Skilled Jobs in Pierce County: Gaps & Opportunities at a Glance

Winter 2018

Partnering in pursuit of GREATER ECONOMIC VITALITY FOR ALL.
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Read the full report at workforce-central.org/research-data/economic-workforce-data/#reports
WorkForce Central on behalf of the Pierce County Workforce Development Council commissioned a comprehensive study of skilled employment across Pierce County. The purpose of the study is to guide strategies on how to address gaps and harness opportunities within this economic bracket, ultimately connecting more residents with meaningful work.

Key findings uncovered during the research include:

- **A job candidate is significantly more likely to find work once he or she attains any level of specialization beyond high school.** Employability and wages jump when a job seeker completes a training program, no matter the type.

- **Skilled jobs face a retirement cliff.** While demand for workers varies greatly among skilled job types, virtually every industry needs to plan ahead for a pipeline of skilled workers ready to hire when retirement vacancies occur, in addition to increased demand due to natural economic growth.

- **Disparities between men and women have two potentially correlated consequences within skilled employment.**
  - The average starting wage for women in skilled jobs is 49 cents per hour less than men, amounting to a disparity of more than $1,000 each year or $30,000 over the course of a 30-year career.
  - Women are significantly less likely than men to complete apprenticeships or long-term training programs, and instead are more likely to be employed in skilled jobs that require only short-term or no specialized training. However, when women received financial and childcare assistance, they completed long-term training programs at far higher numbers.

The report outlined several recommendations to improve skilled employment opportunities in Pierce County, including:

- **Streamline the job-search** process by establishing a centralized database for online job postings.

- **Foster the development of essential (soft) skills** by adding work-readiness components into all training programs and by encouraging young workers to seek customer-centric experience in industries such as retail or hospitality.

- **Build an outreach strategy and develop materials to promote skilled jobs** to job seekers at all age levels.

- **Provide supportive services** such as financial and childcare assistance to allow women to access more training opportunities.
Skilled jobs are known as “Middle Skill” jobs throughout much of the workforce development world because of their relationship to “High Skill Jobs” (such as physicians and architects) and “Low Skill Jobs” (such as retail and food service workers).

In general, skilled jobs require less than a four-year college degree but some level of specialized training beyond high school.

- Associate degree
- Certificate
- Short-term specialized training
- Apprenticeship

Skilled jobs tend to pay well—more than minimum wage to start, and in some cases, six-figures once a candidate is established in the field. Many of these jobs face high demand, and training is often accessible in terms of duration and cost.

Skilled jobs exist beyond the traditional four-year college track. As a result, students and workers tend to learn about them in nontraditional ways—outside of the K-12 system. When employers want to hire middle skill candidates, they frequently encounter labor shortages and skills gaps.

In general, both employability and wages increase when an individual seeks specialization of any kind beyond high school. Those without some college or an associate degree tend to experience higher unemployment, less employment stability or delayed economic recoveries after downturns.¹
As of summer 2017, there were 136,359 skilled jobs in Pierce County, accounting for 38% of all jobs in the region. By 2021, nearly 9,500 new skilled jobs will be created—representing 37% of the total new jobs created.\(^2\)

Skilled jobs make up the largest portion of the labor market not just in Pierce County but in the nation as a whole.

- Nationwide in 2015, skilled jobs made up 53% of all jobs, but only 43% of the labor force worked in skilled positions.\(^3\)
- In Washington, 51% of 2007 jobs were categorized as skilled, but skilled workers made up 45% of the labor force. By 2015, skilled workers made up just 44% of the labor force while the percentage of skills jobs remained the same.\(^4\)

In late 2017, Pierce County’s unemployment rate dropped below 5.0% for the first time since the Recession, but Pierce County’s rate consistently lags behind Washington State’s overall rate and the rate for the nation. Training and certification for job seekers to find skilled jobs is one way to address the gap.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pierce County Skilled Jobs by Occupational Cluster, 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30% Office &amp; Administrative Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Installation, Maintenance &amp; Repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Healthcare Practitioners, Technical &amp; Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% Transportation &amp; Material Moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7% Personal Care &amp; Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Construction &amp; Extraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Sales &amp; Related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% Protective Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>3% Education, Training &amp; Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6% Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MONTHLY EMPLOYMENT REPORT, OCTOBER 2007–OCTOBER 2017\(^5\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pierce County</th>
<th>Washington State</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
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<td>9.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The State of Skilled Jobs in Pierce County

**PIRCE COUNTY ANNUAL JOBS, 2012–2021**
- Skilled Jobs
- Total Jobs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Skilled Jobs</th>
<th>Total Jobs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>342,095</td>
<td>340,666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>344,638</td>
<td>351,093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>359,299</td>
<td>366,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>372,186</td>
<td>377,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>381,996</td>
<td>385,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>384,432</td>
<td>393,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>398,078</td>
<td>407,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>411,660</td>
<td>420,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>426,242</td>
<td>435,284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>440,824</td>
<td>450,846</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**COMPUTING PATTERNS**

A 2016 analysis of Pierce County’s sectors, commissioned by WorkForce Central, revealed that nearly 135,000 Pierce County residents work outside the county, 105,100 of whom commute to King County.
MATCHING SUPPLY WITH DEMAND

The study highlights three skilled-job positions for which Pierce County produces far more trainees than job availability here would warrant:

- Web Developers*
- Medical Assistants
- Computer Network Support Specialists*

Meanwhile, occupations experiencing a labor shortage include Customer Service Representative and Office Clerk. Though traditional training programs don’t always exist for these specific positions, workforce demand suggests there may be a need to create short-term training programs to funnel qualified candidates to these in-demand positions.

*This study does not account for demand and placement beyond Pierce County’s borders. In fact, regional demand likely justifies the completions in this field.

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PIERCE COUNTY EDUCATION LEVEL BY PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION, AGE 25*

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school (24,505 people in 2016)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma (84,969 people in 2016)</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college* or associate degree (127,979 people in 2016)</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher (101,263 people in 2016)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Regardless of whether a credential is obtained.

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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The proportion of Pierce County residents aged 25 and older with some college or associate degrees has remained virtually unchanged since 2011. The percentage is unlikely to budge without targeted strategies to increase specialized training attainment less than a four-year degree after high school.

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ACCESS TO QUALITY INFORMATION

When compared with other developed countries around the world, the U.S. produces less quality information on skilled jobs to employers, educators and job seekers. Often, job seekers don’t know about career paths at which they could succeed and end up selecting entry-level jobs with no advancement opportunities rather than comparable entry-level jobs with increased earning potential over time.
Challenges

**RETIREMENT CLIFF**

Statewide, the number of workers aged 65 and older is expected to increase 62% by 2032. In Pierce County, an estimated 24,212 workers will be eligible to retire within the next decade in addition to the nearly 7,000 workers who currently remain in the workforce in spite of their eligibility to retire. Nearly a quarter of the Pierce County skilled-job workforce is likely to retire over the next 10 years.

**ESSENTIAL SKILLS**

Not unique to this study, essential (soft) skills are cited as a major hurdle to finding qualified workers. Specifically, this study lists communication, understanding workplace etiquette and time-management as important deficits to address.

**THE PAY GAP**

Women are far less represented in higher-paying skilled occupations and often enter more “traditionally female” jobs such as secretaries, childcare workers and nursing assistants. Even though women account for 51 percent of the skilled-job workforce, their average entry-level wage is 49 cents less than the entry wage of men in skilled jobs.

Longer-term, intensive training programs and apprenticeships tend to result in higher-paying positions, but women often find themselves without adequate childcare or the financial means necessary to invest in long-term training or any training at all. Notably, studies find that when women receive financial and childcare assistance, they complete training programs at far higher rates.
ONLINE JOB POSTINGS
Create a centralized online digest of job postings specific to Pierce County to simplify the wide variety of online job search services available and connect more workers with opportunities close to home.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS
Address the essential (soft) skills gap by incorporating work-readiness topics into all training programs, including K-12 curricula. Encourage young workers to develop and refine their essential skills by seeking paid or volunteer work experience—such as jobs in retail or hospitality—as these sectors provide an ideal training ground for developing skills such as communication, understanding of workplace etiquette and time management.

QUALITY INFORMATION
Develop targeted outreach strategies and high-quality informational tools to reach Pierce County residents who lack specialized training and education or who are un- or under-employed. These strategies and materials should target K-12 students as well, to highlight career paths that are less likely to be promoted in a school setting.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR WOMEN
Provide financial and childcare assistance to women to foster their completion of long-term training programs and apprenticeships, thereby increasing the pool of qualified candidates from which employers can hire and decreasing the existing wage gap over time.
Footnotes

This document is a summary of “Pierce County Skilled Jobs: Gaps and Opportunities”—a report produced by the San Diego Workforce Partnership in August 2017. To read the full report, go to: workforce-central.org/research-data/economic-workforce-data/#reports

Researchers at the San Diego Workforce Partnership relied on data and information from:

- Burning Glass Technologies
- Economic Modeling Specialists, International (EMSI)
- Institute for Women’s Policy Research
- North American Industry Classification System (NAICS)
- National Skills Coalition
- ONET Online
- Tacoma News Tribune
- US Census
- Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD)
- WorkForce Central Sector Studies (workforce-central.org/Data2016)

To view all sources, refer to the footnotes in the full report. For information on methodology used, see Appendix A of the full report.