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## **Funding Urged For Job Training**

**[By Winthrop Quigley](#)**

*Journal Staff Writer*

Advocates for both business and the poor said Monday that New Mexico faces a bleak economic future if lawmakers don't help its work force become better educated.

One group also released a study that shows an employee pool composed of too many drop-outs, too many illiterates and too many people who can't afford the education to improve their skills.

Leaders of the Association of Commerce and Industry and New Mexico Voices for Children called on the state Legislature to fund job training, adult education and higher education assistance programs. They cited a wealth of statistics showing New Mexico's workers are seriously under-trained to compete in the global economy.

Without better trained workers, New Mexico risks being "stuck at the bottom" economically, said Voices for Children executive director Kay Monaco in a conference call with reporters. "Business can't be competitive without a skilled work force," she said.

"In the United States, the bigger issue is whether we can maintain the (competitive) advantages we previously had with our skilled work force," said John Carey, Association of Commerce and Industry president.

The study released by Voices for Children found:

- About 17 percent of New Mexicans ages 25 to 54 lack a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- More than 41 percent of working families have at least one parent without a high school diploma or its equivalent.
- Only 11 percent of the 130,800 people who need adult basic education are enrolled in a program to get it.

There is only enough training funding to serve a tenth of the people who need help obtaining the literacy skills necessary to function in the work force, said Frank Renz, New Mexico Association of Community Colleges executive director, who also participated in the conference call.

While New Mexico's higher education tuition is among the lowest in the country, the total cost of going to a community college amounts to about 33 percent of a family's income because incomes in New Mexico are so low, Renz said. Half of community college students work 20 hours a week or more, and their average age is 31, he said.

The state is working harder to improve public education, but many under-trained adults still have decades left in the work force and need to become competitive now if New Mexico's economy is to prosper, Monaco said.

"I don't think people are unwilling to get more education and skills," Monaco said. "They need a

path cleared for them."

New Mexico Voices and ACI want the Legislature to pass:

- The College Affordability Act, which would help more needy adults pay for education and career-improvement classes. This would assist those who don't qualify for lottery scholarships because those scholarships are limited to students straight out of high school.
- A \$500,000 appropriation to support adult basic education— course work to help adults obtain a GED. The money would come from the general fund.
- A new appropriation of \$10 million for in-plant job training. The money would come from the general fund.

Voices for Children also wants the state to increase the state's minimum wage; develop a "realistic" cost-of-living index that would be used to set eligibility standards for assistance programs; and create a system that provides affordable health insurance to residents.

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