

**Testimony of Paul Skeith**  
**Chair, Capital IDEA Board of Directors**  
**Leader and Strategy Team Member, Austin Interfaith**  
**Managing Partner, Richards, Rodriguez, and Skeith**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony about how Capital IDEA lifts working poor adults from poverty into good careers through a community college education. We are very proud of our 1,000+ formerly working poor who have started new careers as nurses, network administrators, energy techs, and other skilled workers needed by our economy. As you heard in testimony from Tara Smith of the University of Texas' Ray Marshall Center, rigorous evaluations demonstrate that Capital IDEA graduates nearly triple their earnings and deliver a 501 percent return-on-investment to taxpayers. Over 1,000 working poor adults who formerly needed taxpayer assistance are now substantial taxpayers themselves. Moreover, they serve as role models for their children, 90 percent of whom graduate from high school and 75 percent go on to higher education—permanently breaking the cycle of poverty.

The strategy that the Texas Industrial Areas Foundation Network of Organizations first developed with Project QUEST in San Antonio in the 1990s is simultaneously complex and simple. The most important ingredient of our success is a mutual commitment between the student and the community. Yes, we invest substantial money and time in our students: our sectoral workforce intermediary organizations like Capital IDEA pay for (or leverage with our partners) tuition, fees, books, vaccinations, tools, exam fees, uniforms, child care, bus passes or gas money, credentials, and everything else short of bare living expenses. But there is much more to success in a community college than just resources.

First, people find out about us from institutions they trust -- the congregations of Austin Interfaith and our sister Industrial Areas Foundation organizations, friends and family, and social service agencies. They know that these institutions believe in them, care about them, and also expect accountability from them.

Second, they go through a six-week "admissions" process. The first step is to ask them to explore the high-demand, high-skill careers our employer partner's offer. Next we measure their baseline math and reading skills and assess their fit for their career of interest. Then together we develop a three or four-year financial and educational plan that will raise them from as low as fifth-grade math and reading skills to a community college graduate. The final and most important step is a heart-to-heart conversation about commitment to the plan and, once graduated, to give back to the community that supported and believed in them. We don't often say "No," but we do say "Not yet," and help them identify the things needed to get ready.

Third, once they begin, students team with a group of their peers and a Career Navigator, who is a student's guardian angel throughout their journey. Students meet weekly as a group with their Navigator and his or her responsibility is to get them successfully through their education and into a career, no matter what. If someone's spouse or partner becomes abusive, we help them get into a shelter. If the shelter is closed, we take our credit card and get them into a hotel until the shelter opens. If someone's child acts up in school, we help them deal with the school system. If someone has an undiagnosed learning disability, we help them get support.

Currently, the Federal funding for these efforts is limited and short-term. We leverage everything available from the Workforce Investment Act, federal child care dollars, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and other sources. However, none will support all of a student's needs throughout this multiple year and multiple step process. From the beginning the Industrial Areas Foundation organizations and their business community partners develop local general revenue and philanthropic support to fill the gaps left by traditional workforce development funding. We have also developed a state program, the Innovative Adult Career Education program, which we offer as a model for future Federal efforts.

We emphasize that resources are not enough on their own. Legislation needs to fund the full-on case management and counseling/advising of Career Navigators for non-traditional adults and other first-generation college students. If one does not have a college-educated parent to guide him or her through the college maze, he or she needs someone like our Career Navigator to play a similar role.

Industrial Areas Foundation organizations have put this strategy to work effectively in cities and regions across Texas and in Arizona, Louisiana, and Iowa. We firmly believe that the working poor are not a liability for our society but our biggest opportunity. No students will work harder than parents who have determined to change their lives and their children's lives. We have had women give birth on a Thursday and then take mid-terms the next week. The time and resources necessary to educate an adult may seem like a lot from the perspective of traditional workforce development policy, but it is a very little from the perspective of a lifelong career contributing to our economy and tax base.

Thank you.