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TOP STORY URGENT

## Governor's Workforce Cabinet begins big task of aligning Indiana's education and job training programs

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Danny Lopez, left, chairman of the Governor's Workforce Cabinet, speaks Tuesday at the first meeting of the member panel tasked with aligning the state's education and workforce development programs as former L

Mayor Blair Milo, now Indiana's secretary of career connections and talent, looks on.

Don Garden, The Times



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Holcomb appoints two from Region to serve on new Governor's Workforce Cabinet



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Governor signs laws intended to streamline and enhance urgency of Indiana workforce development programs



Holcomb wants Hoosiers to embrace economic change by preparing for jobs of the future

INDIANAPOLIS — If the state someday has a sufficient number of workers with the education and training to meet the ever-changing needs of Indiana employers, future Hoosiers might look back at a meeting in a nondescript state library conference room as the moment a dream of Republican Gov. Eric Holcomb edged toward reality.

The 21 members of the Governor's Workforce Cabinet convened for the first time Tuesday in a spirit of optimism, but also keenly aware of the challenge of their task to align Indiana's education and workforce training programs, invest in what works and dump what doesn't.

They promptly organized into five "action teams" to start evaluating where Indiana stands in terms of college and career funding, career coaching opportunities, career and technical education programs, workforce services, and local job training offerings.

Chairman Danny Lopez, Holcomb's former deputy chief of staff, explained unlike myriad prior commissions, boards and study committees that looked at workforce issues, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet includes all the key state decision-makers and a legislative mandate to act quickly to implement change.

"This is an enormously important undertaking," Lopez said. "We know that we've got a whole host of folks, upwards of 700,000 people in this state, who started some post-secondary (education) and



Holcomb names workforce development 'defining issue of the decade' in annual State of the State address

not completed it, don't have anything to show for it at this point, and another 400,000 or so who did not complete their high school diplomas."

He said those Hoosiers will be unprepared come 2025 when an estimated 60 percent of Indiana jobs, across all industries, will require post-secondary training, be it a specific certification, such as welding, or an associate or bachelor's degree.

"The nature of jobs is changing, and the way we think about work and education and training is changing," Lopez said.

"The challenge for us as a state is going to be how we create a sense of lifelong learning in the state, and how we're helping people insulate themselves from changes in the economy."



Holcomb seeking federal waiver for already-enacted changes to Indiana's workforce development system

### **Rethinking what's needed**

The 13 cabinet members from the state's business community made clear those changes are coming, and coming fast, due to automation, technology and virtual reality causing hiring to already shift, in part, from people who make things to people who program and maintain the things that make things.

Mark Kara, of Hobart, a cabinet member representing Operating Engineers Local 150, said middle and high school students urgently need to embrace math and science education, since even paving a street today is about more than just running a roller over some asphalt.

It requires interacting with technology to identify the ideal temperature, thickness and location, he



Gov. Holcomb establishes new state office for apprenticeships and work-based learning



Indiana partnering with 19 states to promote worker skills training



Study finds Indiana common construction wage repeal reduced worker pay, didn't save money on public works projects

said.

Jená Bellezza, of Crown Point, vice president at the Indiana Parenting Institute, similarly said she believes all Hoosiers need to rethink their understanding of education and workforce to recognize that what children learn in school has to be directly applicable to their careers.

Others observed that if Indiana is serious about improving Hoosier workforce skills, the state must find ways to offer learning opportunities at convenient times, in accessible locations and affordable child care for parents working at a job or training for one.

Former LaPorte Mayor Blair Milo, a cabinet member and Indiana's secretary of career connections and talent, said she plans to apply her local government experience to find Hoosiers the help they need to pursue new opportunities.

"My heart lies in connecting people and communities, in building solutions and gathering collective resources, and being able to build collaborative solutions," Milo said. "I think so much of the work that has to be done is a ground game."

Lopez said the cabinet will convene every other month, with action team meetings in between, as it works to identify and make administrative improvements to existing education and workforce programs, as well as to develop legislative recommendations for the 2019 General Assembly.

"I don't think there's a silver bullet. If there were we would have done it already," Lopez said. "The

opportunities really are out there. It's ensuring that people know what those opportunities are, and meaningfully, and in an easy way, navigate the system."

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## Daniel Carden

Dan is Statehouse Bureau Chief for The Times. Since 2009, he's reported on Indiana government and politics — and how both impact the Region — from the state capital in Indianapolis. He originally is from Orland Park, Ill.