

# Understanding the Local Labor Market

## Promising Career Pathways in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

### Focus: Computer Support Specialists

*Understanding the Local Labor Market: Promising Career Pathways in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County* is intended as a useful resource for career counselors and other professionals responsible for helping jobseekers make informed decisions about employment and training. Featured occupations are selected on the basis of vacancies, wages and benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

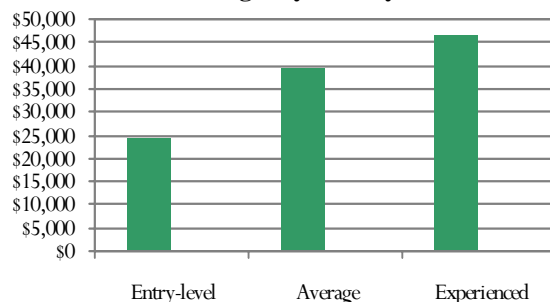
#### What do computer support specialists do?

- Computer support specialists — also called PC technicians, user support specialists, technical support specialists and IT specialists — assist computer system users by answering questions and solving problems related to computer software, hardware and networks.
- Specific tasks may include: answering inquiries in-person, by phone or email; troubleshooting software and hardware to identify problems; installing or repairing hardware or software; overseeing the daily performance of computer systems; developing training materials or procedures to assist others in using computer hardware or software; working with outside vendors to address hardware or software problems.
- Strong problem-solving, analytical, interpersonal, and oral and written-communication skills are needed to successfully perform the tasks required of computer support specialists.

#### What are computer support specialists' wages, benefits, and work conditions?

- Computer support specialist jobs tend to be full-time, salaried positions. They may offer benefits including healthcare, retirement, and funding for training needed to upgrade skills. Overtime may be required and some employers may require computer support specialists to be on call during evenings and weekends. The PA Department of Labor and Industry estimates average annual wages for computer support specialists in Allegheny County at \$39,212.
- Computer support specialists generally work in well-lit comfortable office environments.

**Wages for Computer Support Specialists  
Allegheny County**



Source: PA Dept. of Labor & Industry, Center for Workforce Information & Analysis ([www.dli.state.pa.us/workforceinfo](http://www.dli.state.pa.us/workforceinfo))

#### What do computer support specialists like about their jobs?

- Computer support specialists like the challenge of troubleshooting and solving technical issues related to computer hardware and software.
- They enjoy interacting with people on a daily basis and ultimately gain satisfaction from helping people by solving their computer-related problems.
- They appreciate that their jobs require continual learning and skill upgrades because computer technology is constantly changing.

#### What are related jobs and advancement opportunities?

- With additional skill development, certifications, and/or formal education, computer support specialists may advance into other, higher-paying IT occupations including: computer programmers; computer systems analysts; network administrators; and computer and information systems managers.
- Computer support specialists working in IT companies may advance into positions in which they use customer knowledge and experience to design future products.

#### How many computer support specialists openings are there?

- The growth of computers in the workplace has created a strong demand for computer support specialists.
- Local demand for computer support specialists is steady and expected to grow. The PA Department of Labor & Industry estimates that there are approximately 3,500 computer support specialists working in Allegheny County. Allegheny County is expected to add approximately 150 computer support specialist jobs every year through 2010.
- 364 local computer support specialist jobs were posted on the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink website ([www.careerlinkpittsburgh.com](http://www.careerlinkpittsburgh.com)) between January 2004 and January 2005.
- In Allegheny County, computer support specialists work for employers in a range of industries including: financial services; healthcare; education; government; and information technology. They may serve as in-house experts or work for companies that provide services on a contract basis from an off-site location.

## FOCUS: Computer Support Specialists

### How can I become a computer support specialist?

- There are multiple paths to becoming a computer support specialist. While training requirements may vary by employer, most employers prefer formal education in the form of at least an IT-related associate degree for these positions.
- Extensive knowledge of computer software, hardware and networks is required. Without an IT-specific degree, certifications (including A+, Network+, CCNA and MCSA) demonstrating this knowledge may be needed to obtain a computer support specialist position.
- There are a number of local training programs where individuals can acquire the knowledge and skills, degrees and/or certifications needed for computer support specialist positions. (See list, right.)
- These programs tend to cover: basic hardware; PC components; operating systems; networks; most commonly used software applications; and troubleshooting. Self-motivated individuals may independently prepare to take certification exams by using books or online prep materials.
- Knowledge of the computer hardware, software and systems used in a particular industry may be required to obtain a computer support specialist position within that industry.
- Computer support specialists must continually upgrade their knowledge and skills in order to remain current and effectively perform their jobs.

### How do I find out about computer support specialist jobs?

- **Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink** has many computer support specialist job postings (contact 1-866-317-JOBS or visit [www.careerlinkpittsburgh.com](http://www.careerlinkpittsburgh.com) to learn more).
- Many employers use local newspapers or online search engines to advertise computer support specialist openings.
- Local employers also use The Pittsburgh Technology Council's careers database (<http://careers.pghtech.org>) to list these and other IT positions.

### Where can I get training locally?

**Beattie Technical School** — 412-366-2800, [www.beattietech.com](http://www.beattietech.com). Basic computer technology program open to 10th, 11th and 12th graders from sending schools\* and to adults.

**Bradford School** — 412-391-6710, [www.bradfordpittsburgh.edu](http://www.bradfordpittsburgh.edu). 10-month computer specialist diploma program.

**Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC)** — 412-237-2511, [www.ccac.edu](http://www.ccac.edu). User Support Certificate and User Support Associate Degree.

**Forbes Road Career and Technology Center (CTC)** — 412-373-8100, [www.forbesroad.com](http://www.forbesroad.com). Computer Networking / Engineering Technology program open to 10th, 11th and 12th graders from sending schools\* and to adults.

**ITT Technical Institute** — 1-800-353-8324, [www.itt-tech.edu](http://www.itt-tech.edu). 2-year associate degree program in information technology.

**New Horizons Computer Learning Center Institute** — 412-920-5100, [www.nhpittsburgh.com](http://www.nhpittsburgh.com). Online and classroom instruction towards industry-recognized certifications.

**Parkway West Area Vocational Technical School (AVTS)** — 412-923-1772, [www.parkwaywest.org](http://www.parkwaywest.org). Information Communications Systems Technology program open to 10th, 11th and 12th graders from sending schools\* (starting this fall).

**Pittsburgh Technical Institute (PTI)** — 412-809-5369, [www.pti.edu](http://www.pti.edu). Associate degree in Information Technology as well as various relevant certifications.

**Steel Center Area Vocational Technical School (AVTS)** — 412-469-3200, [www.scavts.net](http://www.scavts.net). Courses for high school students and adults that provide relevant computer support specialist training and certification opportunities.

*\*Area high schools served by these vocational schools.*

### Can I get help paying for training?

- Limited training funds may be available through **Pittsburgh/Allegheny County CareerLink**.
- Financial aid may be available for some local training programs.

### Remember...

Labor markets are affected by economic, social, and institutional factors that are difficult to predict. No one can forecast perfectly how many jobs will be available, or whether there will be too many or too few workers to fill those jobs. The reality is that employment is never a guarantee, even for individuals who pursue training in demand occupations.

The Three Rivers Workforce Investment Board (TRWIB) is charged with promoting a coordinated and accountable employment and training system for Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. Responsibilities include setting and monitoring local performance standards, chartering CareerLink comprehensive and community centers that provide a range of services to jobseekers and employers, and certifying qualified training providers. Board members are appointed by Mayor Tom Murphy (City of Pittsburgh) and Chief Executive Dan Onorato (Allegheny County).

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