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Understanding the green job market tough, but education is key

East Bay Business Times - by [Michael Fitzhugh](#) Staff reporter[Print](#) [Email](#) [Reprints](#) [RSS Feeds](#) [Add to Del.icio.us](#) [Digg This](#) [Comments](#)

Congressman Jerry McNerney emphasized the importance of education and renewable energy development in a Wednesday address to community leaders attending a work force development summit organized by the Tri-Valley Business Council.

“No matter how many jobs we create or how much money we spend, if we don’t get kids engaged, we’re going to lose them,” McNerney told the gathering of educators, government officials and businesses interested in renewable energy.

Panelists representing community colleges, Cal State East Bay and K-12 programs discussed the efforts under way to build a pipeline of students prepared to take on technically rigorous engineering, construction and research jobs many expect a new green economy will deliver.

But data on which green-collar jobs are materializing and which ones might grow fastest is still scarce. Bonnie Graybill, a deputy director with the California Development Department, said the state’s Labor Market Information Division is still trying to “get our arms around” the impact of new materials, methods, products and services that sustainable efforts are creating.

Industry representatives spoke of the importance of engineering and mathematics education as well as communications skills to supplying their needs.

Chevron Energy Solutions, which hires electrical and mechanical engineers to work on energy efficiency projects, finds workers who come to their jobs with hands-on energy equipment experience can advance quickly in the field, said Heather Benner, a project

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manager with the company. But even some skilled engineers have trouble communicating and writing reports, she said.

Matt Hansen of **Pacific Gas and Electric Co.** said that 42 percent of the company's line workers are ready to retire in the next five years. To fill the company's needs, the company has started a program to train line workers technicians and other potential PG&E employees. But Hansen said many candidates who apply don't even possess the eight-grade-level math skills the program requires. Of those that were accepted to a recent class, graduated 19 students in August, 17 of which were hired by PG&E, he said.

Andrew McIlroy, acting director of the combustion research facility at **Sandia National Laboratories** in Livermore also voiced concern about the supply of workers capable of taking up positions to further the lab's work on national energy security issues.

"We don't know what the (green jobs) of the future are going to be, But if we don't make the investments now (in K-12 education)... if we lose that pipeline, we'll lose out entirely," he said.

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