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## Education aid & employer help

By SALLIE GLICKMAN & DAVID THORNBURGH

YOU MAY remember last year when the Brookings Institution released a report that showed Philadelphia ranked 92nd of the 100 largest cities in the percentage of adults with college degrees. Challenged by that painful statistic, our organizations decided we couldn't sit still.

Last fall, the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board and the Pennsylvania Economy League launched Graduate! Philadelphia, the most focused, aggressive initiative in the U.S. designed to increase the number of college graduates. On Wednesday, hundreds of "Comebackers" - working adults who started but never completed their degrees - attended the first annual Returning to Learning Education Fair presented by Graduate! Philadelphia and the Gwynedd-Mercy College Center for Lifelong Learning.

Now that this structure is in place, it's time for all businesses to take a hard look at what we are doing to support employees who want to complete their degrees. Fortunately, we have some excellent examples and new resources to help working adults return to college.

For example, it can be hard to come up with the tuition at registration. So Citizens Bank, a sponsor of the fair, recently converted its tuition reimbursement to an upfront payment. The result: much higher employee use of the benefit.

Perhaps you are a small employer, and can't do much in the way of tuition assistance. Fortunately, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, another supporter of Graduate! Philadelphia and the Education Fair, can help employees with a new emphasis on financial aid for working adults. You can still do your part, though, by providing flexible schedules so employees can balance work and education commitments.

Those who saw the extensive coverage of Returning to Learning Education Fair in these pages read stories of adults who have managed jobs, families and a range of other priorities to return to school. As a community of employers, we need to ask what we are doing to help them. Do our employees know about the benefits we offer to help them succeed in school, financial and otherwise? Can we be doing more and, if so, how?

Philadelphia's working adults showed us on Wednesday they want to be part of the solution. Now it's our turn to meet them halfway.

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*Sallie Glickman is executive director of the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board. David Thornburgh is executive director of the Pennsylvania Economy League.*