Throughout its 35-year history, I-CAR has strived to provide the educational tools necessary to train a professional collision repair workforce. Over the last two years, the not-for-profit organization has expanded its reach beyond the body shop world and into America’s vocational school system in revolutionary ways.

In August 2012, I-CAR launched an Education Edition of its Professional Development Program (PDP). The result of years of research and extensive conversations with hundreds of professionals from the education and repair communities, this special two-year curriculum was designed to give vocational school students an opportunity to reach ProLevel 1 status in the PDP’s Refinish Technician and Non-Structural Technician roles and leave school with I-CAR Platinum recognition. By entering the workforce with these achievements already in place, a young technician has the credentials necessary to not only become a valued member of a professional collision repair team, but also to aid his or her employer by being one of four Platinum individuals needed on staff in order for a facility to earn I-CAR Gold status. As of this writing, the Education Edition is being utilized by 320 schools across the country, including 25 of the 41 vocational facilities in Missouri. I-CAR plans to begin offering a welding component to the curriculum later this month, while this spring will see the debut of a new Educator role within the PDP that will allow teachers to achieve Platinum status as well. This will include a requirement that instructors must have to successfully pass any I-CAR course they intend to teach to students.

Bill Stage, I-CAR’s senior director of segment development, sees the Education Edition as a way to bridge the ever-widening gap between collision repair career and technical education facilities and the industry they serve.

“We want to give everyone in the industry the knowledge and skills to fix the cars right for the ultimate benefit of the consumer,” he says. “We want the graduating students to be productive from day one; that is what the industry has told us they want.”

Well known in the industry for its progressive attitude towards education, the Roger L. Putnam Vocational-Technical Academy in Springfield is one of a growing list of Massachusetts schools to embrace the I-CAR curriculum. Since implementing the program last year, Putnam instructor John Kennedy has been nothing but impressed.

“[The program] breaks it down so that the students are understanding what it is to be a professional and what they have to look forward to [in the field],” he says. “The more knowledge [the students] have, the more money they’re worth. With the high-tech vehicles today, when a car gets into an accident, you have to have the training and knowledge to repair it. We try to reinforce that with the I-CAR curriculum.”

In order to bring the program to their auto body department, a school pays I-CAR an annual $1,100 licensing fee. A $50 “start fee” is added for each student who enters the program, while an additional $100 is applied for each student who takes the End of Program Exam before graduation. Although I-CAR acknowledges that this amount might be prohibitive for some schools in an era of budgets cuts, Stage notes that the organization is willing to offer “heavily discounted” pricing for the first year to help a school get started. Additionally, I-CAR’s partnership with
the Collision Repair Education Foundation provides free Education Editions to 50 schools annually as part of the Foundation’s Ultimate Collision Education Makeover Grants. (More information on these grants, including what schools need to do to apply by the May 29 deadline, is available at http://collisioneducationfoundation.org/ultimate-collision-education-makeover-grant/).

For a complete overview of the Professional Development Program - Education Edition, please visit www.i-car.com/Home/Educational-Programs/Career-Technical-School-Programs/PDP-Education-Edition (PDP-EE). Information is also available through www.collisioncareers.org, a special I-CAR-created site for students interested in pursuing a career in collision repair.

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Under the proposed legislation, Labor Rates in Massachusetts would simply be the average of its bordering states, but will never be the highest in the region.”

Although it has long been a common tactic for insurers to claim that increasing the Labor Rate (especially in the way suggested by AASP/MA’s legislation) would increase policyholder premiums, Zywien is quick to calm these concerns.

“Premiums do not have to rise to account for an increase in the Labor Rate,” she reasons. “There are many areas where insurers have the flexibility to address an increase in the Labor Rate. Whether redirecting advertising and marketing dollars to the benefit of policyholders, or in the same way insurers are able to offer special pricing on plans, these companies presently have the ability to address this without raising premiums. According to a report conducted by J.D. Power, the personal auto insurance industry spent more than $5 billion in marketing and advertising in 2010 alone. This figure has increased each year since.”

As is evident in this feature, AASP/MA plans to make 2015 a pivotal year for the collision industry’s involvement in the Legislature. For more information on this legislation – including how you can help push the bills along – please contact AASP/MA at (617) 574-0741.