

Understanding the Employment

SKILLS GAP

in Central New York



Onondaga
**Citizens
League**

2014 Study | Report No. 34



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Preface and Acknowledgements

Sandra Barrett
Executive
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April 2015

Nearly 25 years ago, OCL issued its 11th report, "Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare?" Study committee members then heard that many jobs in the region were going unfilled, especially in technical and service-related fields. Jobs in the computer and health-related fields were experiencing serious shortages, and the health care system was expected to expand by 20 percent in the decade. Employers told the 1990 study committee, they "experience trouble locating employees for jobs that may not require a college degree but do require advanced skills and training." The committee also heard that the dispersion of the population throughout the county was placing more demands on the transit and transportation systems, job growth was occurring among small businesses, and there was a mismatch between labor supply and demand. In 1990 a state labor department economist told the committee, "(the) biggest source of new employees will be the underemployed and underutilized people currently in the work force."

In many ways it seems not much has changed in the past 25 years. In spite of the many studies and reports, then as now it seems that "despite numerous channels of communication between education and business" and in spite of many resources, "prospective workers are not coming to the workplace with appropriate skills and training," and despite decades of lagging behind other countries in advanced manufacturing, "technical and vocational trades continue to be viewed as low-paying and unattractive careers." And finally the 1990 report concluded its concerns, despite many programs and initiatives, "there is no focal point of exchange for labor supply and demand."

OCL hopes that this current report on Understanding the Employment Skills Gap in Central New York will serve as a renewed call for a coordinated and nimble approach to long-range planning and programming that will benefit secondary and post-secondary schools and their students, jobseekers, employers, local governments and the economic vitality of the entire community.

I would like to thank the Study Committee and co-chairs Barbara Carranti and Ben Lockwood for their dedication and many contributions to the study and report. Many thanks also to study writer Renee Gadoua who kept track of Study Committee proceedings and drafted the report, and designer Nancy Boyce who created the report layout and cover design. We also thank Jeff Craig of OCM BOCES for many of the photographs and to the Greater Central New York Education and Business Consortium for sponsoring the release of the report. OCL office coordinator Colleen Karl-Howe managed the study process from start to finish. We are also grateful to our friends at ProLiteracy, the location of our many study committee meetings. As always, special thanks are extended to the individual and corporate members who support the work of the Citizens League through their membership fees and donations, and to University College of Syracuse University for its administrative and organizational support of the work of OCL.

For over 35 years, the Onondaga Citizens League has been an unparalleled vehicle for citizen participation in public affairs in Central New York. Founded in 1978, OCL is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that encourages citizen engagement in public issues. OCL's studies on topics of community-wide importance have culminated in reports that have shone a light on the issues and their impact, helped citizens understand the facts and their significance, and spurred policy-makers and community groups to action.

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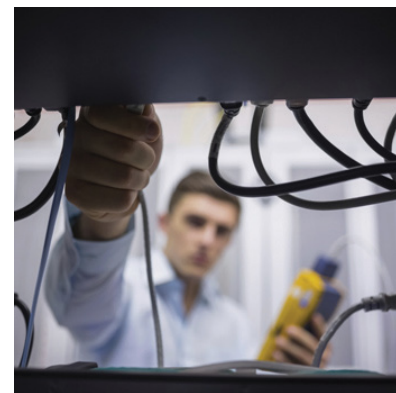
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I. Introduction



Well-paying jobs and a job-ready workforce are crucial to the economic growth and well-being of our community. For the region to succeed, it needs a steady supply of workers with skills that match local opportunities. This requires collaboration among educators, workforce development agencies, government entities, and business leaders. It also requires changes in the ways employers seek workers and job seekers search for jobs.

Onondaga County represents a typical Rust Belt story. A region with a proud history of economic growth fueled by the Erie Canal and manufacturing has lost much of its traditional industrial base. Since the mid-1970s, major companies – Carrier, General Motors, Crouse-Hinds, New Process/Venture Gear, and others – fell victim to changing technology, corporate mergers, down-sizing and outsourcing. Those changes cost the region thousands of steady, well-paying jobs, most of which required little or no post-secondary education.

Large manufacturers no longer offer job security to large groups of blue-collar workers, and the once-powerful union network has shrunk over the last 20 years. Meanwhile, small manufacturers and entrepreneurs continue to operate and innovate in the community and need help in attracting and retaining workers. Many of these employers are frustrated that high school students and their parents are not introduced to new, “clean” manufacturing as an option for careers.

The region was hard-hit by the 2008 recession. The unemployment rate in the Syracuse area has rebounded to pre-recession levels, with 5.8 percent unemployment reported in October 2014, down from 6.8 percent in October 2013. The statewide rate was 6.0 in October, the lowest since 2008. Still, in early 2015, the

Central New York Region remained down 8,900 jobs since the recession, according to the New York State Department of Labor (DOL).

Against this background of a shrinking job market, a contradictory situation has emerged. Even as new workers, displaced workers, and longtime unemployed express frustration at being unable to find good jobs, some employers complain they cannot find people to fill jobs. Thousands of jobs are unfilled in the region that includes Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego counties. The number is fluid, but in February 2015 just over 5,000 jobs were available, according to the state DOL¹.

OCL'S STUDY

The Onondaga Citizens League undertook this study of understanding the employment skills gap in Central New York to try to understand the disconnect between the number of unemployed and unfilled jobs. What started as a study of “the middle skills gap” (jobs that require more than a high school education but less than a four-year college degree) became an exploration of “employment gaps” – a term we learned has many definitions.

We found the solution is not as simple as creating new high school tracks or training programs, although that is necessary. We see a need to

5.8%

October 2014
Unemployment Rate

6.8%

October 2013
Unemployment Rate

8,900

fewer jobs since
pre-recession

SIDEBAR INNOVATION TECH

Innovation Tech is a project learning-based high school that opened at the Career Training Center in Liverpool in fall 2014. A second New Tech High will open in Cortland in 2016, and other school-within-a-school tech high school models are planned.

Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES opened Innovation Tech at the Lee G. Peters Career Training Center in Liverpool with 60 students in ninth and tenth grades. Over the following two years it plans to grow into a 120-student, 9-12 high school.

The Liverpool school is part of the Napa, CA-based New Tech Network. New Tech is a non-profit group with about 140 schools in 23 states. Six of the schools are in New York, including Tech Valley High School, in Rensselaer.

The school replaces the traditional classroom model by emphasizing project-based learning, with students working in groups. BOCES is also working with local businesses to offer internships. The school will also work with local colleges, and students will be expected to graduate with at least 12 college credits.

The approach “reflects the 21st Century and the global environment in which we live,” says the BOCES website. “The world has changed. Work has changed. Technology has changed. Communication has changed. The pace of the world has changed. Innovation Tech is a school that understands these changes and the need for students to be prepared to live and work in our changing world.”

New Tech

non-profit –
140 schools
in 23 states

shift the way we connect school and work, value skills with appropriate pay, recognize differences in job and career interests, define job qualifications, and adapt to rapidly changing job search formats.

Concerns over job-readiness are nothing new. OCL addressed this issue in 1990 with its report “Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare?”² An analysis of that study found some improvement since 1990. We note increased cooperation among economic development agencies and between higher education and the business community. For instance, New York State awarded a \$2.8 million grant to Onondaga Community College, MACNY and the Syracuse City School District to offer Syracuse Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH)³. Students are matched with a corporate mentor, take college classes, and gain professional work experience during their high school years. In six years, students

complete high school and earn associate degrees while getting real-life business experience. The program is free and graduates have first access to job openings with the participating business.

Other school districts offer promising career readiness programs. And the region’s primary economic development plans acknowledge the need for efforts to retain a college-educated workforce. Despite these developments, many of the 1990 report’s recommendations remain relevant.

Most notably, the 1990 study committee recommended that businesses should provide flexible and innovative personnel practices and supports to benefit under-represented groups; and develop policies that address the quality and delivery of training. The report also recommended that schools cooperate with businesses to identify and build skills and inform students of

the broad range of career choices, particularly technical and vocational trades. The report also noted that “prospective workers are not coming to the workplace with appropriate skills and abilities.” Soft skills, especially communication skills, may remain a challenge.

SKILLS GAP OR NOT?

Plenty of evidence at national, state, and local levels supports at least a perception of a skills gap, although the definitions may vary. A recent poll⁴, conducted by franchise staffing firm Express Employment Professionals, found that 83 percent of the 115 company franchises surveyed said that it was “somewhat difficult” or “very difficult” to fill a job opening in 2014. That’s up from 78 percent who reported the same for the survey in 2013.

An analysis by the International Monetary Fund found that the skills gap contributes to about a third of the national unemployment rate⁵. The skills gap also affects the nation’s ability to compete globally. The skill level of the American workforce falls behind that of foreign competitors, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development⁶.

President Barack Obama alluded to the skills gap with several initiatives he announced in his 2014 State of the Union address⁷. These include a government-wide review of federal training programs to help Americans gain the skills needed for good jobs, partnering with leading CEOs to help the long-term unemployed and expanding apprenticeships.

The New York State Board of Regents affirmed the need to better prepare students for the changing workforce by approving new options for meeting graduation requirements in October 2014⁸. Among the new tracks are Career and Technical Education (CTE) and Science,

Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) pathways that will lead to graduation.

Ready Nation/America’s Edge, an organization of business leaders highlighted the local problem in an April 2014 report. “If current education and labor market trends continue, New York will face a deficit of 350,000 workers for current mid-level skill jobs,” the report said⁹. In Central New



IF CURRENT EDUCATION AND LABOR MARKET TRENDS CONTINUE, NEW YORK WILL FACE A DEFICIT OF 350,000 WORKERS FOR CURRENT MID-LEVEL SKILL JOBS

York, the state Department of Labor predicts that “60 percent of the fastest growing occupations in the area will be middle- and high-skilled occupations requiring postsecondary education,” the report continued. The region needs educational programs to provide skills for specific jobs, the report said, citing growth in the health-care field. An optimistic 2013 CenterState CEO report, “CenterState New York Agenda for Economic Opportunity,” noted that the region holds strong potential to excel in emerging technology fields. But the potential growth depends on the ability to retain and expand a skilled workforce, the report said. There are simply not enough qualified candidates to fill in-demand jobs.

The Ready Nation report echoed a major concern many of our presenters expressed: the lack of soft skills. Communication, collaboration, and critical thinking are “required for virtually any occupation in today’s world,” the report said. Presenters at OCL study sessions added other crucial skills many job-seekers lack: punctuality, reliability, and work ethic.

To reverse these troubling trends, Ready Nation supports “greater access to innovative education

One Third

portion of national unemployment rate attributed to skills gap

SIDEBAR

SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Syracuse City School District offers CTE programs in all five of its high schools. Programs include law enforcement and fire/rescue; cyber-security; cosmetology; crime scene investigation; media and communications; welding; nursing; medical assisting; and geospatial intelligence. (The latter involves math, science and computer skills relevant for jobs in intelligence.)

Syracuse P-Tech is a specialized high school run through a partnership with Onondaga Community College and the Manufacturers Association of Central New York. The five- or six-year program housed at the Institute of Technology, combines high school, college and career training.

models that can equip them for success in both college and career.” The group cited the Lafayette Big Picture School and Innovation Tech at Onondaga Cortland Madison BOCES as two promising models. We also found that the Syracuse City School District has a variety of programs that offer students non-traditional paths to graduation and career training.

GOVERNMENT ROLE

In Onondaga County, CNY Works is one of 33 local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) in the state. The agency provides services for the unemployed, under-employed, and emerging workforce through a partnership with the state Department of Labor. Its funding comes from federal and state workforce development grants. The agency’s federal funding previously came through the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. In July 2014, President Obama signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the first legislative reform of the public workforce program in 15 years. It takes effect July 1, 2015. The WIOA is intended to be job-driven with programs that focus on the needs of employers and prepare workers for jobs that are and will be available.

The agency’s mission is to provide a single point of workforce information for job-seekers, businesses and training providers. CNY Works’ workforce services include labor market orientation, assessment, career counseling, resumé preparation, job search assistance, technology training, job matching, resource services, skills development, training, and education. It also works with local businesses to upgrade workforce skills, helps businesses access on-the-job training (OJT) grants.

As a local WIB, CNY Works is also intended to serve as an economic development tool, a function that requires close partnerships and coordination among a myriad of stakeholders.

The agenda for CNY Works is large – including one-on-one efforts to help an unemployed person find work and strategies to align workforce development programs with employers’ needs. The agency’s broad goals may hinder its success. The agency also competes for a variety of grants at different levels of government. Lenore Sealy, executive director of CNY Works, acknowledges the challenge in addressing often competing missions and goals from government entities and funders.

BEYOND MIDDLE SKILLS

Beyond government services, we found a variety of innovative programs addressing aspects of the job skills gap. They include the Center for Community Alternatives' Reintegration and Empowering a Life; CenterState CEO's Work Train; Mercy Works; Visions for Change; and OnPoint for Jobs. (Find a list of organizations offering workforce training in Onondaga County in Appendix A). Existing programs cater to various needs, for example, to long-term unemployed; skilled displaced workers; young people at risk; immigrants and refugees; and people returning from prison. Many local agencies provide programs that address soft skills; however it is unclear if there are enough programs to fill the need, and some programs are too new to judge effectiveness.

In addition to the core skills necessary for employment, networking is a job skill that has undergone significant change with technology. We heard many job placement experts and employers note that, "Who you know can be as important as what you know." But how do people network in 2014? It's no longer as easy as your dad putting in a good word at the local factory. Networks have become narrower as businesses change.

Technology requires that job-seekers have an online presence, a barrier for some low-income and new workers. A common phrase among job counselors is, "If you're not on LinkedIn, you don't exist." Further, networking for many people may not be an option, as their social circles do not include people with the ability to connect them to jobs. The term itself reflects a middle-class practice unavailable to many who most need to connect.

While we heard a lot about unprepared job-seekers, several speakers and committee members noted that employers also need to change. They need to be more willing to provide on-the-job training and take a chance on workers whose resumés don't include job-specific skills. They need to update job-search techniques and learn social media skills to reach new workers. A recent story in *Entrepreneur* noted this challenge headlined "Millennials Would Like to Work for You, If They Can Apply on Their Smartphones."¹⁰

"MILLENNIALS WOULD LIKE TO WORK FOR YOU, IF THEY CAN APPLY ON THEIR SMARTPHONES."

We heard anecdotes about jobs that reportedly require a college degree but starting pay is little more than minimum wage. Some workers are subjected to rigid rules and have frequent schedule changes that make it difficult for workers with transportation limitations or family responsibilities.

According to CenterState CEO, the region's average wage is 20 percent lower than the national average¹¹. The relationship between unfilled jobs and wage rates was a frequent topic of discussion during the study process, echoing a national debate.

During our study, we heard loud and clear the frustration of both job-seekers and employers. We learned numerous gaps exist, and we discovered ambitious efforts to bridge those gaps. The problem is far-reaching. Solutions will take committed efforts from many groups. The need for a solution is clear: The economic success of the region is at stake.



20%

lower wage than
national average

II. Scope of Study and Methodology

During 2014, the Study Committee held 12 study sessions about the employment skills gap and had meetings with several other stakeholders. OCL members, representatives of local agencies and educational organizations, and experts in the economy and employment trends met to discuss the issue. Stakeholders included BOCES, the Syracuse City School District, CenterState CEO, MACNY, the New York State Department of Labor, Onondaga County's Office of Economic Development, and representatives of small and large businesses. The study committee also reviewed many related reports and articles. A complete list of presenters, reports and committee notes is in the Appendix.

Study committee members note the underlying issues related specifically to gaps for unprepared high school graduates, including poverty and the reality that many are unprepared from kindergarten because of a lack of school readiness. OCL addressed this issue in its 2013 study, "Early Childhood and School Readiness: Creating a Community Where All Children Thrive by Five."¹² Low graduation rates go hand in hand with the skills gaps. While these issues are beyond the scope of the report, we recognize their connection to creating work-ready graduates, and they need to be addressed. The Regional Economic Development Council's strategic plan also notes the importance of confronting the issue of poverty in improving the region's economic stability¹³.

Many of our discussions noted the everyday obstacles low-income job seekers face. Even the most highly-motivated job-seekers may struggle to get to training or job interviews without transportation or child care. While the impact of these obstacles is not typically considered soft skills, they represent real barriers for disadvantaged communities. Some programs, including Visions for Change and OnPoint for Jobs, are addressing the barriers, but the community and employers also need to work toward a solution.

III. The Employment Skills Gaps



Our sessions on the skills gap elicited lively discussions on the many facets of the issue, and focus quickly evolved from the middle skills gap to the multitude of gaps preventing full employment. We found that employers held a variety of perspectives, while service providers and job seekers offered diverse nuances. While some concerns overlapped different circumstances, some aspects of the problem were particular to specific groups. Six gaps emerged during our study.

1. LACK OF SOFT SKILLS

In nearly every discussion or presentation, concerns about job-seekers lacking soft skills emerged as the most pressing issue. It's not a new problem; OCL's 1990 study also raised the issue, noting, "Workers just aren't the way they used to be."

The term "soft skills" generally refers to the ability to interact with people. Business owners, educators and employment service representa-

"THERE IS A PROFOUND GAP BETWEEN THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS MOST STUDENTS LEARN IN SCHOOL AND THE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS THEY NEED IN TYPICAL 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITIES AND WORKPLACES."

tives offer a long list of soft skills including working with a team, getting along with others, resolving conflicts, following directions, solving problems, and learning new skills. Soft skills also include basic business etiquette, such as being on time; dressing appropriately; and speaking and behaving appropriately in the workplace.

In our April 22 study meeting, facilitators asked participants to list ideal attributes they seek in employees. Participants overwhelmingly – by about three to one – listed soft skills as most important.

The panelists at that meeting represented small business (with as few as four employees) and large employers, including St. Joseph's Hospital and Health Center and Loretto. Several of the panelists said that job-seekers lack specific industry skills and require training to stay up to date. But the majority of the concerns focused on soft skills.

No matter the job, people are not focused, according to Jonathan Cooper of Loretto. "They are not that interested in embracing what they need to do to be successful," he said.

"We can train people on skills; values like being on time (also) have to be taught," said Charles Collins of Travelers Insurance. He said his company fires more people during training for attendance and tardiness issues than for poor work performance.

Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a national organization that advocates teaching skills to make every student college-, career-, and citizenship-ready, addresses soft skills as well.

"There is a profound gap between the knowledge and skills most students learn in school and the knowledge and skills they need in typical 21st century communities and workplaces," the organization says¹⁴. "To successfully face

rigorous higher education coursework, career challenges and a globally competitive workforce, U.S. schools must align classroom environments with real world environments.”

In addition to stressing core academic content, the group highlights the 4Cs: critical thinking and problem solving; communication; collaboration; and creativity and innovation. The 4Cs, which the Partnership for 21st Century Skills calls learning and innovation skills, summarize the broad soft skills many employers, educators and job search experts say job seekers lack.

“NETWORKING SOUNDS GREAT BUT IT IS DIFFICULT FOR DISADVANTAGED PEOPLE.”

As some panelists point out, some job-seekers lack specific soft skills as a result of cultural barriers, such as immigrant or refugee status. Some job-seekers, such as people in generational poverty, may lack role models to learn the skills they need to succeed. Pre-k programs are attempting to address this gap, as we recognize the importance of emotional competencies children need to succeed as adults.

2. GAP IN ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR LONGTIME UNEMPLOYED OR UNDEREMPLOYED

In our early brainstorming sessions, study committee members expressed concern over barriers to employment faced by people from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds. The groups include people trying to emerge from generational poverty; people returning from or at risk of entering the corrections system; people with substance abuse, mental illness, or developmental disabilities; and immigrants and refugees. Because of their status, these groups also often face barriers as a result of racial or age stereotypes, limited literacy, digital divide, and lack of soft skills and cultural competency.

We heard about these realities in study sessions that included a panel of frustrated job seekers and a panel of representatives serving special populations.

Cholawan Majok, for example, is a refugee from South Sudan with a master’s degree in political science. He works in the mayor’s office as a scheduler, but seeks a better job that uses his education and skills. His comments reflect a number of challenges. Some graduates do not have the professional or family connections to develop networks, he said. He had to stretch himself and be aggressive to land a 16-hour-a-week internship. “Networking sounds great,” he said, but it is “difficult for disadvantaged people.”

Melissa Menon, who helped organize the panel, said Majok is being strategic in planning his career; his current job could well be a stepping stone to a better job in public policy. But his background could just as easily be a liability.

“There is a very real possibility that someone like him could get pigeon-holed,” said Menon, who coordinates OnPoint for Jobs, a program that works with college graduates to improve soft skills and develop networking skills.

Jamie Plumley, who had recently started working for Darco Manufacturing as a result of a family connection, described another barrier for some. “Networking is more a white, middle-class advantage” he said.

One African-American panelist described herself as “the poster child for the Say Yes program.” But that hasn’t helped her. It’s hard to network, she said, because “they’ll just see you as another girl from the ghetto.”

“Many of the barriers to access continue after college,” Menon explained. “Having a professional network is key. They need soft skills and exposure to the cultural world of working

professionals.” For some, she said, “It’s really basic, like getting up in the morning and getting ready for work.” OnPoint for Jobs also counsels students and graduates about networking, interviewing and job skills.

The lack of basic literacy – reading and math skills – remain a barrier for many. Peter Waite, executive vice president of ProLiteracy, an international literacy organization in Syracuse, and Marsha Tait, executive director of Literacy CNY, a local literacy organization offering services and expertise, explained the problem in an October 2014 Campbell Conversation radio interview with program moderator Grant Reeher¹⁵.

About 60,000 adults in Onondaga County have extremely limited literacy skills or extremely limited English language skills, Tait said. About half that number are English language learners (immigrants and refugees) and the other half are people who were “born here, went to school here, may or may not have graduated from high school, but did not acquire the literacy skills that they need.”

Low literacy directly affects a person’s ability to get and keep a well-paying job. “What we are talking about are people who can’t figure out basic job applications, who can’t understand basic medical information and who are seriously sub-standard relative in terms of their interaction with jobs, with family, with others,” Waite said in the interview.

In a recent meeting of local adult education providers, Matt Centore of Work Train noted the crucial role of adult education in improving access to jobs. “As we move forward and have to think about the many and varied ways we can educate and train individuals to make them better prepared for work, it will be invaluable to

understand the key role adult education plays in the training that is being done,” he said.

A felony conviction or substance abuse problem also remains a barrier, even as people try to improve their lives. The felony conviction immediately disqualifies the applicant. The Syracuse City Council voted 8-1 in December 2014 to pass a Ban the Box ordinance that bars the city and all contractors doing business with the city from asking a job applicant about criminal convictions unless the applicant has received a tentative job offer. Supporters of the ordinance say it will help reduce poverty and unemployment.

Panelists noted that employers lose out on hiring good people because of their initial assumptions or screening practices. “Employers should be reminded not to rule out applications because of name, age, appearance, prior conviction,” one panelist said. “The interviewing and hiring process needs to offer access to people who need an opportunity to improve their situation.”

Skin color and language are still very real barriers to employment, noted Gina Rivers of Mercy Works. “People make assumptions based on your zip code,” she said. “If they live on Midland Avenue or their last name is Hernandez, people make assumptions ... We have to do a better job not to profile people.”

Dominic Robinson of Northside UP said such profiling hurts employers. “If you don’t have a GED, you won’t get in. If you have a criminal history, you won’t get in,” he said. “The skills needed often have nothing to do with these things. We need to help employers understand it’s in their best interest to be more flexible. Barriers are more often perceived than real.”

Ron Boxx, a Circles coach at Visions for Change (See sidebar, page 10), described the gap for



60,000

adults in Onondaga
County with limited
literacy skills or
English language skills

\$1.45 million

increase in income

As Housing Visions grew successful at revitalizing city neighborhoods, it created Visions for Change to help residents of improved neighborhoods improve their lives. The goal is to eliminate poverty by teaching people the skills to transition out of poverty and into economic stability and life prosperity.

To do this, Rhonda O'Connor, director of community engagement, created Choosing To Thrive, a curriculum with a more holistic philosophy than traditional workforce development programs.

"Everyone says, 'get people a job,' but retaining that job seemed to be the issue," O'Connor said. Choosing To Thrive goes beyond teaching about resumé's, cover letters and interviews and works with clients to change their mindsets. That change can result in better soft skills and improved job performance.

"We start them out asking them to take a good look at themselves and focus on mindset change," O'Connor said. "What do you dream about? What holds you back from that dream? We look at resilience. What are the skills you need to be able to achieve that?"

Clients work with a job coach, who guides them in where they are and where they can grow. Many people make bad decisions – or are late for work or miss a bill's deadline – because they don't have a plan. O'Connor calls that "tyranny of the moment." To prevent that, Choosing To Thrive staff helps clients put a plan in place. A first step often is to begin using a planner.

The program stresses resilience – how clients can use their personal strengths to get things done. Coaches teach how clients can use skills such as a sense of humor, creativity and independence to plan ahead and make good decisions.

The middle class is driven by achievement, O'Connor said. "To fit into this workplace, we want our clients to understand this," O'Connor said. "When you get into a workplace, take every chance you get to take classes. It shows initiative."

Choosing To Thrive also encourages a shift from seeing a job as a short-term way to make money to a career that allows promotions, a chance to move up, and to earn more money for a better life.

Visions for Change works with business partners who may hire clients who completed the program. "Our job is to open doors," O'Connor said. "We're not going to get them the job, but we'll get you through the door."

Since 2010, 171 people have participated in classes of 15 to 20 people. "We want to build a relationship with them so they can feel safe and comfortable," O'Connor said. It takes two to four months for most clients to get a job, she said. The agency remains in contact with clients for three years and tracks them for five years.

So far, the outcomes are encouraging. The agency tracks decreases in welfare benefits; how many got and retained jobs, were promoted or changed jobs; how many opened a checking account; and how many bought a car.

Since 2010, graduates of the program have seen \$1.45 million annual increase in income. The amount spent on food stamps decreased \$126,000 a year; the annual decrease in cash assistance is \$228,000. Seventy percent of clients got jobs, and of those, 80 percent retain employment.

The agency has hired Syracuse University to provide a program evaluation. It also plans to add hard skills to its program and hopes to increase its client base to 125 people a year.

"This is a start for them to get some success," O'Connor said. "If, as a community, we can all work together and start talking the same language and not just push people through, we can see a real difference."

What do you dream about?

long-term unemployed as a gap in world view. “Low-income people’s view is limited by their experience,” he said. He also offered a potential remedy. “The key to overcoming division is to have intentional relationships that break down stereotypes,” he said. “(Mentor) to help people who have never seen someone succeed in a corporate setting.”

In July 2014, CenterState CEO announced Work Train, a three-year, \$1 million program to create job opportunities and career pathways for low-income people. The program makes Syracuse a community partner in the National Fund for Workforce Solutions. It builds on the successful Green Train and Health Train, which trained people for entry-level jobs in construction and health care. CenterState leaders are optimistic this program can directly address some gaps. (See sidebar, page 12)

3. GAPS FOR SKILLED WORKERS LAID OFF AND HOPING TO STAY IN THE REGION

In 2013, *The Post-Standard* laid off about 120 workers. In 2012, Loretto laid off 100 people. In 2011, National Grid let go of 20 percent of its non-union workforce; Lockheed Martin laid off 89 employees, and the Syracuse City School District, more than 300. How do we retain these skilled workers? Who should respond when large layoffs occur and the region risks a significant brain drain?

Many of these workers have deep roots in the region, but find it difficult to get a comparable, well-paying job. Their challenges include outdated technology, resumé, networking, and job search skills.

Workers idled in their 40s, 50s and 60s may not have written a resumé or searched for a job in at least 20 years. Once thrust back into the applicant pool, they find a new world. Paper resúmes are passé, many job applications

are online, and a social media presence on LinkedIn is a must.

But many long employed simply have not kept up with the changing technology and protocols of job searching.

“If you’re not doing technology, you’re not paying attention,” said Anne Messenger, owner of Messenger Associates. Everyone needs a LinkedIn profile, she said, but they also need to get out and network in person. “Everything is a job interview,” she said.

Allison Smith, president of ISSI Technology Professionals, stressed the importance of networking, highlighted by her company’s tagline: “Good people know good people.”

Both noted that job-seekers can learn the new skills, such as what keywords to use in resúmes so they pop up in automated screening by employers.

Study group members also noted a lack of imagination in how to transfer skills to a different job. The emphasis should be on general skills, not job titles or degree, they say. Heidi Holtz of the Gifford Foundation noted that a theater major may not become an actor, but makes a great employee in many industries because of her creativity, flexibility, and ability to work with others.

Study committee members suggest a shift in perspective: Instead of fitting people into existing holes, start with the talent pool and what it offers to the region. An unemployed newspaper editor may be a good fit for technical writing in the emerging technology field, for example. Great potential also exists to place seasoned workers in non-profit agencies. This, however, requires a commitment to shore up non-profits so they can remain financially successful and retain talented employees.



One-third

region's adults in poverty

CenterState CEO is partnering with funders and businesses on Work Train, an initiative to increase the number of qualified workers to fill open jobs in the region. Stakeholders have long noted the gap that exists with persistent unemployment while business owners say they cannot find people to hire. "The community needs a structure that aligns different workforce development partners," Meg O'Connell, executive director of the Allyn Foundation, said in a February 2015 Thursday Morning Roundtable session about the collaboration. That statement sums up the frustration of many employers and job seekers; it also expresses a significant finding of this study.

The region stands to benefit financially from the success of the program, said Frank Lazarski, president of the United Way of Central New York. A third of the region's adult population lives in poverty, he said. "If they were gainfully employed, they would need fewer services," he said.

Northside UP tested the format with its workforce development programs Green Train and Health Train. The pilot programs trained people, many of them immigrants and refugees, in soft skills and basic work skills. Green Train prepared job seekers for work in the construction industry; Health Train prepared people to work in the health care industry. Successful participants were able to interview with a partner business, such as St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center. The idea was to prepare workers for in-demand jobs that include a ladder to promotions and higher pay.

Work Train will scale up the pilot program, which focuses on the needs of both employers and individuals, said Dominic Robinson of Northside UP and CenterState CEO. "We ask employers what they need," he said. "We want to create a candidate profile driven by employers."

Community partners will create educational programs and provide services and support to help people gain the skills they need for the available jobs. Organizers will seek solutions to barriers

many low-income workers face, such as transportation, child care, and ESL classes.

Robinson noted many community programs address workforce development. "It's not because there aren't great programs, it's because they're not aligned (with the needs or with each other)," he said. "We're creating something larger than any one organization. We're making targeted decisions to get desired outcomes. We're building capacity where we see potential."

The bottom line, says Robinson: "No more train and pray."

A test-run of the program suggests it works. Work Train partnered with Loretto to fill a critical need for certified nurse assistants (CNA). Within two months, 30 CNAs had jobs at Loretto. That number soon increased to more than 50 new CNAs.

The goal, Robinson said, is to coordinate industry-recognized training, get people in jobs, and help businesses retain workers. "There are hungry people in every part of this community for work," he said. "We cannot sustain our future if we can't figure out how to engage them."

**There are
people in every
part of this
community
hungry for
work.**

Job-seekers and others bemoan the lack of a central job-search portal. A priority should be encouraging employers to use the same format and portal to list job openings.

4. SIGNIFICANT UNFILLED JOBS IN THE REGION, WHILE MANY REMAIN UNEMPLOYED

The crux of the skills gap concern is that jobs go unfilled while many workers remain unemployed. We found a disconnect between employers' and employees' expectations; concerns about fair wages; and a mismatch between stated job requirements and the educational attainment, experience or skill levels of job seekers. These gaps may partially explain why jobs are not filled despite people seeking work.

The New York State Department of Labor lists job openings by the state's region. There is constant churning in the job market, and some job listings are not published outside the company, but the monthly report provides a glimpse of the issue. In January 2015, the Central Region (Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga and Oswego counties) had 4,516 job vacancies, according to the state DOL¹⁶. Of those, 596 openings were in the healthcare practitioner and technical category; 506 in sales and related; 281 in computer and mathematical; 251 in transportation and materials management; 208 in production; and 190 in construction and extraction. In February 2015, the total number of job vacancies in the region was 5,402.

The misalignment of workforce needs and skills is one of the most important issues the community faces, according to CenterState CEO's Rob Simpson. He cited the 2013 Agenda for Economic Opportunity¹⁷ analysis of the regional economy and its drivers of economic growth and economic clusters as potential for growth. They include new technology; cybersecurity; thermal and environmental control systems;

agribusiness; and medical technology. As those new industries evolve, the state Department of Labor tracks in-demand jobs. The top five trending jobs in the Central New York Region in January were industrial machinery mechanic, nursing assistant, electrician, welder, and registered nurse.

Training programs must fit the needs of regional industries, said Nora Spillane of the Onondaga County Office of Economic Development. In some cases, people are trained for jobs that do not exist.

In order to keep skilled workers here, businesses must offer competitive wages. In some cases, wages are low on the regional and national scale.

Juanita Perez Williams, regional representative for the New York State Department of Labor, sees no skills gap. Rather she finds employers do not pay enough, nor do they invest in training. The state DOL has grants to provide on-the-job training for people unemployed 26-plus weeks, if the employer pays a living wage (\$11/hour without benefits; \$13/hour with benefits. "Employers want people ready to start now to meet the demand of new orders," she said.

Some experts agree that the skills mismatch argument is overblown. "It is cheap for employers to claim qualified workers are in short supply," Gary Burtless wrote in a July 2014 Brookings opinion piece¹⁸. "It is a bit more expensive for them to do something to boost supply. ...When employers are unwilling to offer better compensation to fill their skill needs, it is reasonable to ask how urgently those skills are really needed."

New York in December 2014 boosted its minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$8.75 an hour, and Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed raising the minimum wage to \$11.50 an hour in New



5,402

February, 2015
number of regions
job vacancies

SIDEBAR APPRENTICESHIPS

Workforce program leaders as well as business representatives view a renewal of apprenticeships as a crucial tool in creating a trained employee pool. The number of apprenticeships has declined significantly over recent decades as emphasis shifted to college degrees; training programs became expensive; and technology led to smaller manufacturing plants.

But apprenticeships offer an important alternative to students not interested in academic-based careers. "It's the other college degree," said Penny Hazer, president of Merit Apprenticeship Alliance.

A formal, registered apprenticeship training involves classroom instruction and on-the-job training. Most apprenticeships require three to five years to complete. A successful apprentice

receives a credential, certified by the New York Department of Labor and recognized by industry leaders across state lines.

Many applicants to apprenticeship programs need help gaining soft skills and basic literacy skills. Pre-apprentice programs help with basic math, educate about unions and apprenticeships and emphasize soft skills.

Agency and business leaders urge parents and schools to include apprenticeships as a viable career path. "Kids need to know there is a sustainable career path," Hazer said. "We're missing how to articulate the path of apprenticeship to journeyman to supervisor so they see it's a sustainable career."

York City and \$10.50 an hour for workers in the rest of the state. Amid the national debate about wages, some experts point to the ways higher wages help the employer as well as the employee.

A recent *New Yorker* article described research that supports so-called efficiency wages¹⁹. When companies pay more, employees stay longer, which saves money. Trader Joe's and Costco have taken this approach. "Instead of relentlessly cost-cutting, they pay their employees relatively well, invest heavily in training them, and design their operations to encourage employee initiative," the article noted. "Their upfront labor costs may be higher," but the "companies end up with motivated, capable workers, better service, and increased sales."

The region must also better promote its relatively low cost of living to attract and retain workers.

A Clarkson University graduate, for example, might be offered a \$120,000 job in Boston and a comparable job in Syracuse that pays \$70,000 a year. Despite the significantly lower cost of living and other regional assets, young workers will often choose the job with the higher salary. Once workers come here, though, they usually stay here, Simpson and Spillane said.

5. GAPS IN CAREER PATH/ PROGRESSION/TRAINING/ CREDENTIALS

Panelists and study committee members expressed frustration that training programs do not lead to existing jobs, which suggests the ongoing need to align workforce development programs with forecasts from the Department of Labor and CenterState CEO. This requires forward-thinking collaboration among stakeholders to make the best use of money and staffing to train workers.

Some participants note that applicants face barriers to union jobs and apprentice programs because of race, age, illiteracy, and politics.

The Urban Jobs Task Force, a coalition of local community groups and activists, urges Syracuse and Onondaga County to increase local employment in large economic development projects, including the city schools reconstruction and the Inner Harbor. The group is also advocating for pledges to include local workers in the upcoming I-81 project.

The task force advocates the city and county enter into Community Benefits Agreements to increase employment and training for local residents. The group's premise is that local workers and communities should benefit from any projects that receive public financing. Good jobs and effective job training for low-income residents will improve the community's stability.

Representatives from the manufacturing community noted a limited pipeline of skilled workers to fill jobs. They blame this, in part, on the pressure on high school students to pursue college degrees without considering apprenticeships or training programs in manufacturing or construction. Underlying this concern is the need to shift the emphasis on four-year college degrees as the only pathway to well-paying jobs. Not everyone is cut out for an academic education, and the region is experiencing growth in jobs that require middle skills – more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree.

“Young people are not encouraged to be computer-controlled machine operators,” said Randy Wolken of MACNY.

Mary Thompson of the Homebuilders Association, agreed. “Members struggle to get workers, and a lot of it is cultural,” she said. “A lot of guidance counselors are not talking about the manufacturing and building industries.”

Panelists at a study session on apprenticeship advocated renewed interest, status, and funding for apprenticeships as a way to create a pipeline of trained, skilled workers. An apprenticeship “provides a credential, certified by the Department of Labor,” noted Bruce Hamm, director of business engagement at MACNY. “Those skills are transferable, and it's a recognized credential.”

To create pathways to careers, job-seekers need soft skills and technical skills, noted Dominic Robinson. “We need to embed core competencies into real-world experiences,” he said. “We need to help young people focus their interests into a real career. We need more use of internships and job shadowing. We need to help people reconcile the reality of the market and encourage experiential learning.”

Some programs, such as those offered by OCM BOCES and other schools, may help fill the gap of traditional apprenticeships. This will require ongoing collaboration between the educational system and local businesses.

THE REGION IS EXPERIENCING GROWTH IN JOBS THAT REQUIRE MIDDLE SKILLS – MORE THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA BUT LESS THAN A FOUR-YEAR DEGREE.

Employers need to play a role, said Laura Miller of Darco Manufacturing and Phil Jakes-Johnson of Solvents & Petroleum Services. Miller and Jakes-Johnson, both of whom run small businesses, suggest that local companies partner with schools by lending skilled workers as instructors for CTE programs and creating training programs or apprenticeships at their companies.

Immigrants and refugees face a different barrier when it comes to finding well-paying jobs. In addition to language barriers, many degrees and credentials from their native countries are not



SIDEBAR

ESM HIGH SCHOOL

East Syracuse Minoa High School offers its Career and Technical Education (CTE) Program as a way to prepare students for postsecondary education and the workplace. Program areas include design technology; innovative technology; nutrition; family and consumer sciences; early childhood education; technology education; construction technology; cosmetology and culinary arts. The school's CTE programs include a student-run credit union.

The school has partnered with Bristol-Myers Squibb, the Village of Minoa, local television stations and Syracuse University for apprenticeships that offer real-world experience.

"They (businesses) want to hire them right away," Randi Ludwig, ESM's coordinator for College and Career Readiness, said of graduates in several of the school's programs.

The district also uses Career Pathways to help students explore potential careers and how they can get there. The program attempts to help students focus on career possibilities based on their interests. An advisor will direct them to relevant courses. The philosophy is to let all students know that even if they don't plan to attend college, they need to plan a path to their desired career.

accepted in the United States. This does lead to refugees with Masters, PhDs, or MDs working low-skilled jobs. Programs like Health Train, which prepares people for entry-level jobs in the health-care field with the promise of career ladder opportunities, offer some relief. But workforce development agencies must expand the programs to different sectors and scale them up.

6. GAP BETWEEN THE CULTURE IN LARGE AND SMALL COMPANIES

Some study participants said they see no job skills gap, while others said they encounter it regularly. One difference seems to relate to how small businesses and large businesses operate. Small companies may be more likely to hire

someone referred by a family member or current employee. They can be nimble and make fast decisions.

Larger companies face different constraints, many of them the result of technology and outsourcing of screening processes. In these cases, hiring decisions take longer and go through several levels of screening and interviewing. Larger companies have more complex systems that often include corporate, union and legal issues. They may also use educational or degree requirements not necessarily related to the job skill sets as a way to screen out candidates.

IV. Findings and Recommendations



OVERALL FINDING

Following a year-long study process, *Understanding the Employment Skills Gap of Central New York* study did not result in a clear definition of a “middle skills gap” or simple resolution of the issue. The study results did, however, reveal barriers for both employers and job seekers. Barriers for job-seekers include transportation options, low wages, lack of networking opportunities, inability to get in front of potential employers, and lack of training in skills specific to job categories. A persistent theme in the skills gap discussion was lack of soft skills. The definition of this term included work ethic, communication abilities, dress, respect, team work, problem solving, critical thinking, all of which matter to potential employers.

Barriers or gaps for employers seem to be the ability to plan ahead and articulate their future workforce needs to schools and training providers, ability to identify and secure workers with the preferred levels of skills and experience, perceived lack of desired soft skills of employees or job seekers, and financial constraints on provision of in-house or on-the-job training.

While many programs attempt to get – and keep – Onondaga County residents employed, there seems to be a lack of a cohesive effort bringing representatives of the many stakeholder groups together to strategically address the long-range and short-term challenges of both employers and job-seekers and therefore the long-term business and economic health of the region.

The Study Committee’s specific findings and corresponding recommendations follow:

FINDING

Employers as well as employment and training agencies identify the lack of soft skills – punctuality, people skills, appropriate dress and attitude – as a significant problem for both new and seasoned workers. Whether the source of the gap is considered to be cultural, generational, or lack of experience or training, the resolution must involve all the stakeholders, including the job applicant or employee. We must instill soft skills throughout the continuum of education, training, and real-world experiences.

The lack of soft skills will likely remain a perennial frustration for employers, and some standards for behavior and dress will evolve as society and technology change. There was a time, for example, when nearly all professionals

wore suits for work; these days, Casual Friday attire is the norm in many workplaces.

Rather than rail at the decline in standards, employers and educators must acknowledge changes and participate in ongoing discussions and training about workplace expectations. Although soft skills belong in the curriculum, employers must be willing to train and retrain employees; the reward is stronger employees who do quality work. Employers should include soft skills training as part of orientation and professional development rather than remedial training or punishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Employers must communicate clear, appropriate and transparent company policies and

be prepared to invest time in coaching new employees in the culture and expectations of the workplace.

- Schools, counselors, training agencies, and job coaches must instruct students and clients in soft skills and apply and enforce appropriate behaviors and practices throughout the continuum of education, training, and internships.
- Job applicants and employees must be proactive in ascertaining and understanding the expectations and practices of the workplace and be willing to conform to reasonable standards.
- Highlight programs, such as Visions for Change and OnPoint, which mentor clients on soft skills, and recruit and encourage more community members to serve as mentors.

FINDING

Special populations, including English-language learners, people with criminal convictions, people with disabilities, and long-term unemployed face specific barriers to employment.

Low literacy bars many people in these categories from improving their lives. Literacy will improve their chances at employment, beginning with the first steps: creating a resumé and filling out applications. Job seekers should make a good-faith effort to improve their literacy skills, and agencies must be ready to meet their needs. Employers must strive to look beyond stereotypes of race and nationality and be open to interviewing or training people who lack skills or are returning to the workforce after incarceration.

Community leaders miss an opportunity to lower unemployment and reduce poverty when they fail to hire local workers for community projects. The upcoming I-81 reconstruction, for example, offers a chance to employ local workers at all levels. Some low-income workers need assistance gaining appropriate skills and credentials to be eligible for jobs. Refugees and immigrants, from entry-level workers to medical doctors, need help gaining skills and credentials to work and earn at the same level as in their home country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Agencies should work with local governments to explore Community Benefits Agreements or Project Labor Agreements to increase employment of neighborhood residents.
- Employers must be willing to look beyond the past history of applicants and focus on potential and transferrable skills.
- Educational institutions should work with local governments to establish the path to licensing or certification for refugees and immigrants with educational credentials and experience from the home countries.
- Highlight need for global perspective in aiding employers to understand the valuable assets a diverse workforce, including refugees, offers.
- Literacy organizations and employment and workforce development agencies should develop a more coordinated recruitment, referral, and public awareness effort for adult education in Onondaga County.

FINDING

Access to jobs and lack of reliable transportation options is a barrier to employment.

The regional transportation authority is unable to serve the needs of employees and employers scattered throughout Onondaga County and beyond. Centro's proposal in early 2015 to cut weekend and evening service would have made it even more difficult for low-income workers who must rely on public transportation. Human services planning for transportation services must consider the needs of workers without private transportation options to jobs. Sprawl and lack of density hinder the feasibility of public transit to satisfy the needs of both urban and suburban workers, so alternatives must be explored. Transportation should be considered an essential community service and transportation issues must be studied and addressed holistically by the community through a variety of avenues including public transit, entrepreneurship, volunteer opportunity, and other alternative models of access. (OCL will address this topic in its 2016 report.)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Public and private workforce development agencies should collaborate to create a website or app that aggregates job openings by location.
- Job fairs and job recruitment events should be held at locations accessible by public transit.
- Encourage employers to hold job fairs at BOCES, community centers, or refugee agencies.
- Encourage employers to support ride-sharing programs.

FINDING

Both employers and job-seekers need to adapt to rapidly changing ways of networking and job seeing. Networking, either at formal events or through personal contacts, is a time-honored way of finding and securing jobs. This tool is changing as the job market shifts and industries narrow. Getting a referral from a friend or relative is no guarantee the applicant will get past an initial inquiry – which is usually online. The dominance of online applications reflect a lack of the human in human resources, create barriers for both employers and job-seekers. Computer programs that scan resumés and applications may weed out excellent candidates, based simply on keywords. Job-seekers face challenges in creating resumés with appropriate keywords if past job titles do not fit the job opening. Limited computer literacy and access also limit low-income job-seekers. Both employers and job-seekers need to adapt to rapidly changing ways of networking and job-seeking, while recognizing the value of traditional vehicles of recruiting and assessing talent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Educators in school and college career centers should emphasize job search and work-related connecting and networking skills.
- Agencies and funders should evaluate, expand, and replicate successful programs such as OnPoint for Jobs, Visions for Change and others that use trained staff and volunteers to coach people in networking skills and help build networks.

- Employers should evaluate the effectiveness of their recruiting and hiring practices and stretch their investment of time and resources in methods that attract and fairly assess a larger and more diverse pool of potential candidates.
- Employers should better promote their job fairs and hold them in places accessible to low-income job-seekers.
- Increase access to public computers and employment assistance in schools and public libraries, which are already recognized and widely utilized sources of job search help in the community.

FINDING

Workforce training programs and employment sites are disconnected and it is unclear if job-seekers know how to access them. CNY Works is the first stop for many workers laid off. Although government agencies offer a variety of retraining programs, many people say it's difficult to learn what programs they are eligible for and how and where to participate. All job-seekers, including recent graduates, need a one-stop shop – online and in a centrally-located office – to access all training and apprenticeship opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Restructure state/federal incentives and or credits for trainings to entice business to utilize the credits.
- Improve workforce/employer websites to make it easier for job-seekers, employers, and job trainers to easily search openings.
- Create a process for community response when large groups of people are laid off so that displaced workers can easily be connected with opportunities that match their skills.

FINDING

Young people, as well as displaced workers, need help to match their interests to possible careers. There's a lively debate about the value of a liberal arts education in the midst of a tightening jobs market and rapid technological change. The age-old question remains: What's an English major

going to do for a living? We need to shift our focus from college major/job title to job skills and possibilities. Theoretically, an English major is curious, creative, organized, and likes to read and write. Those skills are useful for many jobs beyond those in the publishing industry. Former reporters, for example, might be great candidates for technical writing jobs in the growing technology fields. Economic development leaders could do a better job of reaching out to large groups laid off in Central New York.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand, elevate, and rebrand Career and Technical Education in schools and post-secondary programs.
- Employers should increase involvement in middle and high schools to help young people become aware of job and career possibilities and requirements, and to expose students to job-training and apprenticeships.
- Improve accessibility of public service jobs.
- Update civil service job titles and descriptions and accessibility of civil service examinations and jobs.

FINDING

Wages do not always match the employers' expectations for educational qualifications, and skill level. "You get what you pay for," they say. That applies to employers as well. We heard job-seekers and agency representatives describe local job openings that require a college degree, offer rigid job expectations, and pay \$9-10 an hour. Is it any surprise that companies like this complain of frequent turnover? Research shows that offering higher salaries, good benefits, and a comfortable work environment breeds loyalty and hard work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Economic development agencies should collect data on comparable wages and incentivize only creation of jobs that pay fair or living wage.
- Support legislation to increase the minimum wage.

FINDING

There are insufficient pathways to careers for students who do not seek four-year college degrees. Career-training programs at the high school level retain a stigma, despite adapting to changing employment opportunities. It's ingrained in the American Dream to want a better life for your child; for many people, success continues to mean traditional education that leads to a professional job. But today's manufacturing jobs are not the dirty work of yesteryear. People with a high school diploma or two-year college degree can find stable, well-paying jobs that are on the cutting edge of technology and innovation. We must recognize that not everyone wants, or needs, a four-year college degree to enter a successful career path.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create or improve partnerships between manufacturers and CTE programs.
- Create a database of professionals with credentials willing to serve on advisory committees for CTE programs
- Increase use of internships, apprenticeships and job shadowing.
- Encourage experiential learning models and project-based learning.
- Include CTE options from elementary school to educate students about possible career paths.

FINDING

Employers seeking to grow in a tight labor market need to be flexible, consider traditionally "unqualified" candidates, and invest in coaching/training and establishing a supportive workplace.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Monitor and evaluate training programs such as Work Train and expand, if appropriate, to other growth fields.
- Align workforce development programs with CenterState and Department of Labor projections so people will be trained for jobs that will exist.

Summary



There is no single definition of a skills gap. Many groups are working together to fill employment gaps, but the system appears disjointed, difficult to navigate, and fails to address the core of the problem to better connect employers with qualified potential employees.

Following a year-long study process, the findings of *Understanding the Employment Skills Gap* study do not result in a clear definition of the skills gap, nor does it clearly conclude that one exists. The study results did, however, reveal barriers for both employers and job seekers. They include transportation options, low wages, lack of networking opportunities, inability to get in front of potential employers, and lack of training in skills specific to job categories. The persistent theme in the skills gap discussion is the lack of soft skills amongst the labor force. The definition of this term includes work ethic, communication abilities, attitude, respect, team work, problem solving, critical thinking, and a multitude of other elements, all of which matter to potential employers.

Many programs labor to instill these soft skills and remove many barriers to employment in an

effort to find – and keep – Onondaga County residents employed. A lack of a coordinated effort or planning organization seems to be a major barrier to solve both sides of the equation between employers and job seekers. Many programs that exist in the local market provide a niche service to different potential labor market segments such as youth, refugees, and long-term unemployed. The challenge for the greater community is not only to determine which programs can be “scaled up,” but to assess what elements in each program are most effective. It is imperative that the programs and initiatives learn from each other and utilize the best practices of one another in order to optimize success for participants. Employers must respond to the market and assess their recruitment, training and compensation practices. Only by working together will the community ensure success for all partners.

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APPENDIX: **Workforce Training Programs**

These organizations offer workforce training programs in Onondaga County as of April 2015. Please note that this list is not meant to represent a full directory of services.

Built to Build Pre-Apprenticeship Program: Onondaga County's free 10-week program is designed to train and prepare minorities for careers in the construction trades. Pre-apprentices learn blueprint reading, construction math, worker safety, communication skills, and soft skills, and gain labor market education. <http://www.bbpaonondaga.com>

Bryant & Stratton College: Private career college with 19 campuses in New York, Ohio, Wisconsin and Virginia and an Online division. The college offers associate degrees in Accounting, Business, Human Resources, Hospitality Management, Graphic Design, Justice Studies, Medical Assisting, Medical Administrative Assisting, Networking Technology, Office Management and Paralegal. Bachelor degrees programs offered in Business Administration and Health Services Administration. Non-degree programs include Financial Services, Health Care and Insurance. <http://bit.ly/1ly3VIY>

Catholic Charities of Onondaga County

- **Project Joseph:** Creates work opportunities for homeless and housing-vulnerable men and refugee and creates work opportunities.
- **Culinary Arts for Self-Sufficiency:** Prepares refugees for entry-level positions in food service.
- **Home-Based Child Care Microenterprise Program:** Helps refugee women become certified at-home day care providers.

<https://www.ccoc.us/>

Center for Community Alternatives

- **Youth Services:** Employment readiness programs include work experience for youth in alternative schools and in the juvenile justice system.
- **Reintegration and Empowering a Life:** Assists people with a criminal history or challenges with substance abuse.
- **Parent Success Initiative:** Employment assistance for non-custodial parents. <http://www.communityalternatives.org/>

CenterState CEO

- **Up Start Syracuse:** A business incubation collaborative that targets emerging entrepreneurs in Syracuse's urban neighborhoods
- **Work Train:** A partnership of funders and businesses to increase the number of qualified candidates for high demand jobs in the region. (See sidebar, page 12)

<http://www.centerstateceo.com/>

Central New York Joint Area Training Center: Electrician training and apprenticeship program. Program includes classwork and on-the-job training for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW Local 43). <http://www.ibew43.org/>

CNY Technology Development Organization: Not-for-profit consulting and training support of high-tech entrepreneurs and manufacturing businesses in Cayuga, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, and Oswego counties. www.tdo.org/

CNY Works: Mission is to provide a single point of entry for workforce information for businesses, job seekers, and training providers. Offers a variety of classes, workshops, job fairs, company recruitments. Serves adults and youth. www.cnyworks.com

ITT Tech: A for-profit, tuition-based school that offers in-person and online bachelor and associate degree programs in areas including accounting, software engineering, and information systems and cybersecurity. The Liverpool campus is one of 130 in the U.S. www.itt-tech.edu/

JOBSplus! Workforce preparation for people receiving benefits from the Department of Social Services. Partners with Onondaga Community College to provide coursework and counseling for job seekers. <http://www.jobsplus.cc/main.htm>

MACNY: Manufacturers Association of Central New York. Works with SUNY community college system on initiatives including the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grants Program in

Advanced Manufacturing and P-TECH. MACNY is also involved on the local, state, and national level with promoting the National Association of Manufacturers Skills Certification system. www.macny.org/

Mercy Works, SYNERGY: a summer program that offers college students paid training in leadership, time and financial management, conflict resolution, goal setting and communication skills. Also provides paid professional work experience and networking with colleagues and other area business people. www.vcsyracuse.com/

New York State Department of Labor: Services include its affiliation with CNY Works, New York State Job Bank, Self Employment Assistance Program, 599 Training Program (program for people attending school or training program while receiving unemployment insurance), Trade Adjustment Training (training for workers separated due to foreign trade) On the Job Training Program (new employer can receive reimbursement of up to 50% of wages while employee trains for new job). www.labor.ny.gov/

OCM BOCES: Adult education programming includes literacy, Adult Basic Education (ABE), High School Equivalency (HSE), and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). They also provide 15 short term (6-11 month training programs leading to certificates and/or certifications. Literacy programs are at no cost to students. There is a cost for training. Many students qualify for financial aid and grants. Programs include: Welding, HVAC-R, Medical Assisting, LPN, Cosmetology, and Manufacturing to name a few. www.ocmboces.org/

Onondaga Community College: Programs include high school equivalency, bartending, clinical medical assistant, home inspection, medical transcription, and others. Certificate programs include early child care, fire protection technology, law enforcement, line mechanic, professional cooking, surgical technology, and Web technology.

- **Career Pathways:** Career preparation program that begins in high school and transitions into a two- or four-year college program. The CNY Career Pathways Consortium is comprised of area school districts, BOCES, post-secondary institutions, area businesses and community agencies that work together to create a seamless transition for students from high school to college and finally, into their selected career. www.sunyocc.edu/

OnPoint for Jobs: A career-readiness and placement service for anyone enrolled in OnPoint for College. Assists college graduates, current students and stop-outs (students who have left school). <http://onpointforcollege.org/onpointforjobs8.htm>

Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency's Employee Productivity Program (EPP): Helps companies in Onondaga County by funding training that improves employee skills, provides certifications to enable the business to open new markets, or training on new equipment acquisitions. <http://www.syracusecentral.com/Site-Selection-Data/Workforce-Development.aspx>

Partners for Education and Business: A MACNY affiliate that provides teachers with a structured opportunity to visit an employer, observe the different types of occupations and tasks conducted, and develop curriculum around the experience. <http://www.macny.org/PartnersforEducationBusiness.aspx>

Rescue Mission

- **Willing to Work:** Clients gain work experience through training, volunteering and internships. Clients have opportunities to be hired by companies that partner with the Rescue Mission.
- **Employment Resource Centers:** Two sites for clients who use the Rescue Mission Day Center or Emergency Shelter.

<http://www.rmlifechanging.org/>

Salvation Army: Clients at adult rehabilitation centers participate in a work therapy program that prepares people to enter or re-enter the workforce. Program includes internships at Salvation Army programs. <http://syracuse.ny.salvationarmy.org>

SUNY Educational Opportunity Center: Presents programs to prepare students to compete at the college level and in the workplace. Programs include college preparation, English as a Second Language, High School Equivalency. Also includes technical programs: certified nurse aide, computer software training, medical billing & coding, Microsoft Office 2010 certification. www.syracuseeoc.com

Syracuse University Talent & Education Development Center: Offers training and education to improve workers' skills. Offers Certificate of Workplace Competency for job seekers; skills-building program that leads to Syracuse University Certificate of Workplace Competency in several job categories; college and career prep program. <http://tedcenter.syr.edu/>

Urban Jobs Task Force: Coalition of local community groups and activists, urges Syracuse and Onondaga County to increase local employment in large economic development projects, including the city schools reconstruction and the Inner Harbor. Group advocates the city and county enter into Community Benefits Agreements to increase employment and training for local residents. <https://syracuseurbanjobs.wordpress.com/>

VESID (Adult Career and Continuing Education Services– Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES–VR)): Works with individuals and agencies including ARISE to find employment for people with disabilities.
<http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr/syracuse/home.html>

Visions for Change, Choosing to Thrive: Teaches soft skills, resume workshop and other skills to help people who live in poverty seek and retain employment. (See sidebar, page 10)
<http://vfcinc.org/site/>

Women’s Opportunity Center: Provides job search and job preparation workshops.
<http://womensopportunity.org/syracusewoc/>

PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS

East Syracuse Minoa High School: Career and Technical Education Program prepares students for postsecondary education and the workplace. Program areas include design technology; innovative technology; nutrition; family and consumer sciences; early childhood education; technology education; construction technology; cosmetology and culinary arts. The school’s CTE programs include a student-run credit union. <http://www.esmschools.org/HighSchool.cfm?subpage=25932>

LaFayette Big Picture School: Prepares students for college with individual learning plans based on their interests and passions. Part of the Big Picture Learning Network, began as a program for at-risk youth but now draws students of all backgrounds. <http://www.bigpicture.org/2008/10/lafayette-big-picture-juniorsenior-high-school/>

OCM BOCES: Serves 23 districts in Onondaga, Cortland and Madison counties. Career Technical Education programs include automotive collision, automotive technology, computer technology, construction, cosmetology, culinary arts, early childhood education, graphic communications, health occupations technology, laboratory technology, physical therapy, and welding.

- **New Vision** provides an in-depth overview of a professional field by placing the student in a work environment outside of school. Topic areas include environmental justice, criminal justice, and medical professions.

- **Career Development:** Offers academic and experiential learning for students 13-21 with an emphasis on 21st century leadership and employability skills through work-based learning and hands-on classroom work. Key concepts are emphasized in two subject areas: Retail and Food Service and Facilities and Grounds Maintenance.
- **Innovation Tech:** OCM BOCES runs the project learning-based high school that opened at the Career Training Center in Liverpool in fall 2014. www.ocmboces.org/

Syracuse City School District: CTE programs in all five of its high schools. Programs include law enforcement and fire/rescue; cybersecurity; cosmetology; crime scene investigation; media and communications; welding; nursing; medical assisting; and geospatial intelligence.

- **Syracuse P-TECH** is a specialized high school run through a partnership with Onondaga Community College and the Manufacturers Association of Central New York
- **SCSD Adult Education Program:** Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL), High School Equivalency (HSE) as well as a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program and a Culinary Arts program.
<http://www.syracusecityschools.com/districtpage.cfm?pageid=588>

APPENDIX: **OCL Studies**

1979	Equality and Fairness in Property Assessment
1980	Young People in Trouble: Can Our Services be Organized and Delivered More Effectively?
1981	The County Legislature: Its Function, Size and Structure
1982	Declining School Enrollments: Opportunities for Cooperative Adaptations
1983	Onondaga County Public Works Infrastructure: Status, Funding and Responsibilities
1984	Police Services in Onondaga County: A Review and Recommendations
1985	The City and County Charters: Time for Revision?
1986-87	Blueprints for the Future: Recommendations for the Year 2000
1988	The Role of the Food Industry in the Economy of Onondaga County
1989	Poverty and its Social Costs: Are There Long-term Solutions?
1990	Syracuse Area Workforce of the Future: How Do We Prepare?
1991	Schools that Work: Models in Education that Can be Used in Onondaga County
1992	Town and Village Governments: Opportunities for Cost-effective Changes
1993	The Criminal Justice System in Onondaga County: How Well is it Working?
1994	The Delivery of Human Services: Opportunities for Improvement
1995	Reinvesting in the Community: Opportunities for Economic Development
1996	Building a Non-Violent Community: Successful Strategies for Youth
1997	Security Check: Public Perceptions of Safety and Security
1998	Onondaga County School Systems: Challenges, Goals, and Visions for the Future
1999	Economic Development: Models for Success
2000	Housing and Neighborhoods: Tools for Change
2001	Civic Leadership for Community Transformation
2002	State of the Arts
2003	Mental Health Services: Access, Availability and Responsiveness
2004	Disappearing Democracy? A Report on Political Participation in Onondaga County
2005	Strategic Government Consolidation
2006	Fixing the Hub: Leveraging Better Outcomes for Downtown
2007	How Inequality Makes Us Sick: The Growing Disparities in Health and Health Care
2008-09	Rethinking I-81
2009-10	What Does It Mean To Be Green?
2010-11	Community Image
2012-13	The World at Our Doorstep
2013-14	Early Childhood and School Readiness: Creating a Community Where All Children Thrive by Five
2014-15	Understanding the Employment Skills Gap in Central New York

APPENDIX: OCL Members 2013-2014

OCL LIFETIME MEMBERS

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Patrick Mannion
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Nan Strickland

OCL CORPORATE SUSTAINING MEMBERS

CNY Community Foundation
Darco
Manufacturing
Progressive Expert Consulting

OCL CORPORATE SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Bryant & Stratton College
Eric Mower & Associates
Le Moyne College
Washington Street Partners
Syracuse 20/20

OCL CORPORATE BASIC MEMBERS

ARC of Onondaga
ARISE
Children's Consortium
Home Builders & Remodelers of CNY
InterFaith Works
Leadership Greater Syracuse
Messenger Associates
Onondaga County Public Library
Pioneer Companies

Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau
Syracuse University
The Bonadio Group
United Radio

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Maryanne Corasaniti
Daniel Hartnett
Alexander and Charlotte Holstein
Stan Goettel
Beth Hurny
Darlene Kerr
Andrea Latchem
Peggy Liuzzi and David Michel
Sarah Merrick
Paul Predmore
Vito Sciscioli
Siegfried Snyder
Douglas Sutherland
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Therese and Richard Driscoll
Linda and Marion Ervin
Janet and John Mallan
John and Nancy Murray

Eric and Joanne Pettit
Grant Reeher and Kathryn Sowards
Lynn Shepard Scott and Guy Scott
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