

## College Unbound director: New program has potential to graduate new talent



**DENNIS LITTKY**, middle, is seen at a 2012 panel discussion about education and employers that also featured Andrea Castaneda, head of the Accelerating School Performance at the R.I. Department of Education, and Steven Adams, a partner with Taylor Duane Barton & Gilman LLP.  
PBN FILE PHOTO/RUPERT WHITELEY

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**(This updates a [story](#) posted Monday at 5:44 p.m.)** PROVIDENCE – The director of College Unbound says plans to turn the nonprofit higher education program for underserved adults into a degree-granting program has the potential to graduate new talent and leaders.

Dennis Littky’s proposal for the nonprofit comes before the R.I. Council on Postsecondary Education at a 5:30 p.m. meeting at the Community College of Rhode Island Wednesday. If approved, College Unbound would produce its own four-year bachelor’s degree in Rhode Island in organizational leadership and change.

The program has existed since 2009, affiliating with other schools to lead students to college degrees, at one point with Roger Williams University and today with Charter Oak State College in Connecticut. If the plan to operate independently is approved for a crop of about 100 new students, the program would finish working with about 77 students at Charter Oak and eventually end that affiliation, Littky said.

The proposal to become a degree-granting program involves hybrid learning that would be both online and on the ground at the Metropolitan Regional and Technical Center in Providence.

“I’ve been running this program in conjunction with other colleges since 2009,” Littky said. “We always thought we wanted to do it our way and when you’re partnering with somebody you’re

not. [The new plan] would give us a chance to put all our ideas together and start from scratch, and when you start from scratch you have the chance to be innovative.”

Students attending the program now are about 10 percent native Americans, 10 percent former prisoners, and the rest have typically completed some college coursework but not yet graduated, he said. Many have jobs already and would be looking with this degree to become supervisors or administrators, he added.

“There are 110,000 people in Rhode Island who started college and didn’t finish,” Littky said. “There’s a great need for this adult population and an underserved population that doesn’t feel comfortable going back to school [to graduate]. We’re talent finders and talent developers. We’re helping to broaden people’s leadership skills.”

If approved Wednesday, a two-to-five year accreditation process would be pursued through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. While the official start date of a class for the four-year degree is September of 2016, there may be a way to start some classes this fall, Littky said.

The 120-credit bachelor’s degree would combine set coursework with customized credit for work experience, such as computer skills, he said.

“We’re trying to really support adult learners and capitalize on the things they have done and their competencies and intelligence and give people credit for that work,” he added.

College Unbound is an outgrowth of Big Picture Learning, a nonprofit Littky co-founded to redesign education in the U.S. Big Picture Learning has a network of 100 high schools in 27 U.S. cities, as well as schools in Australia and the Netherlands, according to documentation on file with the Council on Postsecondary Education.

If the College Bound proposal is approved, Littky would become president, he said. Tuition that is just under \$10,000 a year through Charter Oak would be about the same for the degree-granting program, he said.