

Workforce programs to be tightened

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- Scott L. Miley | CNHI Statehouse Reporter
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INDIANAPOLIS — As Indiana's unemployment rate stays below the national average, the Indiana General Assembly will likely tighten coordination among at least nine agencies responsible for developing the state's workforce.

And revise a message to students.

"We have to get into our high schools and do a good job of letting students know that to be successful not every student has to go to college," House Speaker Brian Bosma, R-Indianapolis, said this week.

"I think there does need to be more coordination from the state level with our institutions such as Ivy Tech and Vincennes (University) reaching down into the high schools," Senate Minority Leader Tim Lanane, D-Anderson, said.

"But I would even say down into the middle schools as well to get these kids thinking about these things," Lanane said.

Lanane also wants school counselors to be active in guiding students to careers.

Building and maintaining a large and skilled workforce is the state's top challenge, the Indiana Chamber of Commerce said this week in announcing its legislative agenda.

The Chamber also supports evaluation of the state's various education and workforce programs, asking that the business community be able to provide input on how to provide training for job markets.

Last session, the Legal Services Agency was assigned to set up an evaluation process for workforce programs; the first review of eight programs will occur in 2019. A program's effectiveness is to be reviewed every five years.

Part of the evaluation will look at whether agencies have metrics in place to determine performance.

So far, the Legislative Services Agency has found that about five programs receiving federal funding were unable to provide relevant outcome measures and three state-funded programs didn't have consistent measurement tools.

More than 50 training and workforce education programs are on the review list involving 10 state agencies. About 800,000 Hoosiers participate in the programs funded by the state for \$1.4 billion a year and \$400 million in federal funds.

Indiana's unemployment was at 3.5 percent in October, lower than the national rate of 3.7 percent. Indiana's rate has been below the national average for five years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.