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Viewpoint: Workforce challenge remains urgent in 2018

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In May 2016, the Allegheny Conference on Community Development's "Inflection Point" report put the region on notice: without an aggressive approach, southwestern Pennsylvania would face a substantial workforce shortfall by 2025. Demographic factors and rapid shifts in the skills required by technological innovation are among the situations that could drag us down.

Our recently released "Inflection Point 2017-18," the first of annual updates to the landmark report, confirms that this shortfall still looms and that we're far from being out of the storm. It's worth noting that other regions will face the same challenges, and our going through it first is already positioning us as a leading-edge model for workforce development in the country.

"Inflection Point" started a critical conversation about our future across the region's public and private sectors, and we're now moving to direct action that will position us for a globally competitive workforce.

Notably, many education institutions have stepped up to the challenge identified in the 2016 report, adapting curriculum and majors, and factoring its findings into their strategic planning. Employers representing the region's key industries, too, have initiated proactive strategies to build and



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strengthen their talent pipelines. Check out the case studies in Chapter 3 of “Inflection Point 2017-18” for additional details.

On the plus side, the report points to new promise for the workforce in the region. Pittsburgh is emerging as a national leader in rapidly growing industry clusters: autonomous vehicles, additive manufacturing and robotics – all underscoring our tech and innovation capacity and helping with attraction of some of the brightest talent. At the same time, strengths and resources tied to manufacturing and energy are still going strong and providing economic opportunities.

Our future success, and the chance to pull ahead of other regions facing similar workforce challenges (who are competitors for talent), will rely on what regional employers do now. “Inflection Point” urges them to accelerate their efforts to adapt their recruiting practices in light of the talent shortage. The 2017-18 update, which includes results of a survey of area HR directors, indicates that we may be unintentionally holding ourselves back.

For example, at a time of high demand in occupations such as software development and engineering, our job postings tend to demand education and experience far beyond what is required to do the job – and beyond what employers elsewhere require. In a tight labor market such as ours, inflated requirements may be creating artificial vacuums for key talent. Despite the fact that half of our 40,000 annual college graduates leave the region, less than half of our employers host internship programs, a key way to retain that young talent. What’s more, fewer than 10 percent of the region’s employers are actively – or even considering – engaging with the K-12 system to build talent pipelines that lead to jobs of the future.

This workforce shortage requires all of us to dig in and re-examine how we view talent as a key competitive resource. The Allegheny Conference will continue to do its part by playing the role of convener and will help to stimulate and trigger activity and better connect key partners, and we’ll be giving thought to a policy framework that facilitates the building of better bridges between employers and educators. We invite and encourage employers to join us in collaborating, as a region, to confront and solve our workforce challenges. We want you to get involved in the conversation and the activities that can – and must – change the course of the future of work in our region. Get started by reading “Inflection Point 2017-18” and be in touch with us at workforce@alleghenyconference.org to take part.