

Great high-tech jobs are out there if we give our kids skills to fill them

Luke Rhine and Randolph Guschl | Published 8:00 p.m. ET March 19, 2018 | Updated 3:25 p.m. ET March 20, 2018



(Photo: Submitted)

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Editor's note: This op-ed has been updated to reflect the new date for an event that was postponed due to weather.

Luke Rhine is Director of Career and Technical Education/STEM Initiatives at the Delaware Department of Education. Randolph Guschl is executive director of the Delaware Foundation for Science and Math Education.

The Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce recently released a report on [Good Jobs That Pay without a BA: A State-by-State Analysis, 2017](#). It defines a good job as providing a living wage — or wages greater than \$35,000 for workers under the age of 42 and greater than \$45,000 for workers over the age of 42.

The report, which was commissioned by JPMorgan Chase, also discusses the importance of registered apprenticeships, associate degree programs, and other forms of education and training that prepare people for good jobs. And the findings nationally are pretty simple.



Randolph Guschl is executive director of the Delaware Foundation for Science and Math Education (Photo: DFSME)

A significant percentage of our economy, or a quarter of the American workforce, has a good job but doesn't have a bachelor's degree. These jobs are highly technical and increasingly require [some type of post-secondary education](#) — typically a certification, a journeyman credential, or an associate degree.

But the report also illustrates that the nature of good jobs is changing. It calls on states to invest in a variety of postsecondary education options to support youth entering the labor market and adults seeking to up-skill.

In Delaware, the percentage of workers who have a good job without a bachelor's degree has grown from 38.7 percent of all workers in 1991 to 40.7 percent in 2015. That means roughly half of all workers in Delaware with good jobs have a bachelor's degree and half do not. The median earnings of non-bachelor good job workers was \$56,000 annually in 2015.

These non-bachelor good jobs are growing in industries such as health and financial services, manufacturing, information technology, and construction. And these in-demand jobs complement industries that have traditionally underpinned Delaware's economy such as agriculture, hospitality, and business administration.

As our state's economy changes, we need to consider how we evolve our education and workforce development systems.

We are a state that relies on technology as a tool for economic development. We are also a state that needs to develop talent at a regional scale based on employer needs and expectations for in-demand jobs.

Further, we need to acknowledge that families, youth, employers, community stakeholders, and educators play an equal part in the development of our future and current workforce. Below are some ideas to help grow talent and build a brighter economy for our youth and their families.

All families want their children to be happy, well educated, and have the opportunity to pursue great careers. Nothing is more important than getting a head start on education. Investments in early learning and literacy are important.

But so is an investment in STEM education (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). If we want our youngest learners and elementary youth to understand how science and technology will play a role in their future careers, we need to start early.

People learn in a variety of formats and in different contexts. This past week, youth and their families gathered at the ACE Mentoring program, which connects Delaware youth interested in careers in architecture, engineering, and construction — and at the 5th Annual STEM Expo at Delaware Technical Community College, which helped middle and high school students to build STEM skills aligned to potential careers.

We need to connect in-school and out-of-school learning to support the whole child. And we need to grow the number of employers who sponsor industry-led projects and support internships for secondary and post-secondary students.

We know that good jobs exist for people with and without a bachelor's degree. We need to elevate our conversation with youth about what it means to be prepared for the workforce.

Opportunities for good jobs exist through different types of post-secondary education, including registered apprenticeship, associate degree programs, and bachelor's degree programs. Our discussion with youth needs to focus on what excites them about learning — then we need to talk about the type of post-secondary education that most closely aligns with their career aspirations.

As our economy shifts, more and more jobs that only require a high school diploma will change or be eliminated. Our continued investment in state scholarship programs such as the SEED and Inspire are essential to increase the skill level of our future workforce.

We must also consider new investments, such as the workforce intermediary at Delaware Technical Community College, to further bridge the gap between education providers and employers.

If you would like to learn more about the discussion occurring to help shape our education and workforce system, you are invited to attend the 4th Annual Delaware Pathways Conference from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 27 at the Chase Center in Wilmington.

If you or your children are interested in learning more about in-demand careers, you are invited to attend the free Pathways EXPO from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the same location.

Employer partners such as Christiana Care Health System and Nemours Alfred I duPont Hospital for Children will provide hands-on activities to showcase careers in healthcare along with dozens of community partners who support youth and adult skill development.

For more information please visit delawarepathways.org.