

Good paying jobs without a 4-year degree

David Pearce, Carl Guardino

HELP WANTED: High-tech and life science employees for high-skill, high-wage careers. Ph.D., master's or bachelor's degrees not necessarily needed.

Too many people in California do not realize the number and variety of meaningful jobs with solid incomes available in Silicon Valley and beyond that require a two-year degree, a certificate or specific technical training rather than a doctorate, a master's or bachelor's degree.

In today's innovation economy, career paths offer people with specific skill sets diverse opportunities not only to succeed, but to continually learn throughout their careers in all kinds of educational environments. The key question is simple and straightforward: In the rapidly changing, highly competitive global economy, how do our workers get the education they need, the hard and soft skills we require, and at a pace that keeps up with the international competition we face?

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger convened a Career Technical Education Summit yesterday in Southern California to seek some of the answers. The gathering in Torrance brought government, industry, workforce and education leaders together to review existing education standards, outline industry needs over the next decade and evaluate and identify how schools can best prepare students for the new kinds of jobs coming onto the market. Equally important, the governor is ensuring that those groups are clearly communicating with each other about the needs of California's diverse economy and population.

We participated, along with

Silicon Valley leaders such as Seagate Technology CEO Bill Watkins, Gilead Sciences CEO John Martin, Cisco executive Brian Schipper, and some two dozen other private and public sector leaders, who share the governor's commitment to career preparation. Employers, employees, elected officials and educators must do our part to help.

California is already equipped with an affordable and accessible institution to provide many of these skills: our community colleges. With 109 campuses in 72 districts, community colleges provide two-year degrees, technical degrees, certification coursework, or simply the one or two tune-up classes needed to place workers on an enhanced career pathway. Community colleges are often nimble in meeting market needs, incredibly affordable and already help to educate 2.5 million Californians annually.

With some 2,700 biotechnology companies in the state, the industry's workforce demands in the course of the next decade will require a broad spectrum of employees with an equally broad spectrum of education and training. Up to 30 percent of this specialized workforce will qualify for productive, rewarding jobs with two-year degrees or technical certificates.

Gilead's workforce, for instance, is growing 20 to 30 percent annually. It expects to add 300 jobs in California by the end of this year and anticipates doubling the size of its Foster City facility within five to 10 years. The employment outlook for "clean and green tech" is also strong. Solar technology innovator Miasolé, for example, anticipates tripling its workforce to 300 employees by the end of this year. This vibrant and vital sector is

producing products that are important both to the prosperity of our people and to the future of our planet. Silicon Valley, already home to 7,000 technology companies, is experiencing a similar level of workforce demands and growth as the statewide biotech industry. Seagate has hired more than 700 employees in Northern California in the past 18 months, some 200 of them without four-year degrees.

Wisely, the governor's proposed 2007-08 budget for the state includes \$52 million to improve career technical education programs by enhancing curriculum, increasing teacher recruitment and training, and maximizing bond funds for new facilities.

The governor's budget aims to enhance career technical education curriculum and streamline teacher recruitment and training. This includes \$20 million in funding to reform vocational coursework through partnerships between high schools and community colleges, broadening standards to include technical programs in emerging and traditional career paths, and expanding courses to ensure more students acquire the skills needed for gainful employment. The funds will also increase professional development training opportunities for educators and counselors.

In the business community, we can help by supporting this effort to build public-private partnerships that expand apprenticeships, internships and training in emerging technologies. A collaborative effort will help to fill our classrooms, companies and communities with well-educated, experienced and productive workers -- not just with jobs, but with careers, on pathways to promising futures that enhance their lives and livelihoods.