

October 19, 2009

Report sees job jolt in the middle

By Christopher Behman
DAILY PRESS & ARGUS

A privately funded report claims 650,000 middle-skill jobs and job openings — those that require more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year degree — will be created by 2016.

The report, "Michigan's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs," was released last week, and claims the jobs will comprise 46 percent of all job openings during the period of 2006-2016, based mostly on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

It claims low- and high-skilled jobs will account for 24 percent and 30 percent of job openings, respectively, during that time frame.

Middle-skill jobs cover positions including carpenters, auto mechanics, truck drivers, electricians, dental hygienists and other jobs that require a six-month to two-year degree of some kind.

The report states middle-skill jobs already represent the largest share of jobs in Michigan at roughly 51 percent, but only 46 percent of workers in the state are qualified for them.

"We see that trend carrying out to 2016 and probably beyond that," said Andrea Ray, regional field director for The Workforce Alliance, which produced the report.

Meanwhile, statistics are expected to show at the end of next year, 2010, that Michigan lost 1 million jobs over the past decade, since 2000. More than 800,000 are already gone. The 650,000 jobs and openings won't replace lost jobs, but will come from creation of new jobs and retirement and other forms of attrition, Ray said.

The alliance's report was compiled with input from its Michigan partners, including the Michigan Community College Association, Michigan League for Human Services and the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce.

The report calls for support for training programs, and names the state's No Worker Left Behind Act as an example of a successful state training program.

The report states the program to date has put more than 96,000 Michiganders into job training.

Ray said federal recovery dollars will play a role in job creation, but that most of the projected jobs and openings will be created through marketplace demand.

She said allocated recovery funds are probably already creating jobs considered middle-skill level.

"It's a good time to make sure workers have the training they need for those jobs so when these industries come online and really demonstrate a need, we have workers that are ready to go and fill these positions," Ray said.

She said the middle-skill jobs won't outnumber low- and high-skilled jobs, but that jobs between the two categories will grow considerably.

The state Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth has endorsed the data in the report, and said it proves training through No Worker Left Behind is a wise investment.

"There's still a sizable portion of jobs in the middle. It kind of really refutes that hourglass notion," Ray

said.

Training programs like No Worker Left Behind haven't translated to job creation, said Michael LaFaive, director of the Mackinac Center's Morey Fiscal Policy Initiative in Midland.

LaFaive said realization of the projected spike in middle-skill jobs will depend on how well Michigan's economy recovers in the coming years.

Contact Daily Press & Argus reporter Christopher Behnan at (517) 548-7108 or at cbehnan@gannett.com.

Additional Facts

View the report

To view "Michigan's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs" visit www.skills2compete.org, then click on the "in the states" icon on the right, then "state S2C campaigns." Select S2C-Michigan and download the report.
