

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

The Shared Imperatives for Employers and Community Colleges To Collaborate



SUMMARY

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. 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.

At the same time, education is suffering a crisis of efficacy on multiple levels. Community colleges, which have been particularly successful at providing entrée to higher education, are not producing enough individuals with completed certificates and/or degrees with labor market value.

These two trends—employers in need of better-prepared workers and educational systems striving to produce an adequate supply of appropriately skilled graduates—have been on a collision course. Yet, that course is not irreversible. With decisive action and a sustained commitment, we are able to align these trajectories—not only for the benefit of employers and schools, but also for individuals, families, and the nation’s economy. When business and industry collaborates 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, under-skilled workers. Recent research shows that postsecondary education has become the gateway to family sustaining wages and the middle class.

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

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the first place, or expand their efforts if they are already doing so. The full report, “From an ‘Ill-prepared to a Well-Prepared Workforce,” identifies important mutual goals that support post-secondary completion and prepare individuals for economic and life successes. It examines ways in which promising collaborations are formed and function, with an eye toward replicating and scaling these partnerships. The report and micro-cases are available at [www.corporatevoices/well-prepared-workforce](http://www.corporatevoices/well-prepared-workforce).

## 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

## 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 American Council on Education 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.

From large corporations to medium and small employers, private business spends approximately \$485 billion annually on education and training, both formal and informal. Clearly, talent development is a top priority for employers. Companies support ongoing training, education, and postsecondary completion across a continuum from high-engagement involvement to less involved forms of support and encouragement. The table above is a sampling of these corporate practices.

Very high support programs, such as apprenticeships, provide full-time paid employment and benefits to workers as they earn postsecondary credentials. Although few companies provide this level of support to entry-level workers, most offer some continuing education support. Many of these practices and expenditures could be enhanced with closer collaboration between employers and community colleges.

Offering flexible work schedules that compliment academic needs is a way in which many employers support continuing education for working learners. These working learners look to community colleges to provide education and skills training that ultimately leads to employment. By partnering with employers, community colleges gain clarity and understanding of the skill needs of their regional economies and further a mutual goal of increasing the number of students who obtain valuable postsecondary credentials. See the full report at the Corporate Voices website for more detailed information on the employer and community college partnerships.

## The imperatives for businesses and community colleges to collaborate are clear

- Employers need community college partners to meet workforce readiness training
- Community colleges need employers to support and inform their mission
- Community college students need support from both employers and educators

The time is ripe for businesses and community colleges to work together in ways that go far beyond current limited understandings. Forging partnerships that take collaboration to new levels requires imagination, innovation, and trust building among willing leaders. Corporate Voices leads a Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team that is identifying and defining the continuum of activities that leading employers are undertaking to further postsecondary completion goals.

For the complete **“From an ‘Ill-Prepared’ to Well Prepared Workforce”** report and information about the Learn and Earn Business Leadership Team and micro-business cases, go to: [www.corporatevoices.org/well-prepared-workforce](http://www.corporatevoices.org/well-prepared-workforce).