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Report: 'Mid-skill' jobs to grow fastest

State needs to ramp up training to meet worker shortages, nonprofit says

by Kevin James Shay | Staff Writer

State officials need to make "major investments" in training programs to boost low-skill workers into a growing number of middle-skill jobs that are expected to see a worker shortage in coming years, according to a report released Tuesday.

Middle-skill jobs are those that require more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree, such as insurance claims adjusters, computer support specialists and health-care technicians.

Nearly half of all Maryland jobs in 2008 — 46 percent — were middle-skill jobs, and about 434,000 middle-skill openings are expected in the state through 2016, according to the study by the nonprofit National Skills Coalition, formerly Workforce Alliance. The middle range will account for 42 percent of all job openings in the next six years, compared with 35 percent in high-skill fields and 23 percent in low-skill ones.

The Washington, D.C., group includes leaders from business, labor, community colleges, community organizations and government entities.

An education and training strategy guided by the national Skills2Compete program would give Maryland a competitive edge, said Eric M. Seleznow, executive director of the state Governor's Workforce Investment Board, in a statement. "As Maryland looks to remain a strong competitor in the global economy, it's critical that we prepare workers for the jobs of the future."

Among the higher-paying middle-skills jobs in the state are dental hygienists and diagnostic medical sonographers, which are expected to have about 1,300 and 500 openings, respectively, through 2016. Those fields had 2007 median earnings in Maryland of \$68,840 and \$67,050, respectively.

The mid-skill field with the most projected openings in the state is carpenters with 11,575. That segment paid \$39,160 in 2007 median earnings.