

## **Working Cities Grant Opens New Era of Collaboration in Lawrence**

Lawrence, Mass. (Jan. 15, 2013) – Recognizing a pioneering community-wide plan to engage Lawrence families in the Schools Turnaround, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston has awarded \$700,000 to the team of Lawrence CommunityWorks, the Lawrence Public Schools, and a coalition of public and private sector partners.

It was the highest award given to any of the 20 applicants in the Boston Fed's Working Cities Challenge and will help launch the **Lawrence Working Families Initiative**, an unprecedented pairing of LPS and community partners to address the direct connection between families' economic challenges and student success.

The Initiative will be headquartered in a new LPS Family Resource Center and managed by Lawrence CommunityWorks, with close support from LPS. Its primary goals will be increasing stable employment — with equal focus on job skills and placement through a network of employer relationships — and parental engagement, both long-term keys to closing the achievement gap and improving outcomes for Lawrence children.

"This is the real story of Lawrence – the story that doesn't get told," said Mayor Daniel Rivera. "It's a story of partnership and tenacity that will overcome tough challenges. The City is delighted by this recognition, and we are ready to get to work."

In addition to Lawrence CommunityWorks and LPS, Lawrence Working Families Initiative partners include: the Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board and Valleyworks Career Center; Greater Lawrence Family Health Center; Greater Lawrence Community Action Council; Groundwork Lawrence; YWCA of Greater Lawrence; Family Services of the Merrimack Valley, Inc.; Lawrence History Center; COMPASS for Kids; City of Lawrence Community Development Department; Northern Essex Community College; The Community Group; Neighborhood Legal Services; Lawrence Training School; Cambridge College; Merrimack Valley YMCA; Lawrence History Center; Solectria Renewables; Eastern Bank; Imagine That; Little Sprouts; Merrimack Valley Federal Credit Union; New Balance; TD Bank; The Stevens Foundations; the City of Lawrence Mayor's Health Task Force; Everett Mills; Greater Lawrence Technical School; and Lawrence General Hospital.

### **Resources for Youth and Families:**

As a partner in the Lawrence Working Families Initiative (LWFI) the MVWIB will ensure that parents and students are aware and have access to the programs and activities available to them through the MVWIB and ValleyWorks Career Center at the Family Development Center and LPS. During the next school year, youth will have the opportunity to enroll in a number of career exploration-

related activities within Lawrence High School which include pre-employment skill building, vocational counseling and exploration and career and labor market information related to the local area.

The MVWIB will provide employer forums for students, parents, teachers on key regional industry sectors that are expected to grow for the foreseeable future. Funding to support activities in STEM employment sectors has been secured and will include:

- Career awareness workshops,
- vocational exploration,
- teacher externships,
- local labor market information
- employer forums for parents, teachers and students in emerging or expanding sectors,
- job requirements,
- employer involvement in contextualized curriculum development and the classroom itself
- linking these activities with opportunities for employment experiences, internships, summer jobs.

The MVIB and ValleyWorks Career Center also operate a YouthWorks program that provides summer employment for young people in Lawrence, Methuen and Haverhill. We anticipate being able to provide job opportunities during the school year and plan to link these opportunities with those previously discussed and create more real working world experiences.

### **Resources for Job Seekers:**

The MVWIB and VWCC works in collaboration with numerous education and training providers throughout the Merrimack Valley in the planning and delivery of workforce development services designed to meet the needs of job seekers at all stages of their working lives.

As part of this initiative the MVWIB and ValleyWorks will make every effort to ensure that agencies throughout the community are aware of the resources available through the MVWIB and VWCC for individuals who are seeking employment by:

- Providing information sessions for staff in other organizations on the services and programs available for their job seeking customers.
- Outstationing Career Center staff in the Parent Center on a regular basis.
- Providing information/ assisting with job fairs, targeted recruitments, and other specialized employment activities
- Assisting in organizing and identifying employers for career panels or informational events.
- Support and collaboration on initiatives designed to increase the employability of Lawrence residents.

- Making referrals and identification of resources for customers with special needs
- Expanded distribution of marketing material and informational material.

The MVWIB is excited to be part of the the Lawrence Working Families Initiative and supports the overarching goal of expanded collaboration and coordination among the many service providers and organizations involved in this effort and the Lawrence School Department and City of Lawrence administration. In an environment of declining public financial support for employment and training services but increasing educational and technological skill requirements to achieve sustainable employment we need to organize our resources to ensure the future for the City and its residents.

**The Working Cities Challenge** is led by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, in partnership with key leaders in the public, private and non-profit sectors, including the Living Cities Funder Collaborative, the Mass Competitive Partnership and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which are contributing prize funds.

Over the past six months, 20 smaller cities submitted proposals with the goal of strengthening civic leadership infrastructure and improving the lives of low-income people through impressive cross-sector community development efforts. Funding award winners were chosen by a jury made up of representatives from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. For more information on the Working Cities Challenge, visit <http://www.bostonfed.org/workingcities/> or contact Matt Campion (617-973-1476) or Denae Thibault (617-973-3559) at the Boston Fed.

For more information on the role of the MVWIB in this project and how you can become involved please contact Rafael Abislaiman or Barbara Zeimetz at 978-682-7099.