

# THE MIDDLE-SKILLS GAP

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# NexGen

MIDDLE-SKILLS SOLUTIONS

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# MIDDLE-SKILLS GAP

The middle skills gap—referring to the shortage of workers with education beyond high school but not requiring a four-year degree—poses a significant challenge for Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in the U.S.

This gap impacts key sectors like healthcare, manufacturing, and information technology, where demand for middle-skill jobs is increasing. By 2035, the need for skilled labor in these areas is projected to grow further, and if CTE programs do not adapt to meet these demands, the U.S. will struggle to maintain its competitiveness in the global economy.

For example, the shortage of workers trained in advanced manufacturing or renewable energy could hamper the country's ability to innovate and respond to global market shifts effectively ([BOCES, Advance CTE](#)).

# CHAPTER 1

Addressing the middle-skills gap through CTE programs is crucial not only for meeting domestic labor demands but also for enhancing the U.S.'s economic standing worldwide. Effective CTE programs aligned with industry needs can create a pipeline of qualified workers, enabling industries to thrive and contributing to national economic growth.

As such, partnerships between educational institutions and businesses are vital to designing programs that equip students with the skills needed for high-demand roles, ensuring the U.S. workforce remains agile, capable, and competitive on the global stage (Advance CTE).

# OPPORTUNITY GAPS

**Closing the middle-skills gap requires transformative partnerships between education, industries, and communities!**

The middle-skills gap highlights profound **opportunity gaps** that exist for underserved communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), low-income students, and those in rural areas. These groups often face systemic barriers, such as limited access to quality programs, inadequate resources, and a lack of exposure to high-demand career pathways. Without strategic interventions, these barriers perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit social mobility.

For instance, schools in underserved areas may lack the infrastructure or partnerships necessary to offer advanced training in high-growth sectors like **biotech or clean energy**, further widening the opportunity gap. To address these disparities, CTE programs must intentionally focus on inclusivity, targeting outreach and resources to underserved populations and ensuring equitable access to high-quality programs.