



Workplace Readiness Issues and How Can States Address These Needs

Carlos Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Principal Research Scientist
American Institutes for Research
1000 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW
Washington, DC 20007
202-403-5343
202-403-5454 (fax)

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What States Should Do

- ...states should consider requiring students to participate in at least some community-based activities . . . These activities might include service learning, structured internships, field-based investigations or other community projects

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What States Should Do

Launch statewide APPRENTICESHIPS

- Perceived and documented relevance to a successful transition to work — through school/business partnerships — is likely to increase the holding power of schools, for it will strengthen students' perception that staying in school will help them land better jobs.

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A dichotomy has been established between preparing for college and better preparing directly for work.

- The focus of education cannot be limited to creating academically rigorous courses that help those who are planning to go to college — so they can prepare for the really good jobs.
- *The facts do not support the proposition that employers of high school graduates need, or are looking for, academic achievement alone.* This is not at all to say that academic achievement is where it needs to be. For a significant segment of the population, it is too low and needs to be raised. The bar needs to be high enough so students graduate with the skills they need to continue to learn throughout their careers and throughout their lives.



Michael Cohen (2001), The Aspen Institute
The Purpose of High School

- Promote healthy personal and social development
- Help young people develop their skills, attitudes, and dispositions is necessary for successful transition to adulthood
- Become a source of personal identity and civic responsibility
- Develop personal habits of persistence and reliability, commitment to community and sense of their place in it.

Can't be accomplished solely within the walls of the high school.



Engage Employers

- Those making education policy have a responsibility to come to grips with the kind of workforce preparation that employers value. They would also be wise to involve employers in decisions more directly — perhaps through partnerships such as those urged by the National Association of Manufacturers and others.



Engage Employers

- "If connecting the classroom to the workplace can help diminish the skills gap between what employers require to remain competitive and the jobs for which graduating seniors are adequately prepared, this is an effort that will serve our entire nation."

– Larry Stupski, Charles Schwab and Company

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Engage Employers

- "Cluster strategies for states are efforts to take advantage of naturally existing groupings of companies, usually within a particular industry but often including suppliers," explains Steve Crawford, who directs the NGA's division of social, economic, and workforce programs. "That sort of expertise creates a synergy in a region and gives a competitive advantage to the companies and firms."

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Engage Employers

- "the key ingredient in any industry is knowledge or human talent, so part of a good cluster strategy is to make sure that universities, the high schools with their career academies, the community colleges, are producing folks with the skills you'd want."

□ [National Governors Association](#) contracted with the [Monitor Group](#), a consulting group based in Cambridge, Mass., to produce [analyses for each state of emerging, high-growth clusters](#).

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"The Workforce Readiness Report Card" from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills

Skills critical to success in the 21st century workforce:

- a combination of basic knowledge and applied skills, with **applied skills trumping basics** as in the top five most important for any level of education;
- professionalism/work ethic, teamwork/collaboration, and oral communications, which are rated the three most important applied skills;
- knowledge of foreign languages, an area that will increase in importance in the next five years, more than any other basic skill;
- and creativity/innovation, which is projected to increase in importance for future workforce entrants.

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Applied Skills

- professionalism/work ethic
- teamwork/collaboration
- oral communications

Rated the three most important applied skills!

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Applied Skills – Soft Skills

- Employers complain more about a lack of “soft” or “applied” skills among America’s high school graduates than about inadequate academic skills.
- Conference Board survey: 70 percent of human-resource officials cited deficiencies among graduates in applied skills, such as professionalism and work ethic, defined as “demonstrating personal accountability and effective work habits, such as punctuality, working productively with others, time and workload management.”

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Evidence

□ **“Employers we interviewed said they were able to redesign jobs around academic-skills deficiencies, but not soft-skills deficiencies.”**

□ James E. Rosenbaum, Sociologist,
Northwestern University

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Evidence

□ Nearly all jobs, he says, “require basic work habits, such as regular attendance, motivation, and discipline, and our schools are not taking steps to improve students in these areas. Indeed, the opposite may be occurring. If teachers are compelled to focus more on academic skills and test scores, they may devote less attention to soft skills and efforts to improve them.”

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Evidence

□ **At least one analysis**, by the Princeton, N.J.-based Mathematica Policy Research Inc., suggests that improvements in nonacademic competencies—such as work habits and a belief that success results from hard work rather than luck—may be just as important for improving later earnings and postsecondary success for some students as gains in academic skills.

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Evidence

- [National Educational Longitudinal Survey](#) (NELS, student cohort from the time they were 8th graders in 1988 until 2000)
- For most students improving one of the nonacademic competencies would have had a larger effect than better math scores on their chances of enrolling in and completing a postsecondary program, with 43 percent benefiting most from an improvement in work habits.
- When it came to earning a bachelor's degree, however, improving math scores still had the largest effect for the most students.

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The quality of judgments...

- High school reformers recently have been describing their areas of emphasis as better preparation for college and better preparation for work, for those not going to college. With regard to preparation for work, *the quality of judgments* exhibited by reformers will determine how useful resulting changes are.

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Your Schools

- Discuss how the schools systems in your state are/could address the “soft skills” challenges. How will you know?

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Your Schools

- Lay out the steps for a statewide APPRENTICESHIP Initiative.



Your Communities

- Develop and discuss your thinking on developing cluster strategies for your communities.
 - Remember: states need to focus on areas of high-skill, high-wage job growth that may not necessarily require a four-year college degree, but typically do require some education and training beyond high school.
