

Driving the Need

1. *Early Career Exploration and Relevance*

By the time they enter high school, students should have a preliminary understanding of the world of work. If they do, they can begin exploring what types of jobs interest them, what skills and education are required for each job at each level, and which jobs are in demand in areas they want to call home. This early exploration keeps students engaged in school through graduation; and engaged in life, school, and/or work following high school.

In addition to engaging students, we must assure learning content is *relevant* to their lives. (In a 2006 multi-state study of high-school dropouts, more than 80% of the students stated they would have stayed in school *if only they were learning skills they could apply in the real world* - Bridgeland & Dilulio, 2006).

2. *College and Career Readiness*

College and career readiness in high school are not mutually exclusive. They require many of the same skills—broad foundational skills, specific career/subject-related skills, and soft skills. The goal of readiness is simply to prepare all students for post-secondary education and training, first jobs, and future careers. (Skill Jobs, 2011).

In recent years, more and more schools have implemented rigorous academic programs with benchmarks for achievement to assure students can secure college admissions. This educational strategy has inadvertently created several problems for students:

- Rigorous high-school requirements have lower success rates for students below the top tier. As a result, many students are accepted into college without adequate preparation for college-level coursework. Remediation is now required for 50% of all college students (Alliance, 2011).
- High-school courses are rarely integrated with careers or even acknowledge what students need for future careers, other than more education. With a career focus, students would do better in school, and fewer would require remediation in college.

College readiness is not the only pathway impacted by rigorous academic requirements and the lack of a career-driven focus in education. There is also the “forgotten half”—high-school students not transitioning to higher education. These students often lack needed foundational and soft skills to be work-ready; they rarely have a high-school career plan that aligns their work plans with the reality of the workplace.

For students heading for college, the goal is to send them off with an idea of what they want to do in the future. For students entering the workforce, the goal is to assure they go in with a skill set, training, and credentials. As students build their own career pathways through middle and high school, they gradually understand what more they need to complete their next steps—

perhaps a four-year or higher degree, a two-year associate degree, industry-specific training, an apprenticeship, or on-the-job training.

3. *Supply, Demand, and 21st Century Workforce Skills*

In Wisconsin as across the country, we have a *disconnect* between skills required in jobs and skilled workers available to businesses (Carnevale, 2010). There isn't a day that passes where we don't open the newspaper or listen to the evening news and hear there are jobs to be had and no workers—in manufacturing, in nursing, and, even in the apple orchards in the State of Washington (CBS Nightly News, 2011). Two conditions contribute to this disconnect between jobs and workers.

- *Applicants do not have required skills:* A survey of 2,000 businesses by the McKinsey Group found 40% had positions open at least six months because they could not find suitable candidates who came with the required skills. A 2008 survey of businesses with open positions found roughly half of all *college* graduates applying for open jobs did not have the necessary applied skills to be hired; and 39% of high-school graduates wanting to go directly to work were unprepared for entry-level jobs (Society for Human Resource Management, 2008).
- *High-school and college students are preparing for jobs in which there is no demand:* Educational preparation is not addressing the realities of the workplace. As a result, “orphan jobs” appear across every industry—manufacturing, utilities, transportation, mining, and agricultural industries—from entry level to technical positions and management (Memmott, 2011). One recent study found more than 30% of college graduates were under-employed, *having prepared for careers where there was no demand* (Higher Education, 2010).

With business for manufacturing again on the rise and the Baby Boomer population beginning to retire, there is a huge demand for skilled machinists, tool and die makers, computer controlled machine programmers, and operators. These are good quality middle-class jobs for which Americans should be training. (Kavilanz, 2012)

Educonomy Centers

Who better to create the new workers for the next decade than the 12 Cooperative Educational Service Agencies (CESA) in Wisconsin. We propose that each CESA create an Educonomy Center which would partner with member PK-12 school districts, technical colleges, universities, work force development boards, county governments, Chambers of Commerce, area businesses, and regional communities.

The focus of the Educonomy Centers will be on Wisconsin's secondary schools, the state's current and future work force, and making sure they are career and college ready.