

Poll results

More 2-Year Degree Programs Top Priority for Pa. Business, Civic Leaders

Statewide survey points to niche needs of employers that Erie County Community College would help fill locally

What's the most pressing higher education priority in Pennsylvania?

According to many civic and business leaders who gathered recently in central Pennsylvania, topping the list is ramping up community college-style education to prepare more workers to meet the evolving needs of employers.

In a survey, a big majority — 91 of 125 leaders — chose aligning career and technical education with community colleges and employer training as the highest education priority in the state. More specifically, many at the conference emphasized that Pennsylvania is in dire need of more workers with two-year degrees.

Urgent need

Two-year programming is a niche that the Erie County Community College would help to fill. And the community college, among many other offerings, would serve to meet the specific needs of employers through targeted curriculum and training programs.



Students study a manufacturing process at a community college.

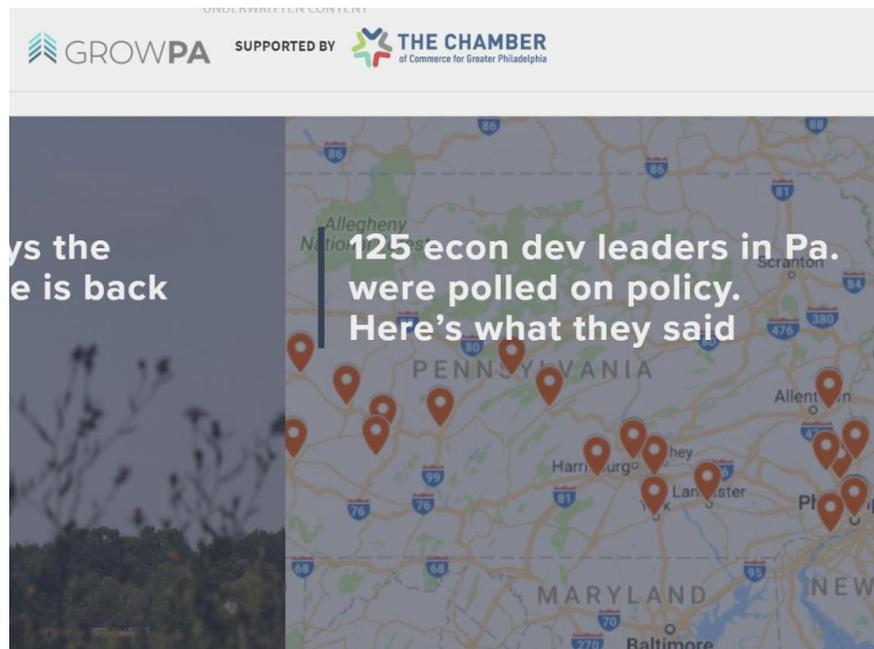
Peter Beens

“Clearly, those in our state who spend their days focused on economic development see an urgent need for more two-year degrees such as those that would be the foundation of a new Erie County Community College,” said Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper. “This is just further affirmation that two-year community college degrees are essential for Erie County to remain competitive within our state and across the country.”

Battling brain drain

The conference featured members of Grow PA, an initiative spearheaded by the Chamber of Commerce for Greater Philadelphia that aims to create a shared plan by engaging economic development leaders on policies that will move local economies forward.

A report about the conference published by Philadelphia-headquartered Technically Media emphasizes the need for additional focus, funding and resources for two-year education, citing examples of where community colleges are successfully feeding employers.



A screengrab of the report, which can be accessed [here](#).

One such example is PECO, an energy company that is looking for 600 pipeline mechanics in the Greater Philadelphia area — no easy task in a state experiencing its share of “brain drain” and an aging population.

The company must replace more than 9,000 miles of gas lines in the region over the next two decades. The large regional project is getting a boost from the Collegiate Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development, a group of local institutions that partner with each other and regional employers to develop local skilled workers and fill workforce gaps. The six regional colleges in the consortium are: Montgomery County Community College, Camden Community College, Community College of Philadelphia, Delaware County Community College, Bucks County Community College and Drexel University.

PECO, which usually gets subcontractors to repair its gas distribution pipelines, is working with the consortium to train and certify students. After nine weeks of training, the students are placed in entry-level union jobs paying \$24 to \$26 an hour.

Matching workers with the right job

Meanwhile, in the Pittsburgh area, there’s a concern among economic development organizations that the region will experience a shortage of workers over the next decade. That shortage could reach 80,000 employees if nothing is done to address the issue.

A big part of the problem is matching workers with the right jobs. Many underemployed workers don’t know where to find jobs outside their immediate skill set, while employers don’t necessarily know how to reach them. Community colleges can play a role to help both employers and prospective employees — in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and hopefully in Erie as well.

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