An Act To Strengthen Maine's Workforce by Expanding English Language Acquisition and Workforce Training Programs

Received by the Clerk of the House on May 4, 2021. Referred to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs pursuant to Joint Rule 308.2 and ordered printed pursuant to Joint Rule 401.

Presented by Representative CLOUTIER of Lewiston.
Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §8614 is enacted to read:

§8614. Grants to fund English language acquisition instruction for adult education programs

The department's office of adult education shall develop and implement a grant process to provide funding on a competitive basis to adult education programs of school administrative units in communities experiencing an increase in immigrant populations or demand to reduce the waiting list for English language acquisition classes or to increase the levels, frequency or intensity of English language acquisition instruction offered as needed by the communities. The office shall award grants under this section to eligible adult education programs in a number and amount determined by available funding. The department shall adopt routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A to carry out the purposes of this section.

Sec. 2. 20-A MRSA §8615 is enacted to read:

§8615. Industry-specific English language acquisition and workforce training program

An industry-specific English language acquisition and workforce training program for immigrants in the State, including training classes, referred to in this section as "the program," is established.

1. Program requirements. The department shall administer the program. The program must prepare immigrants for identified workforce needs of employers in the State to accelerate entry into livable wage employment and employment advancement and to enhance employer retention of immigrant workers by combining industry-specific English language acquisition with training in the specific skill areas required by the employers. Training classes must be provided and funded pursuant to a grant process under subsection 2.

2. Training grants. The department shall establish a statewide competitive grant process to carry out the purposes of subsection 1.

3. Rules. The department shall adopt routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A to carry out the purposes of this section.

Sec. 3. Industry-specific English language acquisition and workforce training grants. The Department of Education's office of adult education, referred to in this section as "the office," shall establish a statewide competitive grant process to carry out the purposes of the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 8615.

1. Training grants. The amount of a grant under this section is determined by the office based upon the needs of the area to be served and the availability of funding. The office shall consider grants to cover all areas of the State with emphasis on areas with large immigrant populations or where there is a need for skilled workers that training under this section may provide. An eligible proposal for a grant under this subsection must include provisions for:
A. Intensive industry-specific English language and vocabulary classes for participating potential employees, including immigrants who have not yet received federal work permits, newly hired employees and incumbent employees;

B. Intensive workforce training classes for participating potential employees, including immigrants who have not yet received federal work permits, newly hired employees and incumbent employees that include habits of work, including but not limited to basic skills necessary to obtain, maintain and advance in employment, such as interviewing and communications skills, and that acquaint immigrants with the culture of the workplace;

C. Interviewing immigrant participants and identifying the education level, English language ability, skill sets, work experience, qualifications and credentials of each immigrant participant;

D. Collaboration with participating employers to:
   (1) Identify the employers' specific workforce needs;
   (2) Identify skills needed for positions required by the employers;
   (3) Receive input from the employers for the design of the training classes, including information on required English language proficiency, workplace culture, on-site space or other vocational training elements such as tools, manuals or site tours;
   (4) For proposals by specific employers to train newly hired or incumbent employees, ensure that the employers provide the time and space to offer training classes on site at the employers' workplaces or, where that is not feasible, that employers provide at no cost to participants supports such as transportation and incentives to prioritize, encourage and facilitate employee participation;
   (5) Unless participating employers can establish that they have already undergone such training within the 12 months prior to the grant submission date, ensure that within the first 12 months of participating in the program employers receive at least 12 hours of formal training on systemic bias and inequities and cultural competency regarding bridging effectively across a wide variety of cultural similarities and differences to help establish an inclusive workplace environment. The office is not responsible for arranging for or providing this training; and
   (6) Create industry-specific skills trainings in which small employers in a specific sector can participate collectively where it is not practicable for them to offer trainings as individual employers. These collective trainings need not take place at a particular employer's workplace;

E. One or more training classes to prepare the immigrant participants as potential employees to enter into and retain livable wage employment within 6 to 24 months of the beginning of the training; and

F. Collection and reporting of data including outcomes of employment and job retention.

The office shall give special consideration to proposals for grants under this subsection that provide incentives for immigrants to participate in the training classes, such as agreements
by employers to pay an employee the employee's hourly rate while attending the training classes.

2. Criteria for applicants. An applicant for a training grant under subsection 1 must have demonstrated expertise and experience in the following:

A. Providing English language acquisition training, including the administration of appropriate academic and vocational assessments and research-based instructional approaches appropriate for English language learners;
B. Working with employers to develop relevant employee training; and
C. Working with partners in the state workforce and state agencies with expertise in serving and preparing immigrants for employment through a case management approach.

3. Report. The office shall prepare a report on the training that includes:

A. The number and amount of grants awarded under this section;
B. The training and services provided by the grant recipients or progress toward establishing new programs to deliver the training and services;
C. Aggregate demographic information about immigrant participants in the training, participating employers, employment opportunities, employment placements and retention by employers of immigrant participants placed under this section; and
D. An evaluation of programs and services most effective in carrying out the purposes of this section.

By November 4, 2022, the office shall submit the report along with any recommended legislation to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education and cultural affairs. The joint standing committee may report out a bill based upon the report to the 131st Legislature.

Sec. 4. Appropriations and allocations. The following appropriations and allocations are made.

EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF

Adult Education 0364
Initiative: Provides funds for grants to adult education programs to increase English language acquisition instruction in communities experiencing an increase in immigrant populations or demand.

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Industry-specific English language Acquisition and Workforce Training Program N255
Initiative: Provides funds in fiscal year 2021-22 and fiscal year 2022-23 for grants to service providers to provide English language instruction and vocational training and to place immigrant populations in the State with employers in the State.
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**SUMMARY**

This bill directs the Department of Education's office of adult education to:

1. Develop and implement a grant process to award grants to adult education programs to increase English language acquisition instruction in communities experiencing an increase in immigrant populations or demand for that instruction; and

2. Administer an industry-specific English language acquisition and workforce training program for immigrants in the State and establish a statewide competitive grant process to carry out the purposes of the program.

The bill also provides funding for the industry-specific English language acquisition and workforce training program and grants to increase English language acquisition instruction.