

Report finds U.S. must find better ways to match training to jobs - pressofatlanticcity.com: Breaking News

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New Jersey ranks sixth nationally in percentage of adults with at least a two-year college degree, according to a report released Monday by the Lumina Foundation, a private nonprofit working to help more Americans graduate from college and meet demands for a higher-skilled work force.

A large gap exists, however, between the northern and southern counties: Cumberland County had the lowest attainment rate in 2010 of 21 percent, while Somerset County had the highest at 61 percent. According to the report based on U.S. Census Bureau data, the rate was 33 percent in Atlantic County and 36 percent in Cape May and Ocean counties.



The statewide average is 45 percent, higher than the 38 percent national average but lower than the foundation's goal of 60 percent by 2025.

Jamie Merisotis, president and CEO of Lumina, said colleges must retool to give students the most access at the best cost. He said nationally a first option might be to target adults who attended college but never finished. In New Jersey, about 852,000, or almost 18 percent of all adults, fit that criterion.

Colleges in so-called low-wage, low-skill areas, such as Cumberland County, face the challenge of trying to improve their local economies by training students for jobs that may not yet exist, and doing it in a way that is both faster and less expensive for students.

Tony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, said the country has a problem in matching training to jobs.

"(Despite high unemployment,) there are jobs going unfilled for too long because people don't have the right skills," he said.

Carnevale said community colleges and industry-based certificates are helping to meet immediate employer demand, but colleges and high schools need to do a better job of matching programs to new careers by helping students find a college or training program that suits them.

Atlantic County has seen casino employment drop by almost a third since its peak in 2004. Even with the new Flamingo Las Vegas megaresort slated to open next month, with 5,000 new employees, Atlantic Cape Community College's Casino Career Training Institute has reported no major increase in enrollment, Atlantic Cape spokeswoman Chelsea Pappalardo said Monday.

Atlantic Cape has begun offering aviation-related programs for the proposed NextGen Aviation Park in Egg Harbor Township, but that project is stalled, with no hiring.

Area community colleges are also working with local health care agencies to expand training programs. Health care was named as one growing service career that offered jobs with good wages.

At a news conference announcing the Lumina Report, titled "A Stronger Nation through Higher Education," speakers said colleges in low-wage, low-skill areas must expect, at least for a while, that many of the people they train will leave the area to find work. But if workers are not trained, it will be harder to attract new industry.

Richard Stockton College last week announced it expects students to graduate with 10 "soft skills" applied to many jobs, such as creativity, critical thinking and teamwork.

The college has also begun a study on how to better fund and deliver higher education in New Jersey.

"The means by which we finance public colleges is irreparably broken," Darryl Greer, former executive director of the New Jersey Association of State Colleges and Universities and now a senior fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center for Public Policy at Stockton, said in a recent interview. "We have to change the whole process by which we make operations more effective, more affordable and allow students to complete faster."

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