

Middle-Skill Job Opportunities in the Metropolitan Chicago Region

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that nearly half (about 45 percent) of all job openings in the next 10 years will be in the broad occupational categories that are mostly middle-skill.

America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs

Overview

The Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago have issued this publication for the purpose of providing specific information on opportunities in middle-skill jobs in the metropolitan Chicago region.¹ Middle-skill jobs are defined as those jobs that require some training and/or education beyond high school but less than a bachelor's degree. The report provides information specific to the region's middle-skill job opportunities, educational/training requirements, and anticipated earnings. This report builds on information presented in *America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs* which examines issues related to the future demand for a middle-skilled labor force.²

The Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago (Workforce Boards) are a consortium of seven Workforce Boards that include the Chicago Workforce Board, Cook County Workforce Investment Board, DuPage Workforce Board, Grundy Livingston Kankakee Workforce Board, Lake County Workforce Investment Board, The Workforce Board of Northern Cook County, and Workforce Investment Board of Will County. The Workforce Boards are responsible for workforce preparation and economic development activities in their respective local areas but, collectively as a consortium, work to address workforce issues on a regional basis. This consortium has adopted a regional approach recognizing that cross-geographic issues impact the economic vitality of each area.

America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs

The *America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs* report focuses on the importance of middle-skill jobs to our nation's economy. Middle-skill jobs are defined as those jobs requiring more than a high school diploma but less than a four-year degree. The report presents statistics and labor market trends that support the position that stronger national policy and investment of public resources in the development of a middle-skill labor force is needed. The report presents the following conclusions:

- Substantial demand remains for individuals to fill jobs in the middle of the labor market, with many of these jobs paying quite high wages.

- Reports that the middle of the jobs distribution has "hollowed out", creating an hourglass economy" have been overstated. Nearly half of the jobs in the labor market today remain in the middle-skill occupational categories (such as construction, transportation, production clerical, sales, and installation/repair jobs).
- Bureau of Labor Statistics projections indicate, at a minimum, that demand for middle-level skills and occupations will remain robust in the future, with jobs requiring postsecondary education or at least moderate term training growing substantially over the next decade. Demand for skilled labor in construction, healthcare, computer use, transportation and elsewhere are projected to grow at above-average rates.³

Similar to the nation, statistics indicate that middle-skill jobs dominate Illinois' and the metropolitan Chicago region's labor market. While policymakers continue to focus on the need for high-skill workers, the need for middle-skill workers must also be addressed through workforce development policies and initiatives. This report presents information on the region's middle-skill labor market and its significance to the region's economy.

Middle-Skill Jobs in the Regional Labor Market

Middle-skill jobs represent 44% of Illinois' labor market as compared to 45% for the nation (Figure 1). In the metropolitan Chicago region, middle-skill jobs account for 43% of the labor market, with low-skill jobs representing 33% and high-skill 24%. While the nation's middle-skill jobs increased by approximately 3% over the past 5 years, State and regional increases in middle-skill jobs were negligible and were outpaced considerably by high-skill jobs. This is largely attributed to the loss of jobs requiring moderate and long term on-the-job training (OJT) as compared to those requiring an associates degree or post-secondary vocational award, which increased by 6.2% and 7.9% respectively over the past five years. Many of the region's middle-skill occupations requiring OJT include manufacturing and construction occupations that have been especially hard-hit by the economic downturn, with regional unemployment rates of 7.9% and 16.8% respectively for the industries.⁴

¹ The metropolitan Chicago region includes the following areas: City of Chicago and Cook, DeKalb, DuPage, Grundy, Kane, Kankakee, Kendall, Lake, Livingston, McHenry, and Will counties.

² The report, issued November 2007, was prepared for The Workforce Alliance, as part of its Skills2Compete Campaign and supported with funding through the Joyce Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Ford Foundation.

³ *America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*, Harry J. Holzer, Georgetown University and the Urban Institute and Robert I. Lerman, American University and The Urban Institute, November 2007, pages 4 and 5

⁴ Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., Spring 2009 data

Employment by Skill and Education Level
2004-2009
Figure 1

Skill and Educational Level	NATIONAL				ILLINOIS				METROPOLITAN CHICAGO REGION					
	2004		2009		2004		2009		2004		2009		Change	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Low-Skill Jobs	55,852,252	57,143,428	1,291,176	2.3%	2,394,112	2,408,535	14,423	.6%	1,662,142	1,676,830	14,688	.9%	14,688	.9%
Short-Term On-the-Job Training	55,852,252	57,143,428	1,291,176	2.3%	2,394,112	2,408,535	14,423	.6%	1,662,142	1,676,830	14,688	.9%	14,688	.9%
Middle-Skill Jobs	74,431,543	76,609,087	2,177,544	2.9%	3,168,064	3,169,448	1,384	.04%	2,184,130	2,193,097	8,967	.4%	8,967	.4%
Work Experience in Related Field	14,360,994	15,113,595	752,601	5.2%	583,587	595,060	11,473	2.0%	413,559	422,165	8,606	2.1%	8,606	2.1%
Moderate-Term On-the-Job Training	31,412,827	31,496,394	83,567	.3%	1,381,262	1,351,042	(30,220)	(2.08%)	956,770	939,251	(17,519)	(1.8%)	(17,519)	(1.8%)
Long-Term On-the-Job Training	13,519,985	13,532,137	12,152	.1%	576,175	552,967	(23,208)	(4.0%)	372,503	358,279	(14,224)	(3.8%)	(14,224)	(3.8%)
Postsecondary Vocational Award	9,624,883	10,483,802	858,919	8.9%	398,442	426,338	27,896	7.0%	278,887	300,932	22,045	7.9%	22,045	7.9%
Associates Degree	5,512,854	5,983,159	470,305	8.5%	228,598	244,041	15,443	6.8%	162,411	172,470	10,059	6.2%	10,059	6.2%
High-Skill Jobs	35,877,100	38,388,352	2,511,252	7.0%	1,626,228	1,684,476	58,248	3.4%	1,203,796	1,249,318	45,522	3.8%	45,522	3.8%
Bachelor Degree	21,162,268	22,670,275	1,508,007	7.1%	1,010,362	1,041,838	31,476	3.1%	763,854	790,468	26,614	3.5%	26,614	3.5%
Degree Plus Work Experience	8,093,538	8,472,361	378,823	4.7%	334,510	341,676	7,166	2.1%	237,857	244,349	6,492	2.7%	6,492	2.7%
First Professional Degree	2,264,139	2,393,065	128,926	5.7%	104,397	109,057	4,660	4.5%	81,468	84,558	3,090	3.8%	3,090	3.8%
Masters Degree	2,358,997	2,604,846	245,849	10.4%	91,482	97,397	5,915	6.5%	63,533	68,051	4,518	7.1%	4,518	7.1%
Doctoral Degree	1,998,158	2,247,805	249,647	12.5%	85,477	94,508	9,031	10.6%	57,084	61,892	4,808	8.4%	4,808	8.4%
Total Jobs⁵	166,160,895	172,140,867	5,979,972	3.6%	7,188,404	7,262,459	74,055	1.0%	5,050,068	5,119,245	69,177	1.36%	69,177	1.36%

Source: EMSI Complete Employment – Spring 2009

⁵ Military occupations are not included.

Employment Opportunities

While during the prior five year period, middle-skill jobs increased only .4% in the metropolitan Chicago region, projections for the next five years show much more significant growth. Figure 2 provides projections relative to the growth of middle-skill jobs in the metropolitan Chicago region over the next five years.

As reflected in Figure 2, the region's anticipated growth in new middle-skill jobs between 2009 and 2014 is 173,271 as compared to low-skill jobs increasing by 116,306 and high-skill jobs increasing by 131,196 jobs. These new jobs represent

approximately an 8% growth rate in middle-skill jobs as compared to rates for low and high-skill jobs of 7% and 11% respectively. In fact, 41% of all new jobs in the region will be middle-skill jobs. Of new middle-skill jobs, 62,683 (36%) will require an associates degree or postsecondary vocational award.

**Middle-skill positions continue to account for most jobs in the U.S. economy.
America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs**

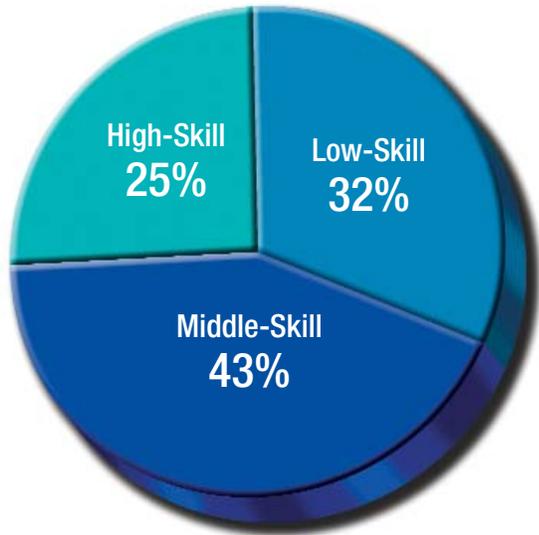
Employment Projections by Skill and Education Level
New and Replacement Jobs
2009 to 2014
Figure 2

Skill and Educational Level	NATIONAL					ILLINOIS					METROPOLITAN CHICAGO REGION				
	2009	2014	New & Replacement Jobs	2009	2014	New & Replacement Jobs	2009	2014	New & Replacement Jobs	2009	2014	New Jobs	New & Replacement Jobs		
Low-Skill Jobs	57,143,428	61,406,941	11,595,013	2,408,535	2,562,597	502,519	1,676,830	1,793,136	116,306	359,412					
Short-Term On-the-Job Training	57,143,428	61,406,941	11,595,013	2,408,535	2,562,597	502,519	1,676,830	1,793,136	116,306	359,412					
Middle-Skill Jobs	76,609,087	83,303,833	12,518,366	3,169,448	3,391,368	540,952	2,193,097	2,366,368	173,271	393,630					
Work Experience in Related Field	15,113,595	16,743,696	2,467,995	595,060	642,743	104,581	422,165	457,321	35,156	75,520					
Moderate-Term On-the-Job Training	31,496,394	33,806,174	5,090,383	1,351,042	1,424,072	212,387	939,251	995,834	56,583	152,739					
Long-Term On-the-Job Training	13,532,137	14,409,043	1,893,867	552,967	574,676	83,728	358,279	377,128	18,849	59,858					
Postsecondary Vocational Award	10,483,802	11,697,950	1,830,228	426,338	475,322	84,903	300,932	339,793	38,861	63,912					
Associates Degree	5,983,159	6,646,970	1,235,893	244,041	274,555	55,353	172,470	196,292	23,822	41,601					
High-Skill Jobs	38,388,352	42,390,826	6,757,607	1,684,476	1,845,708	323,710	1,249,318	1,380,514	131,196	251,469					
Bachelor Degree	22,670,275	25,250,820	4,234,221	1,041,838	1,149,620	205,523	790,468	879,302	88,834	162,508					
Degree Plus Work Experience	8,472,361	9,105,977	1,260,830	341,676	362,685	58,131	244,349	261,733	17,384	44,207					
First Professional Degree	2,393,065	2,599,082	363,195	109,057	118,107	19,089	84,558	91,886	7,328	15,141					
Masters Degree	2,604,846	2,881,562	466,239	97,397	108,051	20,029	68,051	76,553	8,502	15,048					
Doctoral Degree	2,247,805	2,553,385	463,122	94,508	107,245	20,938	61,892	71,040	9,148	14,565					
Total Jobs⁶	172,140,867	187,101,600	30,870,986	7,262,459	7,799,673	1,367,181	5,119,245	5,540,018	420,773	1,004,511					

Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., Spring 2009 data

⁶ Military occupations are not included.

Metropolitan Chicago Region
Jobs by Skill Level
2014



Job growth is only one indicator of the demand for skilled workers. In addition to new jobs, individuals are needed to replace those who leave positions. This includes individuals who change careers as well as those who retire. When these replacement jobs are included, the number of middle-skill workers needed over the next five years increases by 220,359, from 173,271 to 393,630. In terms of employment

opportunities resulting from new and replacement jobs, regional middle-skill jobs comprise 39% of the regional total, as compared to low-skill jobs representing 36% and high-skill jobs representing 25%. The State and national demand for middle-skill workers for new and replacement jobs will be similar to the region, 39% and 40% respectively.

Data clearly indicates that there are and will continue to be middle-skill employment opportunities. But within the metropolitan Chicago region, specifically which occupations provide the best opportunities? Figure 3 identifies the top seven occupations for each education level based on the number of new and replacement jobs over the next five years. Looking only at new jobs, the highest demand is registered nurses at 12,118 followed by customer service representatives at 19,316; nurses aides, orderlies and attendants at 6,352; and executive secretaries and administrative assistants at 6,113.

But it is important to note that these numbers can be deceiving in terms of employment opportunities for new entrants into the labor force. For example, while automotive service technicians and mechanics and fitness trainers and aerobic instructors are expected to increase over the next five years, the number of jobs in these occupations actually decreased over the last five years. Therefore, it is highly likely some of these new jobs will provide re-employment to individuals with experience - something individuals choosing new careers and investing in training programs may want to consider. In terms of construction, carpenters, electricians, construction laborers, and plumbers, pipefitters and steamfitters are identified among the highest growing occupations. And even though the construction industry currently has the highest unemployment rate of any industry represented in the metropolitan Chicago region (16.8%), it is anticipated that the economic stimulus initiatives discussed later in the report will increase the need for a variety of workers in this industry.



Occupational Demand
Metropolitan Chicago Region
2009 to 2014
Figure 3

Educational Level	2009	2014	New Jobs	New & Replacement Jobs ⁷
Associates Degree				
Registered nurses	74,331	86,449	12,118	18,253
Computer support specialists	17,602	19,480	1,878	4,596
Computer specialists, all other	11,379	12,797	1,418	2,927
Dental hygienists	5,329	6,533	1,204	1,712
Paralegals and legal assistants	7,306	8,199	893	1,374
Medical records and health information technicians	6,075	6,899	824	1,646
Veterinary technologists and technicians	2,547	3,235	688	1,077
Postsecondary Vocational Award⁸				
Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants	41,453	47,805	6,352	8,207
Automotive service technicians and mechanics	23,151	26,037	2,886	5,208
Fitness trainers and aerobics instructors	9,710	11,921	2,211	3,120
Medical secretaries	13,567	15,727	2,160	3,240
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	14,970	16,977	2,007	4,048
Preschool teachers, except special education	13,157	15,087	1,930	3,017
Emergency medical technicians and paramedics	7,648	8,966	1,318	1,754
Long-Term On-the-Job Training				
Carpenters	39,750	43,494	3,744	6,433
Cooks, restaurant	27,516	30,034	2,518	6,244
Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	14,474	16,151	1,677	3,170
Police and sheriff's patrol officers	23,740	25,315	1,575	4,748
Coaches and scouts	5,514	6,362	848	1,556
Fire fighters	12,315	13,135	820	3,064
Electricians	20,394	21,115	721	3,346
Moderate-Term On-the-Job Training				
Customer service representatives	73,162	82,292	9,130	19,316
Executive secretaries and administrative assistants	60,809	66,922	6,113	10,954
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks	59,652	64,763	5,111	9,778
Truck drivers, heavy and tractor-trailer	53,036	57,750	4,714	9,419
Sales representatives, services, all other	26,644	30,658	4,014	7,151
Construction laborers	39,482	43,470	3,988	5,474
Medical assistants	10,046	12,734	2,688	3,311
Work Experience in Related Field⁹				
Managers, all other ¹⁰	66,573	71,152	4,579	11,200
First-line supervisors/managers of housekeeping & janitorial workers	12,286	14,696	2,410	3,315
First-line supervisors/managers of office & administrative support workers	41,665	44,065	2,400	6,699
First-line supervisors/managers of non-retail sales workers	27,135	29,416	2,281	4,237
First-line supervisors/managers of food preparation & serving workers	19,538	21,465	1,927	2,662
First-line supervisors/managers of retail sales workers	54,184	55,875	1,691	7,375
First-line supervisors/managers of construction trades & extraction workers	17,519	19,097	1,578	2,801

Source: EMSI Complete Employment – Spring 2009

- ⁷ Replacement jobs are jobs where individuals are needed to replace individuals who leave positions. This includes individuals who change careers as well as those who retire.
- ⁸ Real estate sales agents and appraiser and assessors of real estate ranked in the top seven high growth occupations requiring a post secondary vocational award based on EMSI data. While it is expected that the real estate market will rebound, it is not viewed as a viable short term occupational choice and, therefore, is not reflected on the table.
- ⁹ Real estate broker ranked in the top seven high growth occupations requiring a post secondary vocational award based on EMSI data. While it is expected that the real estate market will rebound, it is not viewed as a viable short term occupational choice and, therefore, is not reflected on the table.
- ¹⁰ Managers, all other requiring work experience in a related field do not include industrial production managers, transportation, storage, and distribution managers, food service managers, gaming managers, or lodging managers..

Earnings

All middle-skill jobs are not created equal – some pay considerably more than others. Figure 4 provides the average hourly wage for middle-skill occupations by educational level. This chart illustrates the importance of education. Overall, jobs requiring an associates degree result in annualized earnings that are \$5,000 to \$15,000 more than occupations requiring a postsecondary vocational award or on-the-job training. The higher average hourly earning for jobs with work experience in a related field is largely attributed to the managerial and supervisory positions in this educational category that result from longevity and advancement within a particular industry.

Average Hourly Earnings for Middle-Skill Jobs 2009 Figure 4			
Educational Level	National	Illinois	Metro Chicago Region
Associates Degree	\$22.90	\$23.10	\$24.19
Long-Term On-the-Job Training	\$18.86	\$20.71	\$21.80
Postsecondary Vocational Award	\$17.59	\$18.40	\$19.30
Moderate-Term On-the-Job Training	\$18.21	\$17.59	\$16.95
Work Experience in Related Field	\$22.38	\$23.73	\$25.10

Source: EMSI Complete Employment – Spring 2009

In an effort to determine the highest paying middle-skill jobs that provide employment opportunities in the metropolitan

Chicago region, the 20 top paying occupations within each educational level were identified. After examining the number of new jobs expected between 2009 and 2014, the occupations reflected in Figure 5 emerged as middle-skill job opportunities with the highest combined growth and earning potential over the next five years. Average hourly wages range from \$19.43 to \$39.79, annual earnings of \$40,414 to \$82,763, as compared to an average wage rate of \$21.53 or annual earnings of \$44,782 for all regional jobs

In addition to higher work participation rates, adults with some college averaged about \$240,000 more in lifetime earnings than those with only a high school education, and adults with an associates degree averaged about \$360,000 more in lifetime earnings.

Illinois' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs

Public policymakers have focused on middle-skill jobs as career opportunities for advancing the working poor into higher paying jobs. Recognizing that many of these individuals lack the basic skills required for entry and success in educational programs, bridge programs are one strategy for providing low wage earners with the skills and credentials needed for advancement. Bridge programs are structured to address basic skill deficiencies and sequential advancement in a career pathway. In the metropolitan Chicago region, bridge programs in the healthcare sector have been particularly successful in preparing individuals for employment in middle-skill healthcare occupations.



**Middle-Skill Occupations with Highest Average Hourly Earnings
Metropolitan Chicago Region
2009 - 2014
Figure 5**

Educational Level	Jobs 2009	Jobs 2014	New Jobs	Average Hourly Jobs
Associates Degree				
Computer specialists, all other	11,379	12,797	1,418	\$33.27
Dental hygienists	5,329	6,533	1,204	\$33.02
Registered nurses	74,331	86,449	12,118	\$30.31
Radiologic technologists and technicians	4,575	5,111	536	\$27.22
Paralegals and legal assistants	7,306	8,199	893	\$25.77
Postsecondary Vocational Award				
Mobile heavy equipment mechanics, except engines	1,643	1,790	147	\$26.36
Surgical technologists	2,651	3,064	413	\$21.26
Bus and truck mechanics and diesel engine specialists	6,521	7,051	530	\$20.91
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	14,970	16,977	2,007	\$20.50
Legal secretaries	14,597	15,909	1,312	\$19.43
Long-Term On-the-Job Training				
Flight attendants	8,298	8,822	524	\$39.79
Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters	14,474	16,151	1,677	\$32.78
Police and sheriff's patrol officers	23,740	25,315	1,575	\$32.12
Electricians	20,394	21,115	721	\$31.83
Fire fighters	12,315	13,135	820	\$28.04
Moderate-Term On-the-Job Training				
Correctional officers and jailers	5,695	6,290	595	\$39.83
Operating engineers and other construction equipment operators	6,964	7,333	369	\$35.51
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, technical and scientific products	21,680	22,457	777	\$33.31
Cement masons and concrete finishers	3,908	4,145	237	\$30.90
Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products	59,588	60,766	1,178	\$29.38
Work Experience in Related Field				
First-line supervisors/managers of mechanics, installers, and repairers	10,291	10,797	506	\$30.86
Managers, all other	66,573	71,152	4,579	\$30.64
Cost estimators	6,277	6,901	624	\$30.59
First-line supervisors/managers of construction trades and extraction workers	17,519	19,097	1,578	\$27.50
First-line supervisors/managers of non-retail sales workers	27,135	29,416	2,281	\$25.98

Source: EMSI Complete Employment – Spring 2009

Preparing for Middle-Skill Jobs

Middle-skill jobs require relatively short term training but in the metropolitan Chicago region earn on an average of \$6,800 to \$23,800 more annually than low-skill employment.¹¹ Unlike high-skill jobs that require college or post-graduate degrees, educational outcomes for middle-skill jobs can take the form of occupational certifications, associate degrees or apprenticeship certifications that can be acquired through training programs offered at community colleges, proprietary schools, community-based training organizations and the workplace.

President Barack Obama has challenged all citizens to acquire at least one year of postsecondary education in preparation for future jobs. Estimates of the region's educational attainment for

individuals ages 25 years and older are presented in Figure 6. Based on available statistics, 41% lack any formal postsecondary education while only 33% of the region's jobs are classified as low-skill.

"So tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be a community college or a four-year school, vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma."

President Barack Obama
February 24, 2009

Educational Attainment 25 Years and Older Figure 6							
	Population	Less than High School, No Diploma	High School Diploma or Equivalency	Some College, No Degree	Associates Degree	Bachelor Degree	Graduate or Professional Degree
Metropolitan Chicago Region	5,636,079	865,321	1,455,252	1,093,889	372,145	1,147,175	702,297
		15.4%	25.8%	19.4%	6.6%	20.3%	12.5%
Illinois	8,292,894	1,227,348	2,388,353	1,675,165	597,088	1,509,307	895,633
		14.8%	28.8%	20.2%	7.2%	18.2%	10.8%
National	195,646,383	31,303,421	58,693,915	38,346,691	14,477,832	33,455,531	19,368,993
		16%	30%	19.6%	7.4%	17.1%	9.9%

Source: 2005-2007 American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates

The metropolitan Chicago region has an abundance of education and training opportunities that prepare individuals for employment in high demand, high wage middle-skill jobs. Figure 7 is intended to provide a snapshot of the availability of career

preparation programs in the region. As the chart demonstrates, individuals preparing for many of the region's high demand middle-skill occupations have considerable choice in selecting a training program that is suitable for them.

Training Opportunities for High Demand Middle-Skill Jobs Metropolitan Chicago Region Figure 7		
Occupational Training at Public Community Colleges and Private Institutions	Training Programs ¹²	Apprenticeship Programs
Computer support specialists	5	Bricklayer
Dental hygienists	5	Operating Engineer
Electricians	10	Carpenter
Emergency medical technicians and paramedics	29	Operating Engineer Technician
Legal secretaries	9	Cement Mason
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	11	Painter/Decorator
Medical records and health information technicians	19	Ceramic Tile Layer
Medical secretary	22	Painter/Drywall Finisher
Nursing aides, orderlies, and attendants	22	Drywall Finisher
Paralegals and legal assistants	18	Pipefitter
Preschool teachers, except special education	6	Electrician
Radiologic technologists and technicians	16	Plasterer
Registered nurses	19	Glazier
Surgical technologists	13	Plumber
		Heat and Frost Insulator
		Roofer & Waterproofor
		Iron Worker
		Sheet Metal Worker
		Laborer
		Sprinkler Fitter
		Machinery Mover
		Tuckpointer

Source: EMSI Career Pathways, 2007 Occupational Programs Data and <http://www.cisco.org/etc/apprec.htm>

¹¹ Low-skill average wage of \$13.66 annualized at \$28,413 as compared to middle-skill average wages of \$16.95 (low) to \$25.10 (high) annualized at \$35.256 and \$52,208 respectively.

¹² Education and training programs at institutions within the region that result in less than a bachelor degree

America Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Act), enacted February 17, 2009, is designed to “create jobs, jump-start growth, and transform our economy to compete in the 21st century.”¹³ The Act authorizes funding of \$789 billion that is intended to create or save 3.5 million jobs over the next two years. It is estimated that Illinois will reap 148,000 jobs and approximately 93,000 of those jobs will be in the metropolitan Chicago region.¹⁴



The Act provides funding for a number of initiatives that will create a range of jobs – many of which will be middle-skill jobs. The initiatives that will have the most immediate impact on middle-skill jobs include:

- Create jobs through investments aimed at doubling renewable energy production and renovation of public buildings to make them more energy efficient, including transforming the nation’s energy transmission, distribution and production system by creating a smarter and better grid and investing in renewable technology; repairing public housing and making energy efficiency retrofits; and weatherizing modest-income homes.
- Provide employment through improvements to roads, bridges, transit and waterways, and public buildings and cleaning of the air, water, and land, including modernizing transit systems, improving the speed and capacity of intercity passenger rail service, constructing and repairing

highways and bridges, and modernizing federal and other public infrastructures.

- Improve educational opportunities of our children through the repair and modernization of schools.¹⁵

The construction industry will see an immediate impact in terms of increased employment but other sectors will see new middle-skill jobs over time as the increased demand for construction products require increased production, research and development initiatives result in new innovations, and assistance to small businesses enables expansion and start-ups that create jobs.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 also impacts the region’s education and training system in two areas that are significant to the region’s development of a skilled workforce to fill middle-skill occupations and take advantage of employment opportunities:

- Funding: Increased funding for Pell grants and training assistance through the Workforce Investment Act will enable an increased number of individuals to pursue postsecondary training. Additional funding will also be available on a competitive basis for training programs that prepare individuals for employment in high growth and emerging industries, with a priority on preparing workers for careers in the healthcare sector and in energy efficiency and renewable energy. The region’s training and education system will see an increased demand for training for high growth, middle-skill occupations.
- Specialized Training – The Act supports initiatives that will result in the creation of green jobs. A green job has been defined as involving some task associated with improving the environment, including reducing carbon emissions and creating and/or using energy more efficiently.¹⁶ While some efforts such as the Illinois Community College’s Sustainability Network and the Chicagoland Green Jobs Initiative are underway to assist training providers in adapting and/or establishing curricula that address green job skills, these efforts will need to be accelerated to maximize employment outcomes envisioned for economic stimulus projects.

“Over the next two years, this plan (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act) will save or create 3.5 million jobs. More than 90 percent of these jobs will be in the private sector, jobs rebuilding our roads and bridges, constructing wind turbines and solar panels, laying broadband and expanding mass transit.”

President Barack Obama
February 24, 2009

¹³ Stimulus Bill Summary: American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009, January 17, 2009, http://www.communityinvestmentnetwork.org/nc/single-news-item-states/article/stimulus-bill-summary-american-recovery-reinvestment-act-of-2009/?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=1684

¹⁴ American Recovery and Reinvestment Act: Job Impact by Congressional District, The White House, February 17, 2009, <http://www.ncsl.org/print/statelred/ImpactofARRA.pdf> |bid

¹⁵ Stimulus Bill Summary: American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009, January 17, 2009, http://www.communityinvestmentnetwork.org/nc/single-news-item-states/article/stimulus-bill-summary-american-recovery-reinvestment-act-of-2009/?tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=1684

¹⁶ Green Jobs: A Pathway to a Strong Middle Class, White House Task Force on the Middle Class, <http://files.meetup.com/1073632/White%20House%20Green%20Jobs%20Report.pdf>

Conclusion

Regional data presented in this report supports many of the findings and information presented in the *America's Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs*:

- Middle-skill jobs represent a significant share of the region's labor market and will continue to do so in the future.
- Middle-skill jobs provide unique opportunities to low wage earners and the unemployed. Specifically, individuals can acquire the skills and knowledge required for advancement or a new career in a relatively short period of time.
- Middle-skill job wages are significantly better than low level jobs.

So, how do we meet the future demand for middle-skill workers? We know that our aging middle-skill, blue collar workers are less likely to delay retirements than high-skill workers. Many of our youth who complete high school lack the basic skills needed to continue their education (30% of incoming first-year college students are required to enroll in remedial courses).¹⁷ Individuals already in the labor force lack the qualifications needed to fill the region's high-demand middle-skill jobs.

If the region is going to meet the future demand middle-skill workers, it will need to deploy new strategies that include:

- Expanding high-quality career and technical training opportunities for at-risk youth (e.g., career academies

and career pathway models which provide career ladders into well-paying occupational clusters);

- Supplementing education or training for adults with enhanced linkages to employers in sectors with high growth middle-skill occupations, including assistance with child care, transportation, tuition and other training costs; and
- Expanding apprenticeships that result in career related and portable credentials that are recognized and respected by employers.¹⁸

The region's robust education and training system coupled with new strategies and funding available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides the region with a unique opportunity to increase its pipeline of middle-skill workers. This is good news for individuals interested in pursuing middle-skill careers and employers in need of middle-skill workers.

Every working Illinoisan should have access to the equivalent of at least two years of education or training past high school – leading to a vocational credential, industry certification or one's first two years of college – to be pursued at whatever point and pace makes sense for individual workers and industries. Every person must also have access to the basic skills needed to pursue such education.

Illinois' Forgotten Middle-Skill Jobs



¹⁷ *The Connection Strategy*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007, page 3.

¹⁸ *The Future of Middle Skill Jobs*, Center on Children and Families, Harry J. Holzer and Robert I. Lerman, February 2009, pages 7 and 8.