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## Jobs are out there – for graduates who have the right skills

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Last year, my company spent more than \$100,000 with headhunters, trying to find talent to fill the gaps we have in employment. Sadly enough, the vast majority of the people we found did not come from North Carolina.

It is not just occupation skills that are hard to find. Too many young people entering the workforce lack the “soft skills” – communication, collaboration and critical thinking – that can spell the difference between success and failure in today’s business world.

As we enter another graduation season, we should examine if students are developing the skills they will need when they enter the workforce.

Our education system is so focused on memorization and “making the grade” that we are not helping enough students “learn to learn.” They need to have a strong command of core academic content but they also need a strong command of the increasingly important soft skills.

Most businesses demand these skills in all levels of jobs. Yet six out of 10 surveyed N.C. employers reported communications skills gaps among job applicants – and close to half reported deficiencies in critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Take manufacturing – with which I am very familiar. If you have the right skills, the jobs are definitely out there. But the Manufacturers Institute has reported that 67 percent of manufacturers have moderate to severe shortages of available, qualified workers.

How critical is education in establishing a career in our region? According to a report from the business leaders group, America’s Edge, by 2018, two thirds of all new jobs in North Carolina will require some type of education beyond high school. That percentage rises to 91 percent for science, technology, engineering and math jobs. These benchmarks will be hard to meet when 22 percent of our students do not graduate on

time and only 30 percent of the North Carolina Class of 2012 graduates taking the ACT college admissions test met college readiness benchmarks.

The outlook is certainly challenging. But it is solvable.

We must train and re-train our workforce and attract skilled workers to our region and state. But we must also embrace innovative education models that will develop necessary skills in the next generation.

One solution? Make what children learn at school relevant to the business world, so they can develop the skills businesses look for in new hires and continue the implementation of our new rigorous standards and assessments.

High schools across the country, including in Charlotte, are already working to incorporate these ideas, by integrating career relevance training with rigorous academic curriculum. Students take classes together as a cohort with a career-themed curriculum that helps them see the connections between academic subjects and their real-world applications. By working in teams and gaining actual work experience, students begin to understand the importance of professionalism, reliability, teamwork and clear communications skills.

The business community knows what we need in our workforce. Innovation in our schools will create innovators in our workforce.

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Read more here: <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/2013/05/21/4054891/jobs-are-out-there-for-graduates.html#storylink=cpy>