

October 14, 2009

## 'Middle-skill' jobs called crucial to state economy

Study says Michigan must invest heavily in key jobs category

*Melissa Domsic*  
mdomsic@lsj.com

Training workers for "middle-skill" jobs - those requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a college bachelor's degree - is key to Michigan's economic recovery.

That's the conclusion of a study released Tuesday by national advocacy group, The Workforce Alliance, which bases its conclusions partly on federal Bureau of Labor Statistics and state Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth data.

Middle-skill occupations is a broad category, and includes such jobs as licensed practical nurses, dental hygienists and auto mechanics to paralegals, carpenters and police officers.

The report said Michigan needs to make significant investments in training programs to help workers obtain more abundant middle-skill positions.

Local work force development and educational leaders agree. But some say training shouldn't stop there.

"These middle jobs are still not an excuse for not committing to lifelong learning," said Kate Tykocki, spokeswoman for Capital Area Michigan Works.

"The fastest-growing and highest paying jobs are still ones that require bachelor's and beyond."

## 51 percent of state jobs

The Workforce Alliance is a coalition of community organizations, community colleges, labor unions and business leaders and local officials who advocate for public investment in worker training and education.

Middle-skill occupations accounted for 51 percent of all Michigan jobs in 2008, according to the study.

The report predicted 646,580 job openings, or about 46 percent of the 1.4 million openings expected between 2006 and 2016, will be in middle-skill careers, while 30 percent will be in high-skilled jobs and 24 percent in low-skilled occupations.

## Training required

Middle-skill jobs account for 80 percent of the employees at Hayes Green Beach Memorial Hospital in Charlotte, said human resources manager Jennifer Myers. She said training is required, even for positions such as medical assistants that didn't used to need certification.

Middle-skill jobs are important because they can support a family, said Sharon Parks, president and CEO of the Michigan League for Human Services. Parks served on the report's advisory committee.

"It's very important we look at these jobs and do everything we can to move men and women into these jobs," she said.

"That's going to take some investment here in Michigan in programs and initiatives."

## No Worker Left Behind

That includes the state and federally funded No Worker Left Behind. Since August 2007, the initiative has provided more than 96,000 people up to two years of free tuition to train for a high-demand occupation, emerging industry or to start their own business, said Andy Levin, DELEG's deputy director.

"Why not take this moment, when the economy is in so much trouble and you might have trouble finding a job anyway, to really upskill in a big way toward a job we think is going to be there?" Levin said.

He said the state continues to seek and receive federal grants for the program. The No Worker Left Behind initiative is set to end by August 2010, but Levin said he expects it will be extended.

## Program participant

Charlotte resident Nicole Schartow recently took advantage of the program to get her medical assistant certification at American Medical Careers.

But she realized certification doesn't guarantee a job.

"I got the certification, but I don't have the experience that the doctor's office wants," she said.

Enrollment at community colleges tends to increase during poor economic times, said Brent Knight, president of Lansing Community College. He said LCC's enrollment was up 8 percent this semester.

Training for middle-skill jobs is a core part of the school's mission, Knight said.

"It's necessary for ongoing economic vitality of the Lansing region," he said.

---