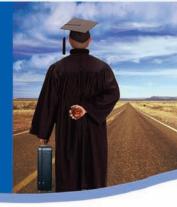
A Developmental Perspective on

Workplace Readiness:

Preparing High School Students for Success

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Child



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Attention has been focused for decades on the need to improve high school students' preparation for the workplace.⁴³ Employers report that nearly half of their entry-level employees are inadequately prepared and lack basic communication and critical thinking skills as well as a work ethic.41 Although a postsecondary credential is considered necessary for today's workforce, there is also much that high schools can do to prepare students. How can high schools help students develop the skills needed to succeed in the workplace? Current criteria developed by business and government leaders tend to emphasize general behaviors, skills, and competencies necessary for success in the workplace. This brief will highlight specific competencies that research has identified as necessary for a person to become a valued and skilled employee in the areas of social, cognitive, and psychological development. It also identifies strategies that high schools can use to help young adults develop these competencies.

Social Development

Social competence is the set of skills necessary to interact successfully with other people, to be generous and thoughtful, and to use accepted social techniques.⁵ Specific social competencies highlighted in the workplace readiness research include the ability to communicate well, work with diverse groups, and resolve conflicts. The American Diploma project² specifically emphasizes that oral as well as written communication skills are required for workplace success.^{2,3,7,28,39-42,44} The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)⁴⁷ identifies social and cross-cultural competencies as necessary for successful interactions with clients, customers, and coworkers, especially in light of increased globalization and the diversification of society.

Specific social competence skills include:

- The ability to interact with other people^{11,34,35} such as:
 - resolving conflicts;
 - cooperating;
 - working together on a team;
 - understanding and being tolerant of other people and cultures; and
 - working with diverse populations. 12,25,28,44,47
- Choosing words precisely, being persuasive, and listening.²
- Crafting effective written communications such as emails, memos, and reports.
- The ability to speak a second language (for instance, Spanish for native English speakers, and English for non-native English speakers). 1,20

This brief draws from the report, A Developmental Perspective on College and Workplace Readiness, (http://www.childtrends.org/Files//Child_Trends-2008_09_15_FR_ReadinessReport.pdf) by Laura Lippman, Astrid Atienza, Andrew Rivers, and Julie Keith of Child Trends, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The report summarizes and compares competencies that researchers across three fields have found are necessary to be ready for college, the workplace, and a successful transition to adulthood. It applies a developmental framework to recommendations from each field that reveals where those recommendations fall short, from a developmental perspective, and how they could be strengthened. It also highlights competencies that are particularly salient for students with specific challenges, and effective ways that schools could support their development. A chart of key competencies across fields is included (the citations for each of these competencies are found in the full report).

Cognitive Development

While good grades in rigorous academic subjects and a high school diploma are considered necessary for college readiness, the workplace readiness literature places less emphasis on them. ^{16,27} In fact, basic academic skills are only one benchmark for determining workplace readiness, and some employers administer their own hiring tests to determine whether a student is ready for a job, rather than relying on high school transcripts. ^{2,29}

Employers often look for job-specific skills and competencies that suggest a person would be a dependable worker. 16,24,27 These skills and competencies include:

- Obtaining a workforce readiness credential, such as a certificate in a specific trade;
- Having previous internship or work experience;
- The quality of the internship or work experience; 3,8,15,16,18,19,24,39,44,46,49
- The ability to use technology; 40,41,43-45,47 and
- Critical thinking/problem solving skills. 41

Psychological Development

Mental health is a key asset in the work-place. 7,39,43,44,47 Reports of high levels of depression and anxiety found in the workplace 17 indicate that good psychological development can help young adults succeed at work. Personal qualities identified in the workplace readiness literature related to psychological development include:

- Positive self-esteem; ⁷
- Optimism and planfulness;
- Coping skills, resilience and flexibility;
- Good judgment; 8,9,13,33,34,39,40,43,44,47,49
- Self-management, such as motivation, autonomy, initiative, responsibility, time management; ^{39,47} and
- Moral development, such as a strong work ethic, reliability, honesty, integrity, and professionalism. ^{3,6,16,32,40,41,43,44,47}

What can schools and communities do to help youth develop the skills needed for the workplace?

Research suggests that if schools tailor curricula to workplace needs, increase support to students and offer activities relevant to the workplace, students will be better prepared to enter the workforce.

Improve school curriculum

 Teach students social skills such as cooperation, working in teams, negotiating, and resolving conflicts.

- Provide better access to technology, and hire appropriately trained faculty to teach technology-related courses.
- Foster communication skills as students prepare assignments, reports, and presentations. Specifically:
 - Assist students in developing written communication skills by assigning work that allows them to practice drafting business correspondence such as emails, memos, and reports.²
 - Assign oral presentations to students so that they can learn to summarize information and develop persuasive arguments and reasoning skills.²
- Add coursework in career and technical training that is relevant to the world of work so that students who are not on the academic track to college can receive training that will benefit them beyond high school.³³
- Offer work experience through multiple options, including programs that provide technical curricula in addition to academic curricula; partnerships with area businesses that offer workplace experience and even summer or permanent employment to students upon completion of the curriculum.²³
- Connect standard high school curricula more directly with workforce needs, and provide students with an understanding of how specific topics and skills are used in the world of work.³¹
- Organize classes around themes that are relevant to life beyond high school.³⁰ (Internships could be organized around such themes as well).

Increase support to students

- Broaden the role of guidance counselors to provide information and guidance on career planning in addition to preparation for college.
 - Provide students interested in career and technical training with information on community college training programs or certificate programs in a specific trade.
- Pair students with mentors to help develop interpersonal skills and identify career interests and opportunities.^{10,22,26,33,37} Mentors can help foster leadership, communication, and social skills.⁵⁰

- Encourage at-risk students to participate in transition or transfer programs that lead to the completion of a regular high school diploma rather than a GED. Research demonstrates that those with a high school diploma have long-term advantages, including social skills, that employers value over those with a GED.21
- Implement positive mental health training and self-assessment tools so that students can learn how be resilient in a changing iob market.
- Help foster a sense of positive self-esteem by providing opportunities to explore interests, develop leadership, meet one's goals, and obtain skills training.4,36

Offer a variety of activities

- Organize civic engagement opportunities that can help students develop leadership skills, communication skills, and interpersonal skills, such as tolerance and the ability to work with diverse populations.⁵¹
- Provide opportunities for career exploration by offering apprenticeships, internships, and job shadowing partnerships.⁴⁹
- Coordinate job fairs so students can learn what types of jobs are available in the community and can develop their interviewing skills.

When students are able to learn about topics and acquire skills that are relevant to work, when they have supportive adults guiding them, and when they are given opportunities to explore different careers, they are more likely to succeed in the workplace.14,29,33,48

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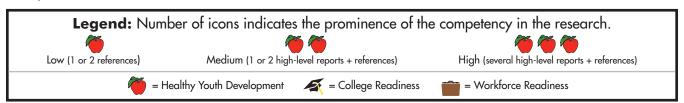
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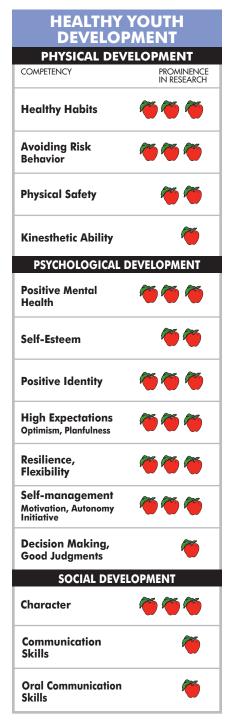
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Chart of Key Competencies Across Three Fields:

Healthy Youth Development, College Readiness, and Workforce Readiness

This chart shows each competency mentioned in the report and whether research identifies the competency as critical to healthy youth development, college readiness, or workforce readiness. The order is the same as is mentioned in the report, and it does not imply level of importance. A scale of High, Medium, and Low has been used to identify the extent and strength of research for each competency. Blank spaces in this chart show that no research mentioning that competency was found, not that the competency is unnecessary. Page numbers indicate where the competency is discussed in the report.





COLLEGE READINESS PHYSICAL DEVELOP COMPETENCY	MENT PROMINENCE
COMILIENCI	IN RESEARCH
DCACHOLOGICAL DEALE	ORMENIT
PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVEL	OPMENT
Self-Esteem	A
High Expectations High Achievement Motivation	55
Self-management	S S
Motivation, Persistence, Initiative, Time management	
SOCIAL DEVELOPM	ENT
Communication	
Skills	AA
Oral Communication Skills	4



HEALTHY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT		COLLEGE READINESS SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT		WORKFORCE READINESS	
				SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT	
COMPETENCY	PROMINENCE IN RESEARCH	COMPETENCY	PROMINENCE IN RESEARCH	COMPETENCY PROMINENCE IN RESEARCH Quantitative Communication Skills	
				Persuasiveness, Appropriately Contributing to Group	
				Ability to Assist, Teach Others	
				Listening Skills	
		Effective Written Communication	(SS	Effective Written Communication	
Using Communication Tools Effectively	~	Using Communication Tools Effectively	4	Using Communication Tools Effectively	
Social Competence	~~~	Social Competence	4	Social Competence	
Conflict Resolution	*	Conflict Resolution	5	Conflict Resolution, Cooperation	
Cross-Cultural Competency	*	Cross-Cultural Competency	55	Cross-Cultural Competency	
				Understand US Norms, Democracy, and Race Discrimination	
Ability to Adapt to Different Situations	~			Ability to Adapt to Different Situations	
Acting Appropriately in Larger Context	~	Acting Appropriately in Larger Context	有有	Acting Appropriately in Larger Context	
Social Support		Social Support	A S		
		Engagement in School	SSS	Engagement in Work	
Prosocial Behaviors				Prosocial Behaviors	
COGNITIVE DEVEL	OPMENT	COGNITIVE DEVELO	PMENT	COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT	
Academic Achievement	~~~	Academic Achievement	SSS	Achievement on Employer Exams	
		Rigorous Coursework	SSS	Rigorous Coursework	
		High-level Math Courses including Algebra II and especially Calculus	SS	4 Years High School Math including Algebra II, Geometry, Statistics	
		Advanced Science Courses	55	Advanced Science Courses	
		4 Years of High School English	SS	4 Years of High School English	

HEALTHY Y DEVELOP COGNITIVE DEVE	
COMPETENCY	PROMINENCE IN RESEARCH
Educational Attainment	*
Lifelong Learning Skills	
Use Knowledge, Information and Technology Interactivel	y 🍎 🍎
Creativity	~
Critical Thinking	~
Problem-solving Skills	~~~
SPIRITUAL DEVE	LOPMENT
Spirituality	6
Sense of Purpose	~~
Religiosity	

