

America's Edge study: Career-themed high school curricula needed to fill health care job gap

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ANTIOCH -- The health care industry is one of the state's fastest-growing job sectors, but there are some gaps in the pipeline of skilled workers coming in to fill those positions.

California, including the East Bay, runs the risk of falling behind in preparing the workforce to compete successfully for health care jobs, according to a report released Friday by America's Edge, a coalition of business leaders that studies future job trends and needs.

One solution identified to reinvigorate the workforce is the establishment of career-themed education, or Linked Learning.

"Finding strong candidates to fill available jobs is difficult to do," Amy Anderson, John Muir Health's workforce development coordinator, said Friday during a news conference at Dozier-Libbey Medical High School.

Health care industry jobs require a unique combination of work skills, caring compassion and dedication to confidentiality, she said.

"We cannot expect to close the current and future skills gap unless we are preparing our students immediately," Anderson said.

Anderson was joined by Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Stockton, and other local educational and business leaders to discuss the study and merits of Linked Learning.

The largest demands are for nurses and home health aides. It is estimated California will have a shortfall of 116,000 registered nurses by 2020 because of the improved economy, growing demand as the uninsured attain health insurance and retirement of the current workforce, according to the study.

However, there has been a void left by a state high school dropout rate of 21.5 percent, a sizable portion of graduates being unprepared for higher education when leaving school and many East Bay adults lacking the background to compete for skilled health care jobs, said Jennifer Ortega, America's Edge state director.

Antioch officials say Linked Learning is making a difference.

"This innovative approach really is turning high school education around, not only here, but up and down California," Antioch Unified Superintendent Donald Gill said. "It's creating relevant experiences for the kids, engaging them in the active learning process, igniting their passion and really building opportunities for career pathways."

Founded in 2008, Dozier-Libbey, a stand-alone high school with a health care-centric curriculum, has the highest attendance rate among Antioch's high schools -- 97 percent compared with the average of 95 percent.

About 55 percent of the district's high schoolers are in its eight Linked Learning subjects. Gill hopes that percentage will bump up to 80 percent in the next couple of years. Antioch is also sharing its knowledge of Linked Learning with the Pittsburg and Mt. Diablo school districts.

There are about 2,000 East Bay students in the 13 health care-based Linked Learning programs at high schools in the region, with 650 attending Dozier-Libbey, Ortega said.

"That's something East Bay employers can take comfort in knowing," she said.

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HEALTH CARE PATHWAYS

Here is a list of high schools in the East Bay that provide career-themed opportunities in health care:

Alameda County

Fremont: Irvington High School, Science, Health, Athletics and Psychology Education (SHAPE) Academy

Oakland: LIFE Academy, Health and Bioscience Academy

Oakland: Oakland High School, Public Health and Policy Academy

Oakland: Oakland Technical High School, Health and Biotechnology Academy

San Lorenzo: Arroyo High School, Academy of Health and Medicine

Contra Costa County

Antioch: Dozier-Libbey Medical High School

Concord: Mt. Diablo High School, Medical and Bio-Tech Academy

Concord: Ygnacio Valley High School, Health Science Academy

Pinole: Pinole Valley High School, Health Academy

Richmond: DeAnza Senior High School, Health Sports Medicine Academy

Richmond: Richmond High School, Health Science Academy

Solano County

Vallejo: Jesse M. Bethel High School, Bio Medical Academy

Vallejo: Vallejo High School, Biotechnology Academy