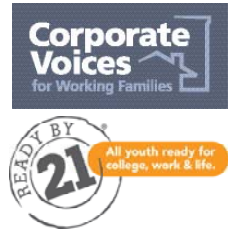


WHAT ARE BUSINESS LEADERS SAYING ABOUT WORKFORCE READINESS?



The future of American business competitiveness is directly tied to the quality and skills of the current and incoming workforce. But many entry level employees are transitioning from school to the workforce without the skills needed to succeed at work. Leaders from both the private and public sectors agree that youth are not prepared and that ensuring they have the skills to achieve is imperative for the nation's economic success.

Given the education and skills gap affecting the U.S. today, Corporate Voices for Working Families (Corporate Voices) conducted a series of surveys to gain a better understanding of business leaders' current level of engagement and interest in supporting the work readiness of their future employees. The 150 surveyed business leaders were also asked to share their current practices and interests in building partnerships with community leaders to prepare their future workforce. Knowing that business alone cannot prepare future workers for the workplace, it was important to gauge the willingness of business leaders to partner with community and education leaders and work together to ensure that young people have the opportunities they need to develop important work skills.

Ninety-seven percent of surveyed business leaders agree that their organization considers workforce readiness a critical business imperative.

Workforce Readiness Considered Critical

Survey respondents were asked to express current attitudes toward investing in workforce readiness and their concerns on how the lack of preparedness of their entry level workers affects their business bottom line. The following findings reflect that business leaders are engaged and consider workforce readiness a high priority, but have concerns about internal business buy-in and coordination.

- In support of Corporate Voices earlier research, entitled, *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*, business leaders concur that the skills most lacking in entry-level employees are critical thinking and communication.

- Ninety-seven percent of surveyed business leaders agree that their organization considers workforce readiness a critical business imperative.

- Business leaders are deeply concerned about their future workforce and the cost of providing training to a generation of workers they view as ill-prepared for the demands on the job.

- These leaders agree that it is imperative that the top decision makers (i.e. "C-Suite Executives"), within their own organizations focus on workforce readiness and the talent development pipeline as a critical investment in their future productivity - not an additional expense.

- Business leaders are concerned with how their investments in workforce readiness training programs link with other community programs run by their own internal corporate departments, specifically with training and development; human resources; and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Engaging Community Leaders is Essential

Survey respondents were asked to explain their level of involvement with community organizations with the goal of ensuring youth are ready for work. The findings below reflect that business leaders are already engaged with community leaders, and they feel they can provide these leaders with expertise to help close the education and skills gap in their communities.

- The majority of the business leaders surveyed are already involved in a variety of community-wide partnerships to advance the education and skill levels of their future workers. They report that they


are engaged through the support of:

- » Afterschool programs or child care
- » Apprenticeships
- » Certification programs
- » College awareness programs
- » Course development
- » Diversity programs
- » Internships
- » Job fairs
- » Job shadowing
- » Mentoring
- » Recruiting new employees
- » STEM programs
- » Summer programs
- » Tuition reimbursement/scholarships



Business leaders believe they bring important private sector expertise to community partnerships and can offer valuable assets.

- Those business leaders who are already engaged want to be recognized for their work and are interested in allocating their resources in the best way possible to ensure that they are receiving qualified and educated workers.
- Business leaders believe they bring important private sector expertise to community partnerships and can offer valuable assets, including leadership, advocacy, infrastructure support, and financial contributions.
- They report a number of frequent challenges and frustrations in their community partnerships, including:
 - » Lack of data delivered in a way to show the story of investments and the direct impact on youth and families;
 - » Frequency of duplicate conversations with community partners;
 - » Lack of transparency in the partnership from the community organization; and
 - » Lack of firm and measurable outcomes.



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- It is important to note that while most business leaders are engaged, a small section of those surveyed feel that their executives still need to be educated on the direct link between the education talent development pipeline and their future workforce.

Linking Survey Findings with Previous Research

As the findings above state, business leaders are engaged in workforce readiness training and feel it is important, despite challenges, to partner with community organizations to ensure that they are receiving a prepared and skilled workforce. These findings build and support two previous surveys of business leaders by Corporate Voices: *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce* and *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce: Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training*.

Are They Really Ready to Work? reflected employers' frustrations over the preparedness of new entrants to the workforce. Employers expect young people to arrive with a core set of basic knowledge and the ability to apply their skills in the workplace - but the reality is not matching the expectation. The research highlighted that among recent high school graduates nearly half (42%) lack the skills they need to succeed in the workplace. The skills most lacking include critical thinking and communication, similar to the survey results highlighted in this brief. The strong desire and need of businesses to have skilled and prepared workers makes investments in workforce readiness critical.

In 2009, Corporate Voices released *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce* that found almost half of employers are providing some type of workforce readiness, or

remedial training, for their employees. Because employees are entering the workforce without adequate basic and applied skills, employers are stepping up to provide the training necessary for sufficient job performance. Similar to the new survey results, this report reflected the employers' frustrations with their entry-level workforce and that they are willing to conduct and produce their own trainings in order to provide their workers with the skills they need to succeed.

Business leaders can work with the Ready by 21 National Partnership as collaborators in their efforts to advance global competitiveness by strengthening the workforce readiness pipeline.

Role of Business Leaders in Communities

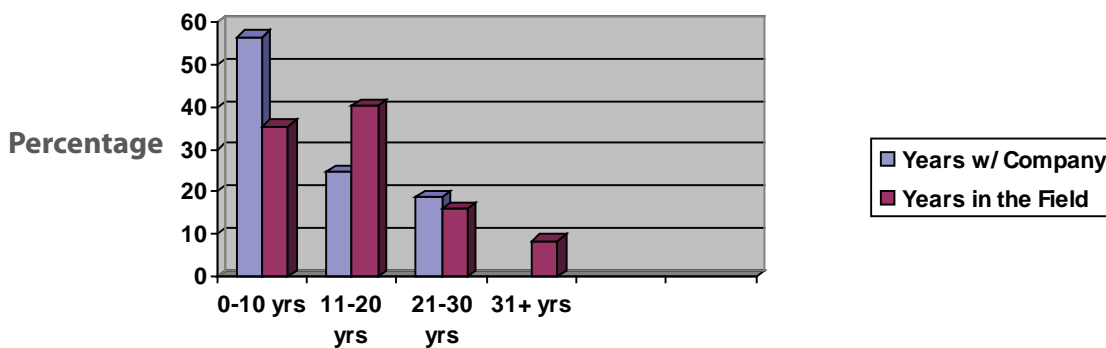
Business and community leaders must work together to ensure that youth are ready for work. Through the Ready by 21 National Partnership, organizations, including Corporate Voices, work with both private and public leaders to implement strategies in the community to ensure that all youth are ready for college, work and life. Business leaders can work with the Ready by 21 National Partnership as collaborators in their efforts to advance global competitiveness by strengthening the workforce readiness pipeline. Strengthening the pipeline means creating a comprehensive, coordinated and

integrated system of learning and development that provides a range of opportunities for youth to succeed throughout school and into their working lives. These survey results show that business is already engaged in the community, despite challenges, and can offer valuable assets to community organizations. Corporate Voices has developed a variety of resources and tools that will help both private and public sector leaders work together and build more sustainable and strategic partnerships to strengthen supports for youth and working families across the education and talent development pipeline. To access these resources and tools, please visit www.corporatevoices.org.

Profile of Surveyed Business Leaders

Nearly 150 business leaders were surveyed. The majority of the respondents had been employed less than ten years with their organizations, but had 1-20 years experience in their respective fields (see table below). The leaders were employed by a variety of large, medium and small businesses. Many of the respondents were willing to go beyond the survey: 61 respondents were willing to share more information about their organizations' challenges, opportunities and relevant policies and practices around workforce readiness, and 53 respondents wanted to become more involved in Corporate Voices' work. These business leaders were surveyed at conferences and in a series of conference calls and meetings with Corporate Voices' member companies and local business leaders between Fall 2009 - Spring 2010.

Business Leader Profile: Years of Employment and Experience



(Note: Survey respondents were not asked to identify 31+ years with a company.)

About Corporate Voices www.corporatevoices.org

Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we improve the lives of working families by developing and advancing innovative policies that reflect collaboration among the private sector, government and other stakeholders. To create bipartisan support for issues affecting working families, we facilitate research in areas spotlighting the intersecting interest of business, community and families: workforce readiness, family economic stability, flexibility in the workplace, and work and family balance. Collectively our more than 50 partner companies with annual net revenues of more than \$1 trillion, employ more than 4 million individuals throughout all 50 states.

About Ready by 21 www.readyby21.org

Ready by 21 is a set of innovative leadership capacity-building strategies developed by the Forum for Youth Investment. The national experts at the Forum have decades of youth policy experience which they leveraged to make the Ready by 21 strategy the most effective way to help communities improve the odds that all youth will be ready for college, work and life. The Ready by 21 strategy recognizes that effective leadership is the critical lever to improving health, educational and social outcomes for children and youth. The Ready by 21 strategy is flexible enough to meet leaders where they are and helps focus them on goals and the systems needing to be addressed; challenges them to create a shared vision and agenda; helps leaders build broader partnerships, set bigger goals, use better data and implement bolder strategies; and asks how all stakeholders, including youth, can deliver solutions.

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