

Letter to the Editor:

The Governor's Manufacturing Advisory Council report noted a staggering gap of available skilled workers. Nationally 1.5 million job vacancies exist that require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree.

In western Pennsylvania, community colleges in Allegheny, Beaver, Butler and Westmoreland counties address the skills gap through geo-targeted training programs. We have joined forces with natural gas companies under the ShaleNET initiative to conduct training for priority occupations as identified by the state's D.O.L. Notably, 2,481 people have completed ShaleNET training and 1,653 have secured Marcellus Shale industry-related jobs in Pennsylvania.

Each college has dedicated JobTrakPA training programs designed to train unemployed workers for in-demand jobs in advanced manufacturing, mechatronics and the energy fields.

However, state budget constraints are restricting what community colleges are able to provide. Nevertheless, Pennsylvania's community colleges stand poised to lead the charge to address the skills gap to get Pennsylvanians back to work, but we need the state to be our partner. Maintaining access and affordability to these institutions, while ensuring resources to train students for 21st century jobs should not be sacrificed in the 2013–14 state budget.

As the Governor finalizes his proposed budget we ask him to consider what's at stake. The future competitiveness of our state, the ability for our businesses to thrive and our students to become valuable workers hinges on equipping community colleges with the necessary resources we need to do the job. A strategic investment into Pennsylvania's community colleges is more important than ever.

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