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Study: California should focus training on 'middle-skill' jobs

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About 12.2% of Californians are [out of work](#), according to the state's latest calculations, and some economists are predicting that the state won't start creating jobs until late 2010.

So what can the state's 2 million unemployed do in the meantime to better qualify themselves to get one of those jobs? Higher education may not be the answer, according to a [study released today](#).

About 2.7 million "middle-skill" jobs will be created in the state by 2016, according to the study by the **Workforce Alliance**, **Skills2Compete** and the **California EDGE Campaign**. Middle-skill jobs refer to those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree. They include jobs in construction, healthcare, law enforcement and many other fields.

"Federal funds from the stimulus bill are expected to create new jobs and many of these will be middle-skill, especially in green jobs, construction, manufacturing and transportation," the report says. "Matching the skills of our workforce to meet this demand will help our economy recover more quickly and prepare us for better times ahead."

The report calculates that about half of all jobs in California fell into the middle-skill category in 2008, and predicts that about 43% of all job openings in the next seven years will be middle-skill. Low-skill jobs will account for a quarter of all job openings over the same time period, and high-skill jobs will make up 32% of openings.

The problem: A shortage of middle-skill workers could develop because the state has cut back on the training of those skills. State budget cuts have drastically reduced funding to community colleges and adult education centers, for example.

"Our structural budget gaps could outlive the recession, forcing cuts to job training at precisely the moment when it is absolutely imperative to our economic well-being," said Virginia Hamilton, executive director of the **California Workforce Assn**. The association represents EDGE, a nonprofit group that advocates for high-wage-job creation in the state.

The study urges the state to ensure that every Californian has access to two years of education or training past high school.

The report predicts above-average growth in positions including dental hygienists, respiratory therapists, emergency medical technicians and industrial machinery mechanics through 2016.

-- Alana Semuels

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