



Testimony

Submitted on behalf of the
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry

Pennsylvania Public Education

Before the
House Republican Policy Committee

Presented by:

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Good morning and thank you to the House Republican Policy Committee for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the education needs of the business community. My name is Jim Willshier and I am the Manager of Chamber Relations and Special Projects at the Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry. The Pennsylvania Chamber has 24,000 members and customers and is the largest broad-based business advocacy organization in the state, representing nearly 50 percent of the private workforce in all industries. Through these members we are able to provide valuable input on organizational structure, performance, and financial planning as well as experience from members that have been in the field of education.

As education is an area that we continue to explore, the following is data to help gain a better understanding of the needs for young workers and reflects what we have heard from the business community.

First of all, reading, writing, and arithmetic skills are still very important core skills for our expanding knowledge economy. Other skills that are less often discussed are strongly needed by employers but do not fall into the above categories because they are more intangible.

The business community has identified the following as areas to improve upon to better meet the needs of employers and to help students have more successful careers:

- The Conference Board's *Are They Really Ready to Work?*, found that 58% of employers said that critical thinking and problem solving skills are very important for successful job performance and 70% said that recently hired high school graduates were deficient in critical thinking
- The Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education's *Preparing for the Future* found that other skills critical for success in the workplace are execution skills (problem solving, following instructions, multi-tasking, workload management, following deadlines), work ethic (motivation, realistic expectations, respect for peers), and conduct/work etiquette
 - MBAE also reported that one of the most common deficiencies is basic employability skills (attendance, timeliness, work ethic, etc.)
- The Strong American Schools' *Diploma To Nowhere* found that over 1/3 of college students needed remedial courses. This includes students that took advanced classes and received good grades in high school. They conservatively estimated that the cost for remediation in public colleges is over \$2 billion nationwide. Their 2008 survey also found that nearly 4/5 of remedial students had a 3.0 or more in high school
- The New Jersey State Chamber's *Learn.Do.Earn.* program offers a support system for high school students. After completing the course, students receive a certificate to present to employers that shows they have taken courses and demonstrated an understanding on responsibility and other "soft skills"

The ability to use "soft skills" or applying the knowledge and skills that are learned in school needs as much attention in education training as the actual instructional material gained in classroom. The ability to use this knowledge for problem solving is necessary for the workplace.

Proficiency in professionalism, work ethic, personal accountability, effective work habits (time and workload management, punctuality, etc.), the ability to work in teams, and better communication are all necessary to be more successful in a student's career and to be effective in the work environment.

However, these skills are not easily evaluated with any exam and are difficult to teach. These skills are learned through a well-structured curriculum, experience, and a serious attitude about the given courses. To help better prepare students for their careers and higher education, they need to view school as their first job.

All students should be exposed to the potential career options available and have opportunities to learn relevant career skills before graduation. They should also be encouraged to have plans for post-graduation in high school, whether that includes a 2-year or 4-year college, technical school, or direct entry into a career. Thinking through these plans can help the student determine the objectives they need to achieve in high school prior to graduation.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our stance this morning and I will answer any questions that you may have on this issue.

Resources:

The Conference Board's *Are They Ready to Work?*,
http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF09-29-06.pdf

Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education's *Preparing for the Future* ,
<http://www.mbae.org/uploads/01122006111154MBAEReport-WorkSkills.pdf>

Strong American Schools' *Diploma to Nowhere*, www.strongamericanschools.org/diploma-nowhere