1955 agreement among the states of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont.

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## EDITOR'S MEMO

### Growing Our Own

Maybe it's a good thing that the hundreds of thousands of New Englanders who are out of work, out of school and underprepared for today's job market, don't monitor the stream of economic prescriptions coming out of the region's business groups and think tanks. They would be appalled by the frequent suggestion that the slow-growing region's future economic success depends upon recruiting talented people from elsewhere.

A human capital strategy growing out of a year's worth of New England Board of Higher Education (NEBHE) conferences on workforce development could offer a refreshing change. The economists, business leaders and educators convened by the board have begun piecing together a strategy to "grow our own," so to speak—to make sure all New England's residents, native-born and immigrant alike, have a place in the new economy.

The experts agree that the only way New England can thrive economically is on the *quality* of its workforce. They also agree generally on ways to get there. Get more kids interested in college, especially in majors leading to higher-paying science, engineering and information technology occupations. Invest more in, but also demand more accountability from, community colleges. Beef up adult basic education programs. Prepare more and better math teachers. Integrate internships and other work experiences with schoolwork. And ensure "universal success" in Algebra I as a sort of prerequisite for critical thinking.

None of this will be easy. Increasing minority participation in science and technology occupations begins with improving poor elementary and secondary schools. That, in turn, will require experiments with "differential pay" to help schools compete with industry for the best teachers, and innovative programs to bring unemployed or semi-retired scientists into the classroom as "coaches," if not full-fledged teachers. But they can't just be geniuses; they need to know how to teach too. And memorization and standardized testing won't suffice. It's planting the pea seed in the paper cup that makes kids care about science.

Moreover, improving schools won't mean much if the pathway to, and through, college is paved with obstacles, the most obvious being rising tuition prices. Nearly nine in 10 Massachusetts parents surveyed by the Boston think tank MassINC want the state to make higher education more affordable. But whether cash-strapped states will increase need-based student aid in proportion to tuition hikes is doubtful.

Watch CONNECTION for more on a New England human capital strategy. NEBHE plans to further hone the workforce recommendations over the coming month and present them to New England's governors for consideration.

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Growing our own doesn't mean slamming the door on everyone else. While a group of Sudanese dancers performed at Rhode Island College in an effort to promote tolerance and inclusion, Massachusetts House Minority Leader Rep. Bradley Jones of North Reading was filing legislation banning people from Sudan and six other countries recognized as sponsors of terrorism from attending public colleges in Massachusetts. The American Civil Liberties Union called the plan "a foolish overreaction."

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Former University of Maine System Chancellor Robert L. Woodbury's Spring 2003 CONNECTION article on "How to Make Your College No. 1 in *U.S. News & World Report* ... and Lose Your Integrity in the Process" was reprinted on the op-ed page of the *Providence Journal* and excerpted in the Magazines & Journals section of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* online. The coverage precipitated a flood of requests for the Spring issue ... lots of praise and a few protests from highly rated colleges who insist they don't do any of those things!

*John O. Harney is executive editor of CONNECTION.*