

College and Career Readiness and Economic Competitiveness

Across the board, expectations have risen for the academic skills and knowledge students must possess to enter, and succeed in, college and careers. Simultaneously, the U.S. education system has essentially remained unchanged, leaving students unprepared for the global economy they will enter once they graduate and employers without the skilled workers they need to keep America, and their companies, competitive.

Current realities and challenges for K-12 students

- All students need a more rigorous foundation in literacy, math and science – no matter what college or career path they choose.
- College and career readiness is NOT about all students attending four-year colleges or universities; it's about access to the middle class. Increasingly, access to middle class jobs requires at least some postsecondary education and or training. This means raising expectations for all students, particularly for those students for whom the education system has served the least – minority and low-income students.
- A major challenge is ensuring all students have access to the core academic knowledge and skills they need to make their own career decisions – as opposed to finding themselves with minimal career opportunities due to a lack of academic preparation.
- 80% of jobs are “middle and high” skilled and require education beyond high school (e.g., associate's, bachelors, and professional, industry-recognized certifications).¹
- 62% of new jobs available in 2018 will require some postsecondary education. For employers, this translates to a need for 22 million new workers with postsecondary degrees. Without a dramatic change of course, the U.S. is on track to fall short of this need by a full three million workers.²
- The New York Times recently noted that “more jobs demand much higher math and reading proficiency than in the past.”³ A Pioneer Institute study found that manuals for auto mechanics, plumbers and those that repair appliances are written “up to a Grade 14 reading level.”⁴
- Data reflect that our students are facing heavy academic competition. On a 2009 international assessment of 15-year olds, over 20 countries had higher *average* achievement scores than the U.S., but also had higher percentages of students performing at the highest levels of mathematics literacy.⁵

We face a serious skills mismatch and U.S. employers are increasingly concerned about their ability to find the workers they need – even in the face of high unemployment rates:

- Of the U.S. employers surveyed in ManpowerGroup's 2011 Talent Shortage Survey, 52% reported difficulty in finding the right talent, up from 14% in 2010. This is the highest U.S. percentage reported in the annual survey's six-year history. With unemployment remaining high, there is an over-supply of available workers but an under-supply of skilled talent.⁶

¹ Holzer, Harry & Robert I. Lerman (2009). *The Future of Middle-Skill Jobs*. Brookings Institution.

http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2009/02_middle_skill_jobs_holzer.aspx

² Carnevale, Anthony P. & Stephen J. Rose (2011). *The Undereducated American*. Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce.

<http://cew.georgetown.edu/undereducated/>

³ Rich, Motoko. *Tough Calculus as Technical Schools Feel Deep Cuts*. *New York Times*, Jul 9, 2011.

⁴ Fraser, Alison L. (2008). *Vocational-Technical Education in Massachusetts*. Pioneer institute White Paper No. 42.

<http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/wp42.pdf>

⁵ Programme for International Student Assessment, 2009. <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011004.pdf>

⁶ ManPower Group. (2011). 2011 Talent Shortage Survey

http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/MAN/1383434252x0x469531/7f71c882-c104-449b-9642-af56b66c1e6d/2011_Talent_Shortage_Survey_US.pdf

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- In a recent survey by global management consulting firm McKinsey & Co. of 2,000 companies, 30% said they had jobs open for six months or more because they could not find ideal candidates.⁷
- It is true that a significant number of existing jobs – including many considered to be the “fastest growing jobs” or “largest growth jobs” – are classified as “low skilled.” However, “many of these jobs are transitional in one way or another... This exaggerates the significance of low-skilled jobs and, in turn, underestimates the demand for postsecondary education and training.”⁸

The military, one of the largest employers of young American workers, also has recruitment challenges because of the inadequate preparation of its applicants:⁹

- More than one in five young people do not meet the minimum standard required for Army enlistment, as measured by the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) comprised of four academic subtests of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB.)
- Among minority applicants, the ineligibility rates are even higher: 29% of Hispanics and 39% of African Americans are ineligible, based on their AFQT scores.
- Minority candidates who do gain entry do so, on average, with lower scores than do their white peers. This excludes many of them from higher level educational, training and advancement opportunities offered by the U.S. Armed Forces.

The Bottom Line:

To compete in a knowledge -based global economy, the U.S. has to improve the educational outcomes of all students. Postsecondary education and or training is the ticket to current and future middle class jobs for individuals – and for future job growth. America’s ability to grow and prosper is dependent on our ability to educate all students to reach their – and our country’s – full potential.

The challenge, therefore, is ensuring all students have access to the academic skills they need so that they make their own career decisions – as opposed to having those decisions made for them because they did not have the academic preparation they needed. Career and technical education (CTE), dual enrollment, early college programs, and other programs play a critical role in expanding access for more students, while providing career exploration, technical and workforce skills, and other important non-academic experiences.

⁷ McKinsey Global Institute (2011). *An Economy that Works: Job Creation and America’s Future*.

http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/publications/us_jobs/index.asp

⁸ Carnevale, et al. (2010). *Help Wanted: Projections of Jobs and Education Requirements Through 2018*.

<http://cew.georgetown.edu/jobs2018/>

⁹ The Education Trust (2010). *Shut Out of the Military: Today’s High School Education Doesn’t Mean You’re Ready for Today’s Army*.

http://www.edtrust.org/sites/edtrust.org/files/publications/files/ASVAB_4.pdf