

Education and Skills for the 21st Century: An **AGENDA** for **ACTION**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Our nation's education and skills pipeline is leaking badly and in need of significant repair. Inefficiencies and obstacles to smooth transitions to further learning come at great cost to individuals, businesses, the economy, and society.

Individuals—in school and in the workforce—must shoulder some of the load when it comes to adapting to the rising demand for skills. That said, our institutions—and their policies—bear significant responsibility. Higher education is financially out of reach for many people, and our colleges are far better at enrolling students than they are at graduating them. Far too few companies recognize the long-term competitive benefits of investing in their employees in ways that enable them to upgrade their skills, be more productive, and advance. Community partnerships—among employers, unions, education institutions, and government agencies—could expand the local or regional pool of knowledgeable workers, but such collaborations are rare and struggle for stable funding. Local, state, and federal government spending on lifelong learning is woefully inadequate, especially compared to spending on other public priorities.

Business as usual—that is, educational and workforce development reforms that tinker at the edges—will not suffice. Instead, we must create an education pipeline that connects and integrates early childhood, K-12,

postsecondary, and adult learning. This pipeline will support those who are at risk of dropping out, raise the performance of poor and minority students, and close achievement gaps. It will engage adults in ongoing learning. And it will be flexible enough to serve emerging industries as well as individuals of varying academic and skill levels.

How can we take advantage of today's best innovations and new models to rebuild and extend the education pipeline for tomorrow's needs? Answers—for individuals, the economy, and the nation—will come through two approaches:

1 Accelerate Achievement and Learning: Create and support rigorous, high-performing learning institutions that enable young people and adults to achieve at high levels and advance rapidly to earning postsecondary credentials.

- Ensure that all high school students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and the workplace by expanding the number of rigorous, high-performing schools.
- Promote rapid advancement based on mastery of content, not seat time, and condense the time needed to earn a postsecondary credential.
- Make the transitions from one segment of the education pipeline to another easier by improving the alignment between K-12

and postsecondary educational institutions and systems and by making workplaces more learning-friendly.

- Provide students with early exposure to and experience in college and workplaces through new partnerships among business and K-12 and postsecondary education.

2 Promote Lifelong Learning:

Create and finance a workforce preparation system that yields the skilled workforces our businesses and communities need in order to thrive today and meet the shifting demands of tomorrow's workplaces.

- Create “learning-friendly” workplaces.
- Create “work-friendly” schools and education programs.
- Foster and build the capacity of a local infrastructure that aids and connects employers, individuals, and educational institutions.
- Create multiple reentry routes for those who leave the education pipeline at any point.
- Develop new mechanisms to ensure lifelong access to adequate, flexible financial aid for all qualified students, including adults who are in school part time or who are raising families.

The Education Pipeline Is Broken



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WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO:

Promote learning—in schools and in the workplace

- Provide leadership in efforts to raise the quality of the nation's education and skills pipeline.
- Engage in partnerships—with schools, school systems, networks of schools, and states—that advocate for, support, and enable the start up and long-term success of high-quality schools.
- Work with high schools and postsecondary institutions to define the critical skills and knowledge that students need to succeed in the workplace
- Provide hands-on learning experiences, such as internships, that give students real-world work experience and expose them to career options.
- Collaborate with postsecondary institutions and workforce development systems to create explicit career paths that link ongoing education to career advancement in the firm or industry.
- Become learning-friendly workplaces by providing up-front tuition payments for entry-level workers, career and educational counseling, and flexible work schedules.

WHAT SECONDARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION CAN DO:

Raise standards, create new school models, support achievement

- Create and engage in academic environments, new school models, and support structures—including personalized learning environments, a variety of learning opportunities, networks of high-performing institutions, teaching skills, and assessments—that ensure that all students master the content

and skills they need to succeed in college and/or work.

- Work together to raise high school graduation requirements and align them with college and workplace entrance expectations, so that all students leave high school prepared to succeed in college and work.
- Provide supports to help all students succeed, including more personalized learning environments and a variety of learning opportunities in and out of school and during and beyond the school day.
- Create work-friendly learning environments, including opportunities for hands-on learning experiences, effective career exploration, and flexible class schedules.
- Develop multiple pathways to postsecondary education and credentials, including community-based dropout recovery programs and alternative high schools within the public education system.

WHAT STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS CAN DO:

Improve measurement of individual progress, support innovation, reward outcomes

- Create incentives, through funding and other public policies, for aligning expectations between and among high school, postsecondary education, and the workplace.
- Create incentives for developing new education and training systems and approaches, such as charter schools, early college high schools, flexible community college and adult basic education programs, and effective workforce development systems.
- Provide incentives and supports for schools that serve the most disadvantaged students so these institutions can extend learning time and help young people catch up.

- Create incentives for business and others to develop and widely implement technology-based solutions for improving assessment and accelerating education and skill development, particularly for disadvantaged youth and adults.
- Create public and private financing mechanisms that encourage entrepreneurial workforce program developers and operators to create and expand effective occupational training programs for less-skilled workers and enable every qualified student to earn a college degree and take part in ongoing education.
- Make programs for “dislocated workers” universally available, including accounts that workers could tap after several years of employment or if they lose their job, and provide additional supports, such as portable pensions and health benefits, that enhance worker mobility and lifetime employability.

WHAT THE PUBLIC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM CAN DO:

Organize employers, the education system, and government to promote advancement

- Promote the alignment of economic development, workforce development, and higher education.
- Target economic sectors and occupations that have significant labor needs and also provide opportunities for individuals to gain skills and advance to better jobs.
- Organize multiple partners and funding streams around common goals, bringing together businesses, labor unions, educational institutions, and social service agencies to design and implement programs and policies that improve the functioning of the labor market for employers and individuals.
- Focus practice and policy on family self-sufficiency, which requires a continuum of services and multiple entry points and make it easier for an individual to get a job, stay employed, and advance.
- Create and fund public-private financing vehicles that would underwrite expanded training opportunities for low-skill incumbent workers in order to improve employers' ability to fill in-demand jobs and low-income workers' ability to advance into middle-class jobs.

BENCHMARKS FOR A HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION PIPELINE

- All students graduate high school with high levels of knowledge and skills, prepared to succeed in further learning.
- All young people earn a postsecondary degree or credential by age 26.
- All workers participate in ongoing learning to update their skills and knowledge and meet the shifting demands of the workplace.