Skills-based practices needed to replenish America's talent pipeline

A shortage of a skilled workforce has become one of the major limiting factors in the Reshoring Initiative® to sustain and bring back American manufacturing jobs. Employers are searching for graduates with the needed employable skills to grow their businesses as well as providing an economic pathway into the middle class and the American Dream for their employees.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 95% of executives and HR heads say nontraditional candidates perform just as well, if not better than, degree-holders. Competency, ability to learn, and versatility is more practical than pedigree, leaders have found. Skills-based practices help companies find and attract a broader pool of talent, filled with candidates who are better suited to fill these positions in the long term. It also helps communities by creating more and better job opportunities for a broader, diverse pool of workers.

Schools need to pursue a competency-based learning (CBL) approach that reflects a deep belief that the education system needs to change to have a more inclusive and learner-centered approach. To help deploy and validate the success of the CBL initiative, ETS, the world's largest private nonprofit educational testing and assessment organization, and the Carnegie Foundation are envisioning a process to prepare and measure students' skills. The potential changes in measuring education experience come as the conversation about shifting to a "skills-based" approach to jobs and hiring has exploded over the past few years.

More employers are starting to embrace skills-based hiring practices. Large companies, such as Boeing, Walmart, Google and IBM have signed on to

the [Rework America Alliance](#) pledging to implement skills-based practices. The Rework America Alliance is now led by Jobs for the Future (JFF). Alliance tools and resources are shared by JFF to support its North Star goal to help 75 million people facing systemic barriers to advancement move into quality jobs within the next 10 years.

Skills-based Learning That Works

During a time of increased concern over worker shortages, skill gaps and workforce readiness, youth apprenticeship has emerged as an important strategy to prepare the future workforce and meet the needs of the evolving economy, to build consistent and diverse talent pipelines and to improve career prospects and economic outcomes for learners.

High school (HS) apprenticeship programs combine work-based, on-the-job learning with relevant technical education in the classroom. Students who participate in these programs graduate with a high school diploma, and earn college credits, and industry credentials. HS apprenticeships benefit businesses as well by providing a fresh source of talent developed from within their community.

In most states like Virginia, youth apprenticeship systems are new and are still evolving in response to the needs of students, employers, and partners. Youth apprenticeship programs exist at the intersection of education and workforce development, serving young people and employers by connecting the learning needs of youth with the talent and skill needs of industry. To scale these high-quality programs, states must make key systems design decisions that promote alignment between partners, define roles and responsibilities, and provide students and other key stakeholders with transparency in what can often be a confusing and duplicative landscape.

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) is a national partner in the **[Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#)** (PAYA), a multiyear collaborative created by New America in 2018 to help states and cities expand access to high-quality apprenticeship opportunities for high school age youth. In August 2023, the NGA Center launched the **[Policy Academy to Advance Youth Apprenticeship](#)**, a yearlong project to support state teams as they develop policy agendas that advance these opportunities. The four elements of a high-quality youth apprenticeship, as identified through PAYA partners' research, are:

- Paid, on-the-job learning under the supervision of skilled employee mentors
- Related classroom-based or technical instruction
- Ongoing assessment against established skills and competencies
- Culmination in a portable, industry-recognized credential and postsecondary credit

Future Skilled Career Pathways

The time has come for reimagining new-collar career pathways to address the challenges of skilling and upskilling the nation's workforce with learning and skills that work. Communities and employers, in collaboration with schools, need to focus more on graduating skilled & career-ready citizens who are rediscovering the value of Career & Technical Education (CTE) programs and associated youth apprenticeship opportunities while in high school.

School districts have an opportunity to collaborate through public-private partnerships with employers and government agencies to learn how to effectively prepare and graduate skilled career-ready citizens. These initiatives will competitively address the growing demands for a new-collar workforce for sustaining and reshoring advanced manufacturing jobs in America.

Editor's Note:

To address these challenges the Association for Manufacturing Excellence (AME) and the Reshoring Initiative (RI) are searching to find and share best practice programs with communities to prepare and graduate students with "employable skills" to sustain and bring manufacturing jobs back home. Please share your best practice ideas with us.

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