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# Closing the "Skills Gap"

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By WKBW Admin  
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Buffalo (WKBW) The unemployment rate in the U.S. is 8.2 percent, and in New York State it is slightly higher at 8.5. Yet one local official says businesses are hiring, and graduates still can't find jobs. Now, she is doing something about it.

Congresswoman Kathy Hochul hosted a roundtable discussion on Monday at BlueCross BlueShield in Buffalo. The issue: how to get college grads jobs while filling the needs of businesses.

"We are educating an entire generation of individuals who are still looking for jobs, yet I tour many facilities, businesses small and large, and they're looking for people to fill the jobs. There's a serious disconnect that we have right now between skills that are being taught and what businesses need," Hochul said.

Some representatives from higher education were also at Monday's meeting, and recognized the part they play in adapting curriculum to bridge the skills gap.

"The top priority, one of the top priorities is to do a better job is better preparing our students for work and career after they graduate," Steven Harvey of the WNY Consortium of Higher Education said.

To speed up the process, Hochul is sponsoring a bill that would give businesses a tax credit for starting job-training programs for students.

"Internships or co ops, to give businesses that chance to trial run these individuals as possible future employees, but also train the young people with skills they may not be getting in the classroom," Hochul said.

By bringing together the business and education sides, the goal is a relationship that will mutually benefit both sides while lowering the unemployment rate.

"New York has one of the best educational systems in the country if not the best. Now we need to take it up a step and really address the needs of the business community," Harvey added.

"We cannot have kids any longer who graduate from college that have student loans without a job to go to because they will start off life with one hand tied behind their backs," Hochul said.

There are more round table meetings and discussions to come, and Hochul says the next step is to bring in university presidents and representatives to keep the ball rolling when it comes to meeting the needs of both job seekers and employers.