

Strengthen support for career training

Helping families become self-sufficient isn't just about encouraging savings or creating more jobs, it is also about keeping people employed and permanently preparing them for future changes in the labor force. Good career training programs with strong government support provide working families with the education and training opportunities they need to update their skills in an ever evolving economy. Current initiatives in Michigan designed to address job training and skill development include No Worker Left Behind and Jobs, Education & Training (JET). Michigan must continue to support these efforts and promote life-long learning.

In June of 2009, the Michigan unemployment rate was marked at a staggering 15.2%. This number was significantly higher than the national average of 9.5%. Overall, 740,000 Michigan residents were unemployed in June 2009; 450,000 of which received unemployment benefits.

A critical method for getting Michigan's thousands of unemployed residents back into the workforce is career training. The state already dedicates funding to career training. The No Worker Left Behind program (NWLB), established in 2007, provides up to \$10,000 (\$5,000 per year for two years) of assistance for tuition to any Michigan community college, university, or other approved training program to unemployed workers. It is estimated that the program will aid over 100,000 unemployed Michigan residents. However, the program is not long-term in scale; no new applicants will be accepted to the program after August 1, 2010.

The Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program administered by the Michigan Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth (DELEG) is a career training strategy targeted at Michigan residents receiving cash assistance through the

Family Independence Program (FIP). JET is a joint effort of local and state human service-related groups. Local workforce boards, Michigan Works! Agencies, the Michigan Rehabilitation Services, the MI DELEG, and Human Services county offices work together to remove barriers to work and help Michigan families achieve lasting economic self-sufficiency through jobs, education, and training. The program designs Family Self-Sufficiency Plans for each family receiving cash assistance, outlining the services they will be provided and the action steps they and their case managers must take to get them on a path to self-sufficiency. JET connects families with training services, job placement, and post-employment services and support.

While Michigan supports career training, a significant number of Michigan residents are running out their unemployment benefits before finding a new job, highlighting a mismatch between career training efforts and actual job placement for the unemployed. Additionally, a recent study found that one in three adults of working age in Michigan lack the basic literacy and math skills needed for employment in available jobs. Such workers require remedial courses before being able to complete the job training they need to gain available employment in the state. Career training in Michigan must be improved. Job placement should be connected with career training programs to ensure employment is achieved after training and that career training programs are giving people the skills demanded by Michigan's employers. Career training should also be coupled with adult education efforts to address the significant need for basic education among Michigan workers.

Good career training can happen in both secondary school and in adult education programs. The Skills 2 Compete Campaign, which advocates that all U.S. residents receive assistance in obtaining at least two years of postsecondary education or training beyond high school, stresses the importance of maintaining

career training programs for high school students not planning on going to a four year college and for adults who need additional education or retraining.¹

Michigan offers a scholarship for high school graduates, giving \$4,000 for tuition for any two- or four-year college or training program that leads to a credential.

Other states offer different support to residents for postsecondary education. Georgia provides two years of career training or college for all residents and offers competitive scholarships for four years of tuition and fees at public universities in the state. Washington has a pilot program offering two years of postsecondary education to residents.² These states take different approaches from Michigan, offering universal access to postsecondary education for all residents regardless of age or credential.

The ABPP strongly recommends strengthening Michigan’s support for career training. Programs like No Worker Left Behind are an integral part of a government effort to get Michigan residents back into the labor force.

Michigan should also expand support for Adult education and literacy training to prepare uneducated workers for training programs that require better literacy and/or math skills than were needed for many of Michigan’s old manufacturing jobs. Michigan must also work to ensure successful job placement for participants in career training programs. Improved career training will help Michigan’s working families to achieve the job and income security needed to build their assets.

This paper prepared by Megan Kursik, Policy Intern, Asset Building Policy Project.

¹ Skills 2 Compete. www.skills2compete.org

² “In the States: Innovators.” Skills 2 Compete. www.skills2compete.org/site/c.fhLIKYPPLuF/b.3354833/k.9957/In_The_States.htm