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Report calls for more investment in skills training

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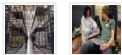
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Maintenance Supervisor Tye Cambe, of Laporte, left, and Operations Supervisor, Sean Reibly, of Portage, walk down an aisle of the storage area of Hanson Logistics, a cold storage company that located of Mississippi Street near 61st Avenue in Hobart. Warehouse and logistics operations have been targeted as places of employment that may employ middle-skill workers.



A national workforce training coalition is pushing for each person in Indiana to have access to at least two years of post-high school education or training.

The training would be aimed at helping people unqualified for jobs that are currently available or soon will be created, according to a report released today.

The Washington, D.C.-based National Skills Coalition released a national report, "America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs," and worked with sources in Indiana to create a state-focused version of it.

As the economy recovers, the report said there will be an increased need for people to fill jobs requiring skills beyond a high school diploma such as those in construction, health care and transportation, distribution and logistics. Middle-skill jobs -- defined as those that require a high school diploma, but less than a four-year college degree -- represent 55 percent of jobs in Indiana.

The report and its four recommendations to grow middle-skill jobs are the latest pieces of the National Skills Coalition's "Skills2Compete" campaign, which began in 2007, said Andrea Ray, a regional field director for the coalition. She said the study is important because it provides a framework for how to provide opportunities for people in an evolving economy.

"The unemployment we're experiencing is structural, not cyclical," Ray said. "A lot of people who lost jobs, they're not coming back. ... New jobs are taking their place, but they will require people who are locked out of the labor market because of the recession to gain additional skills to compete for those jobs."

The coalition recommends creating broader public support of investments in regional industry partnerships, greater financial access for post-secondary education, employers creating new training programs for existing workers, and increasing the emphasis on training workers.

Ray said the report is attracting more attention since President Barack Obama announced an initiative Monday to improve partnerships with community colleges and build a national network of workforce development strategies and job training and placement programs. In addition to creating a task force to

oversee federal efforts, Obama reiterated his goal for an additional 5 million people to graduate or receive certificates from community colleges in the next 10 years.

Linda Woloshansky, president of the Valparaiso-based Center for Workforce Innovations, said the report may help create "a perfect storm in a positive way." She said the new report supports many recommendations the organization she leads is pushing for in Northwest Indiana.

"Clearly there are a lot of people that need post-secondary education and the message is that folks don't have to assume that they need to get a (four-year degree)," said Woloshansky, whose organization is the regional operator of the state's WorkOne employment services program.

Susan Brooks, executive vice president for Ivy Tech Community College's Workforce and Economic Development division, said the statewide college system welcomed the opportunity to be a part of the report and discuss issues in Indiana. Brooks said the challenges of making education accessible and affordable is a battle the college fights daily.

She said the school is working to develop partnerships with industry sources to provide a relevant training curriculum, coordinate flexible class scheduling for working adults, provide the opportunity for students to take more online classes, and reduce costs to make more financial aid available for students.

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