

# Volusia Manufacturers Association on Preparing Today's Graduates for the Workforce



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Author: [WebWax.net](http://WebWax.net)

Industry: [Small Business](#)

A [study](#) conducted collaboratively by The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21 st Century Skills, and HR Society for Human Resource Management has shown today's high school and college graduates are ill-prepared for the 21 st Century Workforce. Industry and Educational Institutions must work together to better prepare our future workforce. The Volusia Manufacturers Association May's General Meeting will present what the Volusia County Schools are doing to prepare their students for the workforce.

With the lack of jobs these days, it's often wondered by the newly educated, job seeking graduate, what skills do I need to be successful in the workforce? In 2006, a study was conducted by a team from The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, the Partnership for 21 st Century Skills, and the Society for Human Resource Management to find out answers for this burning question. Knowing how employers view these new workforce entrants is an important first step in enabling both these new entrants and U.S. business to succeed on the global economic scene.

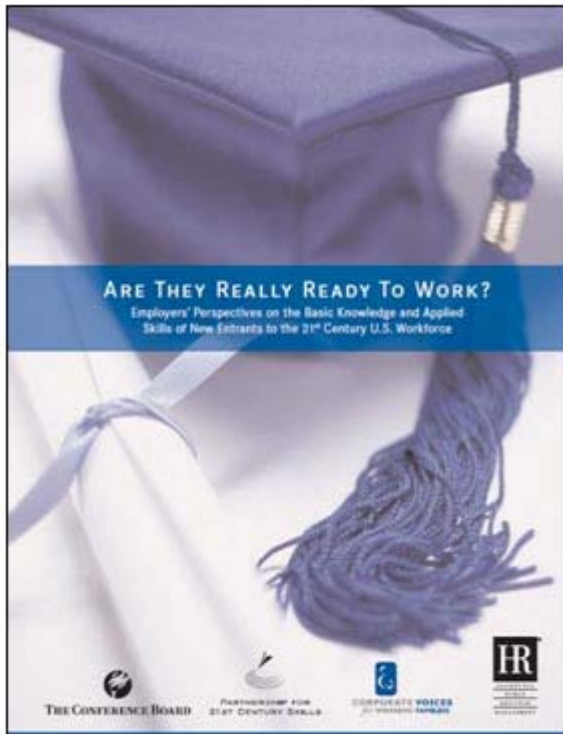


Photo Source: www.P21.org

The four participating organizations jointly surveyed over 400 employers across the United States. These employers articulated the skill sets that new entrants—recently hired graduates from high school, two-year colleges or technical schools, and four-year colleges—need to succeed in the workplace. Among the most important skills cited by employers were:

- **Professionalism/Work Ethic**
- **Oral and Written Communications**
- **Teamwork/Collaboration and**

- **Critical Thinking/Problem Solving**

In fact, the findings indicate that applied skills were viewed as more important than basic knowledge and

skills, such as *Reading Comprehension* and *Mathematics*. So, while the “three Rs” are still critical to any new workforce entrant's ability to do the job, employers strongly emphasized that applied skills like *Teamwork/Collaboration* and *Critical Thinking* are “very important” to success at work as well. The results of the study showed that young people need a range of skills, both academic and applied, in order to be successful in the 21 st century U.S. workforce.

<b>Basic Knowledge/ Skills</b>	<b>Applied Skills</b>
English Language (spoken)	Critical Thinking/ Problem Solving
Reading Comprehension (in English)	Oral Communications
Writing in English (grammar, spelling, etc.)	Written Communications
Mathematics	Teamwork/Collaboration
Science	Diversity
Government/ Economics	Information Technology Application

Humanities/ Arts	Leadership
Foreign Languages	Creativity/ Innovation
History/ Geography	Lifelong Learning/ Self Direction
	Professionalism/ Work Ethic
	Ethics/ Social Responsibility

Unfortunately, this same study showed that employers reported that many new workforce employees do not have the skills necessary for job success. The top five "most important" attributes have changed to incorporate mostly these applied skills:

- **Professionalism/ Work Ethic, Teamwork/ Collaboration and Oral Communications** are rated as the three most important applied skills needed by new employees today.
- **Knowledge of Foreign languages** will increase in importance in the next five years, more than any other basic skill, according to over 63% of employer participants surveyed.
- **Making Appropriate Choices Concerning Health and Wellness** is the number 1 emerging focus area for future graduates entering the U.S. workforce according to 76% employer participants. This attribute involves making educated choices on nutrition, exercise, stress reduction, and work-life balance to reduce stress, absenteeism and turnover and to improve productivity.
- **Creativity/Innovation** is expected to increase in importance for future workers, according to more than 73% of employer participants. This is significant in that currently, 54% of employers rate current workers that have a high school diploma as "deficient" in this skill set and rate current workers with two- and four-year college degrees to be lacking in this as well, with only 4-21% college-degree employees considered "excellent".

In the next five years, college graduates will be a significant number of new hires. More than one-quarter of the employers said that they were expecting to reduce hiring of those employees with only a high-school diploma and move towards hiring those with a two- or four-year degree. Overall, improvements are needed across the board, especially for those workers entering the workforce after high school.

High school graduates are "deficient" in the basic knowledge and skills of Writing in English, Mathematics, and Reading Comprehension,

“deficient” in Written Communications and Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, “deficient” in Professionalism/Work Ethic, and “adequate” in three important applied skills: Information Technology Application, Diversity, and Teamwork/Collaboration. Two-Year and Four-Year College Graduates are better prepared than high school graduates for the entry-level jobs they fill, with only “deficient” ratings in Writing in English, Written Communications, and leadership.

Employers were also asked to evaluate responsibility for making the new workers ready for the workforce. Three-quarters (75.6%) of employer respondents say that K-12 schools should be responsible for providing the necessary basic knowledge and applied skills for their new entrants; over two-thirds (68.4%) say four-year colleges and universities; and 45.2% select two-year colleges among their top three choices. Half of the employer respondents (49.7%) say workforce readiness is the responsibility of the new entrants themselves. One of the choices for primary responsibility for making new entrants work-ready that was not presented on the survey was “parents.” However, that response was written in many times in the “other” category. Employer respondents’ comments indicate that “parents” are an important part of the equation, and that parents play a role by instilling in their children the importance of learning, work, and career.

“The schools are handling all that they can handle. Parents are not pushing the importance of getting a job and keeping a job. I think the teachers are having a similar problem motivating kids to stay in school,” notes Chyrel Fortner of Pan Pacific Products, who has worked with local school boards. Only 19.0% of the employer respondents report that workforce readiness is primarily the responsibility of the hiring employer, and even fewer—11.4%— say it is primarily the responsibility of the business community. Other reports have indicated that the business community shares in the responsibility for workforce readiness and is contributing considerable resources to that cause. According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, business involvement in issues related to public education and workforce readiness has become increasingly more frequent, with companies contributing the equivalent of \$2.5 billion in resources each year.

On May 20, 2010, Dr. Margaret Smith, Superintendent of Volusia County Schools, will be presenting “What Our Schools are doing to Prepare Our Workforce”. The event will be held at [Indigo Lakes Golf Club](#) at 312 Indigo Drive in Daytona Beach, FL, with networking starting at 5:30 P.M. and dinner and presentation at 6:15 P.M.

"Local Manufacturers need to attend this meeting to understand what local schools are doing to educate and train the upcoming eligible workers and how they can contribute," said Jayne Fifer, President/CEO of the Volusia Manufacturers Association. "Based on the results of the *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, there needs to be collaboration, a strongly united effort from both educational and industrial organizations to educate future employees in skills needed for U.S. businesses. We all have to contribute our share so that the U.S. workforce can remain globally strong and successful."

For more information about the Volusia Manufacturers Association or more information on how to attend this meeting, please contact [Volusia Manufacturers Association](#) or Jayne Fifer at 386.673.0505. For more information on the study *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, visit the website <http://www.p21.org>.

### ***About Volusia Manufacturers Association:***

The Volusia Manufacturers Association was founded in 1980 in Volusia County, Florida by manufacturers for manufacturers. Volusia Manufacturers Association provides information, education and networking opportunities to help manufacturers grow and succeed. VMA are made up of companies that range in size from one employee to over 500. If you are interested in joining the Volusia Manufacturers Association, please visit <http://www.vmaonline.com>.

### **Additional Resources for Work-Based Learning Experiences**

**Junior Achievement** uses hands-on experiences to help young people understand the economics of life. In partnership with business and educators, Junior Achievement brings the real world to students, opening their minds to their potential. <http://www.ja.org/>

**Jobs for America's Graduates**, or JAG, is a school-to-career program implemented in 700 high schools, alternative schools, community colleges, and middle schools across the country and United Kingdom. JAG's mission is to keep young people in school through graduation and provide work-based learning experiences that will lead to career advancement opportunities or to enroll in a postsecondary institution that leads to a rewarding career. <http://www.jag.org/>

**EEOC Youth@Work Initiative** : EEOC plans on hosting a series of forums and roundtable discussions with business leaders, human resource groups, industry trade associations, and others to further

explore the workplace trends and challenges affecting young workers. EEOC is especially interested in hearing from businesses and industry associations about the types of technical assistance, guidance or other tools that would be helpful in managing America's next generation of workers. <http://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/initiatives/youth/index.cfm>

**Contact Information:**

Jayne Fifer  
President/CEO  
Volusia Manufacturers Association  
[jayne.fifer@VMAonline.com](mailto:jayne.fifer@VMAonline.com)  
386.673.0505  
Fax: 386.673.6663  
Cell: 386.212.4003  
[www.VMAonline.com](http://www.VMAonline.com)

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