



Sources: Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and US Census Bureau

Southern New England's Middle-Skill Gap: Dilemma for the Hospitality Industry

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In various parts of the United States, there is a significant workforce shortage because of an inadequate supply of workers with in-demand skills. Even though many Americans are graduating from high school and college, employers are concerned about the preparation and specific skills of new graduates. Unless major improvements are made to the American educational system, American employers will be unable to find enough qualified workers for the growing numbers of skilled jobs.

Policymakers and business leaders in New England are concerned about the ramifications of a potential shortage of skilled labor. Besides worrying about insufficient numbers of skilled workers, policy makers

and business leaders are also concerned that the region's workforce will not have the right mix of skills to fill the jobs created by the New England economy. While the region needs a mix of high, medium, and low skilled workers, it is the lack of workers needed to fill the middle-skill level that is of primary concern.

"Special attention needs to be given to attracting and developing a non-professional workforce," says Dr. Sandra Casey-Buford, executive vice president of strategy and innovation for Decision Insight, Inc., an organizational transition management firm located in the Greater Boston Area. "It has been well noted that the non-professional and paraprofessional workforce in Massachusetts remains in the shadows of the hun-

What is a middle-skill job?

One that requires more than a high-school diploma, but not a four-year college degree.

What is the projected growth for middle-skill jobs?

Some 40 percent of all job openings in Massachusetts between now and 2016 will be middle-skill jobs.

Who provides training for these jobs?

Employers, community colleges, apprenticeship programs, nonprofit community-based training organizations, and private career schools.

How can we meet the demand for middle-skill and high-skill jobs?

Every Massachusetts resident should have access to the equivalent of at least two years of education or training past high school and the basic skills needed to enter that training.

dreds of highly skilled professionals who graduate from the state's mecca of colleges and universities.”

A recent research report for the New England Public Policy Center, *Mismatch in the Labor Market: Measuring the Supply of and Demand for Skilled Labor in New England*, identified the middle-skill category as facing the greatest imbalance between the supply and demand for labor in New England over the next two decades. Middle-skill workers are considered individuals with some college education or an associate's degree. These workers often fill critical jobs in healthcare, education, information technology, and other industries such as the hospitality industry. These jobs require some specialized skills, and often involve interpersonal interaction that cannot be easily outsourced or automated. This description fits the hospitality industry to a tee. Great service cannot be outsourced; you must come to the service professionals who know what it is and how to deliver.

Recent labor market trends and future projections for southern New England (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island) vary tremendously from northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont). In northern New England, where population growth is projected to stagnate, policies aimed at attracting and retaining skilled workers will be a priority. In south-

ern New England, where the population is projected to shift toward minority and immigrant groups, policies need to ensure that workers have the right skills to fill jobs created by the region's economy.

Massachusetts is experiencing a shortage of middle-skill workers]. In 2007, about 45 percent of all jobs were classified as middle-skill, but only 32 percent of Massachusetts's workers had the education and training required to fill those positions. In reality, the gap was likely even greater in certain industries because many workers trained to the middle-skill level—and even those with bachelor's degrees—did not have the specific technical skills needed. This means that thousands of well-paid and rewarding jobs are going unfilled in the Commonwealth. Middle-skill workers provide the fuel for industries, such as hospitality and tourism that are, and will continue to be, essential to keeping businesses in Massachusetts while also enhancing the state's economic portfolio.

While, Massachusetts has made significant investments in education and training for its workforce, especially in K–12 education, basic skills, and incumbent worker training, the Commonwealth has underinvested in public higher education and vocational and technical training—two critical components of the state's training infrastructure that must be better aligned to meet industry demand for middle-skill workers. It is recommended that Massachusetts develop affordable pathways to postsecondary education and training for all residents, including those with very low skills and incomes. Massachusetts should also address the gaps that often exist between adult basic education, postsecondary training, and industry-specific skills training.

Dr. Casey-Buford suggests that firms need to form more partnerships with two-year vocational schools and community col-

leges. “I find that many people don’t know what opportunities exist in lodging and related industries,” she said. “Therefore, partnerships should include career awareness seminars and workshops, internships, mentorships, scholarships, and sponsorships to grow a pipeline of well-prepared candidates.”

In addition, it is suggested that Massachusetts also make significant investments in programs that will train more residents who are laid off, or working in low-skill jobs, for better paying middle-skill jobs and careers. Specifically, the hospitality industry provides the greatest opportunity

for this investment due to the multiple business segments it affects directly. The chart on the following page identifies, but is not limited to, the various segments of the hospitality industry.

Due to the effect the hospitality industry has on various business sectors and suppliers, this opens up an opportunity for Massachusetts to address the middle-skill shortage. There are many different pathways to middle-skill jobs and the table below provides a brief summary of opportunities for workforce deployment training programs for Massachusetts.

Time to Complete	Availability	Types of Jobs	Where Jobs are Currently	Growth Rate
Short-term, less than a year, on-the-job training	Employers	Food preparation and service workers	Food Services & Drinking Places (67%)	12.90%
			Food & Beverage Stores (9%)	
			Nursing & Residential Care Facilities (5%)	
			Elementary & Secondary Schools (5%)	
			Professional & Business Services (3%)	
			Accommodation (2%)	
Short-term, less than a year, on-the-job training	Employers	Hotel desk clerks	Leisure & Hospitality (97%)	13.80%
Short-term, less than a year, on-the-job training	Employers	Waiters and waitresses	Food Service & Drinking Places (85%)	7.30%
			Accommodation (5%)	
			Employment Services (2%)	
			Nursing & Residential Care Facilities (2%)	
			Facilities (2%)	
2 years or specialized training	Community college	Bakers and pastry chefs	Food Manufacturing (35%)	8.40%
			Food & Beverage Stores (28%)	
			Accommodation & Food Services (25%)	
			Self-Employed (4%)	
2 years or specialized training	Community college	Chefs and cooks	Food Services & Drinking Places (74%)	6.30%
			Nursing & Residential Care Facilities (5%)	
			Accommodation (5%)	
			Elementary & Secondary Schools (3%)	
			Amusement, Gambling, and Recreation Industries (2%)	
			Hospitals (2%)	
Bachelor’s degree or higher	Universities with 4 year hospitality programs	Food service and lodging managers	Self-Employed (42%)	4.90%
			Food Services & Drinking Places (40%)	
			Accommodation (7%)	
			Nursing & Residential Care Facilities (3%)	
			Elementary & Secondary Schools (2%)	
			Retail Trade (2%)	

THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SEGMENTS



Addressing the need for middle-skill workers will require attention not only to educational opportunities for young people, but also for those already in the workforce. Close to two-thirds of the people who will be in Massachusetts's workforce in the year 2020 were already working adults in 2005—long past the traditional high school-to-college pipeline. That is why talent management and workforce development have become and will continue to be some of the most important issues emphasized by human resources management. This provides southern New England with the opportunity to shape and develop human capital for a sustainable and growing economy. ■



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