

Preparing Young Adults for Fulfilling Futures

The economic health of our nation is riding on it.

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Introduction

A few generations ago it was common for a person – after high school – or perhaps college graduation – to take a job at a company, perhaps hold several positions, then 30+ years later retire from the company. That is now a virtually non-existent scenario – and not likely to return.

Now, a career working for several companies is far more likely. Change is so accelerated people may have multiple careers before retiring – including careers that don’t exist today. And retirement is very different – likely far more active – than it once was.

These large-scale workforce shifts, combined with major transformations in how work is done, and how products and services are created, sold and used, drive the need for a strong educational background, and a very resilient perspective among young adults preparing to enter the workforce. As well, economic health at national, state and local levels depends upon collaboration between the public and private sectors, and driving constant transformational innovation throughout organizations.

The global marketplace demands it.

Employment/Unemployment Trends

Unemployment rates for those under 25 are more than twice the national average, and far above pre-recession levels.² Young adults, age 20 – 24, have an average unemployment rate roughly 75-85% higher than the overall labor force.²⁶ Addressing this issue is critical. **Being unemployed or underemployed early often greatly reduces lifetime earnings and limits social mobility.²**

Racial and Ethnic Disparity

An April Bureau of Labor Statistics report shows variances from Q1 2013 – Q1 2014 for young adults, 20 – 24, by gender and by race/ethnicity. In all cases the year-over-year unemployment rates improved. However, there is considerable disparity in unemployment rates specific to race/ethnicity. African Americans have consistent unemployment rates at approximately twice the rate of Whites. Hispanic/Latino unemployment rates are slightly higher than for Whites, ranging from .2% - 3.1% higher.²⁶

Women

Women’s unemployment rate was lower than men’s for each quarter, and across the race/ethnicity spectrum, although the extent of the variance differed by race/ethnicity.²⁶

Unemployment Rates (%) by Race/Ethnicity and Gender – Ages 20 – 24 vs. All Adults								
Ages 20 – 24	Total		White		African American		Hispanic/Latino	
Gender	1 st 2013	1 st 2014						
Men & Women	14.1%	12.7%	12.2%	10.6%	25.2%	21.9%	14.1%	12.1%
Men	15.5%	14.3%	13.4%	12.0%	27.8%	25.5%	14.4%	12.2%
Women	12.5%	10.9%	10.8%	9.0%	22.8%	18.5%	13.6%	12.1%
Men & Women * All Ages *	8.1%	6.9%	7.3%	6.1%	13.7%	12.2%	10.1%	8.6%

The table shows a narrow snapshot in time, but African American unemployment rates have remained double those of Whites since the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking this data in 1954. While there has been considerable study on reasons for this consistent disparity, there remains no consensus on causes.²⁸

Individuals with associate's or bachelor's degrees have higher employment rates than those with less education.⁴ However, a degree hasn't reliably opened the door to desirable employment as anticipated. An Accenture 2013 College Graduate Employment Survey shows reality is quite different.²⁴

- Since 2011, 41% of graduates are underemployed; holding jobs that don't require their college degrees.
- Even with degrees, 63% say they will need more training in order to get their desired job.
- Unmet expectations: 77% of graduates expect their first employer to provide formal training. However, only 48% of 2011/2012 grads said they received training in their first job after graduation.
- Of grads with a two-year degree, 52% expect to need a four-year degree for jobs they want.

To be competitive in the global marketplace requires full understanding of what led to this situation plus the future economic drivers imperative to taking the right, and right-sized actions. Large scale and highly innovative plans, strategies and methods are essential given the mix of large and entrenched racial employment differences – and changing expectations for employee education, skills and knowledge to deliver sizable economic gains across a number of industries.

This is no time for a “Band-Aid” approach!

Generation Y/Millennials: A Unique Generation

Millennials, (AKA Generation Y) are a distinctive generation. While there isn't common agreement on the generation's birth years, the typical range is late '70s – late '90s (about 15 – 35 years old today). U.S. Millennials are 80 million strong – 25% of the population!⁵ Millennials will represent 75% of the global workforce by 2025.⁷ Beyond their numbers, this generation is important due to its diverse racial and ethnic makeup, as well as its distinct perspectives, beliefs, values, consumer choices and world view. The size of this generation gives it substantial demographic impact as consumers and in other choices they make as adults.



One unique generational characteristic, impacting all aspects of their lives: They are the first generation to grow up with computers and widespread personal technology – digital natives, so to speak – rather than adapting to new technologies like other generations.¹ For many, technology is ingrained into all aspects of their lives. Constantly connected to technology and easily adapting to new technologies, is their norm.

Our ability to measure up to our – and others – expectations in a global marketplace rests on providing the Millennial generation and future generations with a strong educational background to secure skilled and well-compensated employment, engagement to demonstrate support and ensure lifelong learning, and going beyond acceptance of – to fully embracing – the diversity they represent and value.

Growth Industries and Careers

A Georgetown University report states – unless something significant happens – the U.S. economy will create 55 million new jobs by 2020. Of these, 24 million will be new jobs – and 31 million will be tied to baby boomer retirements.¹⁵ Several industries are experiencing significant growth, with future projections for continued expansion. Two representative industries are manufacturing and healthcare.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing has long been a core industry in the U.S. For many years, U.S. manufacturing has been a global leader. Manufacturing has struggled over the last few decades, with job losses due to productivity gains, as well as offshoring jobs to countries where wages were low. And, in some cases American manufacturing was overshadowed by manufacturing innovations in other countries.

Today 90% of Americans view manufacturing as **the** most important industry for maintaining a healthy U.S. economy, generating economic prosperity, a high standard of living and strong national security.¹⁵ Even so, some older adults clearly recall U.S. manufacturing's decline a few decades ago, and don't consider

manufacturing a secure and stable career. Today only one-third of Americans would encourage their children to pursue manufacturing careers.¹⁶ They aren't aware of how manufacturing has evolved, its increasing vigor, high-tech production processes and innovative new product pipelines. A recent survey, showed 86% of manufacturers view their current business outlook as somewhat or very positive.³

The ability to improve our position globally hinges on establishing – and retaining – competitive advantages, including advanced technology, innovation, speed and an increasingly technically skilled workforce. Today in many manufacturing segments a “skills gap”³ exists. Numerous open positions exist – but there aren't enough workers with the skills required in these increasingly technical – and constantly changing, careers.

However, with the right education/training, Millennials are poised to excel in these growing advanced technology careers that pay well and offer long-term opportunities. According to U.S. News & World Report, the average U.S. manufacturing worker earns roughly \$77,000.¹⁴ Within manufacturing, skill sets in greatest demand: IT (44%), engineering (36%) and R&D (29%).²³

For those with an associate's degree or certification, Heating, A/C & Refrigeration Mechanics and Installers are in high demand.²²



Welder Example:²⁰

- Hobart Institute of Welding Technology
- Must have high school diploma or GED to qualify
- About \$25,000 to cover tuition, books and living expenses
- Nine-month program – weld structural steel and pipe, work with more complicated alloys, such as aluminum, titanium and stainless steel – spending more than 1,000 hours under a hood learning and practicing
- Approximately 300 students graduate annually; 83% with a job
- Average pay: \$17/hour or \$36,000 per year initially
- Some students can expect to make a lot more, especially those with strong trigonometry skills, gained in advanced pipe-layout class – and handy when welding pipeline along rough terrain or at unusual angles.
- Welding used to be considered a “dead-end job.” However, with thousands of miles of pipeline being built, demand has risen sharply.

Healthcare

Healthcare is the Midwest region's top growth industry. Over the last decade over 3,000 new jobs have been added annually.⁹ Industry growth is on a strong trajectory, driven in part by an aging population. Required skill sets for these new jobs vary widely. However, the largest job segments require two years or less of post-secondary education.⁹ Gaining an associate degree or technical certificate opens a number of doors. Extra education leads to even more opportunities. These jobs pay well. Average annual earnings exceed \$50,000.⁹ Those with an associate's degree or certificate will find strong opportunities in these fields:^{22 19}

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ▪ Registered nurses | ▪ Occupational therapy assistants |
| ▪ Nursing assistants | ▪ Diagnostic medical sonographers |
| ▪ Licensed practical nurses | ▪ Physical therapist assistant |

Education and Skills

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION – HIGH SCHOOL

Begin Prior to Kindergarten

Typically advocates for early childhood education reference long-term economic benefits such as: the fact those that children entering school ready to learn are more productive, higher earning adults. However, a spring 2014 report from ReadyNation/America's Edge demonstrates how investing in early childhood education is an effective economic stimulus in real time.

Specifically, early childhood education funding of \$1 billion would:

- Produce \$1.8 billion in economic impact
- Create 28,000 jobs, including 5,600 jobs outside the early education sector
- Allow an additional 170,800 children ages 3 – 4 to enroll⁴⁹

Another study found every \$1 spent on preschool reduced future outlays on prison, welfare and other social services by \$7. Essentially, it is very costly to have kids starting behind and staying behind.⁴⁹

An analysis of 84 preschool programs concluded, on average, children gain about one-third of a year of additional learning across language, reading and math skills. “At scale” preschool programs in Tulsa and Boston produced larger gains of one-half to one full year of additional learning in reading and math.⁴²

Across a variety of preschool programs cost-benefit estimates ranged from \$3 - \$7 saved per dollar spent.⁴²

A variety of studies and analyses demonstrate that not only is investment in early childhood education a wise long-term investment; it is a sound investment – with immediate payback and an incredibly strong ROI.

The Poverty Crisis has a Huge Impact on the Education Crisis

Multiple studies have shown **poverty – not race, ethnicity, national origin, or where you attend school – is the best predictor of college attendance and completion.**⁵⁰

Add to this shocking reality the fact that **between 2001 and 2011 poverty grew by 40% in the Midwest, while educational spending per pupil grew by only 12%.**⁵⁰

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Many skills taught in CTE courses were once viewed as “vocational education.” Current CTE programs provide broader and more career-oriented education than the “vo-tech” of the past. Today’s CTE courses are rigorous academically and provide hands-on learning to directly apply to current and future careers. In some cases, CTE programs include apprenticeships, internships and co-op programs along with classroom instruction.²¹

Middle-Skills

Many jobs in high demand today require “middle-skills.”¹² Middle skills bridge the gap between a high school diploma and a bachelor’s degree, typically with an associate’s degree or technical certificate. STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education-related programs are prominent in CTE programs. STEM education is needed for technical positions from heavy equipment mechanic to veterinary tech. A recent The Brookings Institution study showed, 86% of American employers say they would pay more for a job candidate with the right training, hands-on experience, and practical knowledge.¹²

Since 2004, STEM occupations growth has been 12%+, versus total occupational growth of less than 2%. Average STEM wages almost double overall wages. In 2012 average annual wages were \$82,278 for a STEM job. Also, the unemployment rate for STEM occupations was less than half the national average.⁸

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)

What exactly is STEM? While there is no universally agreed-upon definition, there is general agreement that STEM workers use their knowledge of science, technology, engineering or math to try to understand how the world works and solve problems, often using computers and other tools.

Two essential skills for STEM workers:

- 1) **Thinking Skills** – critical and creative thinking are used to problem-solve, detect mistakes, gather relevant information and understand how different parts or systems interact with each other.
- 2) **Communication Skills** – important for working well with others – and conveying information clearly, both written and orally. These skills may be used in technical writing, public speaking, interpersonal communication and to explain difficult concepts simply.⁴¹

Given the importance of enhancing U.S.’ competitive position in the global marketplace, the U.S. must lead with a highly skilled workforce along with the most innovative technology and processes. The strong growth trajectory for STEM jobs is expected to continue.

In some industries, U.S. worker STEM education and skills are behind those of other countries. The U.S. has increased emphasis on breadth and depth of STEM knowledge and skills at all educational levels. New, hands-on learning methods, directly applicable to the job and to future careers are being employed. STEM career fields expect 22% growth, with 93% of positions requiring post-secondary education.¹⁸

Completion hurdle: Of students entering college intending to major in a STEM field only 40% actually complete a STEM degree. It is critical to greatly increase STEM completion rates.²⁸ Proposed initiatives to improve college completion include more tailored and earlier career counseling, mentoring, occupational and work-readiness skills development and subsidized short-term “on-the-job” experiences.⁴

“The future of the economy is in STEM. That’s where the jobs of tomorrow will be.”

James Brown, Executive Director of the STEM Education Coalition in Washington, D.C.⁴¹

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data agrees, showing STEM-related occupations will grow to more than 9 million from 2012 – 2022. That increase of 1 million jobs (13%) over 2012 employment levels is faster than the projected 11% growth for all occupations over the next decade.⁴¹

The Brookings Institution conducted a study to evaluate STEM more broadly than policymakers. Their objective was to determine the total economic impact from STEM jobs. Policymakers primarily focused solely on STEM workers as those with at least a bachelor’s degree. By doing so, they have been overlooking a large segment of the STEM workforce. The report refers to this as, “The Hidden STEM Economy.”³⁶

By including those who work in STEM-related occupations and contribute to the STEM economy they found:

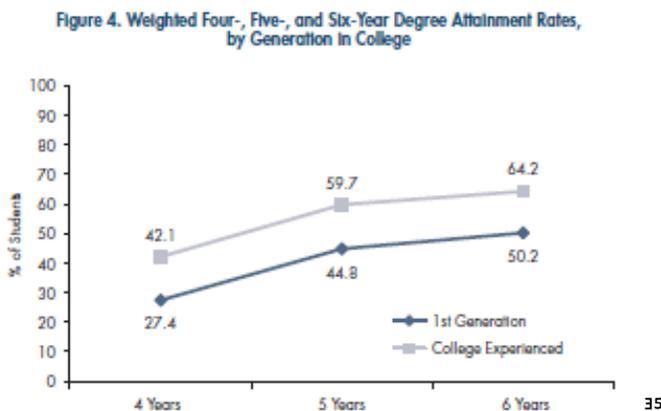
- As of 2011, 26 million U.S. jobs – 20% of ALL U.S. jobs – require a high level of knowledge in any one STEM field.
- Half of all STEM jobs don’t require a four-year college degree.
- These jobs pay \$53,000 on average, approximately 10% higher than jobs with similar educational requirements.

STEM Intensive Sectors: Manufacturing, health care, utilities, construction, professional services and mining

***Health care, manufacturing and construction
– key STEM intensive sectors – make up 30% of total U.S. employment.***

College Achievement Differences among Student Populations

First Generation College Students



Significant differences exist in graduation rates based on whether the student is a first-generation college student. The gap remains consistent whether graduating after four years, five years, or six years.³⁵

Although it isn’t a new issue, special programs exist to help those who are the first in their families – and sometimes first in their neighborhoods – go to college.

Beyond the financial difficulties of going to college, other issues are just as daunting, but haven't received much attention.³¹ That has changed. Across the country programs remove barriers that impede success for first-generation students. Examples:

- Access to information and coaching and guidance to ensure they fully understand the many elements of the enrollment process and what is expected of them in various situations
- Medical and dental care
- Peer networks
- Tailored networking events
- Tutoring³¹

Nonprofits fund most programs, but public universities are realizing the benefits of investing in coaching programs. An Ohio university determined increasing their retention rate by 5% generates nearly \$500,000 in additional tuition and fees. Some programs are restricting students to majors with strong job demand.³²

Dropping out of school isn't always financially-related. Other personal/social issues are also at play. In some cases, students who seek to advance their education and pursue careers that education can provide receive backlash from families and/or friends/neighbors they leave behind when they go to college.³⁶

Women

Women are attaining degrees at higher rates than men. The gender gap has increased over the past decade. Of those entering college in 2004, 32.9% of men completed a bachelor's degree in four years, vs. 43.8% of women. At six years, 58.1% of men had finished a bachelor's degree, vs. 63.6% of women.³⁵

Women typically start out ahead. They were more likely to start college with higher high-school grades and a more rigorous course load, including more high-school math and science.³⁵

Educational Paths

College/University

For the last few generations, a common perception for the "ticket" to a successful career was to attend a four-year college and receive a bachelor's degree. While this career path remains appropriate for many young adults, in reality far more young adults start college than actually receive a degree.⁶

Today across the U.S., more than 40% of freshman will not graduate within six years.¹¹ Several personal and societal "costs" are tied to their failure to graduate. These costs include personal debt; altering their lives to attend; and failing at one of the biggest goals they ever set for themselves. Their future earning potential decreases severely, generating lost income taxes and other financial losses on a national, state and local level.

Given the significant commitments inherent in going to college, we must do a better job of helping young adults select their major wisely.⁴⁷ This can be accomplished by revamping and enhancing career education and counseling available to all who are considering pursuing a college degree. Students need to understand their options from the start and what each requires:

- Financially, time, academic/skills
- What jobs/careers are available
- Typical earnings of these jobs/careers
- Projected strength of that industry
- Knowledge and skill set required to remain competitive⁴⁸

As well, the recent recession and other factors led many states to cut funding to higher education. In 2013 state spending on higher education declined 23%; \$2,026 per student (Missouri ↓27.4%, Kansas ↓22.8%). These cuts hurt considerably, putting substantial strain on budgets. In addition to colleges and universities reducing spending, many states also raised tuition.

Since 1973 average inflation-adjusted public college tuition has more than tripled. During that same time period median household income is up a miserly 5%.³⁷

One bright spot was the increase in Pell Grants, the U.S.'s primary student grant aid program. From 2007/2008 to 2012/2013 school years, the aid program doubled from \$16 billion to nearly \$33 billion.³⁷

In 2012 most states began restoring funding for public higher education.³⁷

- State spending for Fiscal Year 2013 – 2014 increased in all but 8 states. Missouri increased funding 3.6%, \$175 per student; Kansas continued funding cuts at -2.1%, -\$121 per student.
- Tuition increases in 38 states were much smaller, averaging \$120. Missouri increased tuition \$31. However, Kansas was among seven states that raised tuition by more than \$300 after inflation – at \$342.

Community Colleges

Although community colleges have long been a viable option to a traditional four-year college, their role has grown as knowledge and skill expectations in numerous industries exceed those of high school graduates, but fall below four-year degree requirements. CTE and STEM educational programs and the associate's degrees and technical certifications they offer are often the right fit for open skilled positions in a variety of industries.

Huge caveat: Only 13% attain an associate's degree in two years.⁴⁶ Completion rate must increase.

Career Colleges/Technical Schools

Career colleges/career academies and technical schools also offer educational alternatives – particularly for disadvantaged youth. These for-profit educational centers often offer project-based, hands-on education to prepare students explicitly for certain careers or industry sectors, such as healthcare, finance and IT.²¹

One outcome of the inability for those with bachelor's degrees to find jobs within their chosen fields is the reality that 20% of students in career and technical schools have four-year degrees, but are back in school to gain the skills needed for a technical career. For many, debt increases as they work toward a viable career.²⁹

Student Debt

Today many young adults with bachelor's degrees are struggling to enter the workforce. They are either unemployed, underemployed, or working part-time – nearly always in a low-level job that does not use their recently gained skills and knowledge and with much lower compensation. This creates a severe strain for the two-thirds of college graduates who graduate with the burden of substantial debt. In 2012, 68% of graduates of public and non-profit four-year colleges had student debt, averaging \$27,850 per borrower. Debt was a reality for 63% of Missouri graduates from public and non-profit four-year colleges; \$23,030 on average (Kansas 59%, \$23,677).^{13 51} More than 80% of student loans are federal or federally guaranteed.⁴⁵

The student loan amount owed tripled over the last decade – to over \$1.2 trillion in 2012.⁴³ Student loan debt surpassed credit card debt for the first time in 2010, when U.S. households owed \$826.5 billion in revolving credit (98% is credit card debt), and owed \$829.8 billion in student loans. Student loans are now #2 in household debt, behind mortgage debt.⁴³ The bulk of that debt is owed by people in their 20s and 30s. Worse yet, young adults carry these very high levels of debt whether or not they graduated.

Student debt-related issues are creating widespread negative impact on the U.S. economy.^{38 44 52 53}

1. Large numbers of students graduate with student debt at levels that may take more than 20 years to pay.
2. This debt decreases their ability to secure loans for automobiles and homes. When they do receive loans, interest rates are higher. Their credit scores suffer. Auto and home industries face decreased demand.
3. This lack of “first-time homebuyers” creates a ripple effect. “Move-up buyers” are a much smaller group. Today the percentage of 30-year-old homeowners with student debt is lower than 30-year-old homebuyers without student debt. Skilled, educated workers are driven out of the housing market.³⁹
4. They paid high costs for their education, but entry level salaries have barely budged in years.
5. Their inability to earn enough to pay off their debts in a reasonable time means they are essentially unable to enter “adulthood” – delayed in purchasing homes, and the furniture, furnishings, landscaping, gardening and other purchases that go with homeownership. They are waiting to marry and start families.
6. This lessens consumer demand in numerous industries. Banks see reduced demand for consumer credit.
7. It results in lower tax income – of several types – at all levels of government.
8. Parents – many who are behind on saving for retirement – often step in to help, but really can't afford to.
9. Students who default on these loans are most often defaulting on a federal or federally guaranteed loan.
10. **Some financial experts consider student debt to have reached the level that they compare it to the mortgage crisis.**

U.S. Student Skills Relative to Other Countries⁵⁰

The Program for International Student Assessment measures the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students in math, reading and science on a global basis. The latest results (fall 2013) show Finland continues to hold a number of spots near the top. Recent results also show Asian students claimed many top spots. The U.S. maintained its position in the middle. Finland's educational system is one of the world's top-performing. Their system includes universal preschool, site-based management and an aversion to standardized testing.

Poverty is a known factor in determining the outcome of an individual's education. In Finland child poverty is about 5%; the U.S. rate is nearly five times higher.

Consider this: When you measure the test scores of American schools with a child poverty rate of less than 20%, U.S. kids not only outperform Finland's kids, they outperform every nation in the world.⁵⁰

Per the World Economic Forum released its "The Global Competitiveness Report, (2013-2014 Edition) ranks competitiveness according to 12 Competitiveness Pillars. In "Business Sophistication", the U.S. ranks #6, behind Japan, Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands, and Finland. In "Innovation", the U.S. ranks #7, behind Finland, Switzerland, Israel, Germany, Japan and Sweden.⁵⁴

Kansas Blue Area – A Work in Progress

STEM Jobs: Data from the Brookings Institute study:⁴⁰

- Kansas City ranks #26 in total number of STEM jobs in the Kansas City, MO-KS MSA.
- Kansas City has about 193,000 STEM jobs; 20% of all jobs. The Top 10 MSAs had an average of 24% STEM jobs as a percentage of total jobs.
- On the overall "Standardized STEM Score", which evaluated many factors, Kansas City scored .12. The average score for the Top 10 MSAs was 2.0. Northern California's Silicon Valley ranked #1, scoring 4.32.

Kansas City Public Schools

Given Kansas City Public Schools' dismal 62% graduation rate¹², (vs. a 92% national average¹⁰³) combined with a lack of accreditation, we as a community are failing youth who need to graduate from high school with skills to land jobs that remove them from poverty, and put them on track for fulfilling careers.

Kauffman Scholars²⁵

In 2003 the Kauffman Foundation selected 125 seventh graders from low-income households where they would be the first in their family to complete a college degree as the first "class" of Kauffman Scholars. The program's purpose was to 1) prepare these students for college, and 2) assist them throughout college – to graduation. Spring of 2013 was the moment of truth. How many had achieved a bachelor's degree?

Even with the extensive investments, the extra assistance, guidance, tutoring and financial support, 46 of 125 in the first class, graduated in 2013, or were on track to graduate in 2014. The 37% completion rate for bachelor's degrees exceeds the typical 28% completion rate of students in poverty. However, it is not as high as hoped/expected. Over the program's 19 years to date, Kauffman Foundation has invested \$70 million in over 1,100 students. The foundation has made – and is making – program modifications to improve outcomes.

The Broader Kansas City Community

Currently half of all individuals living in poverty in the Kansas City area are under age 25.¹⁷ The need is urgent for tailored post-secondary education, mentoring/support and training to help young adults attain the skills needed, and develop the resilience and academic endurance to complete their education.

There are open positions in growing industries that require skilled professionals to continue their growth and profitability. Placing young, educated and trained adults into these skilled, well-paying positions provides:

- A win for businesses that achieve profitable growth
- A win for individuals and their families
- A win for the community as they purchase homes, begin to raise families, purchase goods and pay taxes

Investing in their future should be considered a fundamentally vital investment in our community's future.

Conclusions

We as a community, and a country, are failing to provide the very basics needed by young adults. Young adults need knowledge, skills and tools to cross the threshold and accept adult responsibilities, hold jobs that enable them to be financially independent, to marry, start families and become consumers of vehicles, homes and the many other purchases typical of adults who are active and contributing to society. We cannot expect great things from them – as we clearly must for our nation’s well-being – unless we have done our part.

Government

For too long we have tolerated an extremely dysfunctional government. Results of that dysfunction are painfully obvious, and negatively impact the lives of millions of Americans. We must enforce, through our votes and our voices our priorities and what we value. There must be an undeniable mandate and accountability.

Poverty

Rather than reflecting the U.S.’ financial/economic status, current poverty levels reflect poor policy choices, elected officials with self-serving agendas, and a growing divide between those who have much, and those struggling to get by on a daily basis.

If Congress would set aside political agendas, work together and compromise, with the “common good” of the U.S. as a shared goal, poverty would no longer be a significant issue. Since poverty is intertwined with other issues, reversing the actions that greatly increased poverty levels is essential to overall economic stability and well-being of Americans. **We must regain a healthy “middle class.”**

Diversity

The United States is a country built on valuing diversity and the rights of individuals. The “face” of diversity today is simply different. Visibly “different” diversity is no more or less important than widespread benefits gained by inviting diversity of thought, of perspectives and values. Diversity strengthens our country.

Education

There are numerous blatant and consistent indicators demonstrating how our current educational system is not meeting the needs of students, young adults, or employers across the country.

Making early childhood education a top priority will increase the health of our nation and make huge positive differences in the lives of children now and in the future. Funding must be prioritized and targeted to achieve the strongest results, and treated as a substantial – and sound – investment in our children’s, and our nation’s future. Huge, long-lasting benefits have been demonstrated.

Achieving global competitiveness requires complete transformation of our education system. We must ensure each child receives a quality education and a chance to become their personal best. Students’ different learning styles necessitate creative teaching methods. Overall, students need to learn the right things and be able to apply that learning. Inequality has no place.

Innovative leaders and teachers will facilitate this transformation with input from numerous stakeholders. Innovative teaching methods are vital, as is rigorous, yet flexible curriculum. It is time to re-evaluate how and what we measure, and what constitutes success.

Given significant ongoing change, creating multiple options for and encouraging lifelong learning is also crucial. Not only is this desirable for all adults, the continued innovations – some of them transformative – in industry and academia will necessitate lifelong learning to be able to meet future needs.

Workforce/Employers

Removing poverty and education barriers will provide employers with the skilled workforce they need to maximize their growth and profitability, with substantial economic growth – across industries and geography – and a stronger global competitive standing.

Public and private priorities must be in sync. Employers that are active within communities, supporting education, providing “hands-on” opportunities for students to apply their learning, and helping to define and build the workforce that meets their future needs will reap the rewards. Embracing and continuously building

upon our nation's diverse skills, strengths and interests will help ensure our future ability to deliver upon changing needs of the public and private sectors.

Today STEM education to fill STEM-related jobs is of great importance. Although change is a given, technology changes and future innovation will likely create an ongoing need. As a nation our future success is dependent upon continual creation of innovations that are transformative across industries. Substantial transformation will impact all organizations. Those that integrated anticipating and monitoring shifts and triggers, the ability to rapidly adapt, flexibility and resilience will be successful – and sustainable – organizations well into the future.

Individual Responsibilities

As adults, we each have responsibilities for future generations of our nation. We each can be positive role models at a minimum. However, there are numerous ways we can actively participate in ensuring future generations receive what they need to live fulfilling lives. **Our legacy. Our choice.**

Working Toward Common Goals

This extensive transformation will require much evaluation, collaboration, cooperation and deeply shared commitment across industry, education, government, nonprofits, foundations and other partners – and each of us individually. It is an undertaking on a scale the U.S. has yet to take on. However, “getting it right” requires that depth and breadth of scale, scope and commitment. The strength of the U.S. is dependent on making wise – future-based – decisions, spending based upon priorities serving national interests, and genuinely valuing diversity, and a quality education; supporting our workforce, and growing our economy.

**Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world.**

Nelson Mandela

The logo for Fresh Perspective features the word "Fresh" in a blue, cursive script font, positioned above the word "Perspective" which is written in a grey, serif font.

***Lisa Hays is founder and CEO of Fresh Perspective, Inc.,
a 16-year-old business intelligence and marketing research firm.
Fresh Perspective helps inform business leaders who make critical strategic decisions.***

**Lisa's passions include the vulnerable and the environment.
She is a volunteer for Green Works in Kansas City, a nonprofit offering
environmental education and workforce development programming for urban youth.**

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