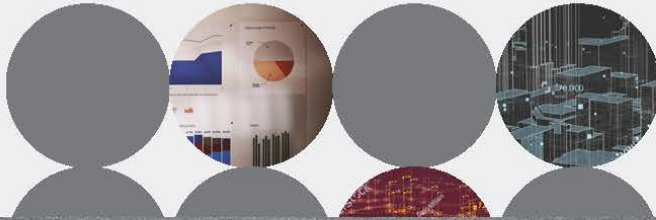
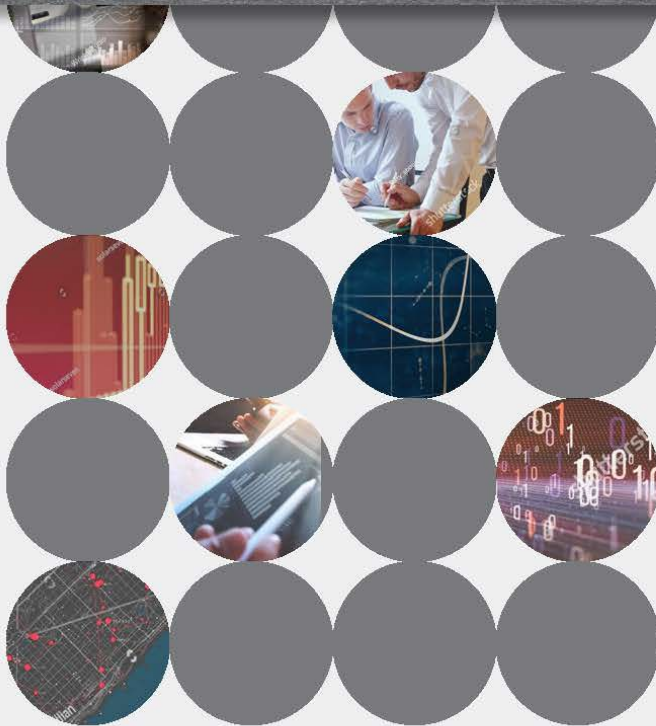


A Partnership Among Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, Johnson College, Keystone College, Lackawanna College, Luzerne County Community College, Marywood University, Misericordia University, Penn State Scranton, Penn State Wilkes-Barre, The Wright Center for Graduate Medical Education, University of Scranton, Wilkes University, and the business community



THE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Workforce Alliance: Education Needs Assessment

September 2023

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Turning Information into Insight

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Introduction

Wayne/Pike Workforce Alliance Serves as an intermediary to identify, create, and provide educational opportunities that build the workforce and support lifelong learning in Wayne and Pike Counties. This education needs assessment is a tool for evaluating alignment between the area's education and workforce programs with employer demands. The tool consists of a 19-item electronic survey, distributed to local employers and allowing them to describe the types of education, training, and skills needed by position in their businesses. It also gives them the opportunity to project future needs and identify the most significant challenges in recruiting, training, and retaining workers.

About the Respondents

Thirty-one people responded to the survey and 21 described the types of businesses or organizations they represent. Nearly one-quarter referenced businesses affiliated with trades, such as construction, engineering, contracting, water, and wastewater operations. One person also referenced manufacturing.

Four individuals (19 percent) represent behavioral health and human services organizations. Two work in hospitality and two others work in childcare. Others mentioned health care, veterinary medicine, seasonal recreation, education, beauty, and wine production and tasting.

Available Opportunities

Survey participants began by prioritizing three job titles they most need to fill – preferably within the six to 12 months following the survey. They were also asked about the degree of difficulty they face when attempting to fill these positions.

Job title 1

Twenty-nine respondents provided clear titles for the top positions they must fill. Twenty-four percent of these roles were technical in nature, such as:

- Machine operator
- Mechanical Engineer
- Service technician
- Weatherization installer

One respondent referenced the need for a veterinary technician as well. Seventeen percent of the respondents cited the need for social service professionals. These occupations include:

- Caseworker
- Crisis intervention specialist
- Direct support professional
- Social service aide

Another individual referenced the need for registered nurses. Four respondents (14 percent) require food service workers (such as a chef and line cook), three respondents require custodians or

maintenance workers, and two require people in the field of education (substitute and teacher aide). Others mentioned occupations of corrections officer, manager, office assistant, marketing coordinator, and data analyst.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents indicated great difficulty filling these roles. Another 38 percent reported some difficulty doing so. Nonetheless, 67 percent aim to hire less than five people for this role. Equal shares of eight percent aim to hire 5-9 people, 10-19 people, 20-49 people, and 50 or more people.

Job title 2

Twenty-five participants identified clear secondary priorities in terms of positions to fill. Sixteen percent of these roles were technical in nature, such as:

- Installation technician
- Mechanical designer
- Water/wastewater technician
- Welder operator

Another 16 percent referenced the need for food service workers, such as dishwashers. Three respondents (12 percent) require administrative personnel, including an executive administrator, a general manager, and office staff. Another 12 percent cited the need for social service professionals, including a caseworker, an overnight mobile crisis specialist, and support staff. Three pairs of participants identified needs in the education (assistant teacher and teacher), customer service (customer service technician and seller of cosmetics), and healthcare (registered nurse and registered radiological technician) fields. Occupations such as fiscal technician, housekeeper, patrol officer, and veterinary assistant.

Forty-one percent of the respondents indicated great difficulty filling these roles. Another 55 percent reported some difficulty doing so. Nonetheless, 71 percent aim to hire less than five people for this role. Twenty-four percent aim to hire 5-9 people, and five percent (one person) aim to hire 10-19 people.

Job title 3

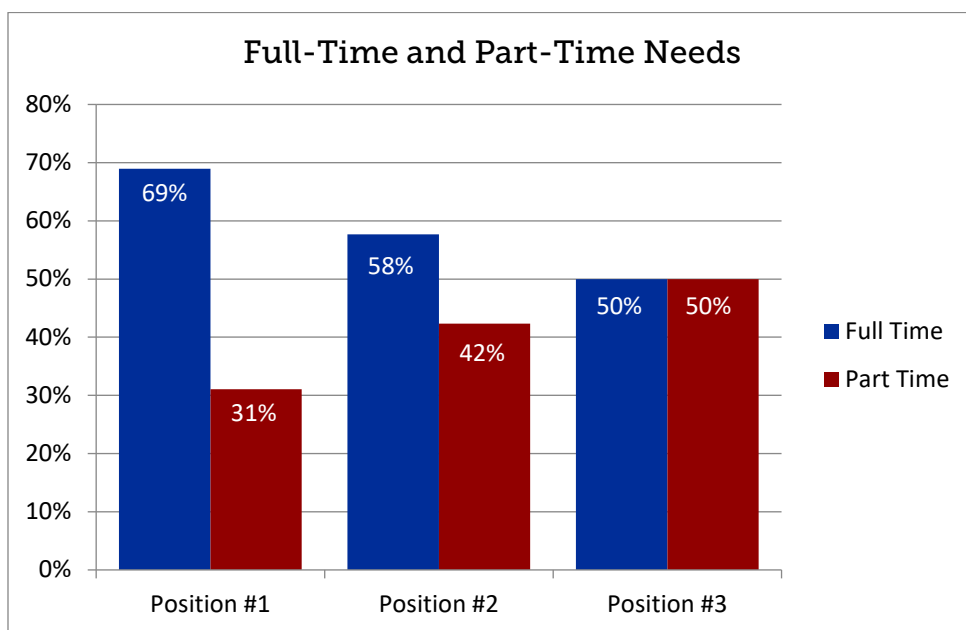
Nineteen participants identified additional positions to fill. Three respondents (16 percent) referenced occupations that are technical in nature (draftsperson, equipment operator, rental shop technician). Another 16 percent referenced occupations in the education industry (assistant teachers and paraeducator). Another 16 percent referenced occupations in the social services sector (casual crisis specialist, human resources worker, and licensed mental health therapist). Another 16 percent referenced occupations in the food service industry (cook, host, wine ambassador).

Two respondents (11 percent) cited the need for receptionists and two others cited the need for housekeepers. Other mentions include a fiscal role, inside sales, and licensed practical nursing.

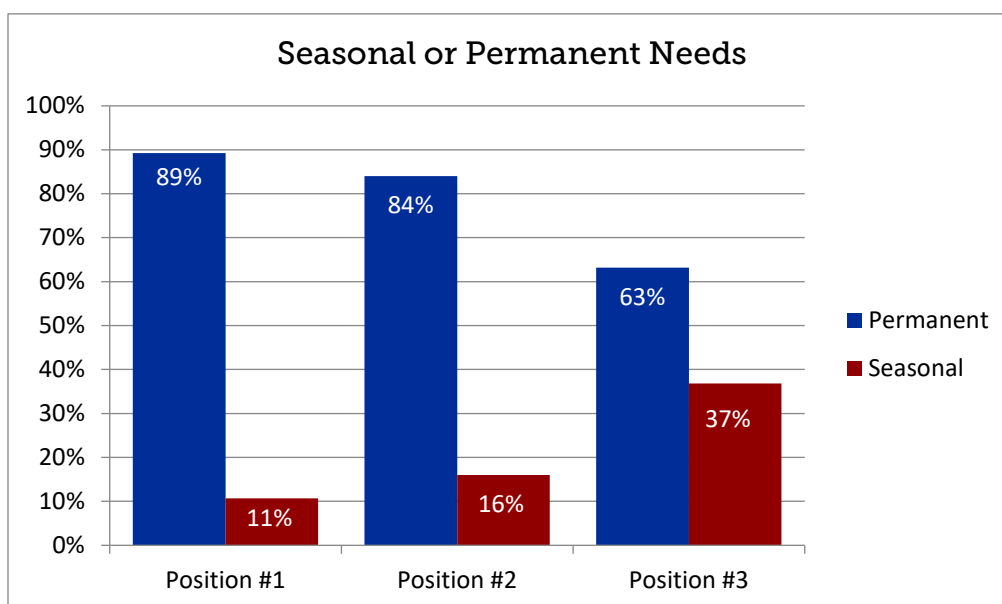
Thirty-eight percent of the respondents indicated great difficulty filling these roles. Another 31 percent reported some difficulty doing so. Nonetheless, three-quarters aim to hire less than five people for this role and one-quarter aims to hire 5-9 people.

Employment Availability and Wages

At 69 percent, most needed positions to fill are full-time roles. A majority (58 percent) of second priority positions are also full-time roles, but additional roles to be filled are evenly divided in terms of full-time and part-time status.



At 89 percent, the most needed positions to fill are permanent roles. This is also the case for the vast majority (84 percent) of second priority positions, but additional roles to be filled are less likely to be permanent. Thirty-seven percent are seasonal.



Respondents were asked to share the salary ranges for the positions they need to fill. None of them offer less than \$10 hourly for any of the positions. Approximately one-third offer \$10-\$15 hourly for all three positions and approximately 40 percent offer \$15-\$20 hourly for all three positions. Sixteen percent offer \$20-\$30 hourly for their top priority positions, 19 percent do so for their second priority positions, and 22 percent do so for additional roles. One person referenced an hourly range of \$30-\$40 for their top priority position (registered nurse), one did so for their second priority position (mechanical designer), and one did so for their additional position (direct support professional). Two individuals referenced an hourly wage exceeding \$40 for their top priority positions (data analyst and mechanical engineer) and one did so for their second priority position (direct support professional).

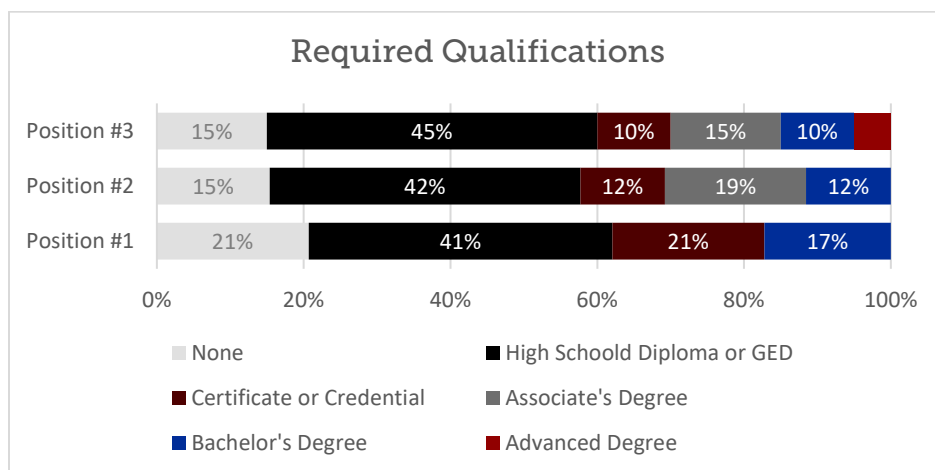
In many cases, the positions requiring less skills pay in the lower range. However, teaching assistants, fiscal technician, and wastewater technician jobs pay in the lowest wage range presented at \$10-\$15 per hour. The next level of wages, \$15-\$20, again identify some low skill jobs and some higher skill jobs such as LPNs (Licensed Practical Nurse), paraeducators, and caseworkers along with many in hospitality. As the wage levels increase, however, it is noted that the occupations require more education and skills.

It should also be noted that the highest demand for workers is in those low wage levels.

Typical Starting Wages						
Hourly Rate	Position 1		Position 2		Position 3	
\$10-\$15	32%	Kitchen worker, custodian, substitute teacher	32%	Fiscal technician, food service, veterinary assistant, housekeeper, wastewater technician	33%	Teacher assistants, host
\$15-\$20	40%	Veterinary technician, case worker, chef, machine operator, laborer,	42%	Patrol officer, dishwasher, executive admin, caseworker, tasting room manager, direct care worker, office staff, customer service	39%	Casual crisis specialist, paraeducators, LPNs, wine ambassador, seasonal employees
\$20-\$25	12%	Case workers, corrections officer trainees	5%	Welder	11%	Fiscal officers, housekeepers
\$25-\$30	4%	Director or supervisor, plumbing service technician	14%	Radiological technicians	11%	
\$30-\$35	0%		5%	Mechanical designer	6%	Clubhouse receptionist
\$35-\$40	4%	RN (Registered Nurse)	0%		0%	
More than \$40	8%	Mechanical engineer, data scientist	5%		0%	

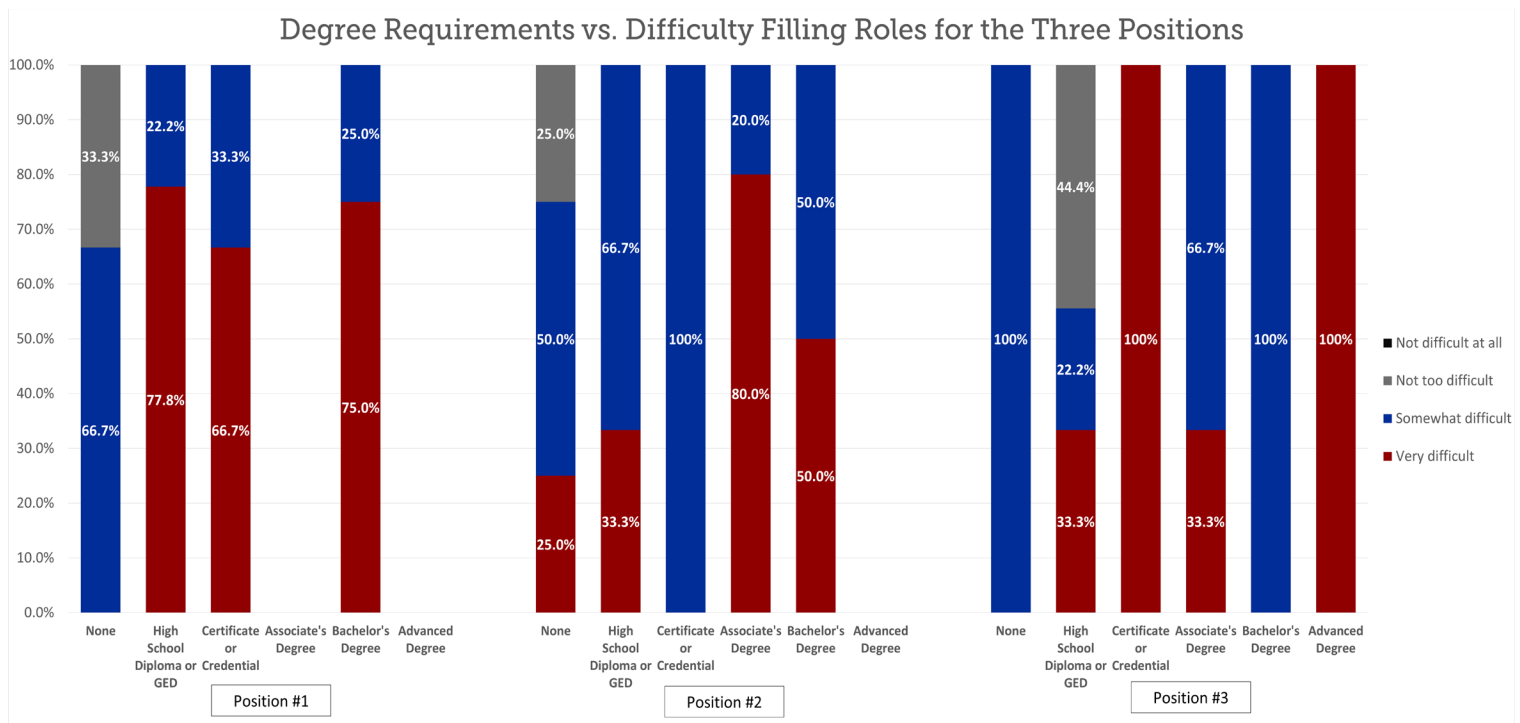
Employment Qualifications

The majority of respondents require high school diplomas for the positions they need to fill. For top-priority positions, 21 percent of respondents require no minimum levels of education, and an equal share requires certificates or credentials. For second-priority positions, 15 percent of respondents require no minimum levels of education, and 19 percent require Associate degrees. Equal shares of 12 percent require Bachelor degrees and certificates or credentials. For additional positions, 15 percent require no minimum level of education, and an equal share requires Associate degrees. For additional positions, equal shares of ten percent require Bachelor degrees and certificates or credentials.



Furthermore, half the respondents expect candidates to have 2-5 years of experience for the positions. One-third require no experience at all. Thirteen percent expect just one year of experience. Forty-three percent of respondents expect candidates to have one year of experience for second-priority positions, and one-third expect 2-5 years of experience. Nineteen percent expect no experience at all. Equal shares of 33 percent expect candidates to have one year of experience or no experience at all for additional positions. One-quarter requires 2-5 years of experience, and the remaining eight percent (one person) requires more than five years of experience.

Additionally, when evaluating the differences between the degree typically required and the typical difficulty finding candidates for the three positions, there were no respondents that indicated each degree was “not difficult at all.” For the first position, there were more respondents that indicated obtaining a high school diploma or GED, certificate, or credentials, and Bachelor degrees were “very difficult” compared to the rest selecting it was “somewhat difficult.” All individuals in the second position that were required to have a certificate or credential was “somewhat difficult.” The majority of respondents who are required to have an Associate degree within the second position indicated it was “very difficult” to fill the roles at 80 percent. Further, for those in the third position, those fulfilling degree requirements of certificate or credential and Advanced degree indicated it was “very difficult” to fill.



Skills in Demand

Survey participants were then asked to identify five hard skills they value in employees. Fourteen respondents clearly and specifically identified the top-ranked skills for the positions they must fill, and five of those skills pertain to computer proficiency or other areas of technical aptitude (such as typing, experience with Excel, and data analysis). Others referenced hard work ethic, communication skills, dependability, organization, customer service skills, understanding of food preparation, ability to clean, propensity for problem-solving, and equipment operation.

Fourteen respondents clearly and specifically identified the second-ranked skills for the positions they must fill, and four of those skills pertain to computer proficiency (including knowledge of Microsoft programs and graphic design). Three people cited interest in trades-related skills (including carpentry, welding, and plumbing design). Others referenced visualization, dependability, punctuality, veterinary knowledge, ability to multitask, mastery of basic math concepts, and ability to prepare and plate food. Instead of describing hard skills, three additional respondents described qualities they seek in applicants. They mentioned kindness, care for others, and customer satisfaction mindset.

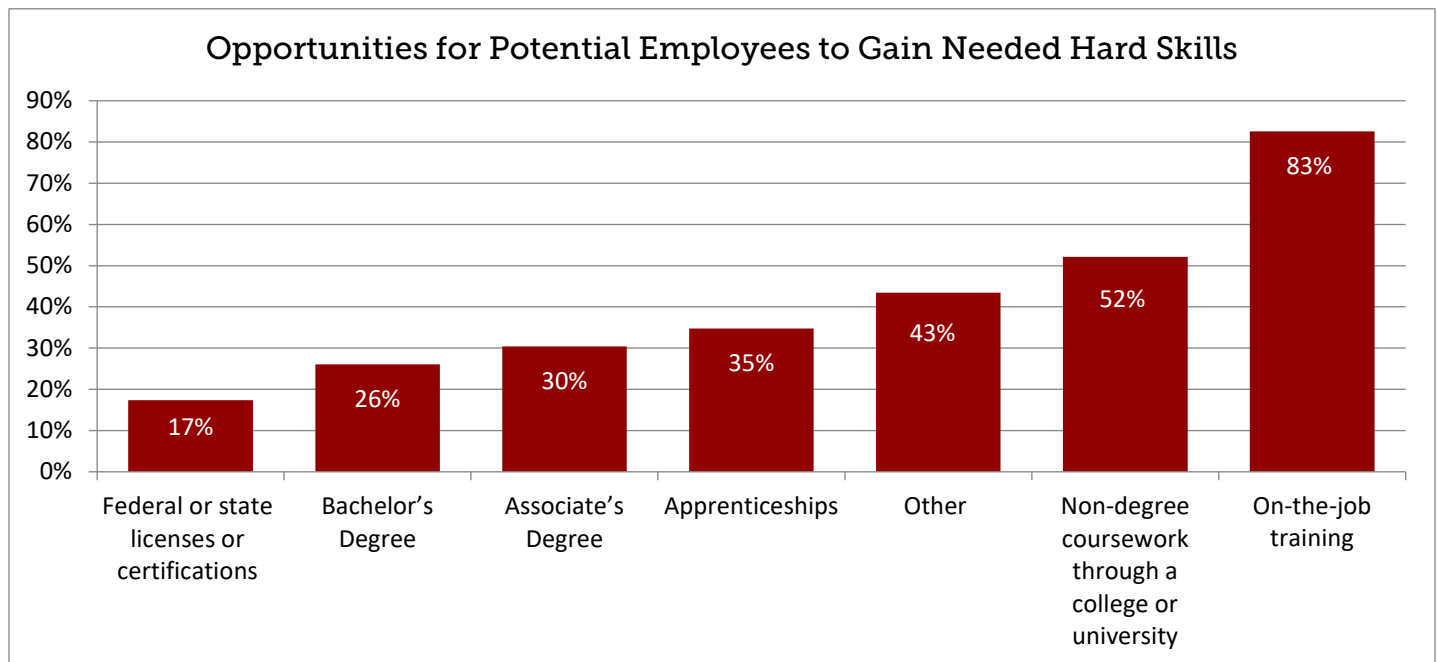
Eleven respondents clearly and specifically identified the third-ranked skills for the positions they must fill, and two cited customer service skills. One person referenced SQL/R coding and another referenced HVAC design. One cited veterinary medical knowledge and another cited marketing experience. Teamwork and dependability were referenced as well. Other mentions include the ability to drive, report writing, and the ability to use a kitchen knife. Instead of describing hard skills, three additional respondents described qualities they seek in applicants. They mentioned approachability, compassion, and a sense of pride.

Ten respondents clearly and specifically identified the fourth-ranked skills for the positions they must fill. One referenced an aptitude for quality improvement and another referenced childcare experience. Customer service skills were mentioned again, along with the ability to perform basic math functions and the ability to clean. Others included plumbing knowledge, butchering knowledge, understanding of trade terminology, machine operating, and positivity.

Eight respondents clearly and specifically identified the fifth-ranked skills for the positions they must fill. They cited understanding of statistics, electrical skills, customer relations, plate finishing, the ability to make a bed, patience, willingness to learn, and perseverance.

Training, Credentialing, and Clearance

Respondents were then asked about appropriate opportunities for potential employees to gain the hard skills needed. Eighty-three percent referenced on-the-job training and 52 percent referenced non-degree coursework at a college or university. Forty-three percent selected the 'Other' response option and, in an open-ended manner, detailed self-paced training (such as Coursera), local seminars, and non-degree coursework in a community setting. Just four individuals (17 percent) referenced federal or state licenses or certifications; in an open-ended manner, respondents detailed weatherization training certification, CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) certification, and child abuse and criminal history clearances. One individual elaborated further, indicating, "It's really needed before they start work. Unless earned through job shadowing, which is not feasible for the company."



Sixty-five percent of survey participants confirmed that they would like to collaborate with Workforce Alliance for assistance with hard skill training needs. An identical share confirmed that they would like to collaborate with Workforce Alliance for assistance hiring people with specific skills training.

They are reportedly interested in training programs and credentials such as:

- Human resources education
- Paraeducator competency training
- Veterinary technician licensure
- Credentialing for care providers (IMSW/LCSW/LMHS, RN)

Potential for Professional Advancement

Survey participants were asked to share examples of skills that entry-level employees must acquire to earn promotions. Fourteen people identified specific or general skills in their responses. One referenced leadership skills and some cited trades-specific knowledge and experience (in manufacturing, welding, and veterinary medicine). Others referenced general soft skills, such as reliability, the ability to communicate, strong work ethic, the ability to follow instruction, emotional control, the ability to work with others, dedication, and willingness to learn. Some described highly specific skills, such as the ability to convert field survey design notes to drawings, along with food management skills like preparation, butchering, grilling, and sauteing. One person cited budgeting and risk management, and another cited scheduling and inventory management. Two mentioned customer service skills, and two mentioned computer skills (familiarity with Windows programs, pdf files, spreadsheets, and email).

Fifty-seven percent of the respondents confirmed interest in collaborating with Workforce Alliance to assist new employees' acquisition of promotable skills. Ninety-one percent provide in-house education and training to their employees. Twenty individuals who confirmed in-house education and training then described the types of training they provide, to which employees they provide it, and whether they enlist any partners for these efforts. Three of these respondents simply referenced agency training (at the federal, state, and county levels) for all their employees. Three referenced partnerships with the agencies, Human Resources departments, and local nonprofit organizations. One of these respondents also cited trauma-informed care training and cultural training.

Eight respondents described in-house education and training opportunities in more general terms. Those available to all employees include "orientation plus over 50 trainings," "online training" that "varies by position," "monthly and quarterly training," on-the-job training, and 12 hours of training on mandated reporting per year. Another respondent referenced trade shows and "in-house education from distributors." One person partners with a line cook and a sous chef to offer on-the-job training and internships. The remaining individual offers on-the-job training and mentoring to people in design and survey positions.

Two respondents referenced machine operation and two referenced safety education, partnering with insurance providers and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry. A respondent mentioned basic training for corrections officers, and another focuses training on anger de-escalation, crisis prevention, fire safety, and administration of medicine to all employees. One survey participant also offers training that covers kitchen skills, food preparation, cooking, and use of equipment for kitchen workers.

Three respondents described employee education opportunities specifically due to partnerships with higher education institutions. This includes weatherization installation and quality control certification through partnership with Penn College's Clean Energy Center, and equipment operation and computer skills training through partnership with Johnson College. A respondent also ensures education surrounding water and wastewater, through a tuition assistance partnership with a local college.

Furthermore, this respondent indicated ongoing conversations regarding potential partnerships with “two other local universities.”

Survey participants mentioned education and training specific to driving and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as well. Additionally, they mentioned partnerships with companies and organizations such as the Red Cross (lifeguard training), Techno Bloc, Schluter, the National Ski Areas Association, and the Snow and Ice Management Association (SIMA). One cited training of veterinary assistants, veterinary technicians, and receptionists through partnership with the Pennsylvania Veterinary Medical Association (PVMA).

Overall, 52 percent of the respondents offer financial support for continuing education and training from schools, colleges, and other providers. Ten of these individuals elaborated on the nature of these programs and credentials, and seven of the ten indicated whether there are any terms or restrictions involved.

Those who did not confirm or deny the presence of any terms or restrictions (two respondents) reportedly offer financial support for online training and state certifications. One respondent, who confirmed the presence of terms or restrictions, but did not share additional details reportedly offers financial support for Associate and Bachelor degrees. Another simply referenced monetary terms or restrictions regarding continuing education courses. Among the remaining respondents:

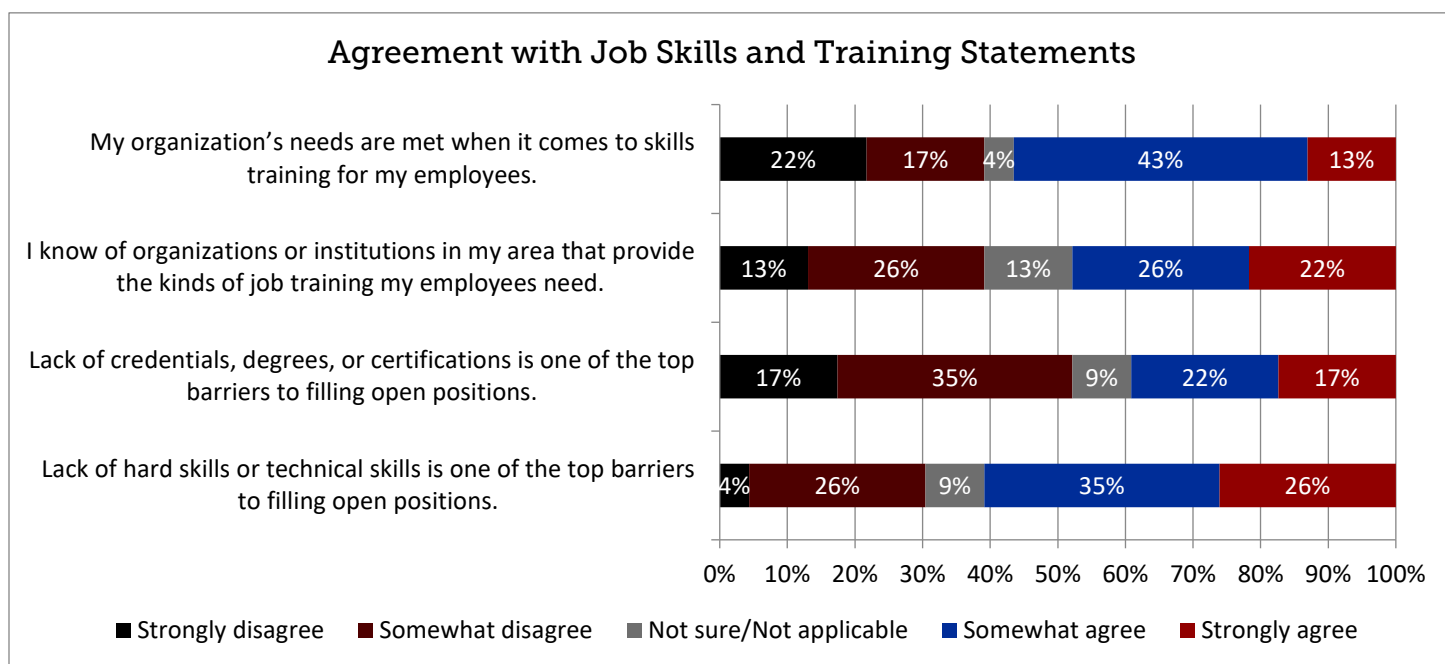
- One offers training specific to weatherization, with the terms being “employment agreement in some cases.”
- One ensures financial support for accredited degrees, which requires approval and includes terms and restrictions specific to grades.
- One offers up to \$5,000 annually (with quarterly payments) for high demand positions such as registered nurses and licensed registered nurses.
- One ensures in-service programs for continuing education credits from local colleges and universities, and terms and restrictions are “dependent upon license or certification requirements.”
- One provides financial assistance for culinary, hospitality, human resources, accounting, marketing, and informational technology programs; this support is dependent upon “length of employment,” and employee agreement to work two years “after completing coursework.”
- One provides assistance if it is determined that an “employee would benefit from the training to better perform their job,” but terms and restrictions demand that the support must be provided at a time when the employer can support the employee attending class, as the training or education is not required for work responsibilities.

Employer Perceptions of the Hiring Landscape

When respondents were asked to rate their levels of agreement with a series of four statements, they agreed most that lack of hard skills or technical skills is one of the top barriers to filling open positions (26 percent agreed strongly and 35 percent agreed somewhat). Twenty-two percent strongly agreed that they are aware of local organizations or institutes that provide the kinds of training their employees need; 26 percent agreed somewhat with this statement, but an equal share disagreed somewhat as well.

Although just 13 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their organization’s needs are met when it comes to skills training for their employees (the smallest share of strong agreement with the statements provided), 43 percent agreed somewhat (the greatest share of some agreement with the statements provided). Twenty-two percent of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, however (the greatest share of strong disagreement with the statements provided).

Finally, more than half the respondents either disagreed strongly or disagreed somewhat that lack of credentials, degrees, or certification is one of the top barriers to filling open positions (17 percent and 35 percent, respectively). Compared to the others, this statement garnered the least agreement from respondents.



Seventy-one percent of the survey participants confirmed that they would collaborate with Workforce Alliance to alleviate the aforementioned hiring barriers.

Final Comments

When afforded an opportunity to share additional feedback in an open-ended manner, three people did so. One commented on the difficulty of training people to navigate unforeseen circumstances. The remaining individuals offered praise and expressions of gratitude for the support of Workforce Alliance, stating, “The summer work program has been very helpful for training,” and, “We are actively partnering with Workforce Alliance, and we are very grateful for the partnership.”

Conclusion

This education needs assessment, consisting of a 19-item electronic survey, is a tool for evaluating alignment between the area’s education and workforce programs with employer demands. Thirty-one people participated. They represent businesses associated with trades, as well as behavioral health, healthcare, childcare, education, hospitality, and recreation.

Respondents began by prioritizing three job titles they most need to fill – preferably within the six to 12 months following the survey. For top-priority positions, nearly one-quarter referenced roles that are technical in nature, 17 percent cited need for social service professionals, 14 percent require food service workers. Others need custodians, maintenance workers, teachers, and administrative staff.

In terms of second-level priorities, 16 percent referenced roles that are technical in nature. Another 16 percent referenced the need for food service workers. Equal shares of 12 percent require administrative personal and social service professionals. Others need teachers, healthcare providers, housekeepers, and customer service specialists.

The remaining open positions include technical roles, educators, social service providers, food service staff, and office personnel. The vast majority of respondents reported some difficulty or great difficulty filling their vacant positions.

Most high-priority positions to fill are full-time roles. A majority of second priority positions are also full-time roles, but additional roles to be filled are evenly divided in terms of full-time and part-time status. Most high-priority and second priority positions to fill are permanent roles, but additional roles to be filled are less likely to be permanent; 37 percent are seasonal. Starting wages are typically between \$15 and \$20 hourly, and the majority of respondents require high school diplomas for the positions they need to fill.

When recruiting and hiring, the responding employers are reportedly interested in skills involving customer service, computer proficiency, and abilities associated with trades (such as carpentry, welding, and plumbing). They expressed interest in a number of soft skills as well, including hard work ethic, dependability, punctuality, and compassion.

When asked about appropriate opportunities for potential employees to gain needed hard skills, 83 percent of the survey participants referenced on-the-job training and 52 percent referenced non-degree coursework at a college or university. Others detailed self-paced training, local seminars, and non-degree coursework in a community setting.

Survey participants were also asked to share examples of skills that entry-level employees must acquire to earn promotions. Fourteen people identified specific or general skills in their responses. One referenced leadership skills and some cited trades-specific knowledge and experience (in manufacturing, welding, and veterinary medicine). Others referenced general soft skills, such as reliability, the ability to communicate, strong work ethic, the ability to follow instruction, emotional control, the ability to work with others, dedication, and willingness to learn. Ninety-one percent provide in-house education and training to their employees and 52 percent of the respondents offer financial support for continuing education and training from schools, colleges, and other providers.

When respondents were asked to rate their levels of agreement with a series of four statements, they agreed most that lack of hard skills or technical skills is one of the top barriers to filling open positions. Twenty-two percent strongly agreed that they are aware of local organizations or institutes that provide the kinds of training their employees need; 26 percent agreed somewhat with this statement, but an equal share disagreed somewhat as well.

Although just 13 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that their organization's needs are met when it comes to skills training for their employees (the smallest share of strong agreement with the

statements provided), 43 percent agreed somewhat (the greatest share of some agreement with the statements provided). Twenty-two percent of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, however (the greatest share of strong disagreement with the statements provided). Finally, more than half the respondents either disagreed strongly or disagreed somewhat that lack of credentials, degrees, or certification is one of the top barriers to filling open positions.

Sixty-five percent of survey participants confirmed that they would like to collaborate with Workforce Alliance for assistance with hard skill training needs. An identical share confirmed that they would like to collaborate with Workforce Alliance for assistance hiring people with specific skills training. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents confirmed interest in collaborating with Workforce Alliance to assist new employees' acquisition of promotable skills, and 71 percent of the survey participants confirmed that they would collaborate with Workforce Alliance to alleviate the aforementioned hiring barriers.

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