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## **NEW REPORT: 43 PERCENT OF CONNECTICUT JOB OPENINGS IN 2016 ARE “MIDDLE-SKILL”; STATE WORKFORCE NOT READY TO MEET FUTURE DEMAND**

***Connecticut’s Economic Recovery Tied to Preparing Workers for Jobs Requiring More than High School Diploma, Less than College Degree; Connecticut Must Use Economic Downtime to Invest in Training Time To Close the Existing Skills Gap***

***Federal Recovery Dollars to Create Jobs in Middle-Skill Industries; Report Calls for Connecticut to Lead A National Vision Guaranteeing Two-Years Training Post High School***

HARTFORD—In what will play a major role in Connecticut’s economic recovery, 43 percent of all job openings projected for the state by 2016 are “middle-skill”—roughly 245,000 positions that require more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year degree—concludes a new study released today by The Workforce Alliance and the Skills2Compete-Connecticut campaign, an affiliate of the national Skills2Compete campaign. But to unleash the full economic benefits of these openings, Connecticut will need to invest in proper training and education for its embattled workforce.

While the recession is stifling current employment growth, the report projects that middle-skill jobs (including new jobs and replacement) would account for 43 percent of all openings between 2006 and 2016. Low- and high- skill jobs will account for 24 percent and 33 percent respectively.

The report, which for the first time tracks Connecticut’s jobs at the middle-skill level, notes that federal funds from the recovery bill are also expected to create millions of new jobs—especially in industries dominated by middle-skill occupations, like healthcare, environment/energy, construction, manufacturing, and transportation.

Connecticut’s strong record of investments in postsecondary education and workforce training has not kept up with demand for middle-skill workers. Prior to the recession Connecticut was already experiencing shortages of middle-skill workers in crucial industries. About 47 percent of all jobs are classified as middle-skill but only 37 percent of Connecticut workers likely have the credentials to fill them. That gap will return as jobs are created, stifling recovery efforts. The gap will widen as more workers retire and if Connecticut’s middle-skill educational attainment continues to decline.

With high unemployment in the state, the report notes the recession is precisely the right time to develop a strong middle-skill workforce.

“Economic downtime in Connecticut must be used to invest in training,” urges Alice Pritchard of the Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund, lead partner in the Skill2Compete-Connecticut campaign. “If Connecticut seeks real economic recovery and long-term prosperity, we must ensure our workforce has the necessary education and training to meet the labor demands of the future. The recession provides a time frame for businesses and the state to be opportunistic: evaluate labor and skill needs and train and prepare for the jobs that are expected to grow.”

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Paul Hoffman, President of the New Haven Manufacturers Association as well as his own company, Orange Research in Milford, CT, expressed his concerns, “We’ve experienced shortages in skilled workers for years. And while the recession certainly limits our current ability to grow, we know that when the economy bounces back we are going to need a robust, skilled workforce at the ready to move our industry ahead.”

The analysis for the study was performed by TWA using data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, American Community Survey and state labor market data from Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund, Connecticut Community College, Connecticut Employment and Training Commission, and the Office of Workforce Competitiveness. The analysis is based on the methodology developed for the national Skills2Compete report—*America’s Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*—by labor economists Harry Holzer and Robert Lerman.

*Connecticut’s Forgotten Middle-Skills Jobs* assesses the current and future middle-skill employment and education patterns in the state:

- **Employers report greater pain in high-demand industries.** In a survey of Connecticut employers, 82 percent of those surveyed said they have had difficulty finding qualified workers in their industry, with the greatest challenges in skilled professional/technicians and skilled machinists and other manufactures.
- Middle-skill jobs expected to grow by 2016 in Connecticut include **heavy truck drivers with a median earning of \$42,390; computer support specialists with a median earning of \$49,060; and licensed practical nurses with a median earning of \$52,040.** The report includes a list of 30 high-demand middle-skill jobs in Connecticut.
- **Connecticut faces substantial challenges when it comes to basic skills.** While 32,000 adults are being served by Connecticut’s adult education system, the Office of Program Review for state General Assembly estimates that at least another 181,000 would participate if more services were available. Another 312,222 working age Connecticut residents graduated from high school with prose and math skills below the basic level.

The report also finds that two-thirds of the people who will be in Connecticut’s workforce in the year 2020 were already working adults in 2005—long past the traditional high school to college pipeline. The Skills2Compete campaign says this finding underscores the crucial importance of investments in training and re-training the current adult workforce to closing the skill gap. And while the nation’s overall K-12 education system also needs significant repair that alone won’t solve this problem.

Echoing a vision put forward by the national Skills2Compete campaign, President Obama first challenged every American to commit to at least one year of postsecondary education or training in February 2009, and has continued to signal that investing in a range of skills for America’s workforce—“be it at a community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship”—will be a priority for his Administration.

“There is a federal call to action that must not be ignored. The President has called on all Americans to obtain some form of postsecondary education or job training and has backed that up with commitments to invest in community colleges and other middle-skill training opportunities” notes, Jessie Hogg, of The Workforce Alliance, the convening organization for the national Skills2Compete campaign.

“Even with a heightened focus on these issues at the national level, Connecticut should not wait for federal policy to play catch-up with state demand but rather take proactive policy actions to train more state residents for better, more plentiful middle-skill jobs and careers,” adds Pritchard.

The Skills2Compete-Connecticut campaign is calling on state leaders to embrace this bold vision to guide its economic and education strategy that would allow residents to meet or exceed the President’s challenge: Every Connecticut resident should have access to at least two years of education or training past high school—leading to a vocational credential, industry certification, or one’s first two years of college—to be pursued at whatever point and pace makes sense for individual workers and industries. An education strategy guided by this vision would give Connecticut a competitive edge for recovery and long-term growth.

The study notes historical precedents for such an initiative at the federal level including universal high school for U.S. students in the mid-nineteenth century and the GI Bill, which boosted post-war prosperity in the 1940s. The report also looks at state-level precedents such as Michigan’s “No Worker Left Behind” initiative, launched in August 2007, which promises to train up to 100,000 state residents in jobs in high demand occupations and emerging industries.

Members of the Skills2Compete-Connecticut campaign will meet in Washington, DC November 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> with legislative leaders to review the study’s findings and encourage further federal efforts to ensure all workers can get the skills they need to play a role in economic recovery. Over those two days, the campaign will brief federal policymakers on the report’s findings and begin to explore ways federal and state policy can complement one another to make Connecticut a leading state in addressing the middle-skills gap.

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Skills2Compete is a non-partisan campaign to ensure the U.S. workforce has the skills needed to meet business demand, foster innovation, and grow broadly shared prosperity. The campaign’s diverse and growing list of endorsers include national and local leaders from business, labor, education and training, community and civil rights groups, and the public sector. The Skills2Compete Vision: Every U.S. worker should have access to the equivalent of at least two years of education or training past high school—leading to a vocational credential, industry certification, or one’s first two years of college—to be pursued at whatever point and pace makes sense for individual workers and industries. Every person must also have the opportunity to obtain the basic skills needed to pursue such education. For more information visit [www.Skills2Compete.org](http://www.Skills2Compete.org) and [www.Skills2Compete.org/Connecticut](http://www.Skills2Compete.org/Connecticut).

TWA’s mission is to advocate for public policies that invest in the skills of America’s workers, so they can better support their families and help American businesses better compete in today’s economy. The Workforce Alliance is a national coalition of community-based training organizations, community colleges, unions, business leaders, local officials, and leading technical assistance and research organizations. This alliance of stakeholders, who have not previously come together, ensures that our efforts are not in the self interest of a particular group, but are instead in the broader public interest of the nation. For more information, visit [www.workforcealliance.org](http://www.workforcealliance.org).