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# Skills2Compete-New York

## Answering the Middle-Skills Challenge

March 2011



NATIONAL SKILLS COALITION  
Every worker. Every industry. A strong economy.



**New York faces a public policy dilemma:** in the face of shrinking public budgets and stagnation in educational attainment and skill acquisition, how can the state ensure that it has a sufficient number of highly trained, work-ready individuals to fill the middle-skill job opportunities projected to emerge as economic recovery takes hold? Thorny though it is, this problem conceals an unprecedented opportunity to boost the Empire State's economic competitiveness and spread the benefits of growth more equitably across the workforce.

The newly released report *New York's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*, produced by the Skills2Compete-New York campaign—a partnership of the National Skills Coalition with a coalition of New York-based government officials, business leaders, educators, advocates and service providers—sets out the dimensions of the challenge. Middle-skill jobs—those that require education beyond a high school diploma but not a four-year college degree—account for 46 percent of all current jobs in New York, and a substantial share of projected future job openings. But only 39 percent of New York's workforce has the educational credentials to fill those positions, posing a risk of worker shortages in crucial industries like health care and information technology that could put the state at a disadvantage in an increasingly competitive regional, national and global economic context. Ensuring an adequate number of middle-skill workers will require providing educational opportunities not only for young people, but also for those already in the workforce. Close to two-thirds of those who will be in New York's workforce in the year 2025 were already working adults in 2010, putting them well beyond the traditional high school-to-college pipeline.<sup>1</sup>

The **vision** of Skills2Compete-New York is:

Every New York resident should have access to the equivalent of at least two years of education or training past high school—leading to a vocational credential, industry certification, or one's first two years of college—to be pursued at whatever point and pace makes sense for individual workers and industries. Every person must also have access to the basic skills needed to pursue such education.

This policy brief makes recommendations to state policymakers and other stakeholders on how New York might progress together toward this goal, given current circumstances and constraints. The recommendations below are informed by three overarching principles:

- **Organize governance structures, investments and services** in the way most conducive to engaging all stakeholders: government, employers, educational institutions, social service providers and the philanthropic community.
- **Set clear overarching goals** for educational attainment, training and transition into employment, and hold all involved parties accountable for achieving them.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel:** as the full report details, there are successful models for many aspects of this work across the state, many of which can be expanded and/or replicated.



This agenda substantially aligns with the policy priorities of Governor Andrew Cuomo, whose 2010 campaign materials included the following language:

*The State's numerous workforce training initiatives should be focused on building the skills of employees for the types of jobs where employers need more workers, especially in targeted industry clusters of each region of the State. To help ensure that training focuses on skills and knowledge transferable directly to the workplace, a Cuomo Administration will align responsibility for workforce training with agencies that have the best understanding of the needs of both business and labor... [w]e also need to closely link our workforce training efforts with community colleges.<sup>2</sup>*

The recommendations fall into three categories: partnerships, pathways and investments. Supporting **partnerships** of employers, education, and workforce stakeholders to address the skill needs of vital industries within regional economies and **career pathways and bridges** that help more adult workers balance progress toward successful attainment of postsecondary credentials with their work and family obligations will help New York meet its demand for middle-skill workers. In this tight budget environment, these strategies **target public investments** toward labor market needs, leveraging the resources of other stakeholders wherever possible. By coordinating the needs of employers with the work of education and workforce development stakeholders, these strategies maximize return on current investments without additional strain on the state's budget.

## PARTNERSHIPS

- Foster the development of employer-driven, industry-focused strategies, such as cluster and sector approaches, that combine the tools of both workforce and economic development in ways that lead to career advancement in high-growth industries.
  - ▶ **Example:** Finger Lakes Advanced Manufacturers' Enterprise (FAME), an initiative of the Finger Lakes Workforce Investment Board and a partnership of public and private regional stakeholders, works to attract and grow a strong advanced manufacturing workforce in the Finger Lakes region. Working with FAME, the Finger Lakes Community College developed the A.A.S. Degree in Instrumentation and Control Technologies, which offers students an opportunity to learn the tools and techniques of emerging technologies crucial for success in this competitive field.
- Support the creation and sustainability of postsecondary technical and vocational programs that create the skilled technical workforce demanded by Governor Cuomo's Regional Economic Councils.



- ▶ **Example:** The Manufacturing Skill Standards Council Certified Production Technician initiative, an innovative partnership between the Capital Region Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and the Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES, helps adult students earn industry-recognized credentials in manufacturing production while creating a pipeline of workers to meet growing local demand for a skilled, high-tech workforce.
- Engage economic development entities—Chambers of Commerce, local development corporations and industry associations—in the development and funding of pipelines to train and place middle-skilled workers
  - ▶ **Example:** The Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills in New York City, a collaboration of the Building Trades Employers Association and the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, has placed more than 1,100 graduates of New York City public schools into union apprenticeships in the construction industry since 2001.<sup>3</sup>

## PATHWAYS

- Help students get through pre-college work more quickly and inexpensively. Minimize remediation by better aligning adult basic education and pre-college programs with postsecondary institutions.
  - ▶ **Example:** The New York City Department of Education and City University of New York have embarked upon a comprehensive College Readiness and Success Initiative emphasizing alignment of standards between high school graduation and college entry to support ambitious goals of increasing college enrollment and rates of college graduation in a timely fashion.<sup>4</sup>
- Expand career pathway and other education and training models that increase credential attainment. Align courses of study within and between institutions; link non-credit and credit programs to credential outcomes; support transition to college; and create more evening, weekend, modular, on-line, off-site and nontraditional courses.
  - ▶ **Example:** The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (CUNY ASAP), a program piloted by New York City's Center for Economic Opportunity to help raise the persistence and completion rates of community college students, offers conveniently scheduled classes and a range of support services. Compared to a control group, CUNY ASAP participants have been more than twice as likely to graduate within three years.<sup>5</sup>
- Appoint a high-level cross agency state council or organization to determine best practices around the transition from adult education or developmental education to college and training programs and make recommendations for implementation.



- ▶ Two entities with interest and expertise in this subject are the New York State Board of Regents, which has responsibility for supervising all educational activities within the state, and the state Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), a mandatory body that has oversight of all Workforce Investment Act-funded activities within the state. Both groups include members with deep experience in this subject in addition to their related statutory responsibilities.
- Set integrated statewide performance goals for the postsecondary and workforce training systems. Goals should measure skill acquisition, educational program completion and credential/certificate attainment, employment, wage increases and progress toward filling middle-skill jobs in New York.
  - ▶ For a variety of reasons, each of New York's subsystems for human capital formation—primary/secondary education, public assistance, postsecondary education, and workforce development—traditionally have set their own goals and designed programs without consideration of the work of the other subsystems. If the state is to meet the challenge of filling its forgotten middle-skill jobs, however, it should set and ensure attainment of unified goals around employment, skill-building, and educational attainment. The State Workforce Investment Board could be one entity to set and enforce such goals.

## INVESTMENTS

- Collaborate across sectors (public, private, philanthropic) to develop new models for investment in/and of governance of workplace-focused education and training models.
  - ▶ **Example:** The New York City Department of Small Business Services partnered with the New York City Workforce Funders, a coalition of foundations that invest in local workforce development activities, on the New York City Sector Initiative (NYCSI), a multi-million dollar initiative that supported the development of career-track training and job placements for several hundred New Yorkers in a range of health care and biotechnology job titles. As public funding for job training and employment services continues to fall, new models for investment will be necessary to support services at a level commensurate with demand.
- Prioritize funding for Adult Basic Education (ABE), providing incentives and support for those programs most effective at helping adults prepare for and transition to postsecondary training programs.



- ▶ Federal funding for adult education declined by 18 percent in constant dollars between Fiscal Years 2002 and 2009, even as need rose steadily<sup>6</sup>—and spiked during the recent recession, as waiting lists roughly doubled from 80,000 to 160,000 between 2008 and 2010.<sup>7</sup> New York has among the longest waits for services; while the state has been relatively generous in its support for ABE, funding has fallen ever further behind demand.
- Increase funding for postsecondary education and training by 5 percent a year, including public higher education and community-based organizations. Funding should support expanded access through creation of additional evening, weekend, off-site, non-semester-based, and/or modular courses in critical industries that most effectively help adults attain middle-skill jobs.
  - ▶ Both the City University of New York (CUNY) and the State University of New York (SUNY) have seen record enrollment since the onset of the Great Recession, a response both to the difficult labor market and the clear signal that educational attainment is the key to economic success in New York’s knowledge economy. Additionally, more and more of the student body in both systems are “non-traditional”—adults with competing obligations of work and family—meaning that they require more flexible schedules and, often, intermediary milestones on the road to academic or vocational credentials. New York State can use its investments to compel changes in scheduling and curriculum within CUNY and SUNY to accommodate the students of today.
- Change current policy to increase financial aid to part-time students, and include student support services along with that aid.
  - ▶ New York’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is among the more generous state-based sources of financial aid for undergraduates. Part-time students, however, are left outside looking in; applicants must enroll full-time for one year before becoming eligible for “part-time TAP.”<sup>8</sup> This restriction ensures that many of the students most in need of financial aid are blocked from receiving it.



## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> *New York's Forgotten Middle Skill Jobs*. Commissioned by the Skills2Compete-New York Campaign and National Skills Coalition. Washington, DC, 2011. Available online at [www.nationalskillscoalition.org/NewYork](http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/NewYork).

<sup>2</sup> Cuomo, Andrew. "New York Works." In *The New NY Agenda: A Plan for Action*. 2010. Available online at <http://www.andrewcuomo.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Learn more about the Edward J. Malloy Initiative for Construction Skills, at <http://www.constructionskills.org>.

<sup>4</sup> Learn more about the City University of New York's College Readiness and Success Initiative, Graduate! NYC, at <http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/ue/CUNYDOECollgeReadiness/GraduateNYCOverview.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Learn more about the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, at <http://www.cuny.edu/academics/programs/notable/asap/about.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Kaleba, Kermit and Rachel Gragg. "Workforce Investment Act, Title II." In *Training Policy in Brief*. National Skills Coalition. Washington, DC, February 2011. Available online at <http://www.nationalskillscoalition.org/InBrief>.

<sup>7</sup> McLendon, Lennox. *Adult Student Waiting List Survey, 2009-2010*. National Council of State Directors of Adult Education. Washington, DC, 2010. Available online at <http://www.ncladvocacy.org/2010AdultEducationWaitingListReport.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Hilliard, Tom. *Working to Learn, Learning to Work*. Center for an Urban Future. New York, NY, August 2007. Available online at [http://www.nycfuture.org/images\\_pdfs/pdfs/WorkingtoLearn.pdf](http://www.nycfuture.org/images_pdfs/pdfs/WorkingtoLearn.pdf).