



# 2018 Advocacy Agenda

Building on Smart Investments in Iowa's Workforce and Industries

by Britney Samuelson, Renée Miller, Pat Steele and Dave Stone

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Iowa Skills2Compete Coalition



### Call to Action: Middle Skills Gap

The middle skills gap is an issue that has been persisting across the country for years. In fact, according to the National Federation of Independent Business, 45 percent of small businesses in the United States claimed that they were unable to find qualified applicants to fill job openings in the beginning of 2017.<sup>1</sup> Iowa is no exception to this national phenomenon. In this state, there is an abundance of middle-skill jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and provide pathways to advancement, yet there are not enough qualified workers to fill this demand. An infrastructure must be created across the state that not only trains Iowans for these opportunities, but also provides supports to allow them to maintain and advance in these jobs.

### *Business perspective on closing the skills gap*

Businesses have a unique ability to help strengthen the communities where their employees work and live. One of the ways we do that is by creating every opportunity to help our teams thrive and succeed, so they can in turn give their very best to our customers. We are all seeking to find and retain the brightest and most diverse skilled workforce we can—and so it's important to look closely at any factor that may create challenges for hardworking families.



Phil Hall  
Wells Fargo,  
Senior Vice  
President  
of Human  
Resources



### Skills Gap

Middle-skill jobs remain an important part of Iowa's expanding economy. These jobs generally require some education and training beyond high school, but less than a bachelor's degree. They are important because they pay family-sustaining wages and provide pathways to advancement while also providing crucial services that meet our economy's new demands.

Middle-skill jobs account for over half of the Iowa economy at 55 percent. Yet, only 32 percent of working Iowans have the skills and credentials to match what is required for these jobs.

This shortage in middle-skilled workers is expected to continue as the labor force participation rate will likely decrease over the next ten years with more of the baby boomer generation retiring.<sup>2</sup>



#### Iowa's Jobs by Skill Level, 2015

High-Skill Jobs	33%
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High-Skill Workers	34%
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Middle-Skill Jobs	55%
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Middle-Skill Workers	32%
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Low-Skill Jobs	12%
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Low-Skill Workers	34%
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Source: Iowa Workforce Development. Middle-Skill Jobs In Iowa, November 2015 Report



## Middle-Skill Jobs: An Opportunity to Achieve Self-Sufficiency

In 2015, it was reported that Iowa has 400,000 middle-skill jobs that pay at least \$35,000 per year; this represented 26 percent of all jobs in Iowa. Forty percent of these jobs paid more than \$50,000 annually and an additional 14 percent had salaries of more than \$75,000.<sup>3</sup> It is also worth noting that these middle-skill workers will likely have relatively low levels of student debt simply because of the reduced amount of time they spend pursuing their postsecondary education. These financial realities represent an opportunity for middle-skill workers to obtain family-sustaining wages that will also work to reinforce a strong middle class in Iowa. In the chart below, a variety of middle-skill occupations which had some of the most openings in 2017 are listed along with their projected growth and average wages. The varied fields and interests these positions involve, as well as the well-paying wages and growth rates, make these occupations promising prospects for a range of middle-skill workers.

### In-Demand Middle Skill Occupations in Iowa, 2017

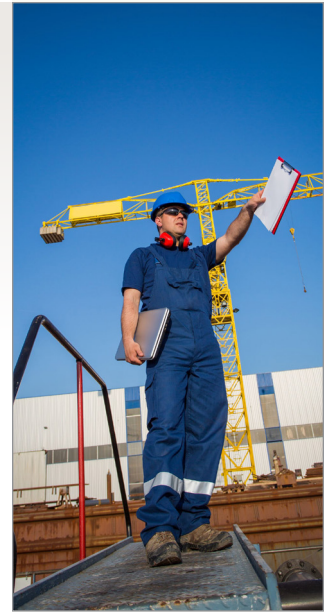
Occupation	Annual Openings	2015-2025 % Projected Growth	Average Hourly Wage
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	4,614	4%	\$19.88
Construction Laborers	2,328	20%	\$16.37
Electricians	1,223	17%	\$24.39
Welders, Cutters, Solderers, and Brazers	1,081	6%	\$17.69
Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics	984	5%	\$17.30
Medical Assistants	675	20%	\$15.89
Medical Secretaries	646	17%	\$16.78
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	646	11%	\$22.61
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	563	9%	\$19.51
Machinists	563	12%	\$18.51

Source: Iowa Department of Education, In Demand Occupations—State of Iowa, 2017.

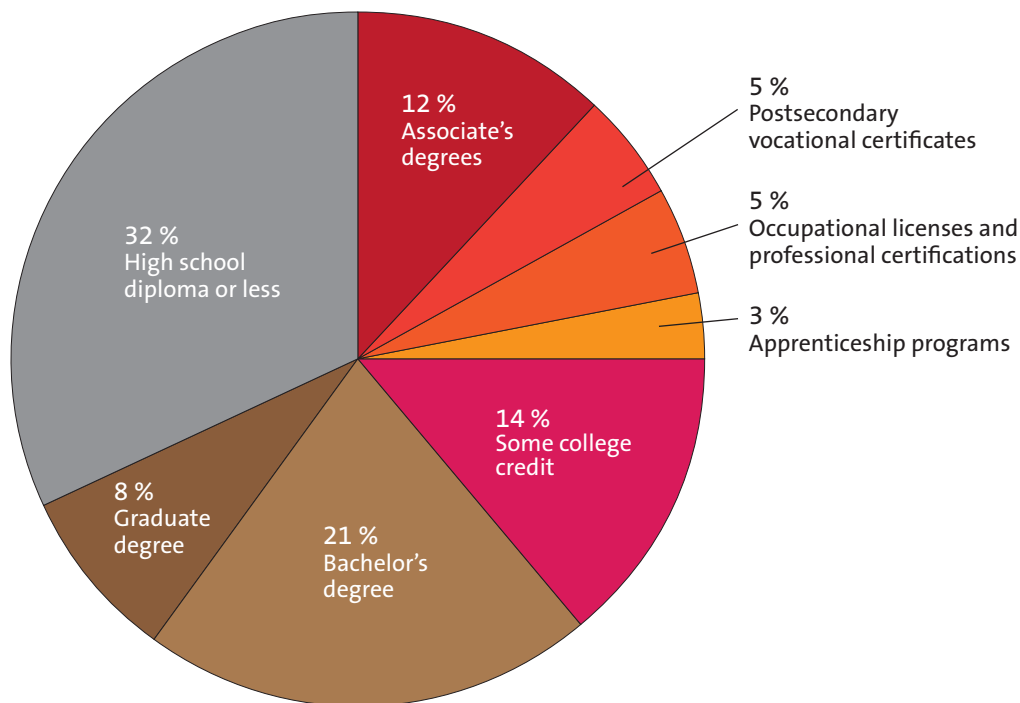
### The History and Future of Iowa's Education and Workforce Trends

Iowa's economy is changing. There are fewer well-paying jobs that only require a high school degree than there were in the 1980s. While this sector has seen rapid decreases across the country, the skilled-service sector has seen positive growth. For instance, between 1991 and 2015, Iowa lost almost 3,000 well-paying blue-collar jobs that did not require a bachelor's degree. In fact, this loss over time was greater in Iowa than 45 other states in the nation. During this same period, Iowa gained 65,000 skilled-services jobs that pay well and do not require a four-year degree.<sup>4</sup> As our economy is changing, the skills and education of our workforce must change as well.

Since the 1980s, education or training beyond high school has become the new minimum threshold for Americans to earn a living wage and attain middle class status. In 1973, only 28 percent of U.S. jobs required education beyond a high school diploma; by 2025, almost two out of three jobs in the nation will require at least some postsecondary education or training. Iowa's economy reflects this national trend and demonstrates a steady increase in the demand for postsecondary education and training in the industries that form the mainstay of the national economy.



### Iowa's Future Workforce Needs by Education Level, 2025



### Middle-Skill Successes

State policymakers have taken significant steps to ensure that as employers bring on new workers, the talent is available. Since 2013, the state is investing \$12.5 million each year towards adult basic education, Pathways for Academic Career and Employment (PACE) programs, GAP tuition assistance, pathway navigators to assist students in PACE programs, and industry sector partnerships. Additionally, in 2017, the Skills2Compete Coalition effectively advocated for a new law that allows the state to recognize alternative pathways to achieving a high school equivalency degree. The passage of this law creates new opportunities for Iowans to obtain this credential that is often a prerequisite to pursue postsecondary education and training and eventually middle-skill occupations.

Moreover, the Department of Human Services is taking action to participate more fully in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance – Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) “50-50” program. The federal program reimburses states up to 50 percent for expenses associated with providing supportive services and tuition to food stamp recipients enrolled in education and training. This program was designed to lead people to jobs and to alleviate the drain on public benefits. We recommend that DHS expand the current pilot program from three community colleges to as many community colleges and community based organizations that express an interest in participating in the program. Iowa’s SNAP E&T program is currently receiving technical assistance from the Seattle Jobs Initiative funded by the National Skills Coalition.







## 2018 Workforce Policy Agenda

The Iowa Skills2Compete Coalition advocates for policies that enable Iowans to obtain and sustain employment while also providing solutions to Iowa's growing middle skills gap. The Coalition offers these **policy recommendations for the 2018 state legislative session**:

- Maintain current investments in adult basic education, PACE programs, pathway navigators, industry sector partnerships and GAP tuition assistance at the level of \$12.5 million and ensure these opportunities are available in each of the state's 15 service areas.
- Eliminate the child care "cliff effect" and increase access to quality and affordable child care assistance to help employers address the growing middle-skills gap and help working families balance their household survival budget. Expand the income eligibility level of the Child Care Assistance (CCA) program for working families from 145% to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and increase the child care provider reimbursement to the current market rate.
- Repeal automatic driver's license suspension for non-driving drug offenders to eliminate barriers toward employment and successful reentry in the community.
- Expand existing direct care workforce recruitment and retention efforts including: interim committee on direct care workforce supports, provide forgivable loans and scholarships for high demand healthcare occupations, expand the Iowa Direct Care Worker Registry and make portable the credentials of those who work in direct care.
- Support both public and private transportation initiatives so communities have access to education, training, and employment.
- Support the recommendations of the Future Ready Iowa Alliance to support and build Iowa's workforce through new investments that build on the solid foundation of programs and funding in place.

## Recommendation 1

**Maintain current investments in adult basic education, PACE programs, pathway navigators, industry sector partnerships and GAP tuition assistance at the level of \$12.5 million and ensure these opportunities are available in each of the state's 15 service areas.**

Investing in career pathways increases the likelihood that students who participate in the programs will be employed or will go onto pursue postsecondary education. With continued state support of these efforts, more Iowans can work towards economic security and self-sufficiency that training and earning skilled credentials helps to provide. In turn, employers can rely on a dependable pool of ready to hire workers.

### Success Story



Rabin achieved his High School Equivalency Degree in May of 2017. Since this accomplishment, his future has only gotten brighter. He is now employed with an electric company, while simultaneously working on a telecommunications degree through Des Moines Area Community College. He plans to soon start an apprenticeship program to become a journeyman. Rabin credits his success to those who supported him in achieving his HSED, an important credential which put him on a path to accomplish even more life-improving achievements.

Program	Numbers Served FY17	Notable Impact
<b>GAP tuition assistance</b> provides funding for need-based tuition assistance to applicants to enable completion of continuing education certificate training programs for in-demand occupations.  There are currently 286 approved certificate programs in which participants of the GAP tuition program may enroll. The programs with the highest enrollment include commercial driver's license/transportation, certified nursing assistant, and welding.	2,331 students applied for tuition assistance  965 students awarded tuition assistance  694 students completed training  An additional 1,182 students were either actively participating or were waiting to participate in a program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>87.8% of students completing training secured employment after using tuition assistance to complete an education program and established an overall new employment rate of 85.5% of those completing training in 2017.</li> </ul>
<b>Adult Education &amp; Literacy Program</b> builds skills for success by providing adults with the opportunity to acquire and improve functional skills necessary to enhance the quality of their lives as workers, family members, and citizens.  Services include basic skills instruction, HSED test preparation, English for Speakers of Other Languages, college readiness skills instruction, job readiness skills instruction, and computer literacy skills.	16,456 students enrolled  11,688 program persisters  5,339 students had a measureable skills gain  1,718 HiSET awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enrollment has decreased over time, but the percentage of participants persisting in the program has increased.</li> </ul>
<b>Pathways for Academic, Career, and Employment Program (PACE)</b> is used to implement a simplified, streamlined, and comprehensive process, along with customized support services, to enable eligible participants to acquire effective academic and employment training to secure gainful, quality, in-state employment.  One feature of the PACE program is to provide a pathway navigator to participants. Pathway navigators work with participants to identify barriers to success and help them minimize those barriers by connecting the students to the appropriate community resources.	4,624 students applied for tuition assistance to cover the PACE program  3,361 students approved and accepted into the PACE program  Training Activities Pursued: HSED & Basic Skills: 1,093 Certificate Programs: 1,790 Degree Seeking: 1,532 Diploma Programs: 646 Total Training Activities: 5,061	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By the end of 2017, 85% of PACE participants were employed.</li> <li>70% overall new employment rate for those exiting the PACE program in 2017.</li> </ul>



## Recommendation 2

***Eliminate the child care “cliff effect” and increase access to quality and affordable child care assistance to help employers address the growing middle-skills gap and help working families balance their household survival budget. Expand the income eligibility level of the Child Care Assistance (CCA) program for working families from 145% to 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) and increase the child care provider reimbursement to the current market rate.***

A critical need for many of Iowa’s working parents is affordable and accessible child care. The need is particularly great in Iowa, which recently ranked first in the nation in the percent of children (76 percent) under the age of six with all parents in the labor force.<sup>5</sup> Without child care for these children, the parents’ opportunities for employment and promotion are limited.

When a household increases in income, even slightly, work supports may be lost, resulting in a net loss of resources. Child care provides a prime example of this “cliff effect.” Iowa’s Child Care Assistance benefits abruptly disappear at 145 percent of the federal poverty level, causing the family (no longer considered living in poverty) to lose roughly \$4,221 annually, which is money that is desperately needed to cover a basic budget. Because of this “cliff effect,” a \$0.15/hour pay increase depletes a family’s net pool of resources by 20%. This causes a disincentive to work additional hours or aim for a higher paying job which in turn can decrease availability of middle skill workers and quality employees for Iowa’s employers. These families remain stagnant, and so does Iowa’s economy.

A solution for this child care issue is to raise the family income eligibility rate for child care assistance up from 145% to 200% of the poverty level. In other words, families were previously eligible if their annual income was \$23,867 or less, but by raising the income eligibility rate to 200% of the poverty level, a single parent that makes up to \$32,920 a year can be eligible for at least some level of child care assistance for one child. In the United

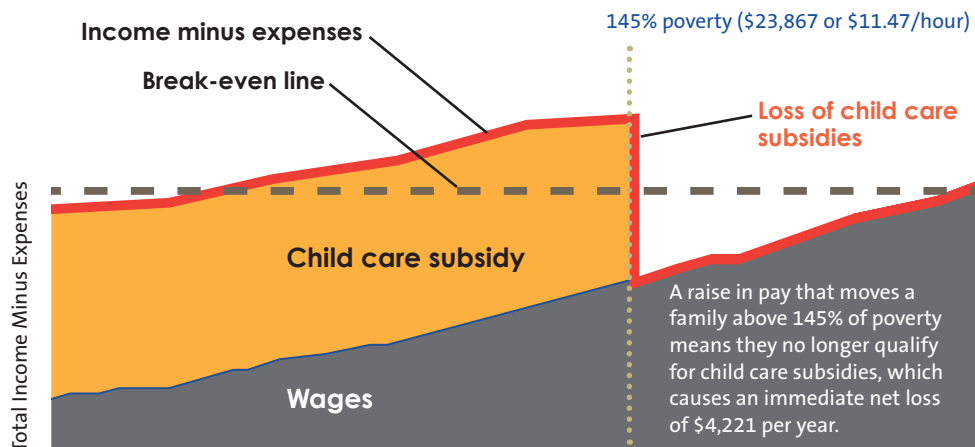
**The average number of Iowa children participating in the Child Care Assistance program per month in FY 2017 was 22,689, an increase of 7% over FY 2016.<sup>6</sup>**

**The average cost of full-time child care in Iowa is 89% of the income of someone working full time at minimum wage.<sup>7</sup>**

**The average annual income of child care workers in Iowa is \$18,930. (A family of two would be living at 115% of the federal poverty level.)<sup>8</sup>**

### When More Means Less: The Child Care Subsidy “Cliff Effect”

For a single parent with one child, a raise of as little as 15 cents an hour could disqualify a parent from Child Care Assistance Benefits.



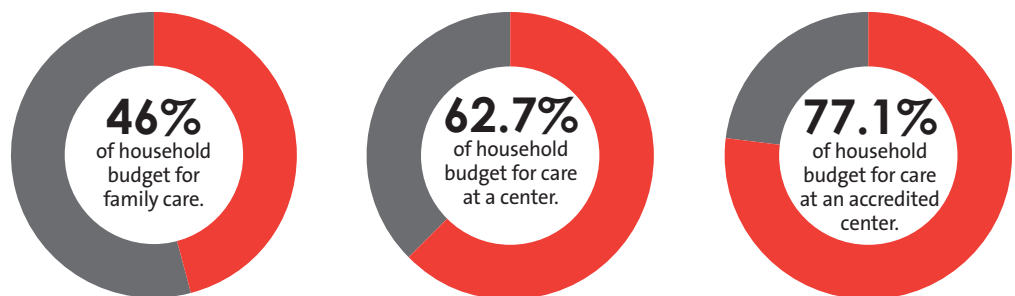
States, the average state child care assistance rate is 177%. At 145% of the federal poverty level, Iowa has the 11th lowest eligibility level in the nation.<sup>9</sup> By raising the eligibility to 200%, many families will avoid the “cliff effect” and parents will be able to maintain their productivity in the workforce because they will have accessible and affordable care for their children. Child care assistance does not make child care free for the eligible families, though.

Parents currently pay a co-pay if they receive state child care assistance. Parents will continue to pay an increased co-pay for their child care as their income climbs. In order to support families who are the most vulnerable to the cliff effect, we recommend complete coverage of child care for families living at 185% of the federal poverty level and below. For families at 186-200% of the federal poverty level, a tiered-exit approach should be implemented with increasing copays to ensure a smooth transition from child care assistance instead of an abrupt cliff.

In addition to repairing Iowa’s child care assistance program for the families who benefit, it is also important to reform the mechanism used to reimburse the child care providers who accept state subsidies. Currently, the State of Iowa only reimburses child care providers at 45% of the market rate, making it a financial disincentive for child care providers to accept state subsidies. In fact, on average, child care providers can lose up to \$20 per day for each child whose parent receives child care assistance when compared to their customers who pay the full market rate. The child care assistance program must be updated to increase the child care provider reimbursement rate to match the current market rate to maintain this industry and allow child care providers a chance to earn sustaining wages themselves.

### The Family’s Share of Childcare Expenses

For a family with one infant and one pre-schooler just over the Child Care Assistance limit (146% of poverty), child care expenses equate to:

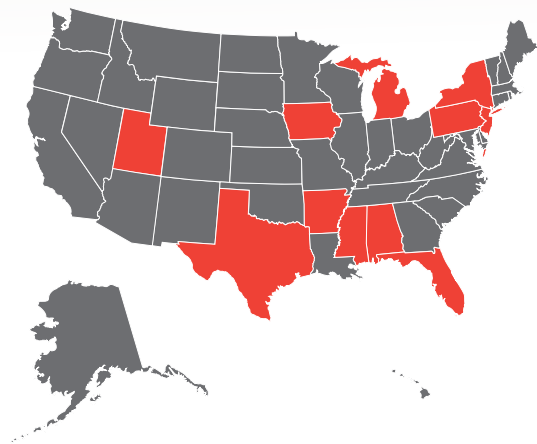


Source: Iowa Department of Human Services; Child Care Resource and Referral

### Recommendation 3

**Repeal automatic driver's license suspension for non-driving drug offenders to eliminate barriers toward employment and successful reentry in the community.**

Iowans who have been released from incarceration have unique barriers that they face in trying to make themselves available for the middle skill jobs that exist. For instance, Iowa is currently one of only eleven states in the country that maintain an antiquated policy that requires automatic driver's license suspensions for drug offenses, even if the crime had nothing to do with a motor vehicle.



**Iowa is one of only eleven states that require automatic driver's license suspensions for drug offenses.**

This law was a consequence of a 1991 federal law that threatened to withhold a portion of states' highway funding if they didn't suspend driver's licenses after a drug conviction. Most states have since utilized a clause of the law that allows them to opt out of the automatic license suspensions, however, Iowa has yet to do so. Approximately 5,000 Iowans are impacted by this law each year.<sup>10</sup>

Offenders who are affected by this outdated law often find themselves stuck in a cycle of law violations, even though they may be trying to successfully reenter

their communities and become contributing members of society. For many jobs, there is a requirement to have a driver's license in order to perform duties associated with the occupation. This can be especially true for middle-skill jobs that require travel to different job sites, such as in the field of construction. Even if the job itself does not require a driver's license, it can still be a necessity for employees who do not have reliable access to public transportation to drive themselves to work. Therefore, many offenders will continue to drive to work even with a suspended license, finding themselves once again in contact with the court system. In 2017, 356 Iowans were arrested for driving with a license that was suspended because of a drug conviction.<sup>11</sup>

In order to engage all populations of the Iowa workforce, we cannot ignore the needs and barriers of offenders. Iowans who have had their license suspended by this outdated policy have already served time for their crimes and should not continue to be punished with challenges to successful reentry. Iowa cannot afford to leave offenders behind if we want to address the growing middle-skills gap in our state.



**More than 30% of Iowans work outside their home county.<sup>12</sup>**

**In 2013, 86% of Americans used a motor vehicle to reach their place of employment.<sup>13</sup>**





63% of direct care professionals in Iowa have received some form of postsecondary education or training.<sup>14</sup>

The average wage for a home health aide in Iowa in 2017 was only \$12.97 an hour, which is roughly 164% of the federal poverty level for a family of two.<sup>15</sup>

One-third of direct care workers benefit from some form of public assistance.<sup>16</sup>

## Recommendation 4

**Expand existing direct care workforce recruitment and retention efforts including: interim committee on direct care workforce supports, provide forgivable loans and scholarships for high demand healthcare occupations, expand the Iowa Direct Care Worker Registry and make portable the credentials of those who work in direct care.**

A Direct Care Professional is an individual who provides supportive services and care to people experiencing illnesses or disabilities. These individuals are the frontline of service delivery in health, support, and long-term care settings, and include certified nurse aides as well as home health aides. These occupations are projected to grow rapidly through 2025, with 25% growth in home health aide positions and 10% growth for nursing assistant positions.<sup>17</sup> In fact, the health care and social assistance industry as a whole experienced the largest increase of any industry between 2005 and 2010. It is also projected to be one of the three major industries with occupational growth, accounting for 54 percent of the state's growth between 2014 and 2024.<sup>18</sup> This continued growth is due to factors such as an aging population, increased chronic care conditions, medical advancements, and an increase in the number of people who are insured.

Even though there will continue to be significant growth in these occupations over the coming years, many challenges in retaining and recruiting employees persist. For instance, direct care occupations experienced some of the most job openings in 2017, likely due to struggles with recruitment and retention. Direct care occupations face obstacles with recruiting and retaining workers because of low wages and high turnover rates.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, people who may be interested in a health care career may not even seek employment or remain in the field because of low frontline worker wages.

In order to improve the retention and recruitment of direct care workers to meet the growing demands of our society, deliberate actions and strategies must be implemented:

- **Convene an interim committee on direct care workforce supports.** A multi-stakeholder and interagency initiative must be created at the state level to comprehensively identify and implement strategies to support direct care workers.
- **Provide forgivable loans and scholarships for high demand healthcare occupations.** Since most direct care occupations require some postsecondary training and education, yet they do not enjoy the higher wages that other middle-skill jobs offer, forgivable loans and scholarships could act as a way to combat unattractive wages by reducing education-related debt.
- **Expand the Iowa Direct Care Worker Registry and make portable the credentials of those who work in direct care.** By expanding this registry to create accurate records of credentials for all direct care workers, portability will be improved because certifications will not be misplaced. This administrative action could lessen the burden on direct care workers, leading to retaining these individuals in the field for a longer period of time.

## Recommendation 5

***Support both public and private transportation initiatives so communities have access to education, training, and employment.***

Transportation has proven to be a significant barrier to people who are pursuing employment opportunities and enrollment in education and training programs. Even those who are the most dedicated and have motivation to find work or improve their skills are stunted when they lack affordable and reliable transportation options. When transportation becomes an impediment to education and employment success for individuals, the workforce and economy suffers as a whole. Comprehensive transportation solutions must be created at the state level to ensure that middle-skill workers are able to travel to middle-skill jobs and training.

The average American has to travel almost 19 minutes to work.<sup>21</sup> While this seems like a short commute, it can be a huge barrier for those who do not have access to reliable transportation.

## Recommendation 6

***Support the recommendations of the Future Ready Iowa Alliance to support and build Iowa's workforce through new investments that build on the solid foundation of programs and funding in place.***

Future Ready Iowa is a proactive partnership between the National Governor's Association and the State of Iowa which is developing a shared vision for ensuring we are preparing workers to match the needs of Iowa's employers.

The initiative's overarching goal is for at least 70 percent of Iowa's workforce to have education or training beyond high school by the year 2025. Currently, 58 percent of Iowans have some postsecondary education or training, meaning that 127,700 more workers would need additional training to meet the 70 percent goal.<sup>20</sup>

To reach this objective, the Future Ready Iowa Alliance—a group of legislative, business, nonprofit, and education leaders—has been charged with designing and recommending a strategic plan, which they released in October 2017. Their recommendations include:

- The creation of The Future Ready Iowa Last-Dollar Scholarship and Grant Program for Iowans seeking education and training for high-demand occupations.
- Better aligning and expanding the ecosystem of support for Iowans beginning college or career training or returning to complete, with a focus on Iowans who are low income and/or underrepresented minorities.
- Expanding high-quality work-based learning experiences in high-demand fields and careers for all students, particularly traditionally underrepresented students.
- Identifying and scaling effective early academic and career development and delivery approaches so all students are prepared for a changing world.
- Developing a grassroots strategy to engage the business community, sector boards, regional workforce boards, STEM regions and other regional collaborations to align with Alliance recommendations.

The Skills2Compete Coalition believes that the Alliance's suggestions fully align with our other recommendations listed in this report, and that new investments towards Future Ready Iowa's plans will build on the solid foundation of programs and funding that Iowa already has in place.

To learn more about the Future Ready Iowa Alliance and its recommendations, [www.visitfuturereadyiowa.gov](http://www.visitfuturereadyiowa.gov).



### Moving Iowa Forward

The Branstad and Reynolds administrations and the state legislature have embarked on several game changing steps to ensure more workers and industries have a role in Iowa's economic prosperity. By embracing the 2018 Workforce Policy Agenda of the Iowa Skills2Compete Coalition, this work can continue making an impact.

Continued investments in skill and credential attainment and adult basic education, along with new investments toward the Future Ready Iowa Alliance's recommendations, will impact the ability of the State of Iowa to fill its middle skills jobs and grow a strong workforce. Work supports such as childcare assistance and affordable transportation are critical to help Iowa's workforce contribute consistently.

Iowa must continue to create incentives for workers to join and remain in health care jobs, as well as removing hurdles that exist for offenders to be productive once they reenter Iowa's workforce. By creating this comprehensive infrastructure for Iowans, we can get closer to meeting our goal of bridging the middle skills gap to create a more vibrant and strong Iowa economy.



## Endnotes

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## Acknowledgements

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**To learn more about the Iowa Skills2Compete Coalition, please visit [www.centraliowaworks.org](http://www.centraliowaworks.org).**

## Iowa Skills2Compete Coalition 2018

AFSCME Council 61  
Association of Business and Industry  
Association of Iowa Workforce Partners  
Central Iowa Workforce Investment Board  
Central Iowa Works  
Child & Family Policy Center  
Des Moines Area Regional Transit (DART)  
Des Moines Area Community College  
Evelyn K Davis Center for Working Families  
Goodwill Industries of Central Iowa  
Greater Des Moines Partnership  
HCI-VNS Care Services  
Iowa Association of Community College Trustees  
Iowa CareGivers Association

Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO  
Iowa Literacy Council  
Iowa State Education Association  
Kirkwood Community College  
National Skills Coalition  
Neighborhood Transportation Services  
Northeast Iowa Community College  
Project Iowa  
United Way of Central Iowa  
United Way of East Central Iowa  
United Way of Siouxland  
United Way of Wapello County  
United Ways of Iowa

## About the Skills2Compete Coalition

The Iowa Skills2Compete Coalition is a statewide partnership of Iowa’s business community, education, legislative and workforce development leaders that serve as an organized voice for “skills” at the state’s capitol and build more policymaker support for state policies that grow Iowa’s economy by investing in its workforce.



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