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Study: 33% of workers unskilled

Indiana must act quickly to better train work force, report for Chamber says.

A third of Indiana's work force not only lacks the skills to compete in today's increasingly knowledge-based economy, but many either don't realize their plight or choose to ignore it, says a study from the Indiana Chamber of Commerce.

Done by a research and consulting firm in Arlington, Mass., called FutureWorks, the study recommends a vast ramp-up in education and training programs to boost the lagging skills of workers around the state.

"It's pretty alarming," said Tom Schuman, vice president of communications at the Chamber, of findings of the study, which was released Thursday.

"If Indiana is to prosper in a global economy biased toward skills, it must make big and quick changes in its ability to produce more highly skilled workers," says the 52-page study, funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment.

The study found that about 1 million working Hoosiers lack basic skills in math, English and writing, along with workplace skills, such as problem-solving abilities, the capacity to work in teams and willingness to accept change and embrace personal improvement.

State retraining programs serve fewer than 25,000 workers a year, which "barely scratches the surface of the apparent need," says the study. It recommends boosting retraining numbers to 75,000 workers a year by 2010, using public, private and nonprofit money.

The study says an influx of Hispanic immigrants and other non-native-born workers in the past decade has worsened the problem in Indiana.

The state's historic dependence on manufacturing jobs, which often haven't required more than a high school education, also left Indiana workers unprepared as those manufacturing jobs dried up, said Ben Ramsey, executive director of Indiana State Building Trades Council.

The Chamber has called for a "work force summit" in Indiana this year to follow up on study recommendations.

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