

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

On January 17, 2017, WASDA and Baird hosted the first in a series of discussions among K–12 educators, business leaders and college entrance officials on what it means to be college- or career-ready in 2017. Their observations and insights are summarized below.

WHAT SKILLS ARE SCHOOLS AND EMPLOYERS LOOKING FOR FROM TODAY'S HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES?

- The ability to face and overcome challenges
- The capacity to accept constructive criticism
- A positive and curious attitude
- The ability to analyze a problem and find a solution
- An aptitude for customer service
- The ability to act and communicate professionally
- A demonstrated commitment and work ethic
- The ability to remain flexible and engaged

WHAT CAUSES NEW GRADUATES ENTERING COLLEGE OR THE WORKFORCE TO FAIL?

- A lack of pride in their work
- A lack of resiliency and “grit”
- An inability to juggle multiple projects
- A lack of confidence
- A disregard for what's expected of them
- Impatience for career advancement
- An inability to appreciate nuance and competing client expectations
- A lack of a strong role model

Today's companies aren't hiring high school graduates for their skills. They're hiring for attitude and will train the skills.

Young people new to college or the workforce are going to make mistakes. It's unavoidable. They must prove they can get up, learn from their mistakes and succeed.

WHAT CURRENT K–12 PRACTICES SUCCESSFULLY PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE AND THEIR CAREERS?

- Businesses – especially skilled-trade businesses – offering to pay for education
- Teachers with firsthand experience of technical colleges, skilled trades and “corporate America”
- Internships, youth apprenticeships and mentorships
- School advancement based on performance and competency
- Informal presentations where business leaders speak with students
- Mock interviews evaluated by human resources professionals
- Extracurricular activities that teach students time management and responsibility
- Instruction that “connects the dots” between the behaviors taught in school and the behaviors expected by colleges and businesses

WHAT COULD HIGH SCHOOLS DO MORE OR LESS OF?

- One career day isn’t the answer – students need to be developing their interpersonal and critical thinking skills throughout school
- Learning through real-world experiences – less telling, more immersing
- More parent engagement in student learning
- Job shadows and industry tours
- Greater flexibility in the curriculum – ex. you could teach geometry in a technical education class on woodworking
- Authentic, personalized assessment of each student’s understanding and abilities
- Educational opportunities that have multiple solutions to develop students’ judgment
- More collaboration and teaming to create high-functioning teams

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It’s so important that students not only learn facts and figures at school – they also need to learn how to think critically and act professionally.

As much as possible, the concepts taught in school should be grounded in practical, real-world applications.

The conversation between K-12 educators, business leaders and college entrance officials will continue at the WASDA Annual Educational Conference on Thursday, May 11, 2017. To learn more, visit the WASDA website at wasda.org.