

Another View: Maine can grow manufacturing sector with targeted education

The jobs are coming, but we don't have the people who are prepared to fill them.

By JESSICA LALIBERTE

In response to the Maine Voices column "Manufacturing in Maine poised to grow -- but where are the workers?" on Sept. 12:

I agree we need to rewrite the story of manufacturing in Maine, but we have an additional way to get there: integrate career-relevant training into our high school classrooms.

Education requirements for virtually all occupations are increasing. Here in Maine, almost 90 percent of jobs created between 2008 and 2018 will require some type of formal education beyond high school. Those increasing education requirements help fuel the "skills gap" that so many businesses are anticipating or are already experiencing.

A recent analysis projects 26,000 new high-wage and growth jobs in our state over 10 years. That's the good news. But the bad news?

That same analysis predicts a shortage of more than 1,500 associate degree workers in information and computer technology; more than 1,000 unfilled machinists positions; and 4,000 high-wage jobs going unfilled. One way we can

combat these predictions is to educate our high school students about various career paths available to them, integrated with a rigorous academic curriculum.

Existing education models that do this show marked improvement with student engagement in school, higher graduation rates and increased enrollment in postsecondary education and training. These kids "learn to learn" and also develop the increasingly important skills of communication, collaboration and critical thinking.

Predictions are not foregone conclusions. As our economy recovers, we can get the skilled work force our businesses will need by being forward-thinking on how we model our education system.

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