



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Increasing and Broadening Learning Opportunities

Corporate Voices for Working Families is dedicated to improving the education system in this country. Through the reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind*, education reforms should focus on educational excellence, ensuring that young people develop the full range of skills they will need to pursue higher education and/or enter the workforce. By agreeing on new educational standards that value a wider range of skills, including critical thinking, communication, teamwork, creativity and professionalism, by encouraging schools to integrate these

skills into the traditional school day, and by measuring how well our schools are teaching them, we will help ensure that all young people master the full set of competencies they need to succeed in school, work and life.

“The global achievement gap...[is] the gap between what even our best suburban, urban and rural public schools are teaching and testing versus what all students will need to succeed as learners, workers, and citizens in today’s global knowledge economy.”

— *Tony Wagner, **The Global Achievement Gap***

In addition to integrating real-world competencies into the school system, success will also depend on additional supports for other educational

partners including afterschool programs, service learning, and mentoring opportunities, each of which can help young people develop these all-important workforce readiness skills.

Afterschool Programs

High-quality afterschool programs and other efforts to expand the formal learning day yield impressive results, including noteworthy gains in academic performance and fewer behavior problems, especially for disadvantaged students. But just as important from an employer’s perspective, these programs serve as a key delivery mechanism to help young people develop the essential applied skills like critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, communication and teamwork that business leaders demand.

Community Service and Service Learning

Service learning has shown promising results on a number of fronts. It can strengthen student engagement, improve school attendance, curb absenteeism and other risk factors for dropping out of school and foster students’ commitment to social and civic responsibility. Community service helps young people build teamwork, communication, leadership skills and a work ethic that will serve them well in the working world.

Mentoring

Young people with dedicated, committed mentors tend to perform better in school, stay away from drugs, graduate from high school and go on to college, and generally have more positive attitudes about their futures than their peers. Similarly, workplace-based mentoring can impact the skills, knowledge and work habits students will need to succeed in professional life.

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We believe Congress could dramatically improve workforce readiness for young people by focusing on the following education policy changes.

- **Reauthorization of *No Child Left Behind*:** We expect many changes will be considered in the debate on NCLB reauthorization, at a minimum the law should:
 - Redouble efforts to improve outcomes for all young people, especially those most at risk of failure.
 - Avoid widening the global achievement gap, the gap between what our best schools are teaching and what students need in the global economy, by encouraging schools to incorporate key workforce skills—critical thinking, communication, teamwork and creativity—into the curriculum.
 - While broadening what we expect young people to learn, schools will need to utilize a wider array of assessment tools to measure progress.
- **Afterschool Programs:** Despite big increases in afterschool funding over the last decade, demand still far exceeds supply. Congress needs to:
 - Continue to build on expansions in federal afterschool resources, through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiatives.
 - Help at-risk high school students with a new Afterschool for Older Youth program to keep them in school and give them marketable career skills.
 - Boost the number of qualified afterschool educators by investing in the Teaching Fellows for Expanded Learning and After School (T-FELAS) Act.
- **Community Service and Service Learning:** We urge lawmakers to fund a “universal, voluntary” public service program. Specifically Congress should:
 - Fully fund existing federal programs that support service learning.
 - Reevaluate community-service programs to ensure that they target incentives to reach disconnected youth.
 - Support a Summer of Service program targeting federal grants to states and localities for summer community service opportunities.
 - Consider legislation that would provide tax deductions to organizations that train and hire at-risk youth through community-service programs.
- **Mentoring:** Lawmakers could dramatically expand the opportunities for mentorship nationwide with several steps. We recommend that Congress:
 - Appropriate adequate funding for current federal programs and invest new dollars in state and local mentoring partnerships.
 - Expand the “allowable” uses of existing federal program funds under a wider array of youth development and prevention programs.
 - Incorporate language supporting the role of mentoring into *NCLB*.