

Building tomorrow's workforce starts in today's classrooms | Guest Opinion

Dave Seeley//September 18, 2026//

For years, employers have been telling us the same thing: they cannot find enough skilled workers.



Dave Seeley

Manufacturers struggle to hire machinists and technicians. Healthcare providers need nurses and medical assistants. Construction firms are searching for electricians, operating engineers, and HVAC technicians. Across nearly every sector, businesses are competing for talent.

At RochesterWorks, we hear these concerns every day. Yet most federal and state workforce investments are directed toward adults who have already left school, entered the workforce without a clear career path, or become unemployed. Those investments are important, but we cannot solve tomorrow's workforce shortages by focusing only on today's workers.

If we are serious about strengthening New York's workforce, we have to start much earlier.

That means giving more students access to the educational experiences that prepare them for college, careers, and lifelong success. Career and Technical Education (CTE), dual

enrollment, work-based learning, tutoring, and other career-connected opportunities all help students build the knowledge, confidence, and skills employers need.

Today's CTE programs are far removed from the vocational education of decades past. Students are learning robotics, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, healthcare, skilled trades, engineering, and information technology. Through internships and work-based learning, they also develop communication, teamwork, and professionalism, the skills employers consistently identify as essential.

Many of these pathways also include dual enrollment opportunities, something we are working to expand here in the Rochester region through [Monroe Community College](#) and other higher education partners. Students can earn college credit and industry-recognized credentials before graduating from high school, reducing both the cost and time required to enter rewarding careers.

These programs work. Students are more likely to graduate, continue their education, and secure family-sustaining careers. Employers benefit from a stronger talent pipeline, and communities become more competitive.

The challenge is that there simply are not enough opportunities. In many communities, demand for career pathway programs exceeds available capacity. Employers are eager to partner with schools, but expanding these programs requires sustained investment in instructors, equipment, work-based learning, and student support.

That is why workforce leaders should welcome opportunities to expand access to high-quality educational experiences.

The new Federal Scholarship Tax Credit has generated understandable debate. But from a workforce perspective, the most important question is not where someone falls on broader education policy. The question is whether this program can help more students access career pathway programs, complete dual enrollment coursework, earn industry-recognized credentials, and prepare for careers in sectors facing critical workforce shortages.

New York now has the opportunity to opt into this new federal program. If implemented thoughtfully, it could help reduce financial barriers for students while encouraging innovative partnerships among schools, community colleges, employers, and workforce organizations.

At RochesterWorks, our mission is to build talent pipelines that meet the needs of regional employers. We measure success by outcomes: credentials earned, employment secured, wages increased, and businesses able to grow because skilled workers are available.

Imagine more youth apprenticeships with local employers. More healthcare pathways connecting students with community colleges and hospitals. More advanced manufacturing and skilled trades programs equipped with modern technology. More students graduating with college credits, industry credentials, and a clear path to employment.

Career preparation should never be viewed as an alternative to college preparation. The strongest career pathway programs accomplish both, preparing students for employment while accelerating progress toward a certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree, apprenticeship, or professional license.

Workforce development doesn't begin when someone walks into a job center. It begins years earlier, in classrooms where students discover their interests, build practical skills, and begin preparing for their future.

If New York has an opportunity to expand those experiences and strengthen the pipeline of future workers, it is an opportunity we should embrace.

Dave Seeley is CEO, RochesterWorks, Inc.