

## Actions

“The numbers don’t bode well for the future—the future of our workforce. It is in our interest to help solve the problem. And business has the capacity to help solve the problem by partnering with education and community leaders to create opportunities for young people to practice the skills they need to be successful.”

Bill Shore, Director, U.S. Community Partners, GlaxoSmithKline

The following are actions for consideration by any individuals or groups who have the opportunity to improve the basic knowledge and applied skills of those graduates entering the workforce.

Families, students, members of the community at large, as well as educators and business people may find opportunities to take actions that address the findings of this study.

High school and two-year and four-year college graduates should acquire basic knowledge and a complement of applied skills. To that end, current students should become familiar with the knowledge that is projected to increase in value to the business community, such as *Foreign Languages*.

*Professionalism/Work Ethic* is emphasized for new entrants at all educational levels, which suggests that issues of timeliness, dress, career growth, courtesy, teamwork, commitment, responsibility, integrity should be addressed as part of “Employment 101” for work-bound students at every educational level.

*Critical Thinking/Problem Solving* and *Communications*, both written and oral, are increasingly important. An emphasis on critical thinking and effective writing and speaking skills in secondary and postsecondary education can support success in the workplace.

*Making Appropriate Choices Concerning Health and Wellness* is the number one “most critical” emerging content area. Issues of nutrition, exercise, stress reduction and work-life effectiveness should be considered part of workforce readiness.

All stakeholders (business, educators, and community members) should consider methods of enhancing important workplace skills. For example, internships, summer jobs, work-study programs, job shadowing, mentoring, on-the-job training, as well as other educational approaches that include real-world experiences or community involvement, provide opportunities for students to acquire basic knowledge and skills, while cultivating applied skills.

Employers need a better understanding of the classroom environment, and academics need a better understanding of the workplace. Employers and academics should work together to make instruction meaningful and internships relevant to workplace needs.

All new entrants to the workforce should understand the importance of and need for *Lifelong Learning/Self Direction* throughout their working lives. Business should research, evaluate, and implement lifelong learning opportunities and partnerships that meet student needs and the changing knowledge and skills requirements in the workplace.

*Creativity/Innovation* is among the top five applied skills projected to increase in importance and yet employer respondents consider it “deficient.” Stakeholders should seek opportunities to encourage creative thinking and the integration of knowledge across disciplines, lateral thinking, and new ways of problem-solving. In addition, given the current emphasis on standardized testing, which may promote rote learning and memorization, all stakeholders should consider how best to nurture creativity as well.

Over the next five years employer respondents expect to reduce their hiring of high school graduates and increase the hiring of post-secondary educated workers. The current and future members of the workforce should develop a sufficient knowledge and skill base to be accepted into two-year or four-year colleges. Simultaneously, affordability of higher education for the broadest base of society must be considered.

Leadership skills must be fostered. Opportunities should be sought and provided for new entrants into the workforce to assume roles requiring them to make decisions and to consider the implications of those decisions. Seeking opportunities for students to practice skills necessary for working within groups or teams should also be encouraged.

All stakeholders should examine the areas of greatest “deficiency” and “excellence,” and consider developing cross-sector approaches to aid in the new entrants’ development. *Diversity, Teamwork/ Collaboration*, and *Information Technology Application* are now perceived as areas in which the graduates are “adequate.” How collaboration between business and schools on these skills has been promoted is an important area for assessment and modeling.

Business should consider calculating the actual costs of remedial training and determine the financial implications of providing versus not providing remedial training—both in the short and longer term—and should evaluate alternative methods of intervention.

Businesses should provide better training for new entrants so they better understand the expectations for advancement and are prepared to chart realistic career paths for themselves.

Educators should consider assessing current curricula in response to the deficiencies and future needs reported in the survey. They should research promising models for incorporating more hands-on and practical experience for students in the curricula and seek ways to involve community organizations and businesses to pilot workforce-applicable learning opportunities.

Young people and their families should assume a significant responsibility for learning and teaching, respectively. Students—the future entrants into the workforce—and their families should assume responsibility for seeking relevant and creative ways to develop basic knowledge and applied skills to enable them to succeed in the workforce.

The findings of the survey and interviews suggest the need for additional research. This work should include but not be limited to:

- case studies of programs that develop young graduates’ workforce readiness,
- roundtable discussions among employers, educators, policymakers, and community members to address workforce readiness, and
- determining methods of evaluating training initiatives or other appropriate research that derives from the findings in this study.