

State official: Indiana must strengthen workforce

More than 1 million jobs must be filled in next 10 years, Zeck says

By Howard Greninger Tribune-Star Oct 25, 2018

The No. 1 obstacle to business growth is a supply of human capital, said Darrel Zeck of Terre Haute, executive director of the state office of Work-Based Learning and Apprenticeship.

“People can’t find enough folks to hire quick enough, they need them today,” Zeck said Thursday in a work-based learning program held at the Ohio Building in Terre Haute.

“If we can get past that immediate need, the other piece is [employers] need that pipeline [of workers] with long-term sustainment in order to grow a business and continue to expand.”

Thursday’s program was part of a statewide effort to hold 32 meetings in all 12 workforce development regions in the state within six weeks. Terre Haute is in the Indiana Department of Workforce Development’s Region 7, which includes Vigo, Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan and Vermillion.

Solutions include “robust job shadowing programs and internships to our state earn and learn program and also the U.S. registered apprenticeship programs,” Zeck said. “Most of the solutions are very low cost or no cost and we can get them done in short order. If there is a [training] course that we can get done in six to eight weeks or maybe something as long as year or two years, we can do that,” Zeck said.

Indiana faces filling more than 1 million jobs in the next 10 years, Zeck said, with 700,000 jobs opening as Baby boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) retire and another \$300,000 for anticipated new jobs, from growing or new business.

“At any given time we have between 85,000 and 100,000 open positions within the state that can’t be filled,” Zeck said.

Companies in major industries report 49 percent have unfilled jobs openings and 37 percent can’t take

on new business. According to Strada Education Network, only about 10 percent of high school graduates are “finding good jobs, good careers,” Zeck said.

“We have a little less than 9,000 high school students, over the last two years, who are not graduating, they are not walking the stage, they are not getting their high school diploma,” Zeck said, citing Strada statistics.

About 25,000 Hoosiers have no plan beyond high school other than “to get a job,” according to Strada statistics.

“While 45,000 will head off to universities or college, only 30,000 are graduating or completing within six years, so 62 percent of our high school seniors six years from their senior year have no credential past high school,” Zeck said. “Thirty percent of our college freshmen are dropping out the first year. That is an average number for our state universities in Indiana.”

In the adult workforce of the more than 3.36 million Hoosiers, 476,000 do not have a high school credential. "About 50 percent of those who enter into adult basic education through the [Indiana] Department of Workforce Development are doing so below a sixth-grade level," he said.

One solution for such a workforce is a focus on skilled-based and industry certification or associated degrees, Zeck said, "which is something less than a four- year degree, but more than a high school diploma," he said.

"It is really keyed in on skilled versus what kind of piece of paper you have. There has been some big companies, IBM and Google, that are opening their doors saying no degree needed. They are pulling people in based on skills," he said.

"There are over 1,200 occupations that have apprenticeship programs," Zeck added. "Developing public/private partnerships, where we are talking about public schools and private business, is a big component to what we are doing."

About 30 people attended Thursday's program,

including representatives from Casey's General Stores, Novelis, Gartland Foundry Co., Enjet Aero Terre Haute LLC (Formerly Stark Industries), Vigo County School Corp., Indiana State University and Ivy Tech Community College and Vincennes University.