



OPINION COLUMNISTS

Bruce Stenslie and Roger Rice: Economy depends on educated, skilled workforce

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The 2013 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Survey of Adult Skills found that employers say potential hires lack the skills or credentials required for in-demand jobs. The economy is ready to expand, noted the analysis, but because workers do not have access to the right kind of training, economic expansion will remain modest in many industries.

These findings do not bode well for our future economic health, both here in Ventura County and nationally.

What can be done? Over the past two years, the state of California has awarded Ventura County educational agencies more than \$38 million in special grants to build regional career pathways.

Through collaborative career-pathway partnerships between business and education, educational programs are being created that will provide a pipeline of skilled, adaptable workers and help Ventura County businesses compete and thrive in the complex, constantly changing global economy.

We hear from our Workforce Development Board members that not having a ready, reliable local talent pool is costing employers money and productivity. This problem has been consistently troublesome during previous periods of high unemployment and even today, when the unemployment rate is low.

When employers are confident they have a pool of skilled workers to choose from, those businesses tend to not only stay local but also expand. New businesses are more likely to relocate here.

A skilled workforce means higher wages, which builds a stronger economic base, which in turn creates revenues to build schools and infrastructure. All of this can't happen without businesses and educational institutions talking to one another first. That's often the hardest step, but once that happens, employers and educators can work together to ensure that curriculum is responsive and adaptable to the changing workplace.

Workforce Development Board sector committees (health care, manufacturing, clean/green) are currently engaging employers in public discussions to provide educators with input on labor market data, local workforce demand, entry-level skill requirements, relevant content for curriculum development and ways to reach employers who will offer career-related experiences. This gives employers a stake in workforce development efforts that will benefit their businesses directly.

Committee members have created lists of entry-level skills for health care, manufacturing, infrastructure and hospitality careers for educators to use in developing coursework, career awareness and work-related experiences. Other employer activities include guest speaking in classrooms, business site visits, job shadowing, internships, mentoring, equipment donations to schools, participation in career expos and support for other career-related

activities at the middle school, high school, adult school, community college and university levels.

With all of the talk about how to build a stronger America, our nation's future economic growth and stability are dependent primarily on one thing: an educated, skilled workforce prepared and adaptable to take on the challenges of the future. For the past few years, Ventura County businesses and educators have been building a collaborative and robust regional network that is enabling students to graduate with skills that will help them obtain high-skilled, high-wage jobs. These efforts are making a positive difference for individuals and for the community as a whole.

Problems associated with the lack of a skilled workforce cannot be fixed by any one company or educational institution. It takes a collaborative commitment to find solutions. To learn more about how to work effectively with schools or with the sector committees, call 477-5306 or visit www.workforceventuracounty.org.

Bruce Stenslie is president/CEO of the Economic Development Collaborative Ventura County. Roger Rice is deputy superintendent of student services for the Ventura County Office of Education. Both are members of the Workforce Development Board of Ventura County.

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