
State gap in 'middle-skill' workers to grow, study says

BY DAVID KRECHEVSKY REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

When the economy recovers, Connecticut faces a growing gap between the projected growth in jobs and the number of workers with the skills needed to fill them, according to a report released Thursday.

Based on analysis of state and federal data, about 245,000 job openings, or 43.5 percent of all jobs, projected for the state by 2016 will be "middle-skill" positions requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree, according to the report by the The Workforce Alliance and Skills2Compete-Connecticut.

The groups said the report is the first to track middle-skill jobs in the state. These jobs include positions in construction, health care, installation and maintenance, and public safety and transportation, among others, the report said.

By comparison, by 2016 low-skilled jobs will account for about 24 percent of the openings, while high-skilled jobs will account for about 33 percent, the report states.

In 2007, middle-skill jobs made up 47 percent of all jobs in Connecticut, while low-skilled jobs made up 19 percent and high-skilled jobs made up 34 percent.

While the percentage of middle-skill jobs will shrink slightly by 2016, the report projects the gap in the number of workers with such skills will grow. The report found that in 2007, when middle-skill jobs made up 47 percent of all jobs in the state, only 37 percent of all workers in the state had the skills to fill them.

"In reality, the gap was likely even greater in certain industries, because many workers trained to the middle-skill level — and even those with bachelor's degrees — did not have the specific technical skills needed," the report states. "This means that thousands of well-paid and rewarding jobs were going unfilled in the state, in industries that are and will be essential to Connecticut's economic portfolio."

To combat the problem, the report calls on the state to ensure that every resident has "access to at least two years of education or training past high school — leading to a vocational credential, industry certification or the first two years of college."