

# Training is key to matching up jobs and workers



By Thomas E. Perez

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As the Secretary of Labor, I have a unique opportunity to meet with employers around the country of all sizes and from an array of industries. So many of them tell me the same thing; they're ready to grow their businesses and to hire more people.

But here's the rub: too often, they can't find workers who have the skills they need.

Meanwhile, although businesses have added 9.9 million jobs since February 2010, a lot of people are still hurting, unable to access the opportunities that will allow them to share in our national recovery. About a third of those who remain unemployed have been unemployed for six months or more.

So we have ready-to-work people looking for work. And we have ready-to-fill jobs that employers can't fill. If we want to continue our economic recovery, grow our middle class and ensure a prosperous future, we've got to match them up.

That's at the heart of President Obama's opportunity agenda. And that's why he recently signed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) — a bipartisan bill that passed with little fanfare, but represents the first major reform of the nation's workforce system since 1998. The reforms in the new law will make the nation's workforce system, which serves more than 20 million people a year, better able to provide people with the skills they need to access ladders of opportunity.

But that's not all. Vice President Biden recently released a report calling for stronger partnerships with employers; better access to information for job-seekers; and more effective training strategies.

All of these efforts are based on the principle of job-driven training. We're doing away with what I call "train and pray" — training people to be widget makers and praying that there's a company hiring widget makers. We need to provide people with the skills needed for jobs that actually exist.

So what exactly does "job-driven training" look like? Here's an example. High school students in the East San Gabriel Valley are getting hands-on career training in science, technology and health care industries. Through the regional Career Pathways Partnership, school officials are

offering students an integrated academic and career development curriculum, providing them with industry-recognized credentials upon graduation and a leg up to succeed in college.

And perhaps the most important ingredient to making this program successful? The school system has developed strong partnerships with local employers — like Boeing and the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership — to provide students with education and training that will lead to jobs in fields employers are looking to expand.

In April, this program was awarded a \$4.5 million Youth CareerConnect grant from the Department of Labor to expand the program to more students. We're putting more than a billion dollars on the street in grant funding to support programs like this one. Those resources are being deployed in a number of different ways — strengthening our community colleges, promoting apprenticeship and on-the-job training, investing in youth employment and more.

On Labor Day, we honor the contributions that hard-working men and women make every day to our nation's strength and vitality. And we recommit ourselves to helping more people enjoy the dignity of work, helping them acquire the skills and access the opportunities to reach the American Dream.

*Thomas E. Perez is the U.S. secretary of Labor. The Department of Labor's new [FindYourPath](http://www.dol.gov/findyourpath) tool ([www.dol.gov/findyourpath](http://www.dol.gov/findyourpath)) can be used to connect with an American Job Center to find training opportunities.*