

## Indiana's middle-skill manufacturing jobs - not gone, not forgotten

More evidence has emerged that thousands of job openings in the manufacturing and logistics fields will require advanced technical skills beyond high school – challenging and good-paying careers for young Hoosiers who are willing to keep learning after getting their high school diplomas.

Two weeks ago, a consortium of human capital-focused organizations (Skills2Compete, the National Skills Coalition, and Indiana Institute for Working Families) released a report, “Indiana’s Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs.” As the title suggests, it aims to draw attention to the fact that the majority of Hoosier job openings through 2016 will be in the ‘middle skill’ category – requiring more than high school but less than a four-year college degree.

These trends are mirrored at the national level, contradicting the view that the U.S. has evolved into an “hourglass” economy – one which offers good jobs to those with advanced degrees, menial ‘service sector’ positions to those without a post-high school education, and not much in between. Just the opposite is true – the middle skill category is where the growth is, offering the promise of a vibrant middle class... that is, if current and future workers are willing to get the education and training necessary.

In Indiana, manufacturing and logistics jobs make up the largest percentage of these middle-skill jobs –nearly 40% - while accounting for one of every five total jobs.


Unfortunately, Indiana faces a shortage of workers with the technical training necessary to take on these positions. While 55% of Hoosier jobs are in the middle-skill category, only 49% of workers achieve a corresponding skill level. Over the next decade, projections suggest that more than 10,000 job openings in Indiana may go unfilled for lack of qualified applicants.

The need is especially critical in manufacturing and logistics. Nationally, manufacturing shows the largest gap between open positions and actual new hires in 2010, as employers struggle to find workers with the education needed to operate and troubleshoot complex computerized equipment, anticipate supply chain needs and work as part of a team in today’s high-tech factories. Across the state, we hear a similar refrain from Conexus’ industry partners – the private sector is ready to grow again, but human capital is often the missing link.

So, “Indiana’s Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs” is a useful reiteration of what we already know – that revitalizing the state’s workforce pipeline for manufacturing and logistics is a critical economic development priority. In response, Conexus’ efforts to translate industry input into useful training programs and promote them to young Hoosiers – a sweeping campaign that engages the Indiana Department of Education, Commission for Higher Education, Ivy Tech and other universities, National Association of

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Manufacturers, a broad consortium of Indiana businesses and other partners – are moving full speed ahead.

Given the circumstances, there's no more important priority for maintaining Indiana's position as the nation's most manufacturing-intensive state and the Crossroads of America for 21st century logistics.

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