



Business

Wanted: 15,000 highly skilled workers.

Apply to: Maine.

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PORTLAND, Maine — Maine needs at least an additional 15,000 highly skilled workers if the state is going to remain competitive in a global economy — a necessity the state’s education system isn’t prepared to provide, according to a report released Tuesday by America’s Edge, a national nonprofit group that focuses on education policy.

Between 2008 and 2018, Maine jobs requiring a postsecondary education are expected to grow seven times faster than jobs for high school dropouts. By 2022, roughly 75 percent of the fastest growing occupations with above-average wages will be jobs that require an associate degree or higher, according to the report.

America’s Edge, which has an office in Topsham, earlier this year commissioned Richmond, Va.-based Chmura Economics and Analytics to write the report.

In the areas of science, technology, engineering and math — referred to as STEM — jobs are expected to grow 7 percent in Maine from 2008 to 2018. Of those STEM jobs, 87 percent will require a advanced education and 57 percent will require a bachelor’s degree or higher, the report states.

While Maine will benefit from the growth in these high-wage jobs, the state’s education system is not graduating enough future employees to fill them, the report shows.

Only 35.5 percent of adults in Maine had a postsecondary degree or higher on average between 2006 and 2010, according to U.S. Census Bureau data.

“These skill gaps will harm our economic recovery and long-term growth,” said Ed Cervone, executive director of the Maine Development Foundation at a press event Tuesday at Cianbro Corp.’s waterfront facility in Portland.



A new report commissioned by America’s Edge says Maine needs at least 15,000 additional highly skilled workers to meet future workforce demands. Steve Pound, associate director of workforce development for Cianbro Corp., speaks at the press event Tuesday morning at Cianbro’s facility in Portland where the report was released.

“We need to make sure that our students — our future workforce — reach their full academic and professional potential so they succeed in life and help Maine businesses succeed in the global economy.”

In 2001 Maine ranked eighth in the country for individual degrees in science and engineering, according to a Milken Institute study cited by the report. In the latest rankings, Maine has fallen to 24th in that measurement.

“We’re moving in the wrong direction,” Cervone said.

It’s hard to pinpoint why Maine’s ranking may have dropped so much in the last 12 years, Cervone said, but he suspects Maine’s educators and business community have not done a good job exposing students to the STEM areas at an early age.

The report doesn’t contain new research, but pulls existing data from sources such as the Maine Department of Labor, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau to draw attention to the widening gap. Chris Hall, CEO of the Portland Regional Chamber said it’s important to keep the issue at the forefront of any conversation about Maine’s future.

“I don’t think we can say enough times how important this is,” Hall said. “I don’t know of anything that’s more important to the future of the state’s economy than this conversation. This is where our future lies.”

The economic impact of graduating 1,000 more high school students each year would increase Maine’s gross state product by \$12 million and increase state revenue by \$900,000 through increased spending and investment spurred on by the graduates elevated income levels, the report states.

The average lifetime earnings of a college graduate are \$2.1 million higher than those of a high school dropout, according to a Georgetown University study cited in the report.

The report also highlights education models that jumpstart innovation, such as the Lake Region High School Career Academies, Jobs for Maine Graduates, the Expeditionary Learning model at Portland’s Casco Bay High School, and the Cianbro Institute, which the company launched in 2008 as an in-house educational program.

“There are great opportunities happening around us in the state to ensure our businesses have the highly skilled workforce that they need,” said Steve Pound, associate director of workforce development at Cianbro, urging lawmakers to continue to invest in “evidence-based” education.

He singled out Maine Common Core Standards and other education assessments as key to “Maine’s economic future and to keep Maine competitive in our global economy.”