Corporate Voices for Working Families

Workforce Readiness Principles

Executive Summary

We need to take a new and different approach to prepare our nation's young people – our next generation of workers and citizens – to be successful in school, on the job and throughout life. We must create an integrated system of learning and development that provides a range of opportunities for young people to develop the skills needed to make successful transitions to school, work and life.

Corporations, with an ongoing need for skilled young people to enter their workforces, have much to offer, and much to gain, from a stronger talent pipeline. In order to remain competitive in the global economy, business must work with educators, policymakers and other community-based leaders to implement strategies that improve the workforce readiness of young people in this country.

The 21st Century Workforce Crisis

Businesses throughout the United States are facing a crisis. Young people today – the workforce of tomorrow – are not prepared to contribute to or succeed in a knowledge-based economy. The crisis is one that threatens our nation's ability to compete in a rapidly changing and more competitive global economy. And if left unresolved, it is a crisis that will undercut the standard of living and way of life for our children – and theirs.

Workforce readiness skills for this next generation mean more than just having the necessary basic academic skills. To remain competitive, businesses also require employees to have applied workplace skills: professionalism, communication, teamwork, innovation and critical thinking.

We have a critical business need to improve workforce readiness in this country. Here's why.

JOBS ARE CHANGING. Our nation is continuing the transition from an industrial- to a knowledge-based economy.

DEMOGRAPHICS ARE CHANGING. As the baby boom generation retires, businesses will require a strong pool of new entrants to the workforce to continue the American traditions of innovation, research and development. Yet most estimates suggest there will be far fewer young people entering to replace retirees.

NEW ENTRANTS ARE UNDERPREPARED. In Are They Really Ready to Work? employers report that more than 40 percent of high school graduates lack the skills they need to make a successful transition to the workplace of the 21st Century.

HIGH DROPOUT RATES. Almost one-third of ninth graders do not complete high school in four years, and in urban centers the number increases to about one-half. With fewer jobs expected for those without higher education, the high school dropout rate is a crisis for young people – and for business.

As a nation we risk diminishing the economic vitality and competitiveness of our business community – and reducing the standard of living and expectations of a generation of young people who will soon take their place in society as heads of working families, employees and voters.

Corporate Voices for Working Families Principles

The following principles serve as a guide creating a new system that will prepare young people to make successful transitions to school, work and life in the 21st Century.

YOUNG PEOPLE: An integrated approach to learning and development must reach all young people, provide additional supports to young people in disadvantaged situations and address young people as active participants in designing and implementing solutions.

LEARNING: An integrated approach to learning and development must support a full range of learning opportunities with a focus on basic and applied skill development; such learning opportunities must be available in a variety of settings throughout the day; before, during and after school; and throughout the year.

PROVIDERS: An integrated approach to learning and development must recruit, train and compensate a professional staff that has the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to support young people.

INFRASTRUCTURE: An integrated approach to learning and development requires an infrastructure for coordinated and strategic action.

ACCOUNTABILITY: An integrated approach to learning and development utilizes multiple assessment mechanisms that measure a range of outcomes and rely on improved collection and use of data.

ALIGNMENT: An integrated approach to learning and development requires educators, business and community leaders to align their goals and strategies.

PARTNERSHIPS: An integrated approach to learning and development requires bringing all relevant stakeholders to the table across sectors and systems.

Recommendations

The business community can and must play a major role in enhancing our nation's workforce readiness by articulating the skills young people need to succeed, by working across sectors to provide opportunities for young people to develop the skills, by encouraging policymakers to create a new system that supports such development and by increasing the coordination of efforts throughout the business community. As examples:

QUANTIFYING CORPORATE REMEDIAL TRAINING INVESTMENT: Corporations should track their remedial training investments so that they gain a better understanding of what they invest. With this knowledge, business leaders will be able to make more informed decisions about where in the talent pipeline they can most efficiently and effectively invest to ensure that new entrants are prepared to succeed in the workplace.

IMPROVING COORDINATION OF BUSINESS STRATEGY: Given that corporations depend upon skilled talent, and that the corporate sector has much to offer in terms of knowledge, experience and resources, it is critical that the business community collectively, and businesses individually, develop a more coordinated strategy to address these challenges.

INCREASING EFFECTIVE CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION: Finding ways to work together and leveraging each sector's unique strengths will lead to increased quantity and improved quality of engaged learning opportunities and improved workforce readiness.

INCREASING LEADERSHIP IN THE PUBLIC POLICY ARENA: It is critical that business leaders use their influential position to talk to policymakers at all levels of government about the changes needed in our education system so that it is transformed into a system that is seamless, coordinated, integrated, and able to provide the opportunities and training young people require in order to make successful transitions to the workplace.

FOCUSING SPECIAL ATTENTION ON CREATING ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS FOR DISCONNECTED YOUTH: It is clear there is a drop-out crisis in the United States. Business has a critical role to play in creating alternate pathways for disconnected youth.

A Time for Action

We have an opportunity now to help enhance the educational system in a way that benefits our young people and strengthens our business community. But we must act now – and we must harness the resources of the public and private sectors to make the changes that our necessary to protect our future.

For a more comprehensive position paper—and our statement of principles—regarding workforce readiness and the 21st Century workforce crisis, please go to our website at www.cvworkingfamilies.org.