

Good jobs in city; how to get them

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Good jobs may be hard to come by in the Springfield area, but so are skilled workers. You just can't have one without the other.

That's why we applaud city, state and business leaders for devising a comprehensive workforce development plan to prepare workers for the knowledge-based jobs of the future. In outlining the plan, they're also sending a message to employers that the local labor force will be ready to meet the challenges of the 21st century workplace.

State Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Suzanne M. Bump was in Springfield this week to announce nearly \$1.3 million in grants to help the city prepare its workforce for a new way of working.

Recognizing that the job development effort couldn't be called comprehensive if it didn't address the education needs of the youngest residents of the Bay State, the plan calls for the establishment of a universal pre-kindergarten program. It's a good place to start. Nobel laureate James J. Heckman points out that early intervention for disadvantaged children - which the city unfortunately has in abundance - promotes staying in school, enhances the productivity of schools, reduces crime, teen pregnancy and dependence on welfare and raises the quality of the workforce.

Other goals of the plan are: to improve education proficiency and career awareness among youth including a recommendation that "extended learning time" be implemented in at least two middle schools; to increase adult literacy education services and to target training and education toward filling jobs in key growth industries such as health care and precision manufacturing.

Big Y, MassMutual Financial Group and Western Mass. Electric Co. have jointly contributed \$150,000 to provide paid internships, year-round career education and mentoring for 50 disadvantaged students. Baystate Medical Center and Mercy Medical Center were granted \$475,000 to finance the recruitment and training of 55 acute care certified nursing assistants and other workers. The city is contributing \$100,000 in community development block grant funds for adult basic education.

The investment in workforce development is one that will pay dividends for the economic well-being of the entire region.

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