



Creating a Workforce to make New Mexico More Competitive

Although New Mexico is blessed with diverse natural resources and world-class research institutions, Diane Denish knows that our strongest asset is our people – the hardworking men and women who keep our state moving every day. By 2020, nearly two-thirds of all jobs will require education beyond a high school diploma.

Diane believes New Mexico must invest in education and training to make our state more competitive for the future. As Governor, Diane will implement policies to ensure that our workers have the skills they need to take on the jobs of the 21st century jobs to achieve financial security and prosperity.

A key element of these policies is to create more opportunities in the middle-skills area of education. That means programs focused on where there is high or increasing job demand; enticing high-school seniors to stay in school by focusing the final year on pathways to the workforce or college; and creating opportunities for mid-career people to add skills to increase their value to employers.

Making Community College a Pathway to the Modern Workforce: New Mexico's community colleges provide a range of modern technical degrees that prepare students to directly compete for jobs in growth industries – such as health care, engineering and computer science. Unfortunately, in these tough times, many New Mexicans cannot afford community college – and folks are entering the workforce without the skills they need to compete for good jobs. As Governor, Diane will seek to remove these barriers to help more New Mexicans earn community college degrees and certificates that prepare them to compete in the modern workforce by:

- Creating the New Mexico **Bridge to the Workforce** scholarship to allow every New Mexican receiving a high school diploma or GED to have the opportunity to get a two-year degree or certificate at a local New Mexico community college – and graduate debt-free and prepared to enter a modern workforce. The Bridge to the Workforce scholarship would cover the cost of tuition at a New Mexico 2-year college for a student's first semester, provided that the student agrees to work towards a degree in a high-demand career – such as in health care. (Upon completion of the first semester with a 2.5 GPA,

the student would then be eligible to complete their degree with the Lottery Scholarship.)

- By accepting the Bridge to the Workforce scholarship, the student would agree to pursue a career in one of the following high-demand areas: health and biosciences, business services, communications and information, arts and entertainment, energy and environmental technology, engineering/construction and manufacturing, hospitality and tourism, and education.
- The Bridge to the Workforce scholarship would be available to all New Mexico residents who have just received their high school diploma or GED and who want to continue in school to get the skills necessary to better compete for high-paying jobs.
- Students who maintain at least a 2.5 GPA the first semester will then be eligible for the New Mexico Lottery Scholarship, which would pay tuition for the remainder of their semesters in community college. The Bridge to the Workforce scholarship will help thousands of New Mexico students, who would otherwise be entering the workforce with only a high school diploma, to secure a degree and the technical skills that are critical to finding a good-paying job.
- The estimated cost of the Bridge to the Workforce scholarship is \$3.6 million a year. This estimate is based on 6,000 first-year community college students at a tuition of \$600 a semester. There are currently 4,700 students in career-tech training programs, so this estimate assumes a 20 percent increase in enrollment once the scholarship is made available.
- **Making Sure Training Leads to a Job:** New Mexico must be a leader in defining which jobs and industries will be growing in our economy. By targeting which industries we will grow, we can make sure our students and parents know which training will lead to a high-paying job, and our schools and colleges can design the coursework they need to successfully launch students into the world of work. Therefore, the state must develop a comprehensive economic-demography model to work with communities to identify job trends and push students in the direction of where the jobs will be.
- **Making A Clear Path to Opportunity:** Our community colleges must have short-term, clear-cut programs that lead a student directly to job opportunities, or prepare them for a 4-year degree. The fact is that too many students start community college and never finish. Our goal should be to graduate as many students with certificates and technical degrees as possible so they can go to work.

- Increased mentorship opportunities to connect working professionals with community college students.
- Collaboration with the business community, the non-profit sector and labor to create more intern and apprenticeship opportunities for students.

New Skills for the Unemployed: Using federal workforce training funds, Diane proposes a community-college and labor apprenticeship program targeted to adults who lost their job in the previous two years and are still unemployed. This program will help pay tuition at a community college or labor apprenticeship in one of the eight high-demand areas outlined above. This will allow displaced adult workers the option of re-potting themselves and setting a new course.

Online and Distance Job Retraining Programs: Many mid-career New Mexicans know they need to update their skills, or learn new skills, to remain competitive in the workforce. However, not all of these people can afford to take classes or have high-speed Internet access. Diane believes we must increase opportunities for on-demand and distance adult basic education. Every library in New Mexico should have broadband access and programs to allow New Mexicans to learn: basic computer skills, English-language skills and how to use the Internet to look for jobs.

A Purposeful Senior Year of High School: For too many high school students in New Mexico, senior year is simply running out the clock when it should be used to prepare a student for college or to prepare a student to enter the workforce. Diane believes that all New Mexico high schools should require seniors to either: take Advanced Placement classes to earn college credit, intern at a local company or participate in other career-path education opportunities. Every student should be using their senior year to prepare them for what comes next, whether it is post-secondary education or direct entry to the workforce.

Simplifying the College Application Process: As Governor, Diane Denish would institute a simplified, standardized enrollment process across institutions so that every high school student in New Mexico would automatically receive acceptance letters from all colleges and universities in the state for which they qualified.

Training New Mexico's Workforce for New Mexico's Health Care Needs: Even during these tough economic times, health-care workers continue to be in high demand. Hospitals and other health care organizations are currently looking for nurses, technicians, physician assistants, dental hygienists, administrative support and many other health professionals. As Governor, Diane would launch a public-private partnership between the state, community colleges and health-care organizations to ensure that there is a well trained New Mexican ready to take every job that becomes available in this sector.

Other ideas:

- Identify academically promising students in targeted growth-industry areas in the community-college pool and provide guidance and encouragement for their advancement in the university system through their undergraduate education.
- Develop agreements among public institutions of higher education around “credit staking” which would allow students to start at one public college or university and complete their degree at the same campus but with a program offered by another public college or university.
- Expand advanced-placement opportunities to include middle school preparatory work for AP high school courses and appropriate professional development training for teachers.
- Collaborate with business and philanthropic communities on creating increased apprenticeship, service learning, and intern opportunities to provide more students with real-work experience.
 - Follow the lead of Innovate-Educate and develop learning *collaboratives* – public-private partnerships that encourage community and business leaders to visit schools to discuss career options; develop local campaigns that engage community and business leaders in communicating the value of education.
- Develop additional career academies in the public school system.
- Continue to develop efforts that provide students with the opportunity to take advantage of a project-based approach to high-tech learning.
- Expand Carve Your Path effort program that allows students to create a career plan and understand what courses will help them reach their goals.