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Area manufacturers hope to build labor pipeline with Manufacturing Day tours

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The next frontier in the effort to close the skills gap in manufacturing is educating the educators.

That was a big focus for Wisconsin Lt. Gov. [Rebecca Kleefisch](#), who brought together a roundtable of executives from Waukesha County manufacturing companies at **TLX Technologies** in Pewaukee on Friday to discuss how to build a talent pipeline for manufacturing jobs.

While the executives brainstormed, middle school students peeked into the conference room as they walked past on a tour of the growing facility, an example of one effort to build that pipeline that has been widely embraced by schools and companies.

Dozens of manufacturing companies in the Milwaukee area opened their doors to students from their communities to showcase diverse career opportunities for National Manufacturing Day. *Click through the slideshow to see inside two factories in Waukesha County — Stanek Tool Corp. and TLX Technologies.*

[Neil Karolek](#), president of TLX Technologies, said the difference between the next generation of workers and the current aging workforce is that students want to be mentally challenged by their career, and they're not afraid of moving around between companies or locations to find that.

"I don't think there are any 'push-a-button' jobs left in the U.S., since we have higher standards of living," he said.

Kleefisch said most students realize that the current jobs in manufacturing offer those challenges when they tour a factory, but many educators and parents don't get the same opportunity to take the tour, and may still have misconceptions about what a manufacturing career is like today.

"We need to educate the educators that 50 percent of new Wisconsin jobs in the next few years will require more than a high school diploma, but less than a bachelor's degree," Kleefisch said.

Olivia Barrow covers manufacturing, travel and tourism for the Milwaukee Business Journal.