



Are Today's Students Ready for Tomorrow's Workforce?

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Upon graduation day, students will process with pomp and circumstance; looking forward to applying the knowledge and skills they've acquired to start their professional lives. It sounds picturesque, and it should. The reality, however, is not so quaint. The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), a survey that compares workers in more than 20 wealthy countries on critical written and numerical information processing skills, recently revealed the unadorned truth about workforce readiness—or the lack thereof.

Though education certification has long served as a proxy for measuring skills, the PIAAC takes a direct approach to measuring these proficiencies, giving concrete insight into the readiness gap on critical competencies for the workplace. The report, which contains data on more than 8,000 adults, displays the scary statistics of U.S. preparedness: **less than a third of U.S. adults age 16-34 with at least a bachelor's degree scored received either of the two highest scores—a four or five—on the literacy portion of the assessment. The same was true for just 17 percent of workers with an associate's degree, 10 percent of those with a high school diploma and 4 percent of those who never completed high school.**

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While it is clear that attaining higher education improves competency in these areas, the deficiencies demonstrated in the PIAAC indicate we have not gone far enough. Furthermore, when students and workers lack the skills they need to succeed in the workplace, we all suffer. Our economic prosperity and international standing is reliant upon our ability to fill jobs, innovate, and grow. However, statistics show the devastating toll America's skills gap is taking:

- Number of senior executives believe there is a serious gap in workforce skills: 92%
- Number of U.S. employers struggling to fill vacant jobs: 49%
- Growth of skills gap by 2020: 6 million unfilled positions.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) is committed to being part of the solution to this skills gap. Through its initiative, Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) [www.uschamberfoundation.org/talent-pipeline-management], **we have engaged employers and their partners across the country in developing a new demand-driven approach to reducing the skills gap.** Through extending lessons learned from innovations in supply chain management, the USCCF calls for employers to play an expanded leadership role as “end-customers” of education and workforce partnerships. From there, employers can proactively organize and manage talent supply chain partnerships with measures and incentives tied to performance.

Our workforce truly is America's greatest resource, and its preparedness is imperative to the success of tomorrow's economy. TPM places employers at the helm to drive the partnerships with education providers we need to reduce the skills gap, prepare our workforce, increase transparency and opportunity for students and workers, and provide higher returns on education and workforce investments for all of us. Through effective, financially sound efforts like TPM, we can help ensure up-and-coming professionals are truly furnished with the necessary skills to sustain our ever-changing 21st century economy.

USCCF will host the Talent Pipeline Management National Conference on March 23 in Washington, DC.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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