

Southwest Idaho
SCHOOL to WORK

Workforce Idaho

*Skills & Attitudes
for Success in the
21st Century*

*A Cooperative Research Project
Conducted by
Southwest Idaho School to Work Partnerships
and
Boise State University*

Sponsored by:

Southwest Idaho School to Work
George Dignan and Bruce Schultz, facilitators

**Boise Area School to Work
Partnership Council**
Ted Crumley, chair and Jerry Evans, vice-chair

**Education and Business Beyond 2000
School to Work Partnership Council**
Craig Nielsen and Vaughn Heinrich, co-chairs

**Partners for the Future
School to Work Partnership Council**
Jim Reed and Bill Purcell, co-chairs

**Boise Area Chamber of Commerce
Economic Development Council**
Don Knickrehm, chair

**In partnership with the following
Southwest Idaho Chambers of Commerce:**

Boise Area
Caldwell
Meridian
Mountain Home
Nampa
Payette
Weiser

Workforce Idaho

Skills & Attitudes for Success
in the 21st Century

Executive Summary

Conducted by

The Center for School Improvement

College of Education

Boise State University

Are Idaho's Youth Prepared to Succeed at Work?

"Idaho employers can help themselves by playing an active, meaningful role in the education of their future employees: our state's youth. The *Workforce Idaho* study helps focus attention on the collaborative work that educators, employers, students, and parents need to do to ensure that all of our youth make the transition to work with the skills and attitudes they need to succeed."

Ted Crumley, senior vice president and chief financial officer, Boise Cascade Corporation
Boise Area School to Work Partnership Council, chair
Boise Area Chamber of Commerce, chair-elect

"School to Work is helping Idaho ensure that its young people acquire not only the basic skills, but the attitudes toward work and life-long learning that will best serve them throughout their lives. This cooperative educational process between home, school, work, and community will help young people succeed in school, at work, and at life."

Craig Nielsen, training manager, Micron Electronics, Inc.
Education & Business Beyond 2000
School to Work Partnership Council, co-chair

PREFACE

Dramatic change in the workplace is commonplace, transforming our culture and heightening the challenges schools face in preparing students to effectively make the transition to the work world. *Workforce Idaho* is a collaborative effort designed to focus southwest Idaho's collective talent and energies on ensuring that this critical challenge is met for the youth in our area.

INTRODUCTION

Workforce Idaho is a comprehensive study sponsored by a coalition of southwest Idaho educational and business groups. The study was designed and conducted by Boise State University's Center for School Improvement to:

- Help educators and students gain a greater understanding of the skills and attitudes required to succeed at work today and in the future.
- Understand the degree to which employees entering the workforce meet southwest Idaho employer expectations.

Ultimately, the study's findings and recommendations are intended to promote public education that best prepares our youth to successfully enter the work world. Youth, parents, educators, employers, and other community members must work together to meet this educational challenge.

The study had three interrelated phases, each building upon the prior:

1. **Site visits:** 89 teams of Idaho educators conducted more than 600 visits to southwest Idaho businesses to learn firsthand the requirements employers look for in employees.
2. **Telephone survey:** BSU's *Social Science Research Center* completed over 450 telephone interviews from a random sample of southwest Idaho businesses. The survey sought employers' expectations and their assessments of employees against these expectations.
3. **Dialogue interviews:** Research teams from BSU's *Center for School Improvement* conducted 17 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with representatives of small to large southwest Idaho businesses from a variety of industries.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- ◆ Interpersonal skills are critical.
- ◆ Today's workplace requires broad basic skills.
- ◆ A strong work ethic and strong work habits are essential.
- ◆ Idaho's workforce has an adequate foundation of workplace skills and attitudes, but continuous improvement is needed.

FINDING 1

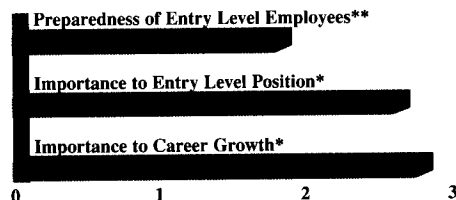
Interpersonal skills are critical in today's competitive and rapidly changing business environment.

Interpersonal skills include *teamwork, empathy, clear communication, adaptability, handling conflict, friendliness, politeness, accepting and giving criticism, and customer relations.*

81% of educator teams reported that interpersonal skills need greater emphasis in school curricula, based on employers' comments during the business visits. This conclusion was consistent with subsequent findings in the employer telephone survey and dialogue interviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Youth need to learn to collaborate and to compete. They need to understand when each is appropriate.
2. Youth need learning environments where openness, sharing, and cooperation are emphasized as keys to effective teamwork.
3. Youth need enhanced opportunities to develop relevant and effective interpersonal communication skills.



* 1-Not Important, 2-Of Some Importance, 3-Of Great Importance
** 1-Poorly Prepared, 2-Adequately Prepared, 3-Well Prepared

FINDING 2

Today's workplace requires a broad foundation of basic skills upon which other skills develop.

Reading, writing, mathematics, speaking, and listening remain important workplace skills. *Problem solving and technology skills* also must be included on the list of basic skills required for workplace success.

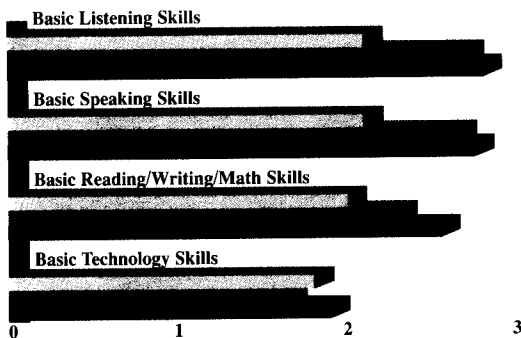
75% of educator teams reported that problem solving needs more emphasis in schools, based on employers' comments during the business visits. This conclusion was consistent with subsequent findings in the employer telephone survey and dialogue interviews.

65% of educator teams reported listening and speaking skills need more emphasis, based on employers' comments during the business visits. This conclusion was consistent with subsequent findings in the employer telephone survey and dialogue interviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All high school graduates must achieve high levels of competence in these basic skills.
2. Youth need more relevant opportunities to develop effective listening and speaking skills.
3. Youth need more opportunities to cooperate in performing relevant complex problem solving.

Preparedness of Entry Level Employees**
 Importance to Entry Level Position*
 Importance to Career Growth*



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FINDING 3

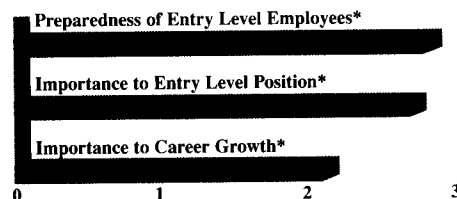
A strong work ethic and strong work habits are essential for workplace success.

For skills to be applied effectively, employees must consistently demonstrate that they possess positive attitudes toward work and effective work habits. *Reliability, dependability, safety, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, personal initiative, persistence, effective time management, attention to detail, work quality, and appropriate organization and prioritization of work* combine to create a strong work ethic.

77% of educator teams reported that work habits need more emphasis in schools, based on employers' comments during the business visits. This conclusion was consistent with subsequent findings in the employer telephone survey and dialogue interviews.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Youth must be encouraged to be lifelong learners who thrive on diverse work challenges and responsibilities.
2. Youth must develop a strong work ethic and strong work habits that are consistently reinforced at home, school, work, and in the community.
3. All youth need realistic workplace-related learning experiences as a regular part of their education.



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FINDING 4

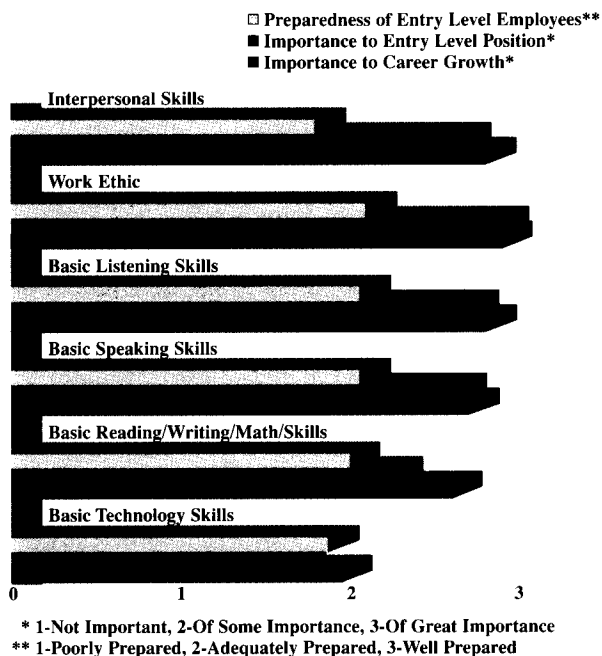
Idaho's workforce has an adequate foundation of workplace skills and attitudes, but continuous improvement is needed.

Employers interviewed for *Workforce Idaho* shared examples of employees entering the workplace with inadequate skills. However, during the telephone survey, when employers ranked employee preparedness on the skills addressed by *Workforce Idaho*, all rankings fell within the "adequately prepared" range. Ability to handle conflict was rated at the low end of this range and employees' honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness were ranked at the high end.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Building upon the established base, southwest Idaho public schools should develop goals and plans designed to ensure that youth entering the workforce demonstrate that they are "well prepared" in *all* the basic skills and attitudes necessary for success in the workplace.
2. Educators, employers, parents, students, and other community members should work collaboratively to ensure continuous progress toward these targeted improvement goals.
3. Employers should share relevant resources including information, technology, workplace examples, and skill development approaches and materials with educators.
4. Idaho educators should be provided increased opportunities for professional development that incorporate relevant workplace skills and attitudes for school curricula.

5. Partnerships between southwest Idaho Chambers of Commerce, businesses, school to work efforts, and educational institutions should be strengthened so that young people enter the workplace prepared to succeed today and in the future.



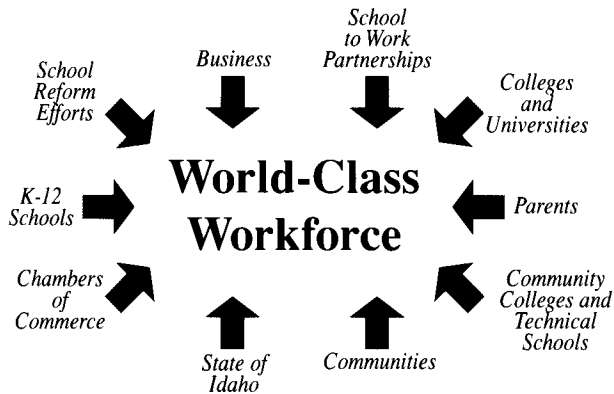
"The information gleaned from the *Workforce Idaho* study will help our communities work together more effectively to ensure that what our students learn more fully prepares them to enter the workplace and succeed."

Jim Reed, superintendent, Weiser School District
Partners for the Future
School to Work Partnership Council, co-chair

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Idaho's youth need to demonstrate the motivation, knowledge, skills, and attitudes for success in today's world.
2. Idaho's youth need rigorous and relevant learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom to develop the motivation, knowledge, skills and attitudes that will give them the greatest chance to succeed.
3. A more active collaboration among educators, students, parents, employers, and communities is the critical element for achieving the recommendations outlined in this Executive Summary.

Workforce Idaho: Skills & Attitudes for Success in the 21st Century



How Idaho Employers Can Collaborate With Educators to Build a World-Class Workforce

Employers in southwest Idaho play an increasingly important role in the education of youth in our region. Employers do much already, but their expanded collaboration with educators is essential to ensure that Idaho's youth enter the workplace prepared to contribute and succeed. The following collaborative strategies need to be dramatically increased.

- **Collaborative Curricula Improvement:** Employers work with educators to ensure that school curricula are designed to impart relevant skills and attitudes to students.
- **Expert Presentations:** Schools host area business and community members to share expertise through presentations, lessons, and demonstrations.
- **Educator/Student Field Experiences:** Employers host teachers and students for visits to the employers' work sites for work-related presentations and tours.
- **Business/School Partnerships:** Employers team with schools to create and strengthen partnerships designed to connect education and work.
- **Job Shadowing:** Teachers and students regularly observe in the workplace. These on-the-job opportunities provide educators and students invaluable career exploration and exposure to the work world.

- **Mentoring:** Employees work intensively with individual students to provide insight, advice and learning opportunities concerning success in the workplace. Youth explore connections between school learning and workplace applications.
- **Internships:** Employers offer in-depth work based learning experiences for students and teachers.

These and other collaborative educational efforts enable employers and educators to have a meaningful impact on the motivation, knowledge, skills and attitudes young people need for success. Such efforts need to be continued and expanded to accomplish the recommendations outlined in this Executive Summary.

“The most important skills every employee needs relate to attendance, punctuality, teamwork, appearance, and interpersonal skills. It’s paramount that businesses, schools, and parents make this point to students so that they can succeed from the time they enter the workforce. School to Work plays an important role in getting this message across.”

Bill Purcell, owner, McDonald’s
Partners for the Future
 School to Work Partnership Council, co-chair

Southwest Idaho School to Work

For copies of this executive summary, an expanded report of the study, or information about School to Work efforts in southwest Idaho contact:

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Center for School Improvement

The Center for School Improvement, a cooperative effort of the College of Education and the College of Social Science and Public Affairs, is organized to provide leadership support and technical assistance towards the improvement of Idaho schools.

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