

Science and Math Education are Key to Retaining Top Jobs in New Jersey's Pharma/Med-Tech Sector

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As this year's college and university graduates head into the workforce, New Jersey's pharmaceutical and medical technology companies continue to be a leading source of jobs offering excellent pay and benefits and promising career opportunities. The industry employs 60,000 workers statewide and modest growth is expected in all job categories for 2007-2010. The question is: Will New Jersey's graduates have the right educational preparation, especially in math and the sciences, to compete for jobs in this important sector?

A new report issued by the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey (HINJ) warns that there may not be enough qualified workers to fill projected job openings during the next several years. The report, prepared by the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University and based on a survey of HINJ member companies, identified significant employment opportunities for Product and Marketing Managers, Clinical Scientists, Regulatory Affairs Managers, Medical Doctors, Biostatisticians and Engineers.

Five of the six "high demand" occupations identified in "The Workforce Needs of New Jersey's Pharmaceutical and Medical Technology Industry" require a solid grounding in both math and science. However, relatively low numbers of New Jersey college graduates earn bachelor's degrees in the critical fields of biochemistry, chemistry, animal science, and marketing. Too few complete master's and doctoral degrees in relevant areas of science and management.

As HINJ President Bob Franks said in reviewing the report, "The good news is that the industry is continuing to produce high-skilled, high-wage jobs. The bad news is that we may not have enough people to fill them."

Governor Corzine's Administration and HINJ member companies are committed to developing a far-reaching workforce development strategy to address these concerns. For example, the state's Department of Labor & Workforce Development distributed \$2.8 million in High-Growth Workforce Investment Grants to fund training partnerships with employers in the pharmaceutical and biotechnology sectors. The New Jersey Commission on Higher Education is also supporting an Innovation Partnership Institute in the Life Sciences, housed at Rutgers University, whose purpose is to boost graduates in critical fields of study.

If New Jersey is to preserve its reputation as the "medicine chest" of the world, a lot more needs to be done. Higher education leaders, school administrators, and teachers need to make a concerted effort to encourage New Jersey's young people to study math and science disciplines, so that the state will generate enough qualified individuals to fill these new jobs and thousands of others in the high tech fields. Not only will the students benefit from great career opportunities, but the state will also be able to retain and attract the most promising jobs of the 21st century.