

Restoring the Dignity of Work:

Transforming the U.S. Workforce Development System into a World Leader

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When will our nation invest the resources required to rebuild the workforce? Our ability to build and maintain what was once the greatest infrastructure system has eroded. We are still a world leader in developing technological innovations, but the workforce required to build, operate and maintain the facilities to support the innovations across their lifecycle is absent. The United States' workforce development system is in need of an overhaul. As a process, workforce development includes the recruitment, training, placement and retention of individuals in gainful employment opportunities. Over the past three decades, we have seen a shortage of construction workforce emerge. The skills shortage has worsened to the point that it is not only hard to find qualified craft professionals, but it also impacts projects' schedule, cost and safety. As a nation, we have a wealth of resources that can be used to reverse these challenges. If we choose to do nothing, the shortage of craft professionals will get worse and likely even accelerate in the next decade due to an aging construction workforce.

Revitalizing our nation's workforce development system is a step on the path toward addressing not only the skilled shortage of construction craft professionals but the nation's shortage across numerous other industries. The effort will require new approaches in how we communicate career opportunities, such as work-based learning and other initiatives, to youth in secondary and postsecondary education. To define this path forward, a series of policies have been developed that impact industry stakeholders

and governmental agencies. Considering the relative benefits and costs associated with each policy, there are ones that we can begin implementing more quickly, in the short term (less than three years), and there are others that will require long-term, sustained efforts.

Short-term Workforce Development Policies

1. Establish and strengthen the awareness of career opportunities in our nation: Most graduating high school students expect to earn a bachelor's degree for employment opportunities and higher wages, yet most jobs in the U.S. require career and technical education (CTE) and the associated certification. We must establish our nation's commitment to the equality of all workers by recognizing the dignity of their contribution to society.

2. Revitalize our work-based learning programs: Despite the tremendous benefits associated with work-based learning, it remains a marginal education strategy in the U.S. Our nation needs to significantly improve participation in work-based learning programs by removing barriers to company participation and promoting its exposure in secondary education.

3. Measure performance and involvement in workforce development when awarding construction contracts: As owners recognized the importance of safety, they held their contractors to high standards of safety performance, which helped with long-term improvements in worker health and safety. Owners need to assess construction firms' dedication and commitment to workforce development much like the industry does with safety.

Longer-term Workforce Development Policies

4. Redefine how we measure the quality of our nation's secondary education system by career and college readiness: In terms of preparing graduates of our nation's secondary education system, "career readiness" and "college readiness" are currently used interchangeably. Career readiness is a broader concept than just preparing individuals for university studies. At a minimum, all high school graduates should be career ready. The nation's secondary education system should be provided greater incentive to ensure the career readiness of all high school graduates.

5. Increase the participation of underrepresented groups in CTE: The groups that represent the greatest opportunity for new workers in the construction industry include women, minorities and veterans. To increase the numbers of these groups within the construction industry we must increase their presence within secondary and postsecondary CTE programs. In addition, the industry must do a better job of recruiting and retaining these future professionals with improved worksite conditions and other incentives.

6. Establish and expand collaboration between industry, education and government: Industry and business leaders directly feel the challenge of recruiting people in non-managerial roles with required skills, training and education. To promote CTE in both secondary and postsecondary education levels, the industry has to take an active role promoting industry involvement and investment into our nation's secondary and postsecondary CTE programs.

7. Develop more balanced funding among postsecondary CTE and higher education: A sizable portion of public education and workforce funding is not effectively allocated to meet the needs of the national economy. The overall governmental funding received by CTE programs across the U.S. has declined over the last decade. As a nation, we must increase funding available to CTE programs most needed by industry through direct funding, incentive programs and streamlined governmental funding programs.

This advocacy document and its policies are meant to educate local, state and federal legislators on why reforming our workforce system is so critical. To make our workforce development system into a global leader, we must emphasize the following changes:

- *Elevate career education*
- *Support workforce development through industry collaboration*
- *Balance funding between CTE and higher education*
- *Recognize all effective work and learn models*
- *Ensure all high school graduates are career ready*

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www.usa.gov/elected-officials



The policies advocated in this document were developed by an industry-driven research team led by NCCER and the Construction Industry Institute (CII) and supported by the Construction Users Roundtable, Ironworkers/IMPACT and representatives from CII member firms. The following organizations endorse these policies:

ACE Mentoring • American Council for Construction Education (ACCE) • American Fire Sprinkler Association (AFSA) • Association for Skilled and Technical Services (ASTS) • Barton Malow • Bechtel • Brown & Root • Central Gulf Industrial Alliance (CGIA) • Cianbro Companies • Construction Labor Market Analyzer (CLMA) • Current Builders • Fluor Corporation • Gaylor Electric, Inc. • GRANIX, LLC • Greater Baton Rouge Industry Alliance, Inc. (GBRIA) • Gulf States Shipbuilders Consortium (GSSC) • Hargrove • Jacobs • LPR Construction Company • McCarthy Building Companies, Inc. • National Academy of Construction (NAC) • National Insulation Association (NIA) • National Maritime Education Council (NMEC) (Representing the Shipbuilding Industry) • National Technical Honor Society (NTHS) • North American Crane Bureau (NACB) • Pearson • Power Up, Inc. • S&B Engineers and Constructors • SkillsUSA • Southeastern Construction Owners and Associates Roundtable (SCOAR) • Southern States Automotive Contractors Association (SSACA) • Steel Erectors Association of America (SEAA) • Sundt Construction, Inc. • The Association of Union Contractors (TAUC) • The Austin Company • The Dow Chemical Company • The Haskell Company • The Southern Company • TIC - The Industrial Company • Turner Industries Group, LLC • University of Colorado at Boulder • University of Florida, M.E. Rinker, Sr. School of Construction Management • University of Kentucky • Wayne J. Griffin Electric, Inc. • Willmar Electric Service

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