



From an “Ill-Prepared” to a Well-Prepared Workforce

The Shared Imperatives for Employers
and Community Colleges To Collaborate

From an “Ill-Prepared” to a Well-Prepared Workforce

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how these partnerships enable working learners to combine education and work and how they help improve student completion rates and enhance the skills of the workforce.

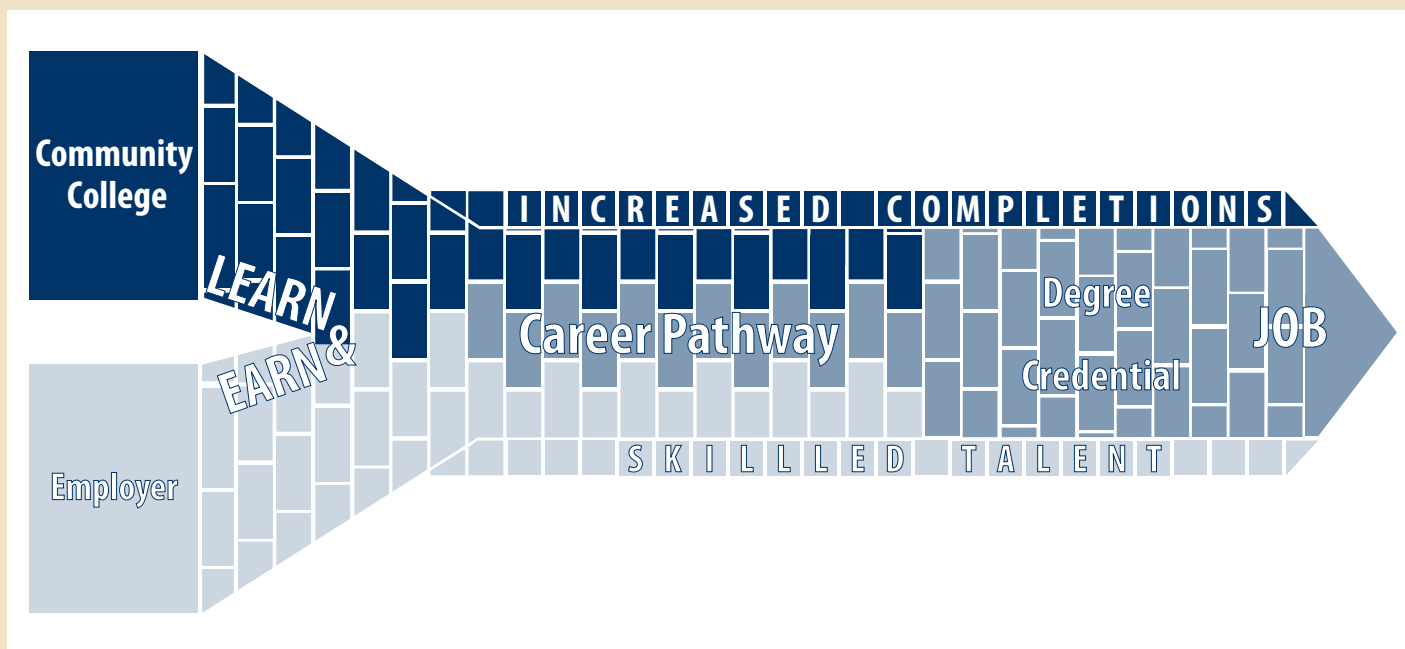
This paper builds on two prior research papers, *Are They Really Ready to Work?* and *The Ill-Prepared Workforce*, which Corporate Voices published in partnership with the American Society for Training and Development, The Conference Board, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

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Learn and Earn Initiatives: Closing the Skills Gap

The skills gap, along with demography and geography, is contributing to a troubling mismatch between job openings and unemployment. Employers and advocates, such as David R. Jones, president of the Community Service Society of New York, agree that the mismatch between employers' needs and the skills and education level of segments of the workforce is hindering the economic recovery. The president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis recently suggested that if the match were at typical levels, the unemployment rate would be at 6.5 percent rather than 9.6 percent, with clear implications for America's economic recovery and long-term vitality.¹ A closer match between young workers' skills and employers' needs is essential in addressing two of the three major factors currently driving high unemployment.

"Learn and earn" initiatives are one crucial strategy for addressing the skills gaps that are hindering workers and business. When community colleges and employers collaborate to provide working learners with the opportunity to pursue postsecondary credentials while simultaneously working and earning a living, all stakeholders benefit. Community colleges are better positioned to ensure students persist and complete their education; employers are able to hire and retain skilled workers; and, critically, low-income young adults are able to acquire the education and skills needed to succeed in the 21st-century workplace.



Introduction

The labor market in America today faces a paradox. Although the United States is experiencing high unemployment and joblessness, employers widely report difficulty finding qualified and skilled workers.² The gap between employers' needs and workers' skills — and the imperative to close it — has been an ongoing call to arms from the business community for many years and has not abated even in current economic conditions.³

At the same time, education is suffering a crisis of efficacy on multiple levels. National high school graduation rates languish around 70 percent, while some urban schools graduate barely four in 10 of the young people who walked through their doors four years earlier.⁴ At the postsecondary level, a similar attrition problem has helped focus national attention on the importance of improving college completion rates. It has become clear that while colleges, particularly community colleges, are successful at providing entrée to higher education, they are not producing nearly enough individuals with completed certificates and/or degrees with labor market value.⁵

These two trends — employers in need of better prepared workers and educational systems that fail to produce an adequate supply of appropriately skilled graduates — have been on a collision course, creating a growing skills gap in the marketplace. Yet that course is not irreversible. With decisive action and a sustained commitment, it is not too late to align these trajectories — for the benefit of not only employers and schools but also individuals, families, and the nation's economy. When business and industry collaborate with education to create opportunities for individuals to advance academically and along career pathways, business, education, and students can all reach their goals.



No group has more to gain from successful employer/education collaborations than low-income, underskilled workers. Recent research shows that postsecondary education has become the gateway to family-sustaining wages and the middle class.⁶ Trapped by economic necessity to earn a living, many low-skilled workers find it difficult to manage employment while obtaining the education and/or training that will lift them out of minimum-wage jobs. By reaching out to each other and forming innovative, sustainable partnerships, employers and educators can drive systems that support postsecondary attainment for these entry-level workers, creating “working learners” and thereby meeting the goals of business, education, and individuals in need of career development.⁷

Meeting the goals of business, education, and lower-skilled working students will require greater focus on the reasons that compel employers and community colleges to collaborate in the first place. That effort should start with identifying the important mutual goals that support postsecondary completion and ultimately prepare individuals for economic and life successes. It also should involve examining the ways in which promising collaborations are formed and function, with an eye toward replicating and scaling these model partnerships to create systems that will ensure a well-prepared workforce. Finally, it should explore the key public and private policies that enhance successful collaborations. This report focuses on these three imperatives. It also illustrates these practices through a number of case studies.

“In order to ensure that community college students have both educational opportunities that lead to completion and workforce opportunities that lead to jobs, partnerships are essential.”

*— Dr. Gerardo de los Santos,
President and Chief Executive Officer,
League for Innovation in the Community College*

This report serves as an invitation to community colleges to join with employers to look for joint solutions that both address employers’ workforce readiness challenges and help community colleges better meet the needs of the students and communities they serve. By collaborating, businesses and educators can greatly enhance the preparation of today’s students for tomorrow’s workplace. If community college leaders are to successfully fulfill their mandate of offering students an education that is not only high quality but also meaningful and relevant, they need clear guidance from employer partners about the skills employers require. Employers, too, will benefit from closer partnerships with trusted community college partners, which are

best positioned to ensure a skilled and credentialed workforce in the regions they serve. We hope this report serves as a valuable starting place to explore solutions about these mutually shared interests.

The report draws on findings from two closely related pieces of corporate research, *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce: Exploring the Challenges of Employer-Provided Workforce Readiness Training*⁸ and *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*.⁹

Why Should Employers and Community Colleges Collaborate?

The simple answer to the question of why employers and community colleges should collaborate is because they share similar goals. Employers seek workplace-ready workers, while community colleges aim to prepare students with the education and credentials required to succeed in regional economies. A broader answer to the question points to other important reasons, which are examined in more detail in the following sections. But at their cores, employers and community colleges are fundamentally tied by their common interest in working learners. And effective collaboration has to start with a better understanding of the challenges working learners face.

Community College Students Need Support from Both Employers and Educators

The majority of community college students are squeezed between two unforgiving bureaucracies — school and work — juggling inflexible work hours with class schedules and other demands. Community colleges are open to everyone and are relatively inexpensive, serving a diverse student population. The majority of community college students are considered “nontraditional,” defined as having one or more of the following risk factors for dropping out: older than 25, from typically underserved populations, employed or recently laid off from employment, and with dependent family and financial responsibilities.¹⁰

While many community college students are older, younger attendees often share these risk factors. Recent research shows that fully 84 percent of community college students under age 24 worked during the 2007–08 school year. Some 66 percent were employed more than 21 hours per week, and 30 percent worked almost full time, at 35 hours or more.¹¹ The research also shows that the risk of dropping out increases with the number of hours worked. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only one in five young people who begin their education at two-year institutions graduates within three years.¹² Not surprising, the number one reason young adults cite for dropping out of college is the stress of working to support themselves and going to school at the same time.¹³

These challenges are only exacerbated for low-income students who, without some postsecondary credential, are at risk of permanent entrapment at the bottom of the emerging economy. According to new research by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, around 30 million of the 47 million jobs that will come online over the next decade will require postsecondary credentials.¹⁴ Roughly half of those jobs will require only a one-year certificate or two-year degree. However, the jobs will be out of reach for too many individuals unless they are successfully able to negotiate school and work. Leaders in business and education must reach out to each other to build bridges of opportunity that help individuals overcome existing barriers to higher skills.

Millions of new jobs will be out of reach for too many individuals unless they are successfully able to negotiate school and work.

“The more closely employers and community colleges can communicate and collaborate, the more effectively colleges can prepare all students to achieve their goals.”

*— George R. Boggs, Ph.D.,
President and CEO,
American Association of Community Colleges*

This problem belongs not only to underskilled, low-income individuals, but also to employers trying to find work-ready employees to fill jobs and to community colleges charged with delivering more graduates. According to the Georgetown Center’s research, as the U.S. economy slowly recovers, demand for new college degrees will fall short by 3 million postsecondary degrees by 2018.¹⁵ What better way to bridge this gap than by tapping the potential of underskilled young workers entering or languishing in the workforce?

This gap is a problem not only for students and employers, but also for the entire national economy. If it is not fixed, the United States

will continue to fall further down the rankings for college attainment within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Once at the top of the rankings with 39 percent of adults holding a two- or four-year degree, the United States has fallen behind 10 other OECD nations, which have boosted college attainment rates — some to more than 50 percent — while America’s have stagnated.¹⁶ If U.S. employers are going to remain competitive in the global economy, they need close ties to the institutions that are educating tomorrow’s workforce with the skills and competencies required in the new global marketplace.

Establishing innovative employer-education partnerships, and growing and replicating successful partnerships, will create positive outcomes for three stakeholders:

- Individuals will be supported and encouraged to complete postsecondary credentials essential to obtaining or growing into employment with family-sustaining wages;
- Business will gain skilled, work-ready talent; and
- Education will be more closely matched to labor market demands, and business will support the college completion agenda.

Employers Need Community College Partnerships To Meet Workforce Readiness Training

Today, employers invest a total of approximately \$485 billion annually on formal and informal education and training,¹⁷ with a significant amount directed to addressing entry-level skills gaps.¹⁸ However, education and training is not a primary focus or area of expertise for employers, and they must rely on educational institutions to prepare tomorrow’s workforce for a competitive global economy. That reality is only reinforced by growing evidence that businesses find today’s labor pool wholly unprepared for the demands of work. Two important pieces of corporate research, discussed in the following section, recently showed that (1) employers think young new employees are not

ready for work, and employers struggle with recent graduates who lack basic and applied skills; and (2) employers' attempts to address the skills gap are falling short. These dynamics compel employers to turn to education partners, particularly community colleges, to supply education and training competencies that employers do not readily possess.

Are They Really Ready To Work?

In Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century Workforce, a survey conducted by Corporate Voices for Working Families, The Conference Board, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management, more than 400 employers across the United States were asked to identify the skills they thought were most important for the success of new entrants to the workforce and, concurrently, what levels of those skills recent graduates possessed. The findings of this survey, summarized in this section, show that respondents found that new entrants to the workforce are not prepared with the skills they need for long-term job success.



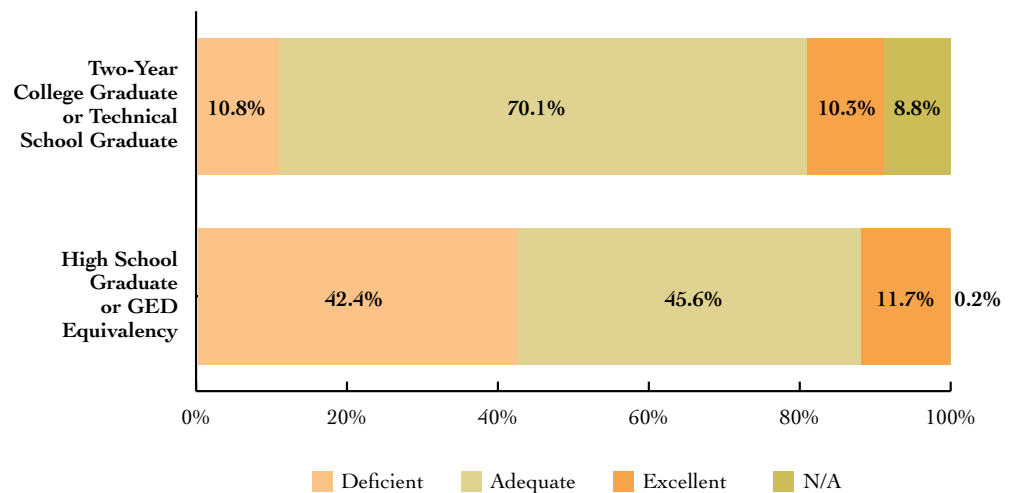
Respondents evaluated new entrants according to levels of educational attainment (high school and two-year colleges for purposes of this report) and according to different skill sets — basic knowledge¹⁹ and applied skills.²⁰ **The skills that employers cited as being the most important for job success were all applied skills, defined as:**

- Professionalism/work ethic;
- Oral and written communications;
- Teamwork/collaboration; and
- Critical thinking/problem solving/creativity.

The findings suggest that while employers expect young people to arrive in the job market prepared with a set of basic and applied skills, recent graduates’ preparedness does not meet these expectations.

More than 42 percent of employers reported that the level of overall preparation of high school graduates to the workforce was “deficient.” This significant lack of workforce readiness for entry-level jobs is experienced nationwide. When asked about the overall preparation of two-year college graduates, employers responded that they were better prepared than high school graduates, but only 10.3 percent of employers reported two-year college graduates as “excellent” in terms of overall preparation.

Overall preparation of high school graduates to the workforce



High School Graduates — Basic Knowledge

Respondents reported high school graduates as being most “deficient” in the following basic knowledge/skills: writing in English (72 percent), foreign languages (61.7 percent), and mathematics (53.5 percent). Yet writing in English and mathematics were reported to be among the top five “very important” basic skills for job success for new workforce entrants with a high school education.

Employers ranked them as having “adequate” levels of English language (73.1 percent), humanities (67.8 percent), and reading comprehension (58.2 percent), and very few employers reported high school graduates as having an “excellent” skill level in any basic knowledge topic.

High School Graduates — Applied Skills

In terms of applied skills, employers reported high school graduates as being most “deficient” in written communications (80.9 percent), leadership, (72.5 percent), professionalism/work ethic (70.3 percent), and critical thinking/problem solving (69.6 percent). Notably, among the applied skills that employers reported as the “most important” for job success for new entrants with a high school education were professionalism/work ethic (80.3 percent) and critical thinking/problem solving (57.5 percent).

In contrast to other applied skills, employers rated high school graduates as “adequate” in three applied skills: information technology application (62.8 percent), diversity (61.8 percent), and teamwork/collaboration (60.9 percent). Very few employers reported high school graduates as having an “excellent” skill base in any of the applied skills. However, 15.8 percent and 10.3 percent of employers reported them as having an “excellent” level of skill for information technology application and diversity, respectively.

Two-Year College Graduates — Basic Knowledge

Employers responded that two-year college graduates were “deficient” in writing in English (46.4 percent) and mathematics (25.4 percent) — two skills that employers identified among the top five “very important” basic skills for job success for new entrants with this level of education. Two-year college graduates were rated “adequate” in reading comprehension (83 percent), English language (82.9 percent), and science (76.7 percent) — the other three of the top five “very important” basic skills valued by employers. Employers did not rank this group as having a significant “excellent” skill level for any basic knowledge category.

Two-Year College Graduates — Applied Skills

Two-year college graduates were found to be “deficient” in both written communications (47.3 percent) and professionalism/work ethic (31.3 percent), which represent two out of the five “very important” skills for job success for two-year college graduates. In the three other “very important” skills — teamwork/collaboration, oral communications, and critical thinking/problem solving — they were mostly ranked as “adequate.” The only applied skill that two-year college graduates were reported to be “excellent” in by many employers was information technology application.



The Ill-Prepared Workforce

Because *Are They Really Ready to Work?* illustrated a crisis in workforce preparedness among recent graduates, a subsequent survey of employers was conducted to determine what employers are doing to address the issue. Corporate Voices for Working Families, the American Society for Training and Development, The Conference Board, and the Society for Human Resource Management surveyed 217 employers in 2008 to examine corporate practices for training newly hired graduates. As in the 2006 report, these graduates had high school diplomas, two-year college degrees, and four-year college degrees.

Workforce Readiness Training: Lackluster Results

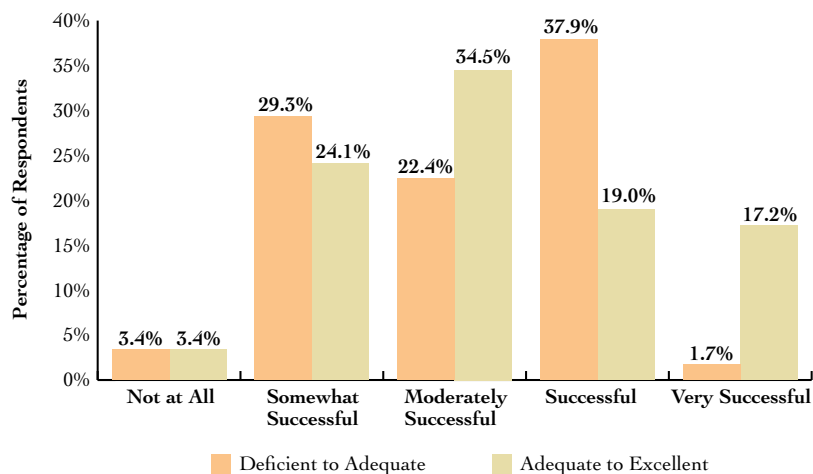
Among the survey's noteworthy findings is that, while they do not see it as their primary responsibility, 46 percent of employers surveyed do provide workforce readiness training for new entrants in an attempt to address the crisis in preparedness. Too often, however, these training programs get lackluster results. Less than 20 percent of employers rate their companies' programs as "very successful" in raising skill levels either from "deficient" to "adequate" or from "adequate" to "excellent." Most companies report these programs as being only "moderately successful" or "somewhat successful."

Programs Offered Do Not Match Employers' Needs

This lukewarm rating of training programs is linked to the fact that the training employers typically offer does not match the needs they themselves identify as most urgent, especially in the applied skills discussed on page 8. Employers reported offering considerable workforce readiness training in information technology application and teamwork/collaboration, but not enough in critical thinking/creativity. This is disturbing, given that 91.7 percent of respondents indicated a "high need" for critical thinking/problem solving skills, and 68.6 percent reported a "high need" for creativity/innovation.

In fact, most employers surveyed were not offering training in the very applied skills they identified as "high need," leaving a significant training gap. In critical thinking, for example, there is a training gap of 43.6 percent. A similar training gap exists for creativity/innovation, despite its role as a driver of business innovation, which is considered a key competitive advantage in the global knowledge economy. Large training gaps also exist for ethics/social responsibility (55 percent), professionalism (47.5 percent), and lifelong learning (44.1 percent).

Respondents report uneven success in workforce readiness programs



These two reports indicate the mismatch among the skills needed by employers, the skills new workforce entrants possess, and the workforce training being provided by educational institutions as well as employers.

These findings should resonate with community colleges that are struggling with oversubscribed remedial education classes. The skills and competencies employers are seeking in entry-level workers are similar to prerequisites required for college admission — basic knowledge of writing and mathematics and applied skills such as critical thinking/problem solving.

A notable finding in the data is that while employers report widespread deficiencies in high school graduates' skill sets, skills improve as education level increases. This suggests that educational attainment can and does have a positive impact on the level of workforce preparedness of new entrants, pointing to the need for employers and community colleges to work together to bridge the skills gap.

The idea of colleges working with employers to help prepare and advance the workforce is not new. However, much of the workforce training agenda has occurred under customized training contracts or business-specific training on the not-for-credit side of the college. While these collaborations teach us much about strong business-education partnerships, it is time to take the partnerships beyond episodic, one-off approaches to systematic change that promotes postsecondary completion of credentials with labor market value. Fortunately, this comes at a time when business is ready and willing to partner with colleges to establish mutually beneficial solutions and create systems that serve the long-term goals of individuals, businesses, and the education community.

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Community Colleges Need Employers To Support and Inform Their Mission

For the majority of students, education, in the end, is about a job. When asked about motivation for educational attainment or continuing education, particularly at the community college level, students indicate one of the top motivators is to obtain the skills needed for career entry or advancement.²¹ If community colleges are to efficiently fulfill their mission to prepare the workforce of an economic region, they need clear and sustained input from employers on the skills and competencies their students must obtain to meet local labor market demands.

The corporate research detailed on pages 7–9 provides an overview of the foundational, work-ready skills that employers seek. It offers a starting place to deepen conversations between community colleges and the employers and economic regions they serve. By seeking further clarity and understanding of the skill needs of regional employers, community colleges can build greater knowledge, trust, and relationships among the employer community and become education and training providers of choice. A greater understanding by community colleges of the skill needs of regional employers also serves their goal of increasing the number of students who obtain valuable postsecondary credentials.

If community colleges are to fulfill their mandate to prepare the workforce of an economic region, they need clear and sustained input from employers on the skills their students must obtain to meet local labor market demands.

Employers, for their part, can and do support the access and completion agenda of community colleges in numerous ways. By promoting the value of education and training, encouraging and supporting working learners, and establishing creative partnerships, employers are providing access to continuing education for individuals who might not otherwise have the opportunity to complete a postsecondary credential. The following section documents promising practices and best-practice examples of these partnerships.

Employers support postsecondary completion by contributing materials and intellectual assets to curricula development that can match workforce readiness with academic preparedness. By providing contextualized learning opportunities and establishing career pathways tied to accelerated learning strategies, employers can make significant contributions to completion of credentials.

Ill Prepared for Work Equals Ill Prepared for College

Just as *Are They Really Ready to Work?* reveals that employers find high school graduates ill prepared for the workforce, studies show that colleges are facing the same issue with incoming students. A substantial body of research shows that only about half of high school graduates are considered to be academically prepared for postsecondary education.²² Eighty percent of all two-year colleges and fully 99.6 percent of public two-year colleges report providing remedial services to their students.²³

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education,

Analyses of students' preparation for college-level work show the weakness of core skills, such as basic study habits and the ability to understand and manage complicated material. The lack of preparation is also apparent in multiple subject areas; of college freshmen taking remedial courses, 35 percent were enrolled in math, 23 percent in writing, and 20 percent in reading.²⁴

A closer examination of the skill requirements of employers and academic preparation requirements of community colleges reveals significant overlap. This common ground is another compelling reason why employers and community colleges should be working together toward the common goal of preparing individuals for success in the workplace and in postsecondary education.

Comparing competencies: What employers and community colleges expect

| SKILLS/COMPETENCIES | WORKFORCE READINESS | ACADEMIC READINESS |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Basic Skills | Writing in English | Writing |
| | Mathematics | Mathematics |
| | Reading comprehension | Reading |
| Applied Skills | Professionalism/work ethic | Basic study habits |
| | Critical thinking/problem solving | Understand and manage complicated materials |
| | Oral and written communications | Applied writing |
| | Teamwork/collaboration | |

The Completion Imperative: Stemming the Dropout Rate

Although there is much debate over how retention and completion at two-year colleges are measured, there is little disagreement that the number of postsecondary credentials and degrees must increase for the United States to remain globally competitive. Unfortunately, only 30 percent of first-time, full-time two-year college students earn an associate degree within three years of entering school, and only one-half of first-time college students at two-year colleges persist to the second year.²⁵

As noted previously, most community college students work part or full time and cite the pressures of juggling work, school, and family obligations as reasons for dropping out of college. When employers are engaged in their employees' postsecondary completion goals, they become a source of support, motivation, and encouragement instead of an impediment. Moreover, when working learners see their education as relevant to their job and their prospects for career advancement, they are more likely to stay on a pathway to completion. Early findings from Corporate Voices' research on business-led "learn and earn" models that support postsecondary completion indicate that employers are in a unique position to influence the academic achievement of their employees. Community colleges can leverage partnerships with employers to increase completion rates among these working learners.



Promising Practices in Employer and Community College Partnerships



As noted in *The Ill-Prepared Workforce*, employer attempts to bridge work readiness gaps on their own often fall short. However, when employers partner with community or technical colleges, their joint efforts often produce innovative solutions resulting in appropriately skilled workers with postsecondary credentials. In fact, in conjunction with *The Ill-Prepared Workforce* survey, a small group of employers were asked to share their most innovative strategies to address entry-level workforce readiness skills gaps. Through those informal discussions, four out of five employers pointed to partnerships with community colleges as the most innovative and effective way to address skills gaps and develop a qualified talent pool in their community.

Combining academic remediation into workforce preparation has become a winning strategy in numerous employer/education partnerships. See the I-BEST program overview on page 16 for more information on one of the most successful and emulated models.

The following examples of employer/community college collaboration provide insight into both the form and the function of successful partnerships. Innovative business and college leaders seeking solutions to the challenges of creating skilled and prepared working learners will find proven practices that might be adapted to their current situations.

- **Verizon Wireless and Pima Community College provide flexible education and training to a large nationwide technical workforce.**

Over the last 10 years, Verizon Wireless and Pima Community College in Tucson, AZ, have developed an education and training collaborative for technical, call center, and retail employees. Through its collaboration and partnership with a delivery vendor, ITCAP, also located in Tucson, Verizon Wireless has provided training for technical support staff, 35 call centers, and 2,400 retail store employees across the country.

In support of its corporate goal of “creating an excellent customer experience,” Verizon Wireless provides technical training to employees by offering tuition assistance for college courses and/or industry certification in Comptia A+, Desktop Support, English as a Second Language, Berlitz Spanish, and a range of customer service topics. Courses are offered to Verizon Wireless employees nationwide in various formats, including online, on site, and in learning labs.

Employee incentives for completing training courses include career progression and promotions. Most Verizon Wireless technical support staff who have completed certification and received course credit also used this as a starting point to pursue additional college-level work.

Pima Community College and ITCAP work together to deliver training to Verizon employees. Pima provides the credit curriculum; coordinates content to meet Verizon Wireless’ needs; and ensures the courses meet accreditation requirements, including assigning credit levels and hours, conducting internal curriculum reviews, and assessing faculty credentials. ITCAP delivers the courses and meets the company’s logistical requirements, including managing course scheduling, timing, site details, and student support.

The Verizon Wireless, ITCAP, and Pima Community College collaboration provides an example of a large-scale, long-term collaboration that meets the education, training, and credentialing needs of a national corporation.

- **United Parcel Service (UPS) stabilized its overnight, part-time workforce and kept thousands of jobs in Louisville, KY, through the creation of Metropolitan College (MC), a public/private partnership with Jefferson Community and Technical College (JCTC) and the University of Louisville (UofL).**

UPS is a Fortune 100 shipping company with \$45.3 billion in annual revenue that operates a Next Day Air hub in Louisville, KY. When an unstable local workforce pool led UPS to consider expanding its Next Day Air operations in other locations, local city, county, and state officials realized the economic importance of keeping UPS in the region. To meet UPS' workforce needs and to provide eligible Kentucky residents access to tuition-free postsecondary education, JCTC, UofL, the commonwealth of Kentucky, Louisville Metro Government, and UPS formed MC.

MC participants employed at UPS' Next Day Air hub are eligible for payment of up to 100 percent of their full-time undergraduate Kentucky resident-rate tuition. UPS funds half of the tuition, while the public partners match the other half of the tuition and infrastructure costs. UPS also reimburses participating employees 100 percent of book costs and awards academic bonuses to employees at semester completions, credit hour milestones, and graduation. MC provides career and academic planning as well as financial and support services vital to motivating students and keeping working students engaged.

MC students are free to pursue certificates and/or degrees in any discipline offered by JCTC or UofL. The certificate or degree need not align with positions or careers at UPS. Between 1998 and spring semester 2009, more than 2,500 individuals earned certificates, associate degrees, bachelor's degrees, and master's or other advanced degrees through MC. Most participants were the first in their families to complete college and might not have achieved this success due to financial barriers.

MC helped UPS stabilize its workforce, decreasing turnover from 100 percent to a respectable 20 percent. In return, the city, region, and state kept UPS Next Day Air jobs in Louisville and gained an increasing number of residents with postsecondary credentials.



- **AOL engages Year Up to provide skilled entry-level employees through an intensive training program leading to college credit and internships for urban young adults.**

A difficult challenge for many employers is finding skilled entry-level talent. Todd Alston, senior technical director at AOL, a leading-edge web services company, says the company "goes through quite a few candidates before finding young people with applicable abilities and the will to succeed." By contracting with Year Up, AOL secured a pipeline of skilled talent and met organizational diversity needs.

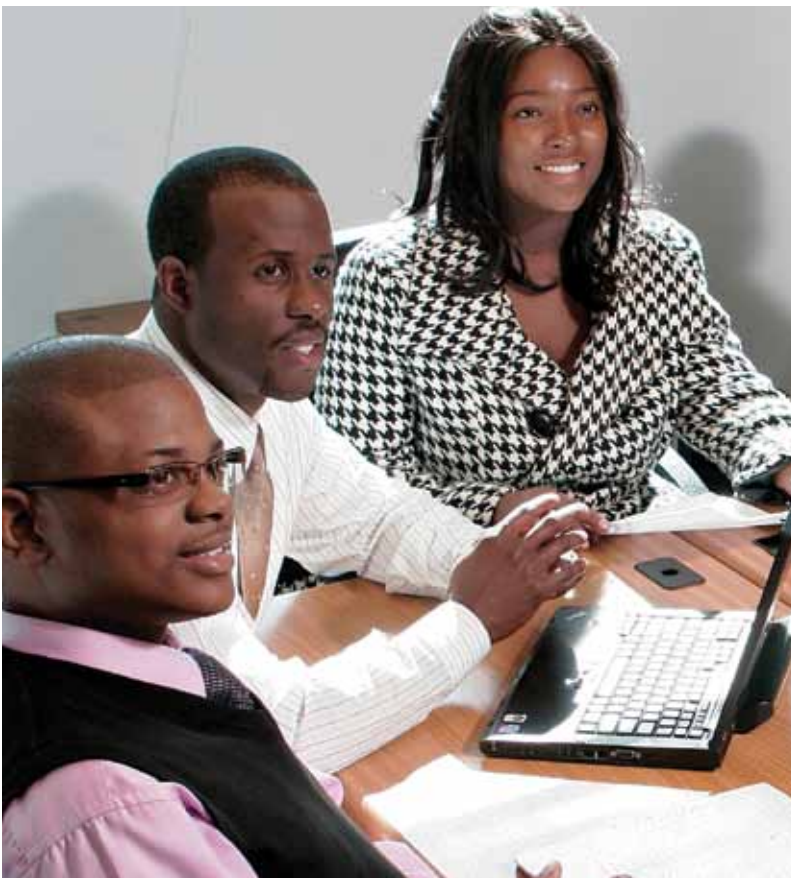
Year Up is a one-year, intensive training program that provides urban young adults ages 18–24 with a unique combination of technical and professional skills, college credits, an educational stipend, and corporate internships. Founded in Boston, Year Up now operates in Atlanta; Chicago; New York City; Providence, RI; the San Francisco Bay area; and the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. In

each region, Year Up partners with a postsecondary institution to award 18 college credits to interns for work accomplished during a six-month classroom training period.

When Year Up participants begin their six-month internship at AOL, they have already completed six months of rigorous classroom training that includes essential technical skills that meet AOL's basic skill requirements. Participants are co-enrolled at Northern Virginia Community College — earning 18 hours of college credits — and receive a weekly stipend to offset living expenses. Year Up participants start in entry-level positions with the expectation that further internal training will quickly make them productive, contributing members of a technology team in areas such as information technology, network operations, desktop support, or operations analysis. AOL's partnership with Year Up has given the company a diverse pool of skilled and highly motivated young people who are proving to be a source of vetted entry-level workers.

To date 1,845 young adults nationally have completed the Year Up experience, with 85 percent obtaining a job earning at least \$30,000 yearly within four months of completing the program. In addition, approximately 29 percent of Year Up graduates are enrolled in postsecondary institutions.

- **Washington state's Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model combines remediation and English language acquisition with workforce training that leads to credentials or certificates that meet state employers' needs for skilled talent.**



Often cited as one of the most promising practices in workforce readiness preparation, Washington state's I-BEST model leverages partnerships among community colleges, business, industry, and government to address basic skills gaps. Like much of the nation, most entry-level jobs in Washington state are filled by a quickly growing group of underskilled students/workers. I-BEST was developed to move adult basic education (ABE) and English as a second language (ESL) students into career pathways, vocation or professional/technical training, certificates, and degrees. ABE students are defined as individuals who lack the equivalent of an 8th grade level of competency in reading, writing, or math and may also be in need of ESL instruction to become employable.

I-BEST began with a pilot of 10 community and technical colleges in 2006. The program model is now offered through all 34 Washington colleges, with each college using at least two of the more than 130 approved vocational professional/technical integrated programs currently available. Offerings range from certified nursing assistant, welding, and accounting to early childhood education, manufacturing, information technology, corrections/law enforcement, and more.

The I-BEST model includes an ABE/ESL instructor and a content-specific instructor in each classroom. Working as a team, they create overlapping teaching and learning opportunities that incorporate program content, language, and learning activities tied to vocational outcomes.

It is important to note that the I-BEST programs are not instructional models but provide a systems approach to a career pathway in each field. I-BEST students are given the opportunity to build necessary basic skills as they learn the subject matter content. This connection helps fill the existing skills gap at the basic level, which in turn, better prepares students for the additional high school or college-level foundational work needed to finish programs for certification and degrees.

Successful I-BEST students earn the same college credits as students who are enrolled in any given professional or technical area. I-BEST students meet the same expectations inherent in all coursework and meet the standards of training and education established statewide.

■ **Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding's (NGSB) The Apprentice School directly connects skills training to college credit and credential attainment while offering full-time employment with benefits.**

NGSB is a business sector of Northrop Grumman Corporation, a leading Fortune 100 global security company. NGSB needs a reliable source of highly skilled, technical workers and future leaders in shipbuilding and repair. NGSB's The Apprentice School fills this mission-critical role.

Replacing a retiring shipbuilding workforce and training employees equipped for the escalating technological challenges of nuclear-powered shipbuilding is the business imperative that justifies NGSB's investment of more than \$100,000 per student at The Apprentice School. NGSB pays new apprentices full salaries with benefits as they progress through four- and five-year programs at The Apprentice School. Apprentices, who must have a high school diploma or GED and be U.S. citizens with the ability to obtain a security clearance, see their starting hourly wages increase on a schedule by term completion until graduates earn more than \$50,000 in base salary.

With 80 percent of graduates still employed after five years and 70 percent still employed after 15 years, more than 2,700 graduates of the school are currently among NGSB's 21,000 employees. The Apprentice School graduates continue to move through career lattices at NGSB, serving in 240 different leadership jobs with more than 70 vice presidents, directors, and senior managers in water-front operations, engineering, and design.

The Apprentice School's World Class Shipbuilder Curriculum offers academic instruction in 19 registered apprenticeship programs critical to shipbuilding. Apprentices choose from careers such as pipefitter, heavy metal fabricator, maintenance electrician, and welder. Because all programs are registered with the Virginia Apprenticeship Council, graduates receive journeyman credentials in their chosen crafts or trades.

The school also offers six optional advanced programs in Marine Design, Modeling & Simulation, Nuclear Test, Production Planning, Cost Engineering, and Advanced Shipyard Operations in partnership with Thomas Nelson and Tidewater Community Colleges. Apprentices who complete the advanced programs receive applicable associate degrees, including an associate of science degree in engineering, an associate of applied science degree in engineering technology (mechanical or electrical), or an associate of science degree in business administration. Impressively, more than 32 percent of a recent class of graduates earned associate degrees as part of their apprenticeship experience.

Conclusions Drawn from Collaborative Practices

The model programs outlined in the previous section represent a number of different approaches to collaboration between community colleges and industry. Although each collaboration is unique, and the roles played by employers and educators may vary, each partner typically contributes key characteristics and well-defined roles and expectations. Corporate Voices’ ongoing survey of diverse “learn and earn” program models reveals some important and consistent features that good college and corporate partners bring to successful programs. The following summary table can serve as a helpful starting point for dialogue between business and college partners.

| A GOOD COLLEGE PARTNER PROVIDES A BUSINESS PARTNER: | A GOOD CORPORATE PARTNER PROVIDES A COLLEGE PARTNER: |
|--|---|
| Flexibility and speed in meeting business needs | Specific challenges to be addressed, competency needs |
| Dedicated faculty and program manager support | Dedicated company liaison to college |
| Single point of contact for outreach and operations | Local support staff at on-site locations |
| Student support for admission and placement processes | Promotion of education and training opportunities |
| Tutoring and advisement services | Awareness and recruitment opportunities |
| Academic and career planning | Career navigation support within corporate career pathways |
| Cost-effective pricing options | Tuition assistance policy information |
| Customized curriculum content | Subject matter experts |
| Train-the-trainer and corporate capacity building | Recognition of credentials and completion |
| Flexible course scheduling and delivery, including online and blended learning | Information about flexible work options available to working learners |
| Partnerships with other community, education, and workforce groups | Opportunities for teacher externships |
| Teamwork and collaboration | Teamwork and collaboration |
| Articulation agreements for credit transfer | In-kind contributions of material, equipment, etc. |
| Foundation and general education courses | Contextualized and mentored learning |
| Acceptance of prior learning assessment for accreditation | Support workers’ prior learning assessment |
| Acceptance of corporate training for college credit through American Council on Education (ACE) recommendation | Corporate training mapped for credit recommendation by ACE |

Public and Private Policies Influence the Success and Growth of Business and Community College Partnerships

From large corporations to medium and small employers, private business spends approximately \$485 billion annually on education and training, both formal and informal.²⁶ Accessing, retaining, and developing talent is a priority for employers.²⁷ Companies support ongoing training, education, and postsecondary completion across a continuum from high-engagement involvement to less involved forms of support and encouragement. Very high-support programs provide full-time paid employment and benefits to workers as they earn postsecondary credentials, such as NGSB's The Apprentice School. Although few companies provide this level of support, most offer some continuing education benefits. Many of these expenditures could be enhanced with closer collaboration between employers and education providers.

Best practice companies offer tuition assistance programs (TAPs) as entry table stakes in the game of recruiting and developing a talent pool. Some companies sweeten the pot by strengthening their TAP with prepaid tuition, stipends for books, and recognition of academic milestones through bonuses and/or pay increases. In some instances, companies have leveraged their TAP to meet strategic internal goals, like Verizon Wireless and UPS have done in partnership with community colleges. TAPs enable many workers to complete a postsecondary credential who might not otherwise be able to. Many employers also work closely with the American Council on Education to ensure that select internal training translates into accreditation by their education partners. This practice provides a boost of academic attainment for working learners that often gives them a jump start on postsecondary completion.

Many larger corporations also negotiate with education providers to deliver classes in a blended learning environment that includes online, on-demand access, as well as on-site academic supports. Accomplishing this type of instruction and support requires close working relationships grounded in solid, data-driven feedback, as found in the Verizon Wireless/Pima Community College/ITCAP partnership. Moving along the continuum of business policies and practices that support postsecondary completion, many companies offer career navigation information linked to the educational requirements of defined career pathways. Some provide career and education mentors and may go so far as to tie supervisors' annual bonus payments to the educational attainment and upward career mobility of the employees they manage. When educators understand this practice, it can stimulate fruitful collaboration between business and community colleges.

From large corporations to medium and small employers, private business spends approximately \$485 billion annually on education and training.



Lower on the scale of employer engagement is the common practice of providing intern opportunities for young adults. This approach also offers a venue for business and education to collaborate to ensure shared outcomes that serve employers, educators, and students. Where they do not exist, internships can establish a starting point for collaboration between business and community colleges. The table below summarizes some of the more common employer practices used to support working learners.

Sample employer practices that support postsecondary completion

| PRACTICE | CHARACTERISTICS |
|--|--|
| Apprenticeship | Provide full-time paid employment with benefits while learning a trade and earning a credential. |
| Tuition Assistance Program | Include best practices such as prepaid tuition, books stipend, recognition of academic milestones, and/or completion bonus. |
| Accredited Corporate Training | Work with ACE to gain credit recommendation for internal training. |
| Flexible Work Scheduling | Apply flexibility policies or practices to working learners to support academic schedule. |
| Support for Industry-Endorsed Skills Certifications | Acknowledge the value of industry-recognized credentials and certifications with specific monetary support for attainment. Best practices also reward attainment. |
| Public/Private Partnership | Participate in regional collaborations with public entities to establish education supports and pathways. Includes working with the public workforce system. |
| Cooperative Education Partnership | Collaborate with higher education providers to provide contextualized learning opportunities. This is often a formalized process with semester credit and/or salary. |
| Negotiate Instructional Delivery | Establish blended learning opportunities with online, on-demand access and/or on-site instruction. |
| Prior Learning Assessment | Support process of attaining credit for prior learning and/or training. |
| Mentorship | Purposefully recruit from at-risk youth populations and support with mentorships and education opportunities. |
| Career Navigation | Link academic achievement to defined career pathways. |
| Internships | Provide contextualized learning with working experience. |

Supportive *public* policies can also play a role in enhancing business practices and corporate policies and will be critical in scaling learn and earn models to be taken across the country. For example, it is clear that tuition assistance is an essential element of most learn and earn models because many low-income young adults cannot afford to pay for postsecondary education on their own. Tax incentives that encourage employers to support educational opportunities for their employees are one important way the government can help ensure that learn and earn models are created, thrive, and ultimately grow to scale. Other policy strategies, including education policies and workforce training policies, will be similarly influential. Working together, business and community college leaders can articulate a set of policy recommendations that will help them more effectively meet the needs of working learners, ensuring that working learners have the skills and credentials needed to make effective transitions to career path employment.

The Time is Ripe for Businesses and Community Colleges To Work Together

The U.S. labor market has entered unprecedented territory with the rising demands of global economic competition and the exponential expansion of knowledge and technology. As employers require more highly skilled workers and individuals need the education and training to meet employer expectations, it is no longer acceptable to simply do more of the same. It is worth remembering that as academic achievement and workforce readiness fall short of their goals, underskilled, underprepared workers will bear the greatest burden of economic displacement.



The time is ripe for businesses and community colleges to work together in ways that go far beyond the current state, which includes practices that are often well intentioned, but are typically limited in terms of scope. Forging partnerships that take collaboration to new levels of scale will require imagination, innovation, and trust-building among willing leaders. Corporate Voices is currently identifying and defining the continuum of activities that leading employers are offering to support postsecondary completion. Preliminary findings of promising practices are discussed in this paper, with more expansive analysis and examples forthcoming. Based on this early work, it is clear that through thoughtful and consistent collaboration, more is possible.

For example, employers can join educators in defining credentials with labor market value that address skills and competency needs — and create a functional shorthand for future business-education collaboration. Employers offering flexible scheduling can relieve some of their working learners' stress by better matching college calendars. Corporate social responsibility goals can be tapped as sources of support for postsecondary completion among low-income young adults.

The possibilities for successful, sustainable, and scalable collaborations are limited only by business' and community colleges' imagination, vision, and willingness to enter into promising new relationships. The business community stands ready to help and will welcome the expertise and guidance of community college leaders who extend a hand in partnership. Ultimately, it will take this heightened level of collaboration between two institutions with closely shared interests to move our nation from an *ill-prepared* to a *well-prepared* workforce.



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About Corporate Voices for Working Families

Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization shaping conversations and collaborations on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we create and advance innovative policy solutions that reflect a commonality of interests among the private sector both global and domestic, government, and other stakeholders.

We are a unique voice, and we provide leading and best-practice employers a forum to improve the lives of working families, while strengthening our nation's economy and enhancing the vitality of our communities.

To learn more about Corporate Voices' workforce readiness portfolio and our postsecondary education work, please visit www.corporatevoices.org/our-work/postsecondary-education-completion.