



## Time, skill needed to fix economy

By Loh-Sze Leung and Nancy Snyder Sunday, August 8, 2010

With unemployment hovering around 9 percent in Massachusetts and higher in other parts of the country, policymakers and average citizens alike are looking for the magic bullet to help people get back to work. Unfortunately, time and experience have shown that there is no such quick fix.

In Massachusetts, we are focused on fields in which there is documented job demand: Health care, life sciences, clean energy and technology are among the industries that are hiring in targeted occupations. The state and philanthropic community have made a collective, substantial investment in job training closely linked to industry demand. That investment is paying off.

In Massachusetts, 45 percent of the jobs are middle-skill - requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree. Last week, the Massachusetts Forgotten Middle Skill Jobs report revealed that nearly 400,000 job openings between now and 2016 will be considered middle-skill. However, only 32 percent of our workforce likely has the skills to fill these jobs.

The bottom line is that even in a recession, there are still employers who are ready to hire but cannot find workers who meet the qualifications and have the right set of skills.

In the greater Boston area, Shire Pharmaceutical is expanding its manufacturing facility and needs dozens of new employees for positions such as manufacturing operator and quality control technician that require training but not a four-year degree. Beth **Israel** Deaconess Medical Center wants to hire more than 75 middle-skill jobs, including medical assistants, patient-care technicians and histotechnicians.

Some of these positions have been challenging to fill because the annual number of graduates in the field is insufficient to meet local demand, so the employers have developed internal programs and partnered with community colleges to train people for middle-skill jobs, and graduates are assured employment upon completion of the program.

Growing the number of middle-skill people in our state is not an overnight proposition, nor is it a problem that will be solved through short-term training. Businesses need to be a growing part of the solution and some companies are making substantial investments in workforce training. But not all of our companies are there yet.

The workforce training and higher education sectors also need to better connect in ways that increase the number of people who complete post-secondary education while also using their time and resources well. Our public, private and philanthropic investments in building a skilled workforce for jobs that are in demand are essential to our state's productivity, competitiveness and growth.

Job training for high-demand jobs, offering individuals skills and certifications aligned with industry needs, can be a useful catalyst for jump-starting the economy and helping to solve the problem of unemployment.

*Loh-Sze Leung is the executive director of SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce. Nancy Snyder is president of the Commonwealth Corporation.*

**Article URL:** [http://www.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/op\\_ed/view.bg?articleid=1272987](http://www.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/op_ed/view.bg?articleid=1272987)