

Alignment of Postsecondary Education and Employment

BACKGROUND

Numerous reports have identified an increasing gap in how well Connecticut prepares its workforce for the demands of current and near-future employment. Today's global economy requires a highly dynamic, technologically advanced 21st century workforce. Compounding this issue is the concern that the state's higher education institutions are producing large numbers of highly qualified graduates who leave Connecticut for jobs in other states.

A recent report by the Connecticut Office of Workforce Competitiveness¹ predicts that the state will face a significant challenge to remain economically competitive given current demographic trends:

- The proportion of Connecticut workers age 55 and older is the seventh highest in the country.
- The relative loss of Connecticut's young workers is noteworthy. From 1990 to 2005, the state's 18 to 34 year-old population decreased almost 23 percent, compared to a less than one percent decrease for this age group nationally.
- Future young workers are projected to lack the higher level skills needed to meet the demands required for Connecticut to remain economically competitive.

Additionally, Connecticut also must contend with changes in the types of employment opportunities available currently and in the near future. The manufacturing jobs that previously sustained the state's workforce fell 25 percent during the 1990s.² Further, community colleges in Connecticut estimate that almost 80 percent of new jobs will require training beyond high school.³

AREA OF FOCUS

This study will examine whether a formal alignment mechanism exists in Connecticut to match the production of skilled graduates from the state's higher education institutions (including public and private universities, four-year colleges, and community colleges) with the current and projected workforce needs of the state's employers. The study will also include technical high schools. Existing state agency efforts and policies aimed at effective coordination will be described, as well as barriers to maximizing such an alignment.

Depending on the availability of outcome information, the study will also comprehensively examine one essential profession experiencing a labor shortage. The efficacy of particular strategies for producing the skilled workforce needed by Connecticut employers and

¹ A Talent-Based Strategy to Keep CT Competitive in the 21st Century: Growing, Using and Enriching Connecticut's Talent Pipeline, Prepared by Office of Workforce Competitiveness, February 2007.

² The South Central Regional Workforce Development Board, State of the Workforce 2003.

³ Connecticut Community Colleges, Career Programs & 21st Century Skills.

Scope of Study

their impact on the in-state employment rate, job vacancies, and placement and out-migration of state graduates will be explored. At a minimum, potential best practices to connect higher education and workforce needs will be identified and how Connecticut compares with those practices.

AREAS OF ANALYSIS

1) Determine what gaps may exist between Connecticut's workforce and current and near-future employment requiring postsecondary education. Summarize these gaps using state and national projections, and explain how the gaps were identified using:

- rate of employment/unemployment by sector;
- out-migration of state graduates;
- placement rates of Connecticut graduates in Connecticut jobs; and
- number of unfilled jobs among Connecticut employers.

2) Describe the roles and responsibilities of the major state entities involved in aligning postsecondary education and employment in Connecticut. Entities may include DOL, SDE, DHE, the state's three public systems of higher education, Office of Workforce Competitiveness, Connecticut Employment and Training Commission, Governor's Jobs Cabinet, and DECD.

Identify and review formal and informal connections and activities over time.

3) Assess how well existing efforts to align postsecondary education and employment have occurred including degree of coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and production of measurable results that lead to timely incorporation into action plans and subsequent implementation.

- Evaluate who benefits from existing alignments.
- Compare Connecticut with best practices/models used successfully in other states for aligning postsecondary education and employment.
- Identify efficiencies or cost-saving measures that could be taken to better align postsecondary education and employment.

4) Identify major barriers to successfully aligning postsecondary education and employment and evaluate ways to overcome these barriers such as the feasibility of creating and implementing a statewide, comprehensive strategy and other mechanisms.

Comprehensive Examination of One Profession

5) Identify one essential profession of the job market experiencing a shortage (e.g., nursing, engineering).

Scope of Study

6) Describe the efforts currently used by agencies/commissions involved in aligning postsecondary education and employment in this profession.

7) Assess how well existing efforts to align postsecondary education and employment in this profession occurred.

8) Identify particular strategies that have demonstrated efficacy in producing the skilled workforce needed by Connecticut employers in this profession (e.g., internships and cooperative work-study programs, career ladder programs, student and faculty recruitment and retention strategies, and financial incentives). To the extent the information is available, assess efficacy of strategies by such measures as:

- higher production of professionals in the sector;
- increased advancement of current professionals in the sector;
- higher retention of professionals in the sector; and
- improved maintenance of/retention of students in the sector's training programs.

AREAS NOT UNDER REVIEW

The study will not examine PK-12 education, programs under the Workforce Investment Act, and stand-alone employee training programs offered by private employers. The study will also not include an analysis of geographic pools of workers and the location of institutions of higher education.