



A Framework for Developing the Emerging Workforce

What Communities, Schools and Families must do to Prepare Young People for Work and Life

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A skilled and motivated workforce is vital to the economic health of businesses, families and the community as a whole. When a community has prepared young people with needed skills, employers have a "deep bench" of employees that sustain and grow their businesses. Communities with a high quality emerging workforce experience revenue growth and cost savings for social supports. Young adults ready for work and life are more likely to maintain family-supporting jobs, to be healthy and to contribute to their community.

However, there are indications communities are struggling to perfect their workforce preparation efforts. Employers report shortcomings in the availability, capability or productivity of young workers. The pipeline through educational levels is too often full of holes, particularly for minority or low-income students. And many young adults are falling behind in measures of economic and social well-being. Every community suffers when it's young people are not ready to take on current needs and future challenges.

Improving or expanding efforts to prepare the emerging workforce involves the entire community: families, educational institutions, businesses, industry and labor groups, government agencies, nonprofit entities and young people themselves. When communities use the multiplicity of resources available collaboratively and intentionally, they can ensure young people have the skills needed to contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of families and the community at large.

Effective use of resources requires a framework that addresses both what communities must do to prepare the emerging workforce and what young people must know. The *system* needs a clear and comprehensive understanding of what must be accomplished together. And, educators, parents and employers need realistic and practical *strategies* for preparing emerging workers. The framework is, therefore, outlined in two parts.

System Requirements

To prepare the emerging workforce, communities must:

1. Understand the skills employers, the community and individuals need to thrive.
2. Maintain a highly responsive education and training system that teaches these skills.
3. Monitor how well its young people are mastering needed skills.

Strategic Approaches

To be prepared for the workforce, young people must:

1. Understand the communities they belong to and impact.
2. Know about the jobs needed in their community.
3. Learn the skills necessary to fill community jobs.
4. Make plans for success and see them through.

This framework for developing the emerging workforce outlines broad requirements and approaches that can be implemented by any community, region or state. The framework is based on the premise that any worker becomes “qualified” for a job based on their ability to perform specific and definable skills, that all young people must be expected to learn job skills that are relevant to their community and that understanding and connecting to one’s community is critical to that learning. Each component of the framework is to some extent sequential and fully interconnected with the other components. The tables below outline possible measures of success and policies or programs for each part of the framework. They indicate a sample of the wide variety of indicators and activities that a community could implement to prepare its emerging workforce.

System Requirements for Preparing the Emerging Workforce

1. Understand the skills employers, the community and individuals need to thrive.

Measures of Success

- The skills needed in occupations critical to the community are identified.
- The skills needed in occupations that develop new innovations for the community are identified.
- The skills that may be needed in the future to meet changing, yet unknown, local conditions are identified.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Organize industry or employer networks to communicate current and developing workplace needs.
- Convene a region-wide collaborative that reviews and improves workforce preparation efforts.
- Align certificate, diploma and degree completion standards to *skill* mastery.
- Sponsor relevant, objective and comprehensive research on the occupations and skills needed in the community.

2. Maintain a highly effective education and training system that teaches needed skills.

Measures of Success

- Educational institutions can quickly develop or adapt high-quality programs that teach skills needed in the workplace.
- The education pipeline is equitable and efficient. Opportunities for learning are available across all social or economic levels. Students start and complete educational components with proficiency.
- Communities, regions and states make financial commitments to fully funding education and to making students' share of educational expenses affordable.
- Educational institutions are linked within and between levels to avoid wasted resources or program gaps. Students can easily transition from one level to another, given documented skill proficiency.
- Career and technical education programs at secondary and postsecondary levels are high quality options for all students.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Use statewide P-16 councils and local educational institution networks to coordinate resources and efforts.
- Match employers and business groups with educational institutions to ensure state of the art equipment and curricula are used in classrooms. Involve employers in securing resources to supply schools and in developing opportunities for work-related learning.
- Conduct open houses, fairs, exploratory courses, guidance workshops and other activities to promote higher education, including career and technical education programs, to all students.
- Provide professional development to ensure teachers have skills needed to prepare all young people for work and life.
- Integrate assessment methods that document skill attainment at all educational levels.

3. Monitor how well its young people are mastering these skills.

Measures of Success

- Information on the educational pipeline is easily accessible and accurate.
- Information on the skills education and community programs teach their students or participants is available.
- Information on the qualities and quantity of young adults who are under-skilled is available.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Create or coordinate data systems to track the number of young people in the educational pipeline for the community's most critical occupations.
- Conduct ongoing research on the most significant barriers to school success.
- Develop a system for identifying disengaged young people and immediately reconnecting them to high quality services.
- Train parents to assess, advocate for and teach their children and youth work relevant skills.
- Provide professional development opportunities for education and community programs that increase their effectiveness in teaching work and life skills.

Strategic Approaches for Preparing the Emerging Workforce

1. Connect young people with the communities they belong to and impact.

Measures of Success

- Young people know about their community's resources, assets and needs.
- Young people understand how individual actions and inaction impact their community.
- Young people understand how to access or bring together resources to impact their community positively.
- Young people are involved in their communities as volunteers, leaders, and voters.
- Disconnected young people have additional help connecting to their community.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Provide training for youth and young adult volunteers and match them with appropriate agencies or activities in the community.
- Include community awareness curriculum at all levels of education.
- Reserve seats for youth and young adult representatives on local boards or commissions.
- Create community mapping activities for youth and young adults.
- Create after-school activities in leadership and community development.

2. Introduce young people to the jobs needed in their community.

Measures of Success

- Young people know about the jobs that address their community's needs, strengthen local assets and utilize local resources.
- Young people have opportunities to learn about jobs from hands-on experiences.
- Young people can describe the skills and educational requirements of jobs they have explored.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Create job placement programs that provide pre-placement training, skill development and adult support.
- Create internships, job shadowing and other career exploration activities.
- Encourage businesses and public agencies to hold open houses and participate in career fairs.
- Develop youth-led enterprises in schools, providing entrepreneurship training and career exploration.
- Train parents and mentors to assist young people with career exploration activities that reach beyond online information searches.

3. Teach young people how to successfully learn job and life skills.

Measures of Success

- Young people understand the requirements for graduating from high school and college.
- Young people know all their educational options and can assess the value and costs of each.
- Young people know their academic strengths and how they can address any weaknesses.
- Young people access resources they need to enter and finish school.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Develop assessments of work and life skills that are useful to young people in understanding their educational needs and options.
- Train parents, teachers, mentors, community volunteers, and other adults to provide academic guidance to young people.
- Fund in-school and community-based counseling programs that provide adequate academic, career and personal counseling to students.
- Streamline college and financial application processes.

4. Assist young people to make plans for success and see them through.

Measures of Success

- Young people have career goals and specific actions for reaching them.
- Young people understand how to finance their educational, job and personal goals.
- Young people know where to go for help when they encounter difficulties reaching their goals.

Promising Policies and Programs

- Provide early and frequent exposures to college entrance and success strategies to young people and their parents or mentors.
- Establish programs to help young people save for their future through IDA accounts.
- Develop job placement centers within high schools.
- Teach financial management skills to young people and their parents.
- Fund school and community-based programs for young people experiencing barriers to success such as early parenting, physical or mental disabilities, economic hardship or criminal history.

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The Emerging Workforce Initiative is committed to helping prepare youth and young adults for work the community needs.