

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

N E W S

The Independent Weekly Report on School-To-Work, Job Training & Vocational Education

Skills Gap To Widen As Baby Boomers Retire

■ *Education and training policy must address skills shortages, expert argues.*

Nearly 50 million 18- to 24-year-olds will enter the workforce over the coming decades, but their skill levels will not be sufficient to fill the jobs left by retiring baby boomers, an expert in education and workforce development warned last week.

The workforce, which has grown by more than 50 percent over the past 20 years, will suddenly stop growing altogether as a large number of workers—including about 46 million with some college education—start retiring, said Anthony Carnevale, vice president of public leadership at Educational Testing Service in Princeton, N.J.

This demographic shift is expected to be felt especially in the skilled jobs that require post-secondary education or training, Carnevale told policy analysts and government officials gathered July 27 at an American Youth Policy Forum event on Capitol Hill.

Help Wanted

The good news is that during the next two decades, nearly 50 million people with some post-secondary education will enter the workforce, a net gain of about 3 million workers with college training, he explained.

“That sounds great,” he said. But the numbers of jobs that will require postsecondary education will grow even faster.

“Continuing through 2020, we will need 12 million [additional] workers with some college education ... it looks like we’ll just get about 3 million,” he said. “The demand for
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Advocates Lobby Senate For Technology Funding

■ *But one analyst argues that no one has ever proven that computers are cost-effective.*

Preparing children for a high-tech economy, mainstreaming special education students, and improving academic achievement all necessitate an expanded federal investment in education technology, advocates told Senate appropriators last week.

“It may be time to conceive of an education [technology] initiative on the scale of the Apollo program or the Genome Project,” said Margaret Honey, vice president of the non-profit Education Development Center.

Currently, 2 percent of all public education funds—federal, state and local—is spent on education technology. By raising that proportion even slightly, policymakers could realize outsized gains, witnesses told members of
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workers with some college education will grow faster than our current ability to supply them.”

The situation will require new federal policies to address “skills shortages in the foreseeable future,” he said, adding this is a turnabout from when officials “used to worry about unemployment.”

Social policies—like raising the retirement age to keep current employees in place longer—“won’t do it,” Carnevale noted. Likewise, bringing in foreign workers through temporary H1-B work visas will not be sufficient to make up the shortfall, he said.

‘Continuing through 2020, we will need 12 million [additional] workers with some college education ... It looks like we’ll just get about 3 million. The demand for workers with some college education will grow faster than our current ability to supply them.’

Anthony Carnevale, vice president
Educational Testing Service

Rather, skills shortages must be addressed through education and training policy, he said, including the need to improve access to post-secondary opportunities, which is proven to increase earnings.

The value of having some kind of postsecondary education will continue to increase, he said, even as more people obtain such degrees.

Indeed, about 88 percent of workers with associate’s degrees earn as much those with bachelor’s degrees, he said, adding that overall earnings for both groups are rising. Meanwhile, earnings for people with only a high school diploma are declining, Carnevale said.

Providing access to postsecondary education and training is especially important for the current 18- to 24-year-old cohort that is dominated by minorities, of which nearly 30 to 35 percent will be economically disadvantaged, Carnevale noted.

Improving access will require “new investments,” he said. But state education resources have been “drifting” to secondary and pre-school education, while funding pots for higher education are “going down,” he said.

Federal student aid also has shifted its focus to the middle class, Carnevale said. He predicts competition for aid dollars will “create future tension between low-income and middle-income Americans trying to afford higher education.”

Cognitive Skills Required

Meanwhile, businesses say they need to spend between \$16 billion and \$17 billion to train their workers to match current skill requirements, Carnevale said. “They don’t want to do this themselves,” he noted. “They want to off-load that to colleges and technical schools.”

Employers also want workers with good cognitive and problem-solving skills, Carnevale added.

“That means some college,” he said. In today’s knowledge-based economy, workers “can’t be rigid and unable to adjust. They have to be able to change gears; multitask.”

Workers also must have good interpersonal skills, whether they work in service jobs or on a manufacturing assembly line, Carnevale said. “College graduates tend to have these skills.” □

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