

CHASE MIDDLE SKILLS INSTITUTE

Providing high school students with labor market information and educating them about regional in-demand jobs is a relatively simple undertaking. Doing so in a fun and engaging way, while motivating them to continue on an educational pathway that leads to high-skill, high-growth careers, is not so simple.

This summer, [Workforce Solutions](#), in collaboration with [JP Morgan Chase](#), [Project GRAD](#) and [Lone Star College](#) provided rising juniors and seniors with the opportunity to engage in project-based learning in a university setting. The two-week middle skills institute offered information on entry-level jobs in Houston's budding energy sector, workplace skills training and options for financing a post-secondary education.

The term "middle skills," which residents are hearing more and more frequently, refers to occupations like machinists, welders, pipefitters and

roustabouts. These occupations require more

education than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year college degree.

"There are opportunities in abundance for students considering middle skills occupations," said Mike Temple, Director of the Gulf Coast Workforce Board.

"By introducing them to these occupations early, and conversing about how they might approach and finance post-secondary schooling, we're working to build an educated and trained workforce for the region."





BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS AND EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

The partnership of business, education, a community organization and the workforce system is what makes the 2014 Chase Middle Skills Institute so appealing. Different groups came together, each with their own strengths, to better understand how to solve the middle skills gap in the Houston-Galveston region and then communicate that information to the public.

A lack of awareness of what a successful education and career look like, along with outdated perceptions of what is right for students today, contribute to the workforce skills gap. An often repeated message in the institute was that four-year college programs may not be for everyone, and that is perfectly alright.

“I call this institute career awareness on steroids,” said Carolyn Watson, the Relationship Manager of Global Philanthropy at JP Morgan Chase & Co. “Awareness is typically a one day job fair, but this was a very targeted, intentional approach.”

Real-world employers also took part in the Chase Middle Skills Institute, and having that perspective to share with students only added to the experience.

Eaton, a global technology leader in power management solutions, was one of the employers involved. Representatives discussed with students the company’s position in the industry and what a global manufacturer looks for in employees.

“Unlike the Middle Skills Institute, we traditionally work with students that have already chosen their careers and are working on increasing their core competency,” said Allan Clark, Eaton’s Global Technical Marketing and Training Manager. “This institute gets to the students before they make a decision on career path. Students learned where employment opportunities are heading and where they should align themselves.”

Being the pilot year, all organizations involved learned much about the institute, what was successful and where improvements can be made in the future. The Middle Skills Institute returns next summer to introduce the subsequent round of students to regional high-skill, high-growth careers, the workplace and technical skills needed to get a job and options for financing an essential post-secondary education.