



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERIES

CAREER READINESS

A BUSINESS-LED APPROACH FOR
SUPPORTING K-12 SCHOOLS



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION
Center for Education and Workforce



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation is dedicated to strengthening America's long-term competitiveness. We educate the public on the conditions necessary for business and communities to thrive, how business positively impacts communities, and emerging issues and creative solutions that will shape the future.

Copyright © 2016 by the United States Chamber of Commerce Foundation. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form—print, electronic, or otherwise—without the express written permission of the publisher.



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the world's largest business federation representing the interests of more than 3 million businesses of all sizes, sectors, and regions, as well as state and local chambers and industry associations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Recent Approaches to Career Readiness in K-12 Schools	5
A Framework for Defining Career Readiness	10
Measuring Career Readiness	14
Adopting Career Readiness in State Accountability Systems.....	17
Business Leadership in Advancing Career Readiness in States and Districts.....	19
Conclusion.....	23
Checklist: Starting a Career Readiness Conversation	24
Example Report Card Dashboard.....	25
Acknowledgments.....	27
End Notes.....	28
Infographic	29

INTRODUCTION

In today's economy, career readiness is receiving increased attention at the state and federal policy levels and in our schools. Much of this is driven by growing interest in improving student transitions to both college and employment. Schools have long sought to better prepare students for the future—including careers—by improving the number of students entering college academically prepared. Employers too are signaling that our schools need to help address a persistent and deepening skills gap that is impacting many industries vital to our country's economic future. For these reasons and more there is renewed interest in addressing the career readiness of students in our K-12 education systems.

Many states have proactively raised academic standards to ensure students are making progress toward important transitions to either college or careers. Many others have been engaged in modernizing their Career and Technical Education (CTE) systems. Others have forged partnerships among K-12 schools, colleges, and workforce systems to ensure students are provided with pathways to careers in fields that are in demand.

A recent development that has generated an increased interest in career readiness is the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Formerly known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the reauthorization of our nation's primary K-12 education law has placed a spotlight on career readiness as part of state accountability systems.

Under the new law, a great deal of flexibility and latitude is afforded to states, including in accountability systems, where they are now tasked with defining and measuring what success looks like for their students. States must track progress against three required indicators and at least one optional indicator, such as "postsecondary readiness." [See Figure 1](#). New state accountability systems must set measurable goals for local districts as well as identify appropriate interventions when goals and benchmarks have not been met.

Many states are now seeking to leverage the new law to build on the advances that have been made to date in supporting career readiness. This too is a topic of great interest within the business community, which depends on our nation's schools for a skilled and competitive workforce. However, while increased

attention on career readiness is a welcome development brought about by the passage of ESSA, the question is how to define and implement it as part of state accountability systems.

Presently, there is very little consensus within the business community—or among education organizations—around how to best define and measure career readiness. For many years, the terms “career readiness” and “college readiness” have been interchangeable and generally understood to mean achieving proficiency in reading and math when measured against rigorous standards. This proficiency was seen as a necessary readiness level to transition to college without needing remediation or to enter the world of work. However, with the possibility of having postsecondary readiness become a significant part of state accountability systems, we must now ask two questions:

- 1) Are college and career readiness in fact different?
- 2) Can postsecondary readiness be measured in a way that captures both?

Answering these questions is critical to the successful implementation of ESSA and to the students whose progress will be measured. As states design and implement their new accountability systems, it is crucial for the business community to be involved. The business community is well positioned to play a lead role in helping states and districts define and implement career readiness to ensure it remains a meaningful part of ESSA implementation moving forward.

For many years, the terms “career readiness” and “college readiness” have been interchangeable and generally understood to mean achieving proficiency in reading and math when measured against rigorous standards.

Figure 1: ESSA State Accountability Requirements

REQUIRED INDICATORS

- 1) Academic achievement (including math and reading/language arts)
- 2) Another academic indicator (e.g., student growth in elementary/middle school or graduation rate in high school)
- 3) English-language proficiency

OPTIONAL INDICATORS (STATES MUST CHOOSE AT LEAST ONE)

- 1) Student engagement
- 2) Educator engagement
- 3) School climate and safety
- 4) Access to and completion of advanced coursework
- 5) Postsecondary readiness
- 6) Any other indicator selected by the state that is valid, reliable, comparable, and statewide and allows for meaningful differentiation in school performance

Note: The required indicators must, together, carry substantial weight compared with the optional indicator.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) calls on the business community to lead in two important ways by supporting states and local districts with:

- 1) Adopting postsecondary readiness as a combined college and career readiness indicator under ESSA accountability, and defining, implementing, and measuring it in a way that reflects the changing needs and requirements of the business community; and
- 2) Implementing the career readiness components of a postsecondary readiness system by addressing key gaps and systemic challenges involved in managing employer engagement, scaling work-based learning, identifying industry-recognized credentials, securing employer endorsements, and evaluating performance.¹

This paper begins with a review of how states and districts have historically approached career readiness in K-12 schools. From there, it addresses some of the limitations and challenges with current approaches. Next, the paper offers a definition of career readiness and argues that it should be pursued as an integrated measure under postsecondary readiness as part of ESSA state accountability systems. Last, the paper provides specific recommendations for how the business community is uniquely positioned to lead in addressing key implementation challenges involving the career readiness components of a postsecondary readiness indicator.

RECENT APPROACHES TO CAREER READINESS IN K-12 SCHOOLS

The idea of implementing, measuring, and valuing career readiness is not a new concept. Over the years, there has been continued and widespread exploration of improving career readiness systems in states and regions. This is noticeable in recent CTE modernization efforts led by groups such as Advance CTE and the Association for Career and Technical Education. More recently, states had begun to expand on their career readiness efforts by including career readiness indicators as part of state waivers under NCLB. Currently, as many as 34 states publicly report and/or include some type of career-focused indicator in their accountability systems.² But before exploring a business-led definition of career readiness for state accountability systems, we first must take a closer look at how states and districts have traditionally supported career readiness in schools.

FIVE APPROACHES

To date, the five most common approaches to supporting career readiness in K-12 systems have been 1) workforce readiness assessments, 2) courses with dual credit opportunities, 3) work-based learning, 4) industry-recognized credentialing, and 5) career guidance.

Workforce Readiness Assessments: The most common approach has been a focus on workforce readiness assessments and ensuring that students have attained the requisite math and reading proficiency to be successful in both college and the workplace. These assessments have come in many different forms, including assessments that are aligned to the adoption of higher standards for college and career readiness, such as PARCC and Smarter Balanced. Other assessments that have been a familiar feature of education systems include the ACT and SAT, which have traditionally been used to ascertain a student's readiness to enter a postsecondary program. Assessments such as ACT WorkKeys and the NOCTI 21st Century Skills Assessment hone in on workplace skills by posing to students contextualized questions that demonstrate their ability to apply their learning in a workplace setting. In addition, many states have developed their own technical skill assessment systems.

Courses With Dual Credit Opportunities: The next most common approach has been through course participation and the attainment of dual credit. Student acquisition of dual or articulated college credit has been seen as a validation of

college and career readiness. For college readiness specifically, this includes student participation in Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, which satisfy high school graduation requirements and are recognized by many colleges and universities for college credit. For career readiness, the dual credit model is often pursued in combination with CTE courses and programs of study that align secondary and postsecondary courses into a seamless career pathway through articulation and transfer agreements between high schools and community colleges. It can also include courses related to science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). More recent efforts have focused on improving course alignment with in-demand industries based on better use of labor market data and employer surveys.

Work-Based Learning: Next, states and districts have emphasized the importance of work-based learning as a critical component of career awareness and preparation. Work-based learning is often embedded as part of course concentrations in a career pathway or as part of STEM programs. In many cases, these experiences are place-based and include internships, cooperatives, and—more recently—youth apprenticeships. However, they can also be project-based or simulated experiences that take place on the school premises. While these experiences have rarely been captured as part of accountability systems, there is increased interest in expanding these opportunities and providing districts credit for increasing the number of quality work-based learning placements.

Industry-Recognized Credentialing: States and districts have also attempted to better connect students to additional credentialing opportunities as a part of career readiness. These include—but are not limited to—industry-recognized credentials, such as those offered by the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council, National Institute for Metalworking Skills, and American Welding Society in manufacturing, as well as by CompTIA in information technology. Opportunities also include many other forms of credentialing, such as diploma endorsements in a career field or program of study as well as micro-credentials (e.g., digital badges).

Career Guidance: States and districts have also attempted to elevate the need for and delivery of career guidance. Given time constraints on school counselors, many districts have tried to expand access to career information through technology platforms and tools. One example is Inspire—offered through Career Cruising—which provides students with information about in-demand occupations, skill requirements, earning potential, and opportunities to connect to local employers. Many states now require students to complete a

personalized learning or career plan, the vast majority of which focus on having students identify their career aspirations and goals. Some of these plans go further and include a crosswalk of career aspirations to a student's academic achievement level, course selection, or future education plans. Innovative states are now supporting these conversations with students through career development standards and through specialized career coaches.³

Rather than pursuing a single approach to career readiness, most states have found opportunities to pursue a combined approach when supporting career readiness for their students. For example, the Pathways to Prosperity Network, a consortium of states that includes Illinois and California, is encouraging the implementation of career pathways that embed work-based learning and the attainment of industry-recognized credentials as part of a course sequence in an in-demand career field. P-TECH in New York is another example, in which IBM and other companies support a model where businesses sponsor a school and provide instructional support and work-based learning opportunities targeted toward growing in-demand occupations. And CTE programs of study combine aligned secondary and postsecondary courses with dual credit opportunities, work-based learning support, and industry credentialing across 16 career clusters that encompass 79 career pathways.

States have not just supported integrated approaches to career readiness systems, but they have also begun experimenting with including career readiness as part of their accountability systems. Advance CTE and Achieve recently released an updated report on *How States are Making Career Readiness Count: A 2016 Update* which catalogues as many as 34 states that publicly report and/or include some type of career-focused indicator in their state accountability systems. Of those, 32 states use career readiness indicators for public reporting purposes. Far fewer—17 states—utilize those indicators to influence their accountability formula, and eight states use them to award bonus points.

Many of the indicators used are a variation on the five approaches previously covered and, in some cases, combine them. Sixteen states, however, rely on dual enrollment and postsecondary enrollment as their preferred career readiness indicator. This is followed by 11 states that report participation in CTE courses.⁴

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES WITH CURRENT APPROACHES

Many of the previously mentioned approaches and experiments have informed a deeper understanding of career readiness systems, but in their current form they each face limitations and challenges when being considered for inclusion in a statewide accountability system. These include the following examples:

- Assessments, while commonly used and important in addressing many of the essential skills students need to transition out of high school, often don't address many of the "soft skills" employers look for, such as effective communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, showing up on time, and conducting oneself professionally in a business environment.
- Career preparation courses have historically been subject to criticism that they track students into a less rigorous pathway that limits, not expands, opportunity.
- Managing quality consistently in work-based learning can be challenging, as can assessing what a student actually learned through his or her experience.
- There remains no consistent approach to understanding which credentials are valued by employers and get good labor market returns, nor does every industry offer credentials that can be attained at the K-12 level. In addition, in state systems, much of the data held by third-party vendors is not available for reporting or verification that a credential has been attained.
- Career guidance, for the most part, is in short supply with few opportunities for students to get meaningful access to information and coaching.

Even if one were to address the limitations outlined above, states and districts would still face several overarching and systemic challenges when considering career readiness as part of their accountability systems. These challenges include the following:

- Career education has largely been stigmatized, and gaining the necessary community buy-in to successfully implement it will be critical. A history of promoting "college for all" has resulted in a perception that anything "less

than college” is suspect, and is rightly critiqued by the business and civil rights communities as failing to provide a rigorous and equitable education.

- There is also a lack of shared accountability across our education and workforce systems, and critical outcome data is unavailable that can tell us whether students have transitioned successfully to employment in their chosen career fields. Currently, statewide longitudinal data systems do not track occupation or workforce performance. Even if states report on whether students make a transition to college and/or employment, feedback from colleges and employers on student readiness is missing.
- Outside of advisory boards, states and districts often lack the necessary employer engagement and leadership they need to implement career readiness successfully. Considering career readiness within a state’s accountability system will require an approach that ensures consistent and reliable feedback from employers in a constantly changing business environment.

Given current limitations and challenges, one might question whether it is possible to define and include career readiness as part of a state’s accountability system. Assuming it is possible, this would require an exploration of the gaps in implementation in order to overcome the challenges identified above. Before turning to how the business community can support the adoption of career readiness as part of a state accountability system and help address the implementation challenges, we first must establish a framework for defining and measuring career readiness that builds on progress made to date.

A FRAMEWORK FOR DEFINING CAREER READINESS

Despite the limitations and challenges that have been experienced with building career readiness in K-12 schools, states have done well experimenting with multiple approaches and much can be done to build on this progress. The business community can also play a new leadership role in assisting with the adoption and implementation of career readiness in a manner that addresses many of the challenges that have been experienced to date, which this paper will return to later.

The business community can also play a new leadership role in assisting with the adoption and implementation of career readiness in a manner that addresses many of the challenges that have been experienced to date.

We begin with framing career readiness as a combined set of activities that, when taken together, can overcome many of the limitations of any one activity. This paper argues that career readiness is not a standalone activity or measure, but is instead an advanced level of college readiness that can be organized in a flexible and responsive manner to account for changing needs across industries and employers.

However, the question remains: which activities should be included and how should they be prioritized? To answer this we must build a common framework for defining career readiness and from there explore how it can be measured and ultimately included in state accountability systems.

THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

By breaking down postsecondary readiness into its component parts, we can explore the relationship between college and career readiness. As previously discussed, the component parts of career readiness should include (1) proficiency on core workforce readiness assessments, (2) successful completion of career-related courses (with optional dual credit), (3) participation in high-quality work-based learning experiences, (4) attainment of industry-recognized and valued credentials, and (5) meaningful guidance and the completion of a college and career plan.

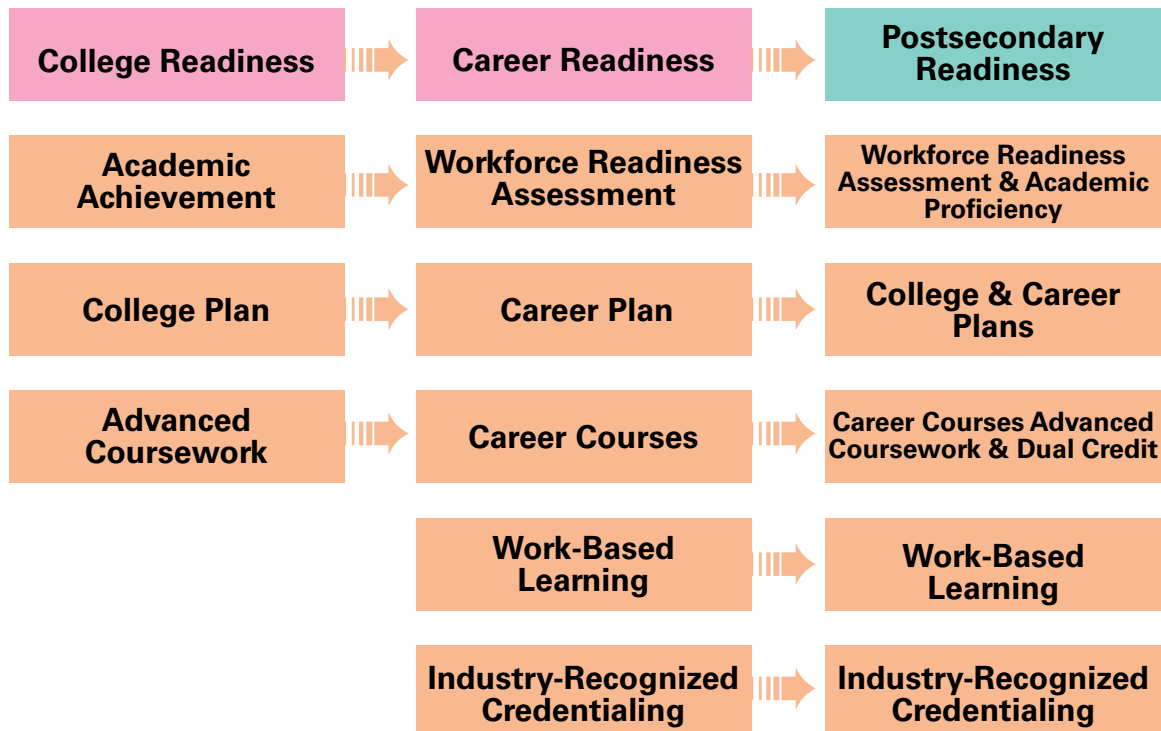
CAREER READINESS: A BUSINESS-LED APPROACH FOR SUPPORTING K-12 SCHOOLS

We can similarly break down the components that make up college readiness. This paper defines college readiness as (1) proficiency on core assessments, (2) attainment of dual credit through advanced coursework, and (3) the completion of a college plan. When we compare the two, we can see the overlap between college and career readiness and that they mutually reinforce one another.

Given the extensive overlap and relationship between the two, any attempt at implementing postsecondary readiness can and should be inclusive of both college and career readiness, and—when possible—connected to the completion of advanced coursework. Using this approach would also account for one of the three required indicators under ESSA, namely academic achievement.

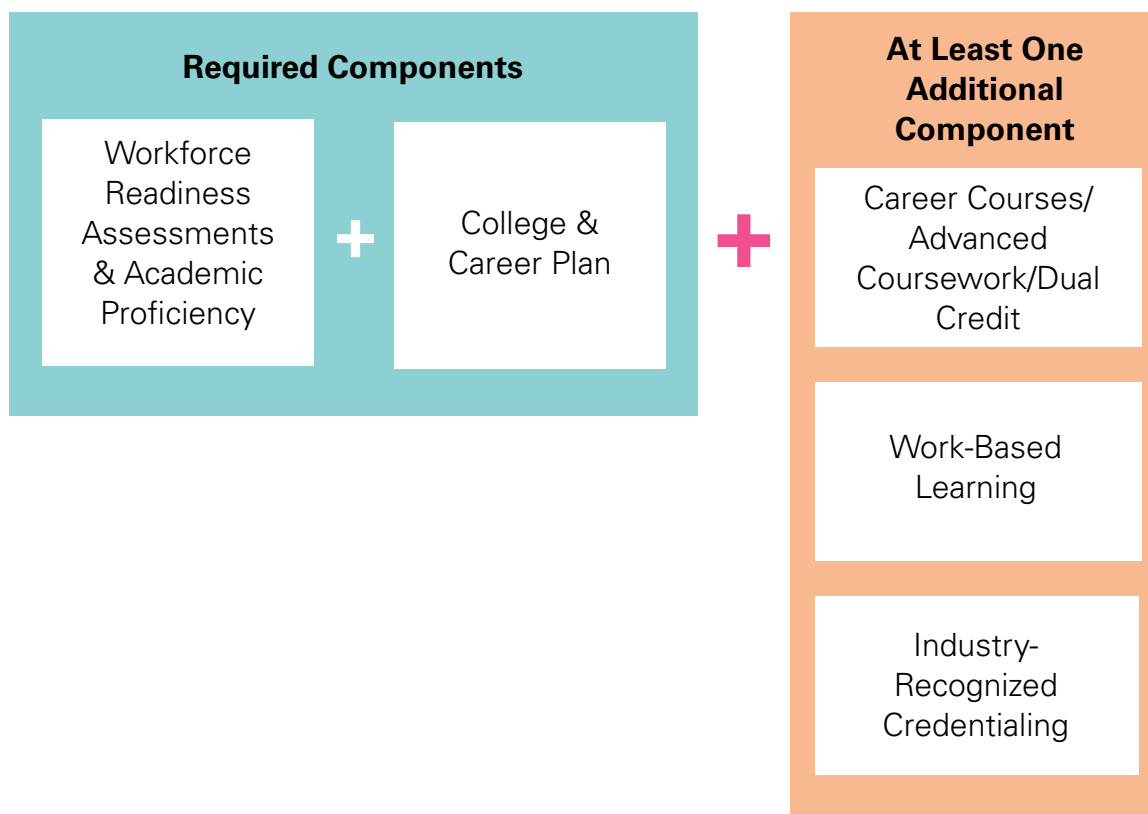
When organized under the ESSA accountability framework, we can see the interdependence of these indicators and how, when taken together, they make for a systemic approach to supporting high-quality college and career readiness in K-12 schools. [See Figure 2.](#)

Figure 2: Integrated Postsecondary Readiness Framework



Going a step further, this paper argues not only that career readiness and college readiness are interdependent under a postsecondary readiness framework, but also that career readiness is in fact inclusive of college readiness and demonstrates a more advanced level of preparation—College Ready Plus. This is particularly important to ensure that career readiness is not perceived or implemented as a lesser pathway when compared to college readiness. [See Figure 3.](#)

Figure 3: College Ready Plus



PRIORITIZING CAREER READINESS INDICATORS THROUGH EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

There is more to defining career readiness than choosing the right indicators, however. This paper argues that there is no one measure that is sufficient; instead, it is the unique combination of measures that, when consistently and reliably validated by the business community, makes for a robust career readiness approach.

Determining which indicators should be prioritized is dependent on feedback received from employer partners based on changing expectations of readiness for their industry. Some industries may prioritize experience over credentials. In other cases, there may be components that are not relevant at all—at least at the K-12 level. For example, in some career pathways, industry credentialing may not be a viable option given it may require licensure that can be attained only post-high school, as seen in many healthcare professions.

What is required is for states to establish a College Ready Plus approach that ensures at the state level that all students have the opportunity to attain an advanced level of readiness beyond college readiness, but allows for local flexibility to make almost real-time adjustments in response to changes in the business environment and across industries. This approach is also important to ensure that postsecondary readiness is not applied uniformly as a generic set of indicators across all industries and career pathways.

This paper argues that there is no one measure that is sufficient; instead, it is the unique combination of measures that, when consistently and reliably validated by the business community, makes for a robust career readiness approach.

MEASURING CAREER READINESS

Once a postsecondary readiness framework is established that encompasses both college and career readiness, states and districts will need to decide how it will be measured. In addition, states and districts will need to establish performance goals for specific measures related to participation and outcomes as well as transitions.

Every student should have an experience that prepares him or her for college with participation in at least one additional career readiness component. States and districts can start by supporting all students in college and career planning and achieving proficiency on core academic assessments.

This paper encourages a broad application of career readiness to be inclusive of all students, or as many students as possible. Every student should have an experience that prepares him or her for college with participation in at least one additional career readiness component. States and districts can start by supporting all students in college and career planning and achieving proficiency on core academic assessments. From there, states can prioritize other components of career readiness based on input from priority industry and employer

partners. Components include career-related course sequences, work-based learning, and industry credentialing—indicators that go beyond the college readiness components.

An integrated set of measures allows opportunities for both CTE students and the broader student population to be included without imposing the same standard of readiness. Students pursuing deeper exploration of a career pathway have the opportunity to meet additional requirements, thereby achieving a more advanced level of readiness.

PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOME MEASURES

Setting specific performance measures for any one indicator (e.g., assessment scores, number of courses completed) is a decision that needs to be made by individual states, but should be made with input from the business community.

This includes setting expectations and goals around participation-oriented measures such as the numbers of students participating in courses, participating in work-based learning, and accessing career planning. Expectations also need to be set for related outcome measures, such as student performance on assessments (both academic and technical) and attainment of industry credentials.

For students who have successfully achieved the required proficiency for college readiness and met all the related career indicators in their chosen program of study, districts should then reflect those students as having achieved College Ready Plus in their state accountability system. This meta-indicator that is more reflective of a student's readiness level should be prioritized since it goes beyond student performance against any one sub-indicator of career readiness and begins to account for other readiness criteria related to his or her career interest area.

States and districts should also be flexible and explore different performance requirements and expectations both within and across industries, career pathways, and even employers. This approach allows employers to provide more specific feedback on what readiness means for particular industries and occupations, and it provides students an opportunity to better communicate their level of readiness. Employers can even specify not just baseline levels of readiness, but also more advanced levels of readiness, allowing students to move *from career ready to career competitive*. Student performance against each sub-indicator must also be available to be disaggregated at the state and district levels for a closer look into how students are meeting performance goals.

TRANSITION MEASURES

Career readiness should go beyond traditional participation and outcome measures and be inclusive of new transition measures that communicate success over time, including, at a minimum, transitions to college and employment.

Statewide longitudinal data systems today have varying degrees of capability when reporting transitions. While they can report that someone is employed and who the employer of record is, they are, however, incapable of reporting what occupation someone is enrolled in or what function he or she performs inside of a company. Statewide longitudinal data systems are also incapable of

reflecting the strategies employers use to identify, recruit, and source talent for key occupations or functions inside their companies (e.g., music majors working in information technology companies due to their cognitive capabilities).

Given these inherent limitations, the best use of outcome measures to start with is validation that a transition to college or work did in fact occur. Statewide longitudinal data systems are capable of reporting whether a former student is enrolled in a postsecondary program and/or employed post-high school. On the college-ready side, many states can report student remediation rates (with the exception of students who leave the state or are enrolled in non-public colleges and universities in state). While outcome measures related to the preparation level of students entering employment are important, they require a level of feedback and reporting from employers that is currently not available.

Given present limitations, the most important transition measures to monitor for first are the number of students who are not in school or in work post-graduation and the remediation rate of students entering college.

ADOPTING CAREER READINESS IN STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS

States will need to determine the extent to which career readiness should be incorporated into their new accountability systems for inclusion in school year 2017-2018. This includes how the indicator will be weighted in comparison with other indicators—required or otherwise—under ESSA. In addition, states will need to determine how the measure should be used, whether for public reporting, intervention purposes, or continuous improvement.

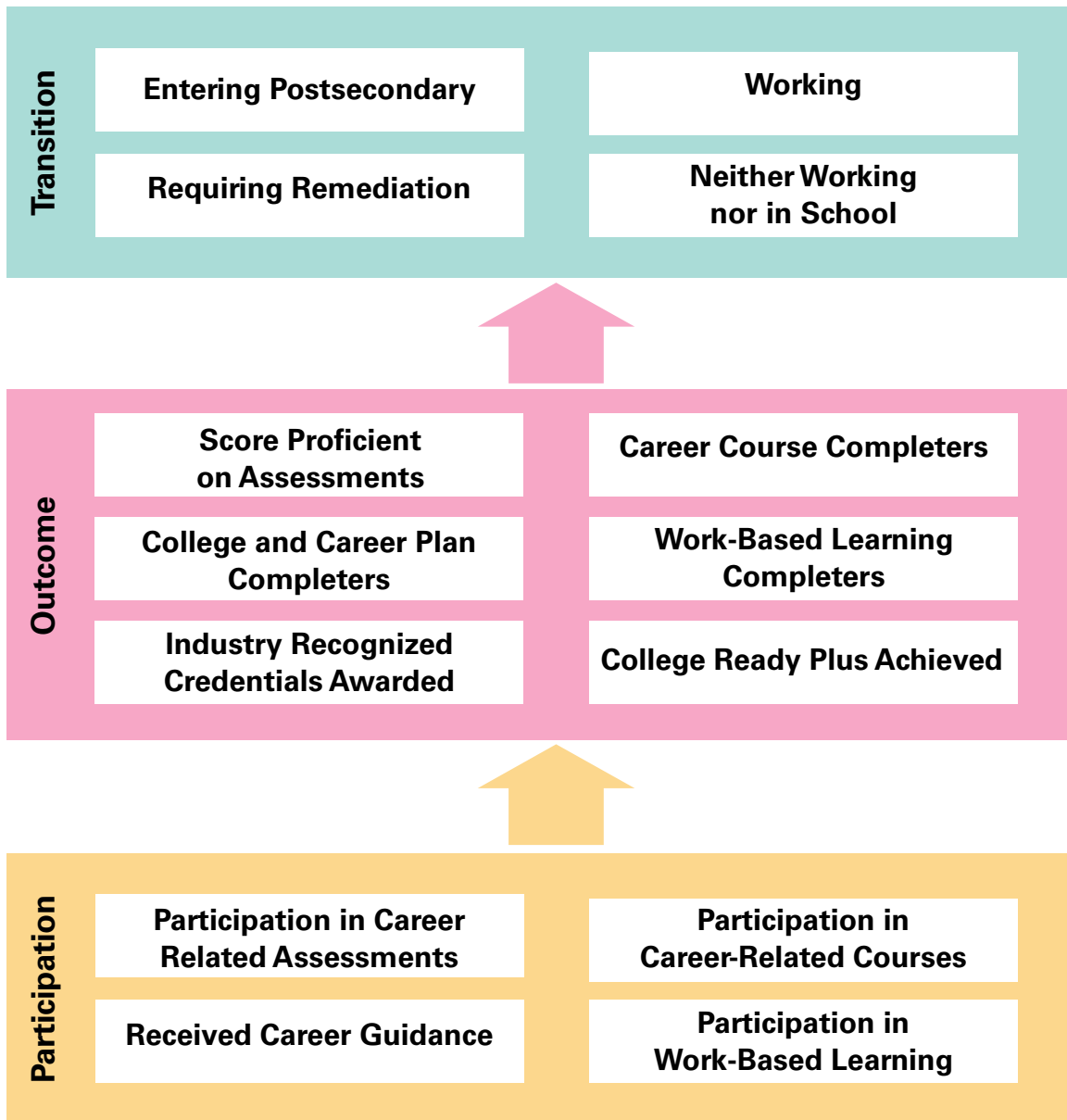
The business community can play a strong leadership role in advocating for the adoption of career readiness as part of ESSA accountability, but it should be done following the framework set forth in this paper to ensure it is rigorous. In addition, the business community can work directly with state superintendents and departments of education—as well as governors—on ensuring career readiness is included in a way that meets its needs for developing a skilled and competitive workforce. This includes ensuring that career readiness is combined with postsecondary readiness as an integrated college and career readiness approach.

This paper only goes so far as to suggest that if career readiness is included as part of a state’s accountability system, it be used as an integrated postsecondary readiness indicator that is substantially weighted enough to be taken seriously and rewards those districts that implement it effectively.

Regardless of whether career readiness indicators become part of a formal accountability system, school districts would be well served by experimenting with new dashboard tools that allow for districts to report career readiness-related activities and measures. For example, states and districts should experiment with new scorecards that communicate performance across key measures. Any scorecard should also be inclusive of important transition measures that communicate whether students are advancing in their education or careers. Such tools will allow for a clearer view of the career readiness of students in a given district or school. [See Figure 4.](#)

While not including career readiness as a required indicator could result in lower take-up for accountability purposes, there are other incentives that could encourage district experimentation. For example, states could use discretionary funds—whether general revenue or funding made available through CTE leadership or reserve funds—to reward districts that score well on experimental measures.

Figure 4: Example Scorecard Measures



BUSINESS LEADERSHIP IN ADVANCING CAREER READINESS IN STATES AND DISTRICTS

For many districts, securing consistent and reliable employer leadership has been a perennial challenge and one that is potentially made more daunting with the inclusion of career readiness in state accountability systems. The stakes are now much higher.

In addition to advocating for and helping define career readiness as part of state accountability systems, the business community can also play a critical role in supporting implementation of career readiness in states and districts. More specifically, the business community can play an expanded leadership role by launching employer-led strategies that address many of the limitations and challenges associated with career readiness systems that were previously identified.

For example, ensuring the right career readiness indicators are prioritized and implemented requires new levels of employer leadership, feedback, support, and validation. What is needed is a nuanced understanding of how career readiness indicators are organized across industry sectors and employers. This is even more challenging given the reality that requirements for career readiness in today's economy are constantly shifting across industries and employers. Therefore, states and districts must have in place a process for continually updating and prioritizing the right combination of measures as defined by the business community.

States will need the leadership and support of the business community to successfully implement career readiness in their community and for their students. With the implementation of ESSA, this is more an opportunity than a challenge and is an invitation to explore new and innovative ways for states and districts to partner with the business community.

The following recommendations outline how the business community can support state and district leaders in adopting and implementing career readiness indicators as part of their accountability systems:



1) Managing Employer Requirements and Engagement: A challenge facing many districts is that there is not necessarily a single point of contact who owns and is responsible for managing business engagement and understanding employer requirements. This function can occasionally be spread across a multitude of positions, ranging from CTE coordinators and instructors to school counselors and senior-level administration. The lack of standardization can make it difficult for employers to know how to sustain their engagement with schools and districts, a problem that can be further exacerbated by staff and faculty turnover.

The business community can address this challenge in new ways by assigning its own agent or liaison who can be embedded in districts and schools. This person would be responsible for both communicating employer partnership requirements for career programs and vetting potential talent on behalf of the companies he or she represents. In this way, employers have a direct connection to students and faculty to ensure their interests are represented and that students are receiving career guidance and being networked with the business community's liaison of choice.⁵

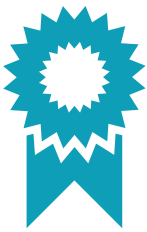


2) Managing High-Quality Work-Based Learning: One of the most challenging components of a career readiness system is how to scale up work-based learning opportunities for students while maintaining a high-quality experience. Too few students are afforded opportunities to engage in a real-world work experience, and districts are seldom recognized or rewarded for making these opportunities available. Given that it is instrumental for a student's career awareness and is highly valued in the eyes of the business community, ESSA provides a unique opportunity to recognize and value work-based learning at a higher level.

Accomplishing this, however, will require the business community to be active in new ways. The business community should take the lead in working through its preferred intermediaries—or through its liaisons as described above—to scale up the practice and to put in place industry-validated processes for managing and assessing the performance of students participating in either place-based experiences like internships or project-based learning performed individually or in teams.⁶

If the business community manages the validation process, it should also be the one to signal that a student has completed the experience

satisfactorily and demonstrated that he or she has attained workplace skills. Data around the successful completion of an industry-validated work-based learning experience can be maintained by a trusted intermediary and made interoperable with statewide longitudinal data systems for record-matching purposes. This would have the added benefit of encouraging more public-private data exchange that would shore up and address gaps in existing public data systems.



3) Tracking the Attainment of Industry-Recognized Credentials: Another missing piece in implementing career readiness is identifying which credentials are recognized and valued by employers and integrating data held by third-party credentialing organizations to track the attainment of industry-recognized credentials. States and districts simply do not have access to these records outside of self-reporting. Yet attainment of industry recognized credentials remains one of the most requested performance requirements in public policy today.

The first step is to have an employer-led process in place to communicate which credentials are required or preferred for hiring purposes. This process must be consistently updated and validated by relevant employer partners. From there, the business community will need to take a lead role in advocating for and supporting solutions around matching student records with third-party credentialing providers. This requires enhancing public-private data integration and interoperability to accurately capture performance against the attainment of industry-recognized credentials.



4) Endorsing Districts and Schools That Meet Employer Requirements: Another incentive the business community could provide to districts and schools is advanced levels of recognition and endorsement for meeting or exceeding performance against measures that matter most to employers and specific industries.

USCCF recently published a report on employer-led quality assurance in education and workforce systems.⁷ Employer-led quality assurance can support the implementation of career readiness under ESSA by establishing new ways for national, state, and regional employers and their associations to specify the processes and performance requirements for attaining their endorsement. This includes specifying—and regularly updating—priority

career readiness indicators. Districts and schools can also secure multiple industry and employer endorsements, which can eventually be leveraged as part of state accountability or incentive systems. Such systems would enable district leaders to develop programs consistent with the expectation of their employers/industries of choice and provide a mechanism to undergo an audit to be formally recognized.

These endorsements could provide districts with priority access to work-based learning opportunities, funding, access to equipment, and many other incentives that are controlled by employers and should be given to those schools that are flexible and responsive in meeting the needs of employers or an industry.



5) Evaluating State and District Performance: The business community is ideally positioned to hold states and districts accountable for performance against college and career readiness indicators. This includes whether students are transitioning to college without remediation or to work, but can also include evaluating performance against more specific industry or employer requirements.

With better tracking of student outcomes and transitions, employers will have the information they need to continually evaluate and improve their guidance on career readiness activities and measures to ensure the activities are predictive of success. Tracking also provides the performance requirement data needed to operationalize an employer-led quality assurance system, as mentioned in the recommendation above. This requires new and more advanced methods for linking public-private data—such as data covered in the previous recommendations on work-based learning and industry-recognized credentialing—to validate outcomes and support periodic reviews at the state and district levels.

With the collection of improved and reliable data, the business community can also play a lead role in tracking national progress in implementing career readiness indicators. Similar to the *Leaders & Laggards* report—a USCCF publication featuring a state-by-state comparison of performance across priority education indicators—the business community can track performance of career readiness throughout ESSA implementation.

CONCLUSION

The inclusion of career readiness as part of accountability systems under ESSA represents an opportunity for the business community to support a robust agenda in states and districts around building a skilled and competitive workforce. However, this will be possible only if the business community plays a leadership role in advocating for its inclusion as well as supporting its implementation.

More than simply advocating for the adoption of a given indicator, the business community must be proactively involved in defining career readiness and ensuring that it is implemented in a manner consistent with its requirements and expectations. This includes advocating for an integrated college and career readiness approach where career readiness is seen as an advanced level of college readiness, not “less than college.”

Employers are uniquely positioned to ensure that career readiness indicators—and the processes by which they are met—are organized to help states and districts adapt in a business environment that has constantly shifting requirements while ensuring all students can meaningfully access postsecondary education. Failure to provide this leadership jeopardizes the business community’s ability to leverage the career-ready workforce on which its competitiveness will increasingly depend.

To ensure that students are not only career ready but career competitive will require the business community to play an expanded leadership role in state and district implementation of ESSA now and through the foreseeable future.

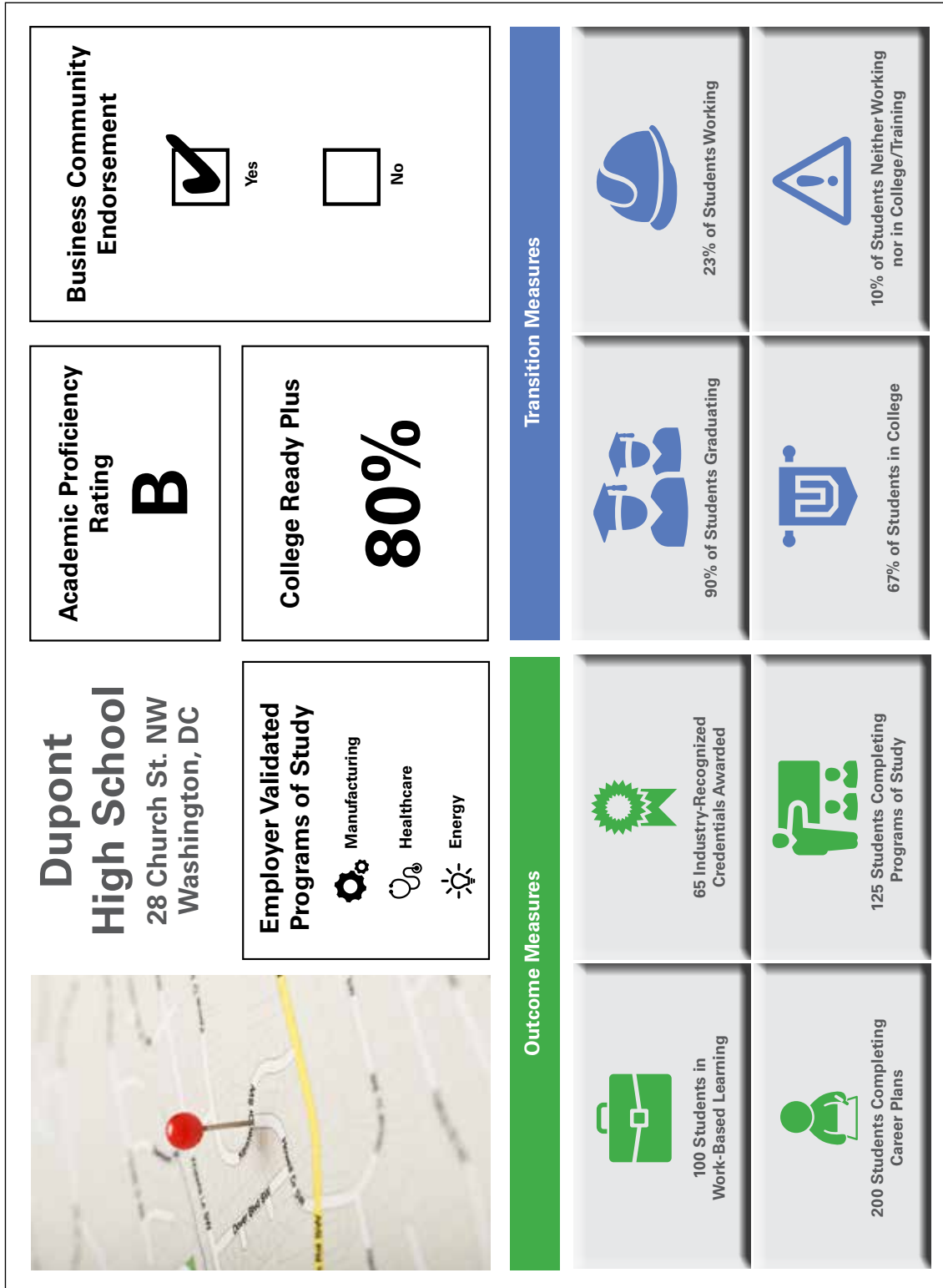
Are you ready to get started? If so, we have provided you with some tools to help you organize your approach:

- 1) A checklist that provides the business community with a useful starting point for having initial conversations about career readiness. [See Figure 5.](#)
- 2) An example dashboard designed to quickly and effectively communicate to employers how schools are performing against the College Ready Plus indicator. [See Figure 6.](#)

Figure 5: Starting a Career Readiness Conversation

1. Does your state plan to use a career readiness-related indicator in your new accountability system?
2. If not, who can you reach out to in your state to get a conversation started?
3. If so, how will career readiness be defined?
4. How will it be measured and which students will be measured by it?
5. Will data be used strictly for public reporting or will it be used to award points to districts as part of the new accountability system?
6. If used to award points, how much weight does career readiness have compared to other indicators?
7. Has the approach been validated by the business community, and if so, how?
8. What role is the business community being asked to play?
9. What implementation challenges does your state or district anticipate (e.g., gaps in data collection)?
10. How will state and district performance be communicated to the business community and what process is in place to get consistent and reliable feedback from business moving forward?

Figure 6: Example Report Card Dashboard



ABOUT USCCF'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT SERIES

As employers continue to struggle to find the skilled workers they need to compete globally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) commits to driving sustainable solutions that build capacity for employers to hire youth and young adults. USCCF's Youth Employment initiative engages chambers of commerce to explore how they are uniquely positioned to support the business community's efforts to create a talent pool of skilled workers. This series aims to highlight demand-driven approaches for chambers and other business associations looking to address youth unemployment to help America's economy grow, businesses remain competitive, and students access opportunities for success.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

The Center for Education and Workforce is a program of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The center is dedicated to strengthening America's long-term competitiveness through informing and mobilizing the business community to be engaged partners, challenging the status quo, and connecting education and workforce reform to economic development.

To learn more visit www.USChamberFoundation.org/cew.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

AUTHOR



Jason A. Tyszko

Jason A. Tyszko, executive director at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Center for Education and Workforce, works on issues related to innovation and reform in education and workforce development. He has an M.A. from the University of Chicago and a B.A. from DePaul University.

THE U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION TEAM

Cheryl Oldham, *Senior Vice President*

Erica Kashiri, *Director, Policy and Programs*

Caitlin Codella, *Director, Policy and Programs*

Lucy Davidson, *Manager, Programs*

Carrie Samson, *Manager, Programs*

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC POLICY

Robert G. Sheets, *Research Professor*

END NOTES

1. While career readiness can be pursued as a separate “optional” indicator under ESSA accountability, for the purpose of this paper, we argue that it is a more effective measure when combined with college readiness under the postsecondary readiness indicator.
2. Achieve, Advance CTE, “How States are Making Career Readiness Count: A 2016 Update,” <https://careertech.org/resource/making-career-readiness-count-2016-update> 2016; Achieve, Advance CTE “Making Career Readiness Count,” <https://careertech.org/resource/making-career-readiness-count>.
3. National Association for College Admission Counseling “Individual Learning Plans for College and Career Readiness: State Policies and School-Based Practices” <http://www.nacacnet.org/>; Hobsons, NACAC, 2015.
4. Achieve, Advance CTE, “How States are Making Career Readiness Count: A 2016 Update,” <https://careertech.org/sites/default/files/MakingCareerReadinessCountUpdate-2016.pdf>, 2016.
5. Erica Kashiri, *Connected to Careers: Expanding Employer Leadership in Career Development*, Washington, DC.: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2016.
6. Erica Kashiri and Jason A. Tyszko, *Talent Orchestrators: Scaling Youth Employment through Business-Facing Intermediaries*, Washington, DC.: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2016.
7. Jason A. Tyszko and Robert G. Sheets, *Changing the Debate on Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The Case for Employer Leadership and a Roadmap for Change*, Washington, DC.: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2016; Jason A. Tyszko, Robert G. Sheets, and Joseph B. Fuller, *Managing the Talent Pipeline: A New Approach to Closing the Skills Gap*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2014; Jason A. Tyszko and Robert G. Sheets, *Building the Talent Pipeline: An Implementation Guide*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2015.

CAREER READY = COLLEGE READY PLUS

A BUSINESS-LED APPROACH FOR SUPPORTING K-12 SCHOOLS



Businesses need talent ready for the world of work...



But there is little consensus on how to best ensure students are career ready.

As a part of the Every Student Succeeds Act, states and districts can adopt accountability measures to signal career readiness. Here's how:

THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



college readiness
+
career readiness

An integrated college and career readiness measure signals a more advanced level of preparation for students. We call this:

COLLEGE READY PLUS

- ✓ Proficiency on **core academic** and **workforce readiness** assessments
- ✓ Engagement in meaningful **college** and **career** planning
- ✓ Successful completion of **dual credit** and **career courses**
- ✓ Participation in high-quality **work-based learning**
- ✓ Attainment of **industry-recognized credentials**

HOW THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY CAN SUPPORT STATES AND DISTRICTS



Manage employer requirements in career guidance practices



Identify and track industry-recognized credentials



Endorse districts and schools developing career-ready students



Validate high-quality work-based learning experiences



Evaluate state and district performance

Moving Students From Career Ready to Career Competitive



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION
Center for Education and Workforce

Learn more at:
www.USChamberFoundation.org/cew



U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE FOUNDATION
Center for Education and Workforce

U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

1615 H Street NW | Washington, DC 20062

Phone: 202-463-5525 | www.uschamberfoundation.org