OKLAHOMA'S HUMAN POTENTIAL

Enhancing Our Workforce for an Increasingly Innovative Economy

The Oklahoma Academy
Town Hall

The 2022 Oklahoma Academy Town Hall
October 16-19, 2022 Choctaw Casino & Resort
Durant, Oklahoma

Town Hall

The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals is a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership organization founded by Governor Henry Bellmon to bring public attention to policy issues, provide objective, thorough research and act as a catalyst for positive change.

After his first term as governor, Bellmon knew there was a need for open, nonpartisan dialogue in the young state. He sought to create a public policy organization that was independent, nonpartisan and inclusive. The purpose of which was to provide citizens the opportunity to participate in a truly democratic process designed to shape the future of Oklahoma. To this day, The Oklahoma Academy upholds Bellmon's vision and the organization's long-standing reputation as the state's premier citizen-based organization for nonpartisan public policy development.

From its inception in 1967 to its revitalization in 1985 to its adoption of the Town Hall process in 2001, The Oklahoma Academy has maintained its relevance in raising awareness and creating public policy for a better Oklahoma. Despite its small staff and limited resources, The Oklahoma Academy generates and manages an impressive amount of public policy information, engages the citizens of Oklahoma in discussing and developing policy recommendations and works ardently with the community leaders and policymakers to implement the resulting ideas through community and legislative action. To date more than 87 pieces of legislation passed since the adoption of the Town Hall process in 2001.

The Academy Process identifies areas of need and problems facing Oklahoma, conducts research on identified critical issues, and develops long range goals, consensus recommendations, and agendas for action.

Through the Town Hall conference process, citizens are given the opportunity to honestly and openly discuss the issues, determine the solutions, and collaborate to develop public policies that they believe will achieve the greatest good. Then, the attendees are empowered to contact their legislators and other policymakers about the proposed policies.

The Academy has covered a wide range of topics, including education, small business development, government structure, crime, technology and the future, and the state's constitution.

Building Awareness, Developing Policies, Inspiring Oklahomans to Move Ideas Into Action!

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Town Hall

Academy President and CEO

JULIE KNUTSON
President and CEO

Hello 2022 Town Hall Member Participant!

The 2022 Town Hall focus on enhancing our workforce for an increasingly innovative economy could not be better timed. Oklahoma's industries are diverse. Here you'll find the world's largest Department of Defense Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility. Head northeast and there's the world's largest commercial airline MRO and Google's 2nd largest data center. Out west you'll see wind turbines on the horizon as you head toward Goodyear's largest tire manufacturing facility. With Oklahoma quickly becoming an important player in aviation / aerospace, biotechnology, film and music, and much more, the need to address a worker shortage in the state is needed now.

According to data from the State Chamber, in 2021, there were 36,000 more job postings than people searching for work. There were 21,000 job openings that went unfilled for jobs requiring a bachelor's degree in 2021. According to the State Chamber, the percentage of the working-age population in Oklahoma that holds a Bachelor's degree is ranked 45th in the country and only accounts for 26% of the workforce. Oklahoma needs a plan to help connect training services for job seekers, and finding workers to help lure large companies into the state.

By accepting the invitation to participate, you have promised to be prepared and ready for open, honest discussion and deliberation. This resource book has been developed to help you do that. It is important that you read the document. Several of you work directly or indirectly workforce development or closely related fields, and therefore may feel you know all there is to know on enhancing our workforce. You may, but you still need to be willing to listen and learn. Others participating know that the workforce is important to our economy and state as a whole, but don't necessarily know all of the specific aspects to be considered in making sure how best Oklahoma promotes our human potential and provides the highest quality of education, training and workforce climate to enhance the well-being of all our citizens. The Background Resource Document is developed to provide many different sides of the issue. If you do not read the document, you will not be prepared, and you will stifle your group's discussion.

You have also accepted the responsibility to represent others in your geographic, demographic, and vocational areas as you discuss and deliberate the discussion questions at Town Hall. You'll be sharing what you learned and Information on the Findings and Recommendations you helped create. It is critical to be prepared. The success of any Town Hall is dependent upon the preparedness of its participants. As a Town Hall member your voice can be heard, should you choose it to be.

From February through June, we held community "listening sessions" on the topic of enhancing our workforce for an increasingly innovative economy. By "listening session" we mean an opportunity to hear from citizens on their thoughts and concerns about our workforce in Oklahoma. Overall we conducted 15 sessions spread out over 8 regions of the state. Many thanks to Chris Benge, Deena Fisher, Michael Gordon, Jeff Greenlee, AJ Griffin, Rachel D. Hutchings, Mike Neal, Larry Rice, Dan Schiedel, Sara Jane Smallwood-Cocke, and Bailey Perkins Wright for their help in organizing sessions in their parts of the state!

Your Assignment and Role…
Take advantage of your unique opportunity. Be prepared. Listen actively, share your thoughts and ideas, and importantly, be willing to learn. The work of the Town Hall is much easier, more satisfying, better done, and more fun to those who have prepared themselves appropriately for the discussions. While there are some plenary session speakers who share information with us during the Town Hall, the real speaker and developer of what comes out of a Town Hall is YOU. The better prepared you are, the richer the discussions and the better the consensus recommendations and solutions.

So, I say again, Be Prepared!

I'm looking forward to seeing you at Town Hall 2022!

Town Hall

2022 Town Hall Leadership

John H. Feaver, Ph.D. **Rachel D. Hutchings**, MA

As co-chairs of the planning committee, we appreciate your willingness to participate in the Oklahoma Academy's 2022 Town Hall. This year's gathering focuses on a terribly important topic. In your work to formulate relevant public policy recommendations, perhaps none is more important if we are to creatively position our state as a competitive player in the national and global economies. This year's gathering will focus on a couple of broad questions. One, how can we effectively organize, equip, and utilize to the fullest extent Oklahoma's diverse human resources particularly in meeting the workforce development and critical occupation needs of our state? Two, how might we most usefully define the meaning of workforce development in ways that recognize the complex nature and range of those training and educational processes that will be necessary if we are to fully serve those needs?

Perforce, your deliberations must recognize that the "old economy" based on the manufacture of goods and services has shifted dramatically over to a "new economy" preoccupied with manufacturing knowledge and ideas; that the older "high school direct to workplace" economy has been replaced by a radical expansion of post-secondary training and education options serving the myriad labor needs of the new economy. While the new economy depends on a steady supply of job specific and occupation-related "hard skills", it is now equally insistent on the infusion of workers with "soft skills – those who can perform non-routine, exceedingly complex tasks in connecting expertise and knowledge to business operations in context of a rapidly evolving technology infrastructure.

Thus, the question is, how do we prepare our K-12 graduates to effectively benefit from this range of post-secondary training and education opportunities in order to infuse our workforce with an adequate pool of those hard and soft skills that Oklahoma will need if to compete as an effective player on a global scale?
While hard skills associated with specific jobs and occupations are more easily identified, soft skills raise the question of determining what learning experiences are most likely to produce them. The question is further complicated in understanding that successful development of the knowledge economy cannot ultimately be separated from successful development in the equally important realms of our state's political, social and cultural quality of life.

So, just how should we train and educate Oklahoma's human resources in order to produce an adequately prepared working population? A sufficiency of hard skills, of course. But also, a critical mass with soft skills? Individuals, for example, who have the ability to speak and write effectively; are computer literate; able to identify problems and provide solutions; able to collaborate with colleagues in a team effort; possess a capacity for lifelong learning; can reason logically and think critically; are adaptable to changing circumstances; appreciate the reality of human diversity and are attuned to the political and cultural implications of the global context in which this country operates; able to communicate across differences; are resilient, persistent, self-reliant and reliable; are self-starters in taking the initiative; are courageous in the face of the unknown; know the difference between science and opinion and understand the role and limits of scientific and non-scientific outcomes; possess civic skills for involvement in the political, social, economic and cultural life of our democratic republic; enough, more, less!?

Regardless of how many incentives or how attractive our communities make themselves for existing and future companies, without a qualified workforce, we will not thrive. Our employers, citizens, children, and communities deserve this timely topic. Your ability to have thoughtful conversations that respectfully convey your experience in this area will be deeply important in the coming days. Being present for the sessions in a way that contributes to the dialogue shows your commitment to the betterment of the state of Oklahoma.

We fervently hope that you will not find yourself constrained by any unnecessary boundaries as you deliberate the themes of this Town Hall assembly and, over its two and a half days, that you arrive at a set of recommendations for improving the living and working conditions and qualities of our marvelous state. Thank you for your continued interest in supporting the mission of the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals to provide a forum that encourages civil discourse in a way that builds consensus.

John H. Feaver, Ph.D.
Town Hall Planning Committee Co-Chair
President, University of Science & Arts of Oklahoma

Rachel D. Hutchings, MA
Town Hall Planning Committee Co-Chair
Principal, Chart Consulting

Town Hall

2022 Town Hall Planning Committee Members

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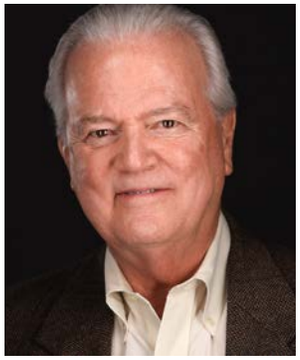
Town Hall

Thoughts from our Town Hall Research Chair...



As with all Town Halls, the quality of the public policy recommendations coming out of a Town Hall are highly dependent upon the depth and breadth of the background resource document. This year's topic on enhancing Oklahoma's human capital is no exception. Over 130 published articles, a number from Oklahoma authors, were collected and reviewed for inclusion into this year's document. For both practical and obvious reasons, the research team limited the number of articles to those that provided the "depth and breadth" essential to fostering stimulating and meaningful dialog among attendees. We hope that was achieved in your eyes.

What is human capital? Human capital has been described as the skills, training, and health acquired through on-the-job training and education. The dictionary defines human capital as " the skills, knowledge, and experience possessed by an individual or population, viewed in terms of their value or cost to an organization or country." In business terms, it is an intangible asset or quality NOT listed on a company's balance sheet. But, in my humble opinion, it is the most critical asset in today's global and competitive marketplace.

There are a number of ways to enhance human capital and this document is dominated by two of the most common and effective ways: Education and Training. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines education as a process of gaining knowledge, skills, and development from study or training. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines training as a process of learning the skills one needs to do a particular job or activity.

The skills and knowledges acquired through education tend to be more theoretical and allow students to develop reasoning and judgment surrounding broad topics. Training refers to the acquisition of specific and applied knowledge and skills. The purpose of training is to improve the performance and productivity among employees.

Training tends to be more narrow in focus, short-term, and associated with the current job. Education tends to be wide in scope, longer-term, and associated with future jobs. If we used fracking technology as a "crude" example, the primary drilling technology for decades was vertical. As the advancement of fracking technologies for natural resource extraction expanded, drilling went horizontal and with bountiful results.

Each company/organization relies upon a workforce that has both, but can more easily provide the former (training) in a shorter period of time than the latter (education). A workforce dominated by the latter has the ability to obtain and apply skills from the former more quickly. Thus, the importance of both.

As a former private sector economist who has also worked in the public and nonprofit sectors for over forty five years, I have viewed first hand the importance of a highly (or not so highly) educated and skilled workforce. While double-degreed with almost 200 hours of college credit, I have also been fortunate to receive training in specific fields, from database management and computer modeling to quality process training. Education AND training are siblings, that together make an individual a more valuable employee and attractive candidate for future employment.

George Crane, an author of a number of critically acclaimed books, once opined that "there is no future in any job. The future lies in the man (woman) who holds the job." The first Dow Jones Industrial Average (1896) had twelve companies represented. Only one survived (General Electric), and it was removed in 2019! The Dow has changed its components (companies) 57 times since its inception. Think about the number of jobs that have disappeared . . . And yet our economy has now surpassed the pre-pandemic employment levels of 2020.

While "total employment" is a great economic metric to track, it is the aggregation of all of us who remain gainfully employed, probably due to the initial and continued acquisition of education and training. For Oklahoma's workforce to compete in an increasingly innovative economy, the state legislature AND each individual Oklahoman must do their parts to significantly and consistently fund our educational and training enterprises while realizing that, as individuals, when we are competitive (well educated/trained), the State of Oklahoma is competitive. Please use your days at the Town Hall to develop recommendations that encourage both.

Craig Knutson
Town Hall Research Chair
President/CEO of Potts Family Foundation

The Oklahoma Academy
Town Hall

Town Hall Contributing Authors

Rachel Cannon

Rachel Cannon is an entertainment executive, entrepreneur, mentor, accomplished television actress, writer and producer. With an acting career in Los Angeles that spans 20 years with over 80 network television credits, Cannon has been featured on iconic television series like "Big Bang Theory," "Two and a Half Men," "Mad Men," and for the last 6 years she played Deidre on ABC's hit comedy, "Fresh Off The Boat." Combining her on-set experience with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, Cannon is determined to bring more creative opportunities for film and television to her home State. She believes this industry will create sustainable jobs, economic diversity and a creative path for the next generation.

Deborah Copeland, M.Ed.

Deborah Copeland is the Executive Director/CEO of DRTC (Dale Rogers Training Center) and has spent her 30-year career in the nonprofit sector working with multiple populations. Deborah began her journey with DRTC in 1996, spending more than 14 years with the agency. She also served as the Chief Operating Officer of Sunbeam Family Services before returning to DRTC in 2019. Deborah has a Master of Education degree specializing in Adult Education from the University of Central Oklahoma and a bachelor's degree in Education from the University of Central Florida. She currently serves on multiple boards and panels including the SourceAmerica® Board of Directors. Deborah frequently speaks on the subject of DEI to advocate for disability inclusion in the workplace and community.

Lee Copeland

Lee Copeland is the Director of Talent & Business Growth for the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber. He spent 26 years in ministry, non-profit and higher educational leadership, where he learned to love the power of a great story to bring perspective. In his role with the Chamber, he is privileged to have conversations with OKC business leaders and learn about emerging trends in business and talent and make creative connections and partnerships. His personal passion is to effect positive disruption and change through imagination, empowerment and growth.

Joanne M. Davis

Joanne Davis serves as the executive director for the Oklahoma City Black Chamber of Commerce. Prior to this role, she worked more than 35 years for the U.S. Air Force and spent nearly a decade as the Director of Small Business for the Air Force Sustainment Center, headquartered at Tinker Air Force Base, focusing on helping small businesses access Air Force contracts and bids. Davis' goal in her role at the chamber is to forge relationships that will ensure an avenue to increase business development within the Black-owned business community, help sustain the viability of current businesses and to ensure that these entrepreneurs are aware of opportunities available as this city continues to grow and expand.

Allison D. Garrett

Chancellor Allison D. Garrett is the chief executive officer for the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education. Garrett leads a state system comprised of 25 state colleges and universities, 11 constituent agencies, one university center, and independent colleges and universities coordinated with the state system. Garrett provides leadership on matters relating to standards for Oklahoma higher education, courses and programs of study, budget allocations for institutions, fees and tuition, and strategic planning. She is responsible for an annual higher education budget in excess of $2.8 billion as well as the state endowment fund, with a market value over $931.5 million. Chancellor Garrett took office as chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education on Nov. 8, 2021. She is the first woman to hold the position of Chancellor.

Chuck Gray

Aerospace and electronics professional with four decades of leadership in engineering management, manufacturing, contracting and profit center performance. Chuck Gray joined Frontier in July 93 following retirement as a Colonel from the USAF. As FES VP/COO, Chuck's innovative, business focused leadership has been instrumental in FES' aerospace, maritime and test systems revenue growth, employee development and customer recognition. FES has earned four Boeing Supplier of the Year awards, three Northrop Grumman World Class Team awards and certification as a Lockheed Martin Star Supplier. Chuck led FES' Mentor-Protégé programs with Northrup. He was selected to represent small business on the Aerospace Industry Association Executive Committee, and NASA's Minority Business Resource Advisory Council. Chuck serves as Chair of the Oklahoma Governors Council for Workforce and Economic Development.

Sharon Harrison, Ed.D.

Sharon Harrison, EdD, is director of workforce development for the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, leading the organization's Workforce OMA efforts over the past five years. She is a native of Northern Ireland but lived and worked in Oklahoma for more than 20 years. As director of Workforce OMA, Harrison is responsible for the Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance's workforce strategy, which focuses on employer-driven solutions. In 2019, she established Harrison Consulting, a private workforce and training company. Additionally, she is a business professor at Rose State College where she teaches project and supply chain management.

James Helm, MPA, CPACC

James Helm is the Community Engagement Supervisor at DRTC (Dale Rogers Training Center), where he is responsible for policy tracking, as well as engaging local universities and the community for service learning opportunities that benefit people with disabilities who are employed, trained or served at DRTC. An award-winning journalist, James joined the Public Relations team at DRTC in 2015. As part of his responsibilities oversighting the agency's website and social media channels, James earned his Certified Professional in Accessibility Core Competencies (CPACC) credential in 2017. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Broadcast Journalism from Oklahoma State University and a Master's degree in Public Administration with honors from the University of Central Oklahoma.

Ashley Howard, MAEd

Ashley Howard is a San Diego Native that relocated to Oklahoma in 2013 after her husband ended his ten-year tenure with the United States Marine Corps. Since moving to Oklahoma, she has dedicated herself to making Oklahoma a better place to live, work, and raise a family. Howard has a master's degree in education, a bachelor's degree in psychology, and serves as the VP of Marketing and Communications at NewView Oklahoma where she oversees marketing, communications, public policy, and advocacy. Her past experiences include several years at The Oklahoman Media Company, where she served as their Audience Development, Events and Promotions Manager and she served as the Director of Strategy and Development at an Oklahoma City based marketing and public relations firm. Ashley is a fierce advocate for education, workforce development, and veterans; she believes whole heartedly in serving others well.

Craig Knutson

Craig Knutson serves as President/CEO of the Potts Family Foundation. He has held professional/executive positions in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. He serves on a number of local and statewide boards of directors including the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals, Foundation Trustees for Sunbeam Family Services, Epworth Villa, Oklahomans for Energy and Jobs, Natural Resources Education Foundation, and Oklahoma Association for Business Economics. Craig is an OKCEO and has a long history of supporting early childhood development through his professional and personal affiliations. He holds a bachelor's in Political Science and a master's in Regional and City Planning both from the University of Oklahoma.

Thomas C. Kupiec, Ph.D.

Dr. Thomas C. Kupiec is the CEO of ARL Bio Pharma and DNA Solutions Inc. Dr. Kupiec received his Ph.D in Pharmaceutical Sciences from the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center College of Pharmacy. He currently serves as a graduate faculty member at the OU Health Sciences Center and has held teaching appointments at several universities. He has published numerous articles and abstracts in a variety of fields including pharmaceutical sciences, forensic sciences and pharmacogenomics. Dr. Kupiec is often requested as a speaker at national pharmaceutical conferences and has spoken at ASHP, IACP, ACA and for state pharmaceutical associations.

Kim Leveridge, Ph.D.

Currently the Senior Director of Learning and Professional Development at the Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits, Dr. Leveridge's career includes operations management of consulting and hospitality companies, business development and human resources experience, and a comprehensive education and research background. In addition to providing her consulting expertise across nearly all industry sectors, Kim has an extensive CV of scholarly articles and research presentations at industry conferences. She received her B.A. in Organizational Communication from the University of Oklahoma and her Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from the University of Tulsa.

Marissa Lightsey, MSHR

Marissa Lightsey is the Executive Director of College and Career Readiness and manages ICAP Implementation, Post – Secondary Partnerships, and college and career readiness strategies for the Oklahoma State Department of Education. Marissa earned a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Communications from Oklahoma Baptist University in 2010 and later earned a Master of Science in Human Resources from East Central University in 2014. Passionate about the well-being of Oklahoma youth, Marissa began her professional career as the communications associate for the Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy where she shared the message of Oklahoma youth advocates statewide. She later served as the upward bound advisor for Seminole State College's TRiO program as well as an advisor for Seminole State Colleges GEAR UP program where she provided career and college advising to over 700 students. Most recently Marissa joined the OSDE team from Oklahoma Baptist University where she served as the Director of Career Development for four years.

Tava Maloy Sofsky

Tava Maloy Sofsky is an Oklahoma Cherokee Native, visionary and trailblazer who began her film career in Los Angeles after earning a bachelor's degree in film and media studies from the University of Oklahoma. For 15 years, she worked on major motion pictures and established a network with filmmakers and talent that included Francis Ford Coppola, Steven Spielberg, Anthony Hopkins, John Travolta and Jennifer Lopez and worked alongside companies like Sony, Paramount, Disney, 1492 Pictures and Amblin Entertainment to name a few. Today Sofsky is director of the Oklahoma Film + Music Office, a position she has held for the last 8 years. She and her husband moved back to Oklahoma to raise their children near family in her home state. The opportunity to lead OF+MO brought her career full circle, back to where her passion for the film and music industry took root.

Mary Mélon-Tully

Mary Mélon-Tully was named president and CEO of the Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation in Sept. 2014 after a 20+ year career leading a business publication, with local and national responsibilities. She, along with board members, district leaders and partners, spearheaded the development and implementation of the Teacher Pipeline Programs. Under her leadership, both the Bilingual and Diversity Teacher Pipeline programs have also joined New America's national Grow Your Own Network which looks at ways to support community development efforts to improve and diversify the educator workforce. She received a bachelor's degree in Journalism from the University of Oklahoma and serves on the board of directors of the National Schools Foundation and received their Certified Leader designation. She also serves on the Board of Trustees for Oklahoma City/County Health Department where she serves as vice-chair, and the Regional Transit Authority where she serves as secretary and chair of the Outreach Committee.

Cassidy Minx

Cassidy Minx is the Coordinator for Workforce & Economic Development at the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE), where she facilitates OSHRE's Economic Development Council, coordinates the annual Regents Business Partnership Excellence Award ceremony, researches employment outcomes for state system graduates, and manages workforce development initiatives. Prior to joining OSRHE, Cassidy served at the University of Central Oklahoma in enrollment management, student records, and admissions in the role of Operations Manager. Cassidy earned her bachelor's and master's from Oklahoma State University and is in her final year as a PhD candidate at Oklahoma State University in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program with an option in Higher Education.

Mike Neal

Mike Neal is in his 16th year as president and chief executive officer of the Tulsa Regional Chamber. In 2018, the Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce Executives (OCCE) inducted Mike into their Hall of Fame in recognition of his 30 years of service to the chamber industry. Tulsa People named Mike the 2011 Tulsan of the Year for his limitless energy, can-do optimism and tireless efforts toward making Tulsa a better place. Mike is heavily involved with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. He serves on its Foundation Board of Directors, its Chamber of Commerce Committee of 100, and its Transportation Infrastructure & Logistics Committee. Mike is also the current chairman of their Accrediting Board of Directors. He also serves on the boards of the International Economic Development Council, the Southern Economic Development Council, and The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals.

Pat Ownbey

Pat Ownbey is the executive director of Oklahoma Community-Based Providers. He served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, representing District 48 from 2008 to 2018. Ownbey earned his B.S. in communications from the University of Oklahoma. When he served in the state House, his professional experience included being the president and general manager of On the Air Property Management, former owner and general manager for KICM Radio, and former vice president and general manager for KKAJ-KVSO Radio.

Matt Payne

Matt Payne is an Emmy-winning filmmaker, writer, photographer and educator based in Oklahoma City. In his 15 years based in Los Angeles, Payne worked as a writer on CBS's "Vegas," "Without a Trace" and "The Defenders." In 2015, Payne moved back to Oklahoma City and since then, has taken a key role in the Oklahoma film community producing documentaries for Griffin Communications and the OETA Foundation as well as teaching film business and screenwriting at Oklahoma City University among other things.

Jim Priest

Jim Priest is a recovering attorney, author, speaker, executive coach, and "people developer," He currently serves as Chief Executive Officer of Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma and brings a long-standing commitment to helping vulnerable and disadvantaged people. A trial lawyer for over 34 years, Jim previously served as Executive Director for two other Oklahoma nonprofits and is dedicated to creating an employee-first organization that serves employees well so they, in turn, can serve Goodwill clients well. Jim is married to his wife of 44 years Diane. They have two adult children, one namesake grandson named James and he is owned by a dog called Jeter named after retired Yankees shortstop Derek Jeter.

Russell Ray

Russell Ray is the Director of Communications and Marketing at the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology. Russell oversees all communications and marketing channels, including social media, crisis communications and a 10-member communications and marketing team. Oklahoma's CareerTech system offers programs and services in 29 technology centers on 58 campuses, 399 K-12 school districts, and 16 Skills Centers campuses statewide. Prior to joining CareerTech, Russell managed the editorial activities of The Journal Record, an award-winning business publication and the most definitive source of business and legislative news in Oklahoma. In addition, Russell coordinated assignments with freelancers and wrote weekly editorials and columns about business and politics in Oklahoma. In 2019, Russell was deemed the best editorial writer and columnist by the Oklahoma Press Association.

Kyra Rivera

As the social media specialist at the Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board, Kyra Rivera represents the organization's social media presence. She is currently completing her sociology degree at Rose State College, where she will continue to work on her higher education after graduation.

Valerie Thompson, Ph.D.

Since 1999, Dr. Valerie Thompson has served as the second female president and CEO for the Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City in the affiliate's 75-year history. She provides strong leadership and ambition for the Urban League, working to further its mission to assist African Americans, other minorities and the poor achieve social and economic equality. Dr. Thompson received a doctorate in political science and a master's of business administration from the University of Oklahoma. She also has a bachelor's degree in business administration from Oklahoma State University. Dr. Thompson has served as an adjunct professor at Oklahoma City University's School of Social Work for over 13 years. Thompson's research and professional interests remain in nonprofit strategic planning and program evaluation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction
State Rankings

Section 1
The New Workplace Culture

Section 2
The Current Workforce Climate

Section 3
Education / Training / Skills

Section 4
Rural & Urban Nature of Oklahoma

Introduction

State Rankings

Oklahoma gets No. 45 ranking in labor survey

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, September 1, 2022

Oklahoma ranks 45th in a new index of best states for workers and their families based on laws and policies in effect as of July 1.

Ahead of Labor Day, Oxfam released its annual report that analyzes policies affecting employees in all 50 states, plus Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. The rankings are derived from state policies in three areas – wages (40% of overall score), worker protections (35%) and rights to organize (25%).

The index shows the best state for employees is Oregon, followed by California, Washington, the District of Columbia and New York.

Data points in the wage category include the ratio of the state minimum wage in relation to the cost of living for a family of four with one wage earner and how well average unemployment payments for minimum-wage workers cover cost of living for a family of four.

The worker protections area considers the quality of life for workers, especially women and parents. Data points include protections for women who are pregnant and breast-feeding, mandates for paid sick and family leave, protections against sexual harassment and heat safety standards for outdoor workers.

The third area looks at whether workers have the right to organize and sustain a trade union. Among the data points are state right-to-work laws (half the states have these) and public employees' rights to collective bargaining and wage negotiation (teachers used as a case study).

Oklahoma's overall score is 18.8 out of 100 – 8.45 in wage policies, 22.62 in worker protection and 30 in right to organize.

States that ranked lower than Oklahoma are Kansas, South Carolina, Texas, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi and North Carolina.

Oklahoma is one of 20 states where the state minimum wage remains at the federal level of $7.25 per hour, which was set in 2009. Oklahoma's cities and towns are prohibited from setting their own minimum wage under a law that went into effect in 2014.

The Oxfam report notes where states have raised minimum wages above the federal threshold, the boosts make a solid difference. For example, in Washington, a full-time minimum wage job pays roughly $30,000 annually ($14.49 an hour), while in neighboring Idaho, the same job pays $15,080 annually ($7.25 an hour). Oklahoma is not among the 11 states – California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island and Washington – that currently offer paid family and medical leave. The District of Columbia does as well.

In 2001, Oklahoma voters passed a right-to-work amendment prohibiting union membership as a condition of employment.

Oxfam also released its "Best States for Working Women" index, which ranks states based on gender-specific protections (such as equal pay and pregnancy accommodations). Oklahoma comes in at 37th in this ranking.

OKLAHOMA

Overall	**#45**
Wage policies	#45
Worker protections	#37
Rights to organize	#39
Minimum wage	$7.25 20.4% of cost of living*

* For a family of four. Based on MIT Living Wage Calculator

Oxfam is a nonprofit global organization. Its focus areas include economic justice and equal rights.

"This is a perilous time for millions of working families in the U.S., who are struggling every day just to make ends meet," senior researcher Kaitlyn Henderson said. "As some states have stepped up to protect and support working families, others have refused to act, leaving workers with poverty wages, dangerous conditions, and no rights to organize or act collectively. This is about the reality of life in our country, and the urgent need for federal action."

The report notes improvements made since the 2021 index include:

- Louisiana passed pregnancy accommodations for private sector workers, protecting workers who are pregnant from losing their jobs or being asked to do overly strenuous tasks.
- Connecticut and Maryland passed paid family leave, allowing workers to take paid time off for a variety of family situations (such as birth or adoption, caring for family with serious health condition).
- New Mexico passed paid sick leave, protecting workers from losing their jobs and guaranteeing financial support when they take time off to recover from an illness or care for a loved one who falls ill.
- Nevada passed legislation stopping private sector employers from requesting past salary information from their new hires, allowing for greater pay equity.

Guest Column: Projections for Oklahoma's workforce needs

Don Morris, The Journal Record August 10, 2022

Don Morris

A thriving economy takes intentional planning. Perhaps the most important piece of that planning is looking to the future of our workforce to ensure growth is sustainable. Oklahoma's economy has advanced and diversified dramatically over the last several years, and the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development is making strides to thoughtfully continue that growth.

The council develops creative solutions that expand and improve Oklahoma's workforce, providing better jobs for workers and a skilled workforce for business and industry. What that boils down to for the Oklahoma Office for Workforce Development is well-defined career pathways for Oklahomans.

Because the state is likely to experience a worker shortage of nearly 20,000 people in the next few years, our most urgent need is a robust workforce to power new and growing fields.

Several factors contribute to the state's projected workforce gap. Shifts in our economy's leading industries, gaps between graduates and high-paying and high-demand jobs, and the anticipated turnover from soon-to-retire workers. In the next decade, 1 in 5 workers will retire in Oklahoma.

Thanks to the council's long-term planning, starting in high school, we will be able to help direct students to quality and fulfilling careers in their own communities. We can help craft higher education programs to meet the demand for degreed professionals in our growing industries. And we can provide more diverse training and education options through apprenticeships and hands-on training.

The council seeks to reach four, well-defined major initiatives over the next few years: 1) increase our state's labor force participation rate from 60% to 65%, 2) Create 50,000 new private sector jobs paying an average of $55,000 per year, 3) Rank among the 10 lowest states for unemployment in the U.S. and 4) Increase our state's effectiveness in serving businesses by 20%.

To ensure Oklahomans are prepared to fill high-demand jobs, much of the council's focus is on early training and educational opportunities. In fact, recent Impact Partnership Grants facilitated by the council already are making strong connections between local employers and educators so that graduates across our state are prepared to fill those new jobs close to home.

Additional factors contributing to this talent gap include an aging population, low workforce participation rates, and low unemployment. This means attention must be paid to keeping our skilled workers home, increasing our workforce participation rate, and recruiting talent from other states to fill the gap.

Our state has already reaped benefits from this work and the Oklahoma Office for Workforce Development is grateful for the council's support. The cycle we start through focusing on our future workforce will pay off in droves, as Oklahoma continues to grow economically. With the leadership of the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development, our state is building a highly connected network of resources to serve businesses and job-seekers and meet our economy's needs.

Don Morris is executive director of the Oklahoma Office for Workforce Development.

Feeling good: These 10 U.S. metros top all rivals in workforce confidence

George Anders, LinkedIn News, April 20, 2022

What does optimism look like? For Greenville, S.C., mayor Knox White, the lure of better times ahead begins with the view from his office window.

"I can see three construction cranes," Mayor White reports. New housing and office complexes are taking shape in a re-energized downtown. Take a walk around the corner, and Greenville's street scene is bustling with outdoor dining at newly opened steakhouses, French restaurants, Thai restaurants and brew pubs.

"We were strong before COVID," White said in a phone interview. "But now the energy is palpable." Companies making everything from genetic-testing kits to refrigerated trucks are ramping up operations in the Greensville metro area. Even mayors from other cities as far away as Grand Rapids, Mich., are visiting Greenville to see how it's done.

Each year, LinkedIn's big Workforce Confidence survey highlights the 10 U.S. metro areas where individuals' overall optimism is running highest. And as the chart below shows, Greenville (plus nearby Spartanburg and Anderson, S.C.) are tied with Nashville for this year's top spot.

Overall, southeastern metros are this year's stars, capturing seven of the top-10 spots. North Carolina has two standouts, while Tennessee, South Carolina, Kentucky, Florida and Virginia each have one. Findings are based on surveys of 34,692 professionals from January 1 through March 31, 2022. Confidence is measured on a scale from a low of -100 to a high of +100.

At the top of this year's list, the Nashville metro area (+51) is benefiting from a population influx of as many as 30,000 people a year. It's also seeing big investments from the likes of Amazon, as well as a robust healthcare sector.

Greenville's metro area, which includes nearby Spartanburg, is becoming a growing hub for the automotive industry. Germany's BMW set up manufacturing in that part of South Carolina decades ago and keeps expanding. Last month Argo AI, a maker of self-driving vehicles, announced a move into the Greenville/Spartanburg area, too.

"I just think we're on the right path," Spartanburg mayor Jerome Rice recently told local television station WSPA, citing not only the city's economic development but also "what we're trying to do with equity and inclusion in the city."

Third-ranked Louisville benefits from a diverse economy that blends health care, manufacturing, retailing, finance, lodging, transportation and warehousing. That's opening a lot of pathways for fresh college graduates; the University of Louisville recently reported that job postings are up 41% from year-earlier levels.

In fourth-ranked Miami-Fort Lauderdale, the metro unemployment rate shrunk to just 2.8% in March, well below the national average of 3.6%. Florida overall is enjoying a manufacturing boom, and Miami is enjoying a surprising rise to prominence as a financial center.

Optimism lives here

These 10 cities are feeling more confident than the average U.S. metropolitan area in the first quarter of 2022.

Region	Individual confidence level *(on a scale from -100 to +100)*
Nashville Metropolitan Area	51
Greenville-Spartanburg-Anderson, South Carolina Area	51
Louisville Metropolitan Area	50
Miami-Fort Lauderdale Area	49
Greensboro--Winston-Salem--High Point Area	48
Salt Lake City Metropolitan Area	47
Greater Seattle Area	46
Greater Pittsburgh Region	45
Hampton Roads, Virginia Metropolitan Area	45
Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill Area	45
U.S. Average	41

LinkedIn News

Source: LinkedIn Market Research

Note: 34,692 professionals in the U.S. were surveyed from January 1 to March 31, 2022. Individual confidence index scores are calculating by assigning each respondent a score (from -100 to +100) based on their confidence in three areas (job security, finances, and career).

If one looks at metros showing the greatest leaps in confidence from 2021's fourth quarter to this year's first quarter, Greenville tops that list, with a 24-point rise (from +27 to +51). Rochester, N.Y. is second, climbing 14 points to +41.

At the other end of the spectrum, St. Louis (+31), the Richmond, Va., area (+34) and Philadelphia (+35) were the three metros with the lowest confidence levels. That's still above the national averages for most of 2020 – in a sign that the pandemic-related gloom of recent times has largely abated.

Methodology

LinkedIn's Workforce Confidence Index is based on a quantitative online survey distributed to members via email every two weeks. Roughly 5,000 U.S.-based members respond to each wave. Members are randomly sampled and must be opted into research to participate. Students, stay-at-home partners and retirees are excluded from analysis so we can get an accurate representation of those currently active in the workforce. We analyze data in aggregate and will always respect member privacy. Data is weighted by engagement level, to ensure fair representation of various activity levels on the platform. The results represent the world as seen through the lens of LinkedIn's membership; variances between LinkedIn's membership and the overall market population are not accounted for.

Study: Oklahoma's workforce near bottom of earnings

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, March 17, 2022

Oklahoma's workforce continues to be among the lowest paid per hour nationwide, a study released this month confirms. The news comes when households are facing rising costs of gasoline, food and housing. The consumer price index was up 8% in February over the same month one year ago, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports.

Oklahoma has the eighth-lowest pay among the 50 states, with average earnings of $24.04 per hour, according to the study by recruitment website Lensa.

Workers here earn almost $16 less per hour than in Connecticut, the highest-paid workforce at $39.89 per hour.

States with the lowest average hourly wages were Mississippi, West Virginia and Alabama, all paying less than $23.

Good pay is a top concern when searching for job opportunities, but it's not the only factor. The cost of living – the amount of money needed to afford basic needs such as housing, food and health care – will determine whether it's worth moving somewhere new for higher pay. The cost of living varies significantly among states.

The Lensa study shows the average annual income is $49,878 in Oklahoma and $78,609 in Connecticut, while the 2022 living wage reported by World Population Review is $47,000 and $60,000 respectively.

The earnings are more than the cost of living in both places, but Connecticut workers are earning 30% more than the living wage while Oklahomans are being paid only 6% more.

Inflation likely has eroded that thin margin to a negative number.

A large determining factor for the World Population Review's 2022 cost-of-living index is housing. The report shows the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the United States is $1,192 per month and in Oklahoma is significantly lower at about $879 per month, based on figures from November 2020.

But rental housing costs in the 50 largest U.S. metro areas rose an astounding 19.3% from December 2020 to December 2021, according to Realtor.com.

The median rent index for a two-bedroom apartment in Oklahoma City today is $1,155, according to the March 2022 rent report from Apartment List. That's more than 25% higher than the November 2020 rate used to determine the cost of living.

Wages in most cases aren't keeping pace, meaning workers may be looking for a raise.

Lensa points out uncertainty in the economy moves companies to manage finances conservatively. Just as there are times when you shouldn't ask for a raise, there are positive clues that indicate opportunities for you to ask for a raise.

Listen for indications the company's financial health is good or it is considering hiring. A good time to ask is after you are recognized for an exceptional contribution or you receive a glowing performance review.

Angela Copeland, founder of Copeland Coaching, gave this advice in a recent Career Corner column:

If you have a hunch that you're underpaid, do your homework. There are websites that share salary data – and more companies are including salaries on job postings.

A good time to have salary conversations is during your annual performance review. This is a time when you discuss the progress you have made over the last year. You're able to showcase your work and discuss your future career path with the company.

If you see other companies paying much more than you make today, your best bet is to start looking at those companies, Copeland continued. Companies reward new employees in order to lure them to their organizations. This is traditionally where the higher salaries are.

Don't be lured into thinking that cheaper parts of the country will always pay less. Salaries vary considerably by company. You may find a job in a cheaper area that actually pays more than you make today.

The Data Section

Craig Knutson, Town Hall Research Chair

With each Town Hall we include data relevant to the topic being addressed. In the case of Oklahoma's Human Capital, we will share data on the ability of the Oklahoma economy to expand employment opportunities for all Oklahomans and the ability of our educational and training institutions to improve the productivity of Oklahoma students/workers to more effectively compete in an increasingly global and competitive marketplace.

First an historical perspective. I asked the OESC to create data tables on population and per capita personal income, by county, and over a 40 year period. They used the census years 1980, 2000, and 2020. First population. Over the 40 year period (1980 – 2020), 37 of Oklahoma's 77 counties showed declines in populations, or **48%** of all counties. Over the most recent 20 year period (2000 – 2020), 40 counties showed a decline, or **52%** of all counties. As an aside, **Oklahoma**'s overall population grew **30.5%** from 1980 – 2020; the US population grew 45% over that same 40 year period.

Of the 16 counties considered to be a part of a metropolitan statistical area (there are 4 in Oklahoma), only one county posted a population decline between 1980 and 2020, and that was Okmulgee County, a part of the Tulsa MSA. So clearly, the declines referenced above were concentrated in non-metro locations in the state. Demographic trends are highly correlated to labor force trends, suggesting declining employment opportunities in non-metro counties over the past 40 years.

OESC also provided per capita personal income (PCPI), by county, over that same time period, and the results revealed a different picture. Overall, the state's PCPI rose from $9,629 in 1980 to $49,878 in 2020, not adjusted for inflation, or a 418% increase. Only 12 counties had a PCPI HIGHER than the state's and nine of those counties were non-metro counties: Beaver, Cimarron, Dewey, Ellis, Grant, Harper, Kingfisher, Texas, and Washington. Cimarron led the entire state with a PCPI of $68,446!! The three metro counties that exceeded the state's average PCPI were Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Rogers counties ($65,519, $56,971, and $50,583). It's important to note that of the nine non-metro counties that exceeded the state's PCPI, six of the nine posted population declines from 1980 – 2020; only Kingfisher, Texas, and Washington counties had larger populations in 2020 than in 1980.

This demographic/economic analysis of the past 40 years does NOT suggest a continuation of these trends for the next 40 years; however, investment capital has historically followed the presence of highly skilled/educated human capital. It would appear that non-metro economic development and chambers of commerce must pursue the educational and technological investments that better equalize their opportunities for attracting investment capital. The following table on , from two industry leading annual surveys, points to the overwhelming importance of "workforce skills," and the "availability of skilled labor."

Given the title of our upcoming Town Hall – Oklahoma's Human Capital – Enhancing our Workforce for an Increasingly Innovate Economy – we felt we needed to share a more current picture of where Oklahoma stands relative to our regional/geographical competitors as well as states that are demographically similar to us. The following two tables contain a broad cross-section of economic indicators and how each state fares. The values in **RED** are highest/best for the indicator considered. For example, Oregon had the highest GDP growth rates among comparably-sized states to Oklahoma and Texas had the highest GDP growth rate among Oklahoma's regional neighbors. As you review each table, you might note the dominance of several states, Connecticut and Utah among the comparably-sized states and Colorado among our neighboring states. A deeper dive about what factors lead to this dominance is certainly warranted (health and educational rankings), but suffice it to say that employment/earnings opportunities are greater in those states.

Site Selection Factors

Craig Knutson, Town Hall Research Chair

Site Selection Factors:
Site Selection Magazine &
Area Development Magazine

Most Important Factors:	2021	2020	Combined
1st is highest			Ranking
(Site Selection)			Averaged
Workforce Skills	**1**	**1**	**1.5**
Transportation Infrastructure	2	3	2.5
Ease of Permitting/Regulatory	3	4	3.5
Workforce Development	**3**	**2**	**2.5**
Utilities (Cost/Reliability)	5	7	6
Right-to-Work State	6	6	6
Higher Education Resources	7		
State/Local Tax Scheme	7	5	6
Economic Development Strategy	9		
Land/Building Prices/Supply	10		
Quality of Life		8	
Incentives		9	
Legal Climate (Tort Reform)		10	
(Area Development)			
Labor Costs	1	5	3
Availability of Skilled Labor	**2**	**1**	**1.5**
Energy Availability and Costs	3	3	3
Inbound/Outbound Shipping Costs	4	10	7
Highway Accessibility	5	2	3.5
Raw Materials Availability	6		
Corporate Tax Rate	7	7	7
State and Local Incentives	8	9	8.5
Environmental Regulations	9		
Tax Exemptions	10	8	9
Qulaity of Life		4	
Occupancy/Construction Costs		6	

Table 1

Craig Knutson, Town Hall Research Chair

7.11.22	U.S.	Ark.	Colo.	Kans.	Mo.	N. Mex.	OK	Tex.
METRICS								
GDP (% growth)	3.8	2.2	3.9	0.1	1.6	1.3	2.5	4.7
Housing Prices (Y-O-Y %)	18.7	19.2	22	16.3	16.5	15	17.6	19.8
Avg. Weekly Earnings ($)	1,109	897	1,167	996	977	916	937	1,091
Unemployment Rate (%)	3.6	3.2	3.5	2.3	3.1	5.1	2.8	4.2
Employment:								
Private:Total (%)	85.1	84	83	79	84	83	76	85
Employment:Population 2021	58.4	54.2	64.6	64.2	65	52.8	58.3	59.7
Employment:Population 2020	56.8	54.4	62.8	62.7	59.1	51.9	56.7	57.9
Per Capita Personal Income ($)	63,450	51,148	69,016	59,324	55,159	49,320	53,156	59,674
All Persons in Poverty (%) 2020	11.40%	15.20%	9.00%	10.60%	12.10%	16.80%	14.30%	13.40%
Population 2020 (millions)	331.8	3	5.8	2.9	6.2	2.1	4	29.1
Population Growth (%) 2010-2020	0.55	0.32	1.4	0.29	0.27	0.28	0.54	1.5
Overall Health Ranking (AHR)		48	11	29	39	42	46	35
Educational Attn. Bachelors+	37.5	24.9	44.2	35.1	31.9	30.1	27	33.2
Educational Attn. Rank		48	2	18	30	38	47	27
Science Technology Index: Rank								
Milken Institute								
Overall		48	2	30	31	18	45	16
R&D Inputs		49	6	38	31	22	48	25
Risk Capital		38	2	35	37	22	43	9
Human Capital		47	4	26	20	28	50	35
Tech/Science Workforce		49	4	26	33	14	35	17
Tech Concentration Dynamism		42	2	26	31	16	40	8
WalletHub: Innovation Index: Rank								
Overall		46	7	35	33	15	38	16
Human Capital		34	4	38	31	14	35	16
Innovation Environment		48	6	32	33	9	41	17

Table 2

Craig Knutson, Town Hall Research Chair

7.11.22	U.S.	La	Ky	Ore	OK	Conn	Ut	Iowa
METRICS								
GDP (% growth)	3.8	1.6	1.6	4	2.5	3.9	2.8	0.5
Housing Prices (Y-O-Y %)	18.7	12.3	16.8	18	17.6	13.5	27	12.5
Avg. Weekly Earnings ($)	1,109	1004	936	1110	937	1187	1,078	977
Unemployment Rate (%)	3.6	4	3.8	3.6	2.8	4.2	2	2.7
Employment:								
Private:Total (%)	85.1	84	84	86	76	87	82	81
Employment:Population 2021	58.4	54.6	55	59	58.3	59.5	66.1	64.1
Employment:Population 2020	56.8	52.6	53.5	56.7	56.7	60	64.6	63.9
Per Capita Personal Income ($)	63,450	54,435	50,699	60,676	53,156	82,082	55,392	56,973
All People in Poverty (%) 2020	11.40%	17.80%	14.90%	11.00%	14.30%	9.70%	7.30%	10.20%
Population 2020 (millions)	331.8	4.7	4.5	4.2	4	3.6	3.3	3.2
Population Growth (%) 2010-2020	0.55	0.27	0.38	1.01	0.54	0.09	1.7	0.46
Overall Health Ranking (AHR)		50	44	16	46	6	7	18
Educational Attn. Bachelors+	37.5	27.2	27.4	36.3	27	42.4	36.9	29.5
Educational Attn. Ranking		46	45	16	47	5	14	39
Science Technology Index: Rank								
Milken Institute								
Overall		47	44	10	45	12	6	34
R&D Inputs		46	43	20	48	8	19	30
Risk Capital		47	31	7	43	15	4	45
Human Capital		45	48	17	50	6	3	18
Tech/Science Workforce		46	44	9	35	21	10	27
Tech Concentration Dynamism		46	39	11	40	20	1	38
WalletHub: Innovation Index: Rank								
Overall		49	44	10	38	12	8	41
Human Capital		49	44	9	35	10	7	45
Innovation Environment		50	43	10	41	15	11	39

Section 1

The New Workplace Culture

Moving from retrofit to redesign on diversity, equity and inclusion: a how-to guide for leaders

Sheela Subramanian, Future Forum by Slack, June 15, 2021

Context

Recently, corporate leaders have become increasingly vocal about social issues impacting historically discriminated communities, from the inequities exposed by the pandemic to the murders of Black citizens by police. In the past year, we've seen action moving beyond words to hiring on the executive levels, including a 3x increase in the hiring of chief diversity officers in the past 16 months and a 240% increase in the naming of Black board members over the past five months. But representation in the workforce is still lacking; for example, despite making up 13.4% of the general population, just 8% of managers are Black, only 5.3% of people working in the tech industry are Black, and there are only four Black CEOs in the Fortune 500.

DEI, DEB and I&D have become commonly used acronyms, yet diversity, equity and inclusion are oftentimes terms used interchangeably and defined inconsistently. It's critical that leaders align on definitions and pay attention to all three, as they are related but drive different outcomes and are equally important for organizations to invest in and monitor.

To start, let's define the terms:

Diversity is the difference in identity, experience and perspective among people. Diversity is often talked about in terms of representation.

Equity is about ensuring processes, policies and practices work well for everyone. It's not about treating everyone exactly the same, as people have different needs, motivations and desires, but it is about making sure the organization works equally well for everyone.

Inclusion is about creating an environment where people feel valued and heard within their organizations. In an inclusive organization, everyone has the confidence they can be themselves and be respected and successful within the organization.

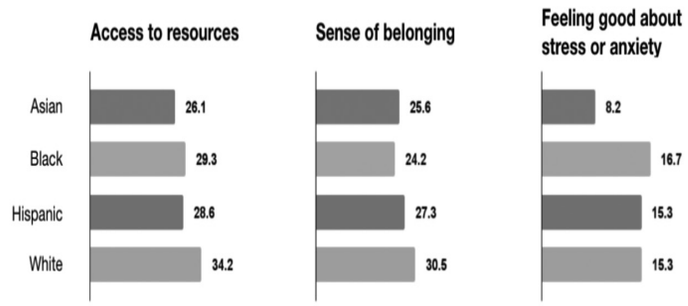
Leaders must understand these concepts and focus equally on all three areas. It's clearly not enough to have a diverse leadership pipeline if there is a toxic culture for non-dominant groups. It's equally problematic—and arguably impossible to achieve in practice—to have an inclusive environment or equitable practices with limited diversity among employees.

Leaders must invest in building a representative workforce at all levels and creating the systems, processes and practices required to provide equitable access to opportunities and a strong sense of belonging.

While the flexible work arrangement that this past year has forced upon us was a better experience than the office for many knowledge workers, the structural challenges around management, transparency and mobility remain.

Based on the latest data from Future Forum, while sense of belonging for Black employees remains higher when working remotely relative to working in the office, there's still a gap in overall experience: White employees still report 25% higher sense of belonging scores compared with Black employees, 21% higher scores for level of access compared to Latinx counterparts, and double the scores for managing stress and anxiety compared to Asian colleagues.

Future Forum Pulse scores by race/ethnic groups



Future Forum Pulse, June 2021, US-only

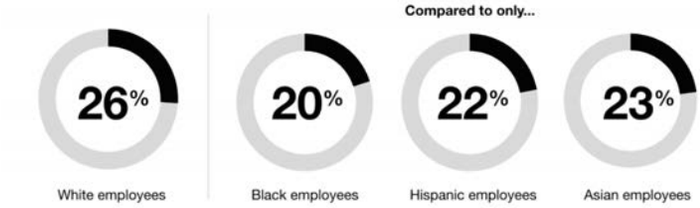
Much of this gap is largely due to inconsistent experiences at work. We often see that underrepresented employees have a fundamentally different experience than majority employees, even when coming from similar backgrounds and within the same organization. Based on the same research, 69% of Black respondents value the relationships held with coworkers, compared to 83% of white respondents.

Even if flexible work increases an organization's ability to compete for diverse talent, there's a massive opportunity to reskill managers to help close this employee experience gap and to help historically underrepresented employees build their networks to successfully navigate the organization.

The key investments for diversity, equity and belonging for 2021 and beyond

Based on June 2021 research, 80% of Black, 78% of Hispanic, and 77% of Asian respondents want a flexible working experience, either through a hybrid or remote-only model.

Who wants to go back to the office full-time?



Future Forum Pulse, June 2021

Flexible working models have become a competitive advantage in the effort to attract more diverse talent. Flexible models can also help organizations tap into broader, more diverse talent pools and give employees far greater room in where they live and how they work. But flexibility alone is not the panacea for improving diversity, equity and belonging in your workplace.

Managers should be trained for inclusivity
MLT surveyed its alumni population of more than 8,000 Black, Latinx and Native American knowledge workers about their experiences over the past year, during which the vast majority—over 95%—have been in hybrid or fully virtual work environments.

Based on MLT alumni data, 35% of individuals surveyed have found it more difficult to get information about key organizational priorities and 39% have found it harder to receive career guidance and advice. Companies need to start by helping (primarily white and often male) managers better understand the underrepresented employee experience, which often looks fundamentally different from their own. Managers also need to be skilled as coaches, rather than the traditional gatekeepers; adopting inclusive practices needs to be a key skill for any successful manager, rather than a nice-to-have.

Access to information and career guidance among MLT alumni

MLT alumni survey, 2021

The first inclusive practice starts with constructive feedback. Constructive feedback is critical in the virtual environment, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and female employees often get less clear and less constructive feedback. Inclusive practices need to be adopted when delivering feedback: Ask yourself whether you've focused on skills and outcomes, rather than prevailing norms of how work should be done or how employees should act.

Regular feedback conversations should cover two distinct types of feedback: (1) performance feedback about how an individual is doing relative to performance expectations for their current role and (2) career feedback about how one is tracking relative to achieving their career goals. These two types of feedback are related, but often separate and distinct. BIPOC employees tend to get less career feedback, which includes specific discussions of the skills individuals need to build, accomplishments individuals need to point to (such as stretch projects, leadership roles or gaps in a résumé) and relationships individuals should develop to position them to achieve their career goals at the organization. As part of the reskilling of managers, leaders should serve as a "career collaborator" with their employees and schedule career conversations on a recurring basis.

In addition to feedback, opportunities for growth and "stretch projects" need to be equitably assigned. It's the role of the leaders to track and equitably distribute who they're selecting for stretch opportunities and cross-functional assignments, which are critical for professional development and career advancement. Employees of color often feel excluded from consideration for these opportunities, which can lead to lack of satisfaction, engagement and confidence one can succeed at the organization.

Break down systemic barriers; invest in advocacy and sponsorship from leaders

As part of their jobs, leaders must also prioritize and protect time for networking—for themselves and for their team members. It's critical that leaders think about who they're spending valuable networking and social time with from an equity perspective (e.g., do leaders find themselves consistently networking/socializing with a small group of people or via activities that naturally attract a similar group of people?). Employees of color often find it more challenging to break into important networks, and leaders must take the extra initiative to break down these barriers.

As teams get increasingly distributed, leaders have the opportunity to create "curated collisions," or networking opportunities with people outside of your immediate working team—whether in the office or using digital tools. Based on MLT alumni data, a large minority of individuals report that their ties outside of their immediate network have gotten weaker during this pandemic.

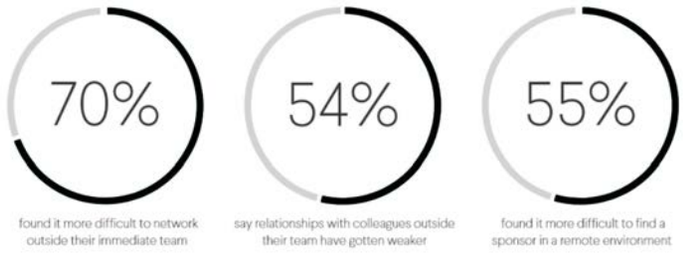
Approximately 70% of MLT alumni have found it harder to network with people outside of their immediate team, 65% report relationships with colleagues outside their team have gotten weaker (or significantly weaker) and 55% have found it more difficult to find a sponsor in the remote environment.

While a hybrid environment may help with building diverse teams, there is also a high risk that it may lead to more inequitable outcomes if not driven by principles and

guidelines. In addition to setting the appropriate frameworks, there's an opportunity to further invest in fostering social connection. Many MLT alumni indicated they would benefit from informal networking opportunities, including games, trivia, coffee chats and small gatherings that are not work-related, especially across departments or office locations.

Digital and physical tools can foster a deeper connection and many innovative solutions have sprung up over the past year. Digital tools like Donut can randomly pair individuals and build one-to-one ties. Ideally, these digital meetups are just that—without agendas or business-related conversation. And by investing in human moments in the office, whether through hoteling or desk swaps or activity-based design, the office can be used to build relationships outside of one's immediate team.

Access to networking and relationship-building among MLT alumni



MLT alumni survey, 2021

Support your ERGs

Based on MLT alumni data, 65% of respondents reported that Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) have been helpful in a hybrid environment. However, out of 50 ERG leaders surveyed, only 10% said their resources increased during the pandemic. Your ERGs help your BIPOC employees build their network and support system—give your leaders the resources they need to grow them.

And support needs to move beyond day-to-day resourcing. While it's critical for executives to sponsor and connect with ERGs, it also requires more than hearing people out: Companies can leverage these groups as an essential cornerstone of strategy for the company. Building a diverse and inclusive organization is a critical part of a business strategy, not a side job. Show your support of this work by appropriately compensating and recognizing your ERG leaders for the critical role that they play by recognizing ERG leadership contributions as part of their job performance. If diversity, equity and belonging are a key part of your business strategy, then your ERG leaders are your core advisors and should be compensated and recognized accordingly.

A final note

While the past fifteen months have raised awareness of the systemic inequities in our society and traditional working models, now is the moment to push for bold changes to address them. It's about time companies moved from statements to the concrete actions required to build a workforce that reflects your customer base and practices that reflect your values and advance your business objectives. Employers can meaningfully move the needle on racial equity within their workplaces, but it requires taking a rigorous approach, which includes evaluating and addressing key practices, policies and systems that have led to many current inequities and different lived experiences.

To learn more about how leaders can meaningfully move the needle, please reference the Black Equity at Work program by MLT.

When you intentionally design for diversity, equity and inclusion, you get diversity, equity and inclusion. This pandemic has given us a new canvas to work from. Let's start redesigning.

Modernizing and Investing in Workforce Development

Larry Good and Earl Buford, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce, March 2021

Executive Summary

Federal investments in workforce development need to be rethought and expanded substantially to provide the services and supports workers need to navigate continuously changing skill requirements and job changes. Federal policy and programs were mostly designed to be short-term interventions in reaction to an immediate crisis or urgent need – a plant closing, a recession, a hurricane, a nursing shortage – or to provide limited anti-poverty support to a set of narrowly defined populations.

That approach, pieced together over nearly a century and spanning every federal department, doesn't line up with the broader needs of workers and employers in response to a dramatically changed economy and accelerated by urgency of the pandemic recession. We are at a turning point as profound as when the GI Bill made college possible for millions of low- and middle-income Americans after World War II.

The U.S. must make a fundamental shift to invest more in our workers. For example, while we have rightly provided needed unemployment assistance, food assistance, and other supports for workers who have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress has not yet invested in helping these workers access career counseling, child care and other supports, nor to reskill for new, in-demand employment. If we are to see an equitable economic recovery, policymakers must prioritize investing in workers at the scale that reflects their importance in our economy and communities.

While the dislocations likely to result from the pandemic are dire, it would be a mistake to respond with one-time funding that ends when the economy rebounds. Current dislocations merely illustrate patterns that have emerged over the past decade and are likely to continue. Even before the pandemic, the U.S. experienced an increasing gap in employment, income and wealth. Despite overall very low unemployment rates, nearly half of American workers found little or no improvement in income and paths to good jobs. A disproportionate number of Black and Latinx workers fell into that lower half.

The U.S. needs to build and sustain an ecosystem that supports lifelong learning and career mobility for all Americans. Workers today must be lifelong learners, navigating an opaque, confusing maze of educational and employment paths. Workers need ongoing career navigation, reskilling opportunities, and reemployment assistance and supports throughout their careers, as they change jobs multiple times and seek necessary skills and credentials along the way.

The Better Employment and Training Solutions (BETS) team recommends:

1. Build needed supports for lifelong iterations of work and learning. These include broadly available financial aid for learning and sustaining income while engaged in learning and during work transitions, quality career navigation using substantial improved information tools, supportive services, expanded integration of work and learning opportunities, and re-imagined credentials that recognize all learning a learner has achieved.

2. Increase funding for workforce development through a co-investment model. Funding adult learning should continue to be a shared responsibility of the government, employers, and learners. Public funding needs to increase substantially as part of that.

3. Shift the paradigm from short-term transactions to longer-term investments. Workforce development programs today function like a social policy emergency room, providing short-term triaged services in reaction to a crisis. That mindset needs to expand to include preventive services and strategies that often will take longer to achieve than the short-term design of many workforce programs today.

4. Challenge and support community collaboratives to deliver results. Collaboratives are inherent in effective workforce strategies, which require engaging diverse stakeholders spanning economic development, education, human services, business, labor, community-based organizations and more to succeed. They are also often the source of innovative solutions to vexing needs. But too often, federal program requirements support the work of individual agencies and make it difficult to align the funding for collaborative ventures.

5. Invest in R&D, continuous learning, and technology within the workforce development ecosystem. As workforce funding has shrunk over the past 40 years, one result has been a dramatic reduction in supporting the field doing this work. That's a sharp contrast to other examples, such as the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), which plays a vital role within our defense strategy. Significant investments are needed to ensure workforce development is being done by highly skilled staff using robust technology supports and continually adapting policies and practices through research and development.

After 40 years of declining investments in workforce development, building this ecosystem to include the components workers urgently need won't be cheap. We estimate that this set of recommendations will require $70 billion/year to fully fund – $50 billion for education and training, $10 billion for career navigation and other supportive services, and $10 billion for the needed infrastructure (R&D, technology, professional development, improved labor market information and more).

Making that investment would move the U.S. from being one of the lowest per capita investors in workforce development into the mainstream of what is being done by advanced nations worldwide.

Development of a re-imagined workforce development ecosystem should be done in close coordination with job quality strategies that focus on redesigning currently low-wage jobs to be ones that can provide workers sustainable income and career pathway options. A companion paper in the BETS series focuses on actions that can improve job quality in the
United States.

Read this full report at https://skilledwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Modernizing-and-Investing-in-Workforce-Development.pdf.

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Workforce Development Should Focus More on Fixing Work

Maureen Conway, Mary Alice Mccarthy & Alex Camardelle, The Aspen Institute, December 8, 2021

While the full scope of recovery investments is not yet clear, it is clear that significant new investments in workforce development will be on the way. This is good news for a field that has been starved for resources for far too long. But for these resources to live up to their promise of building a better, more inclusive economy, the field of workforce development needs a new narrative that reflects current labor market realities.

The dominant story of equipping workers with "in-demand skills" as the key to labor market success is not only contradicted by decades of stagnant wages and the growing gap between worker productivity and compensation, it is also damaging to the goals of equity and job quality that the field has recently embraced. It ignores the role of systemic racism, pervasive sexism, and declining worker power in influencing labor market outcomes and implicitly accepts the persistent overrepresentation of women and workers of color in low-quality work as a fair, market-determined outcome. The field needs a new mental model – one better aligned with labor market realities.

To build this new narrative, let's first be honest about labor demand: there are plenty of jobs that don't require a college degree or extensive pre-employment training. While it is true that occupations requiring a college degree are growing faster than those that don't, it is also true that the large majority of jobs—70 percent—require only a high school degree or less. And these are the jobs employers are currently struggling to fill. There is plenty of demand for labor that is willing to accept low wages, but the skills-based, "demand-driven" framework guiding the delivery of workforce services leaves practitioners with few tools to respond to this labor demand in ways that make progress toward goals of job quality and equity.

Second, let's be honest about labor supply: There are plenty of people looking for work who are capable of performing a wide variety of jobs but are overlooked because of other factors. Training and credentials can make job candidates more competitive, but they are not enough to overcome the systemic discrimination and occupational segregation that are alive and well in our labor markets and penalize women and people of color. Occupations that are dominated by women pay less than those dominated by men, even at similar skill levels. At every level of educational attainment, Black and Hispanic workers earn less than White workers. Recent analysis shows that skills training/workforce development programs have reproduced rather than reduced persistent occupational segregation and poor job quality.

Indeed, the real problem with the current labor market is not the shortage of qualified workers, it is the shortage of quality jobs. Our labor markets have systemic problems that individual service strategies will not address. Workforce development needs to see more of a role for itself in shaping labor demand, rather than just responding to it. This is not to say that workforce organizations should stop building worker skills—of course not. But in addition, the workforce development field needs strategies that are explicit in their intention to reduce inequity and to improve job quality. Here are four steps the field can take:

1. **Develop a Solidarity Mindset:** Too often, workforce development treats workers as collections of problems—low skills, no credentials, bad credit scores, etc.—that need fixing so that they can be marketed to employers. We need an approach that values workers as full human beings. We need a practice that prioritizes listening to workers' experience, engaging their ideas, and connecting them to a broader range of information and education than just the few skills needed to get the next job.

2. **Use Data Differently:** Estimating the extent of the problem is important to setting goals and building partnerships. Too much current data analysis focuses on identifying only the good jobs in a region and leads workforce organizations to compete as they try to place too many people into too few good jobs. A more holistic approach to measuring job quality and equity gaps can provide a foundation for coordinated strategies that increase the number of good jobs and broaden access to them.

3. **Identify New Levers and Partners:** Organizations need to think beyond career navigation and skills development and identify levers for improving job quality and addressing equity gaps. Community benefits agreements, living wage ordinances, and other actions that can shift the policy environment are examples of strategies to consider – and those strategies will require strong partnerships with worker advocates, community groups, and labor organizers.

4. **Connect the Dots between Workforce Development and Worker Protections:** Although offices of workforce development generally sit inside state and federal Departments of Labor, there is typically little communication or coordination with the agencies responsible for enforcing labor laws and worker protections. A new narrative that puts workers first can support a more coordinated approach to addressing problems often considered outside the scope of workforce development like wage theft, discrimination, and safety violations.

Job quality and racial and gender inequities are systemic problems, and they need systemic solutions. Congress appears to be on the verge of historic investments in workforce development at a time when working people really need the help. But for these investments to deliver for workers, and particularly women and workers of color, we must stop averting our eyes from the sea of low-wage work in which so many working people are floundering. It's time for workforce development to build common cause with organizations that share their goal: connecting people to decent, dignified, family-sustaining work.

Maureen Conway is a vice president and executive director of the Economic Opportunities Program at the Aspen Institute. Mary Alice McCarthy is the director of the Center on Education and Labor at New America. Alex Camardelle is the director of workforce policy at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

Op-ed: There's another reason for the labor shortage

Art Bilger, founder and CEO of WorkingNation, CNBC Newsletters, July 21, 2021

More than 9.5 million Americans were unemployed and looking for work in June, according to the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics data. At the same time, job openings in this country hit 9.2 million, a new record high. Statistically, there is an open job for every person looking for one. But even as employers signal that they are ready and willing to hire, they are having trouble finding workers ready and able to fill the jobs.

In its most recent Beige Book report, the Federal Reserve said labor demand was broad-based, but nine out of its 12 districts reported only slight or modest job gains over the past six weeks. "Labor shortages were often cited as a reason firms could not staff at desired levels," according to the report, which is an anecdotal survey of businesses around the country.

Some employers suggested job seekers don't want to work because they are making too much money on extended unemployment benefits, many of which are expiring. Economists are split on whether this is the driving reason businesses can't find enough workers, and by one estimate only four in ten workers actually make more in jobless benefits than from a paycheck.

There are other factors at work, including continuing health concerns around Covid-19 and the lack of affordable child care.

Yet another factor is the acceleration of the mismatch between the skills workers have and those that employers want.

An alarming jobs skills gap made worse

Even before the pandemic forced businesses and workers to adapt to a (partially) remote economy, automation and globalization were changing the way we work, and employers were sounding the alarm that jobseekers with key skills were in noticeably short supply.

Those changes sped up over the past year as employers embraced new ways to continue serving their customers with fewer workers, with existing jobs relying even more heavily on workers with strong technical and digital skills.

What was expected to happen over the next 10 to 20 years has, instead, happened in just a few months and there is evidence that the need for upskilling is stronger than ever.

For example, in Minneapolis, employers told the Fed "the need for more training or education were moderate or significant challenges," while nonprofits working with diverse youth shared that the narrow range of workforce development options was a major challenge for their clients.

Atlanta businesses reported shortages of nurses, drivers, IT and skilled trades workers. In Dallas, staffing firms noted having many more positions to fill than qualified candidates to match.

It's clear, in addition to quickening the pace of adaptation, the pandemic created a new urgency around issues such as closing the skills gap, the role of post-secondary education in developing the workforce, and equity and access to opportunities in education and work. Creating viable solutions to these challenges is not simply good for jobseekers, they're good for business.

New employment solutions

Over the past year, we've seen some promising examples of innovative training, upskilling, and education programs coming from employers, educators, nonprofits, and civic leaders.

Virginia's Newport News Shipbuilding is one of the employers benefiting from the new Community College Workforce Cooperative. The workforce development initiative brings together three community colleges in the Hampton Roads region and focused on training welders and manufacturers and is creating a pipeline of highly-skill talent to the state's largest industrial employer.

In Tennessee, Memphis-based railroad equipment maker Atlantic Track worked with the local high school district to solve its labor shortage attributed to older workers retiring the company could find skilled workers. The Shelby County School District created its first federally registered apprenticeship — an earn and learn model of training. Students get 144 hours of classroom training and 2,000 hours of hands-on training. They're paid while on their way to tradesman status.

The cost of education and upskilling is a barrier for many low-income jobseekers, at times limiting their options in the workforce. Out of the box thinking at Paul Quinn College in Dallas, Texas, is making higher education more affordable and more accessible and helping to level the playing field. The Urban Scholars Program is three years, full-time, and fully online. Much of the tuition is covered through Pell Grants, local employer grants and work-study programs.

There's more. Many employers have recognized that a four-year degree shouldn't necessarily be a requirement for a good-paying job and are starting to implement a skills-focused hiring process. Organizations and companies like Goodwill, Google and Amazon, to name a few, are offering free digital skills training to anyone who wants it. With more emphasis on remote learning and remote working, efforts are underway around the country — in both urban and rural areas — to make broadband access available to all.

The genie is out of the bottle. Companies are not going to go back to the old ways of doing business. Today's jobs, and the jobs of the future, require strong, sometimes new skills. Many key stakeholders are doing their part, coming together to eliminate barriers to upskilling and helping jobseekers along the path to a good-paying job and career. These are encouraging developments, but there is so much more than needs to be done, and done quickly, to ensure our workforce is ready for the jobs employers need to get done.

By Art Bilger, founder and CEO of WorkingNation, a nonprofit that focuses on solutions to the jobs skills gap.

As Women Return to Jobs, Remote Work Could Lock in Gains

Tim Henderson, PEW STATELINE, May 3, 2022

The pandemic "shecession" is fading as more women return to jobs across the country, aided by new workplace flexibility that could lock in future increases in female employment.

Remote work, a loosening of 9-5 workday constraints and evolving ideas such as "returnships" to help women back to careers after extended absences all could make it easier for women, especially those with children, to hold jobs.

Women's employment gains have outpaced men's for six of the past eight months, according to a Stateline analysis of federal statistics through March of this year. The data is from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey provided by the University of Minnesota.

The number of women with jobs is higher now than at any other point since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, though it is still below pre-pandemic levels. During the early months of the pandemic, women lost 1.7 million more jobs than men.

Women already have caught up to their pre-pandemic employment levels in New England and on the West Coast, where there is a high proportion of white-collar jobs in the knowledge economy and in tech that can be performed remotely. The ability to work from home is especially welcome to women raising families or caring for older relatives.

Women's employment lags the most in the Midwest, where there are many manufacturing jobs that can't be done remotely. In that region, women hold almost 800,000 fewer jobs than before the pandemic, according to the Stateline analysis. Meanwhile, in the West Coast region (which includes Alaska and Hawaii), there are more than 400,000 more women working as of this March compared with February 2020.

However, mothers of small children still lag fathers in returning to the workplace nationwide, according to the Stateline analysis.

There are about 250,000 fewer mothers of small children at work than before the pandemic, compared with about 190,000 fewer fathers. More than 90% of fathers of small children are employed, a complete recovery to the pre-pandemic share. Mothers, though, still lag their own pre-pandemic employment rate by almost 2 points, at 68.6%.

Debra Lancaster, director of the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University in New Jersey, said state governments "can and should be setting an example for the private sector" in providing flexibility for their employees. More than 1 in 5 New Jersey households faced disruptions to their child care last year, forcing parents to either supervise children while working or leave their jobs, according to an April report co-written by Lancaster. But New Jersey's new telework policy for state employees, announced in April by Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy, still requires parents to use paid or unpaid leave time if they have to supervise children during scheduled remote working hours.

In Hawaii, lawmakers are considering a plan to subsidize day care salaries to combat a shortage of workers, said Khara Jabola-Carolus, executive director of the state's Commission on the Status of Women. Nationwide, there are 150,000 fewer day care workers than before the pandemic, according to the Stateline analysis.

Another Hawaii bill last year was aimed at the state government's prohibition on employees using their child care responsibilities to justify working remotely, Jabola-Carolus said. The bill has been held up because of criticism from the state employees' union, which insists that legislation that changes working conditions should be part of labor negotiations.

That leaves Hawaii's state employees in limbo, able to stay home for child care only if their supervisors agree, under emergency pandemic rules. Jabola-Carolus, who has two small children herself, said she's lucky to have an understanding boss but that not all employees are so fortunate.

"I spent almost a year looking for day care for my youngest, and I had to send my other son an ocean away to stay with my mother in California for a while. That really hurt, the family separation," said Jabola-Carolus. Her frustrations with pandemic work conditions, vented in an auto-reply to her work email in the summer of 2020 that went viral after she shared it on Instagram, became a rallying cry for pandemic mothers.

"I hope to respond to your message soon," she wrote in the message, which has since been removed. "Like many women I am working full-time while tending to an infant and toddler full-time." She noted that "the average length of an uninterrupted stretch of work time for parents during COVID-19 was three minutes, 24 seconds."

Utah has the highest share of children in the nation, about 29% of its population as of 2020. It has the first state-sponsored "returnship" program to help women get back to the workplace after an absence, typically to care for small children.

"What we are seeing is that while women left the workforce in droves due to the pandemic, a lot of our returners are returning not due to the pandemic's end, but due to in-

flation and rising costs," said Shay Baker, program manager for the Return Utah program. "Staying home with families is harder than it was."

Returnships are a form of mid-career internships that started in the late 2000s in financial services companies as a way to get more women into management roles, despite gaps in their resumes from child-rearing or moving to further a spouse's career, said Carol Fishman Cohen, a consultant who helps design the programs.

More companies are retooling their returnship programs to help with pandemic career breaks, including Goldman Sachs in October, T-Mobile in November and PepsiCo this month. Some are cutting back the required absence time, typically two years, to accommodate shorter pandemic disruptions, and offering faster paths to jobs and more remote work for parents who still need to stay home.

Women who are parents of small children have been particularly hard hit, with school closings early in the pandemic forcing them to assume more child care duties, plus help little ones with remote learning. Even when schools reopened, there were unpredictable quarantines during outbreaks that made it harder for parents to work.

The kinds of jobs women are doing now have changed compared with before the pandemic. There are 1.3 million fewer jobs for them as administrative assistants, waitresses, retail salespeople, nursing assistants and child care workers, while the gains are in fields including mail-order, warehouses and couriers that thrive in remote conditions.

"Coming out of the pandemic we are seeing some great renegotiations, including more women taking higher paying full time jobs in men-dominated fields like warehousing and transportation," said Ariane Hegewisch, program director of employment and earnings for the Institute for Women's Policy Research in Washington, D.C.

"Notably missing in the recovery are nursing care and child care jobs," Hegewisch said. "Unless these [jobs] also become jobs worth returning to, the recovery will remain very partial for women."

Stephanie Aaronson, a labor economist and director of the economic studies program at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., said it's too soon to tell whether the employment recovery for women will continue, but it no longer looks like the "shecession" it was once called.

"At this point women are not particularly lagging men in the recovery any longer," Aaronson said. "There isn't a huge difference now in how men and women are faring."

But the fact that mothers and fathers are still faring differently is a sign that societal norms as well as policies have to change if men and women are to have equal access to employment in the future, according to a working paper published last year by the Massachusetts-based National Bureau of Economic Research and co-authored by Titan Alon, an assistant economics professor at the University of California, San Diego.

"The pandemic is likely to bring about changes in the post-pandemic workplace that open up the potential for much reduced gender inequality in the labor market," the paper concluded.

"But for this potential to be realized, changes in the workplace are not enough; there also needs to be a shift in social norms and expectations that lead mothers and fathers to make more equal use of the added flexibility."

Employee Happiness: What Do Employees Value Most in Their Job?

Ian Heinig, Writer, Clutch, February 18, 2022

The Great Resignation has people quitting at an all-time high, negatively impacting productivity, profitability, and job growth. Clutch surveyed 540 full-time employees from businesses of all sizes to determine what contributes to workplace satisfaction. The report suggests that companies should compensate employees well, reduce stress, and provide ethical leadership to recruit and retain employees.

In November 2021, 4.5 million Americans quit their jobs — an all time high that has been dubbed "The Great Resignation."

The truth is that The Great Resignation has come about due to the culmination of several factors: safety concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, wage stagnation amongst rapid inflation, and ultimately, years of general job dissatisfaction.

As a result, companies that are unable to meet their employees' needs or are unwilling to compromise about things such as return to work policies are hemorrhaging workers. Instead, workers are taking advantage of a booming job market by looking for new opportunities that more closely align with their values.

Watch: The Great Resignation: WorkTech Rountable Podcast

This can be a huge problem for businesses. According to the polling and research company Gallup, companies with disengaged workers suffer from 16% lower profitability, 18% lower productivity, and 37% lower job growth. Organizations with engaged employees, however, receive 100% more job applications.

Workplace values are essential to recruiting, retaining, and motivating quality employees.
If staff needs are met, companies can expect a happy and engaged workforce. But when a business falls short on workplace values, staff disengage and produce lower-quality work.

Clutch surveyed 540 full-time employees of all ages, at companies ranging from small businesses to large enterprises to determine what people value in the workplace and what gives employees the most satisfaction.

We discovered that employees rank competitive pay and fair treatment as the two most important attributes in a job.

Businesses can use this report to learn what employees value in the workplace and how to create a supportive environment that generates superior results.

Looking for a great HR company to handle benefit plan management, recruiting, training, or payroll processing? Check out our directory of top HR outsourcing companies.

Our Findings

1. The most important workplace values for full-time employees are fair pay (55%) and fair treatment (54%). Over half of employees ranked these values as first- or second-most important among other values.

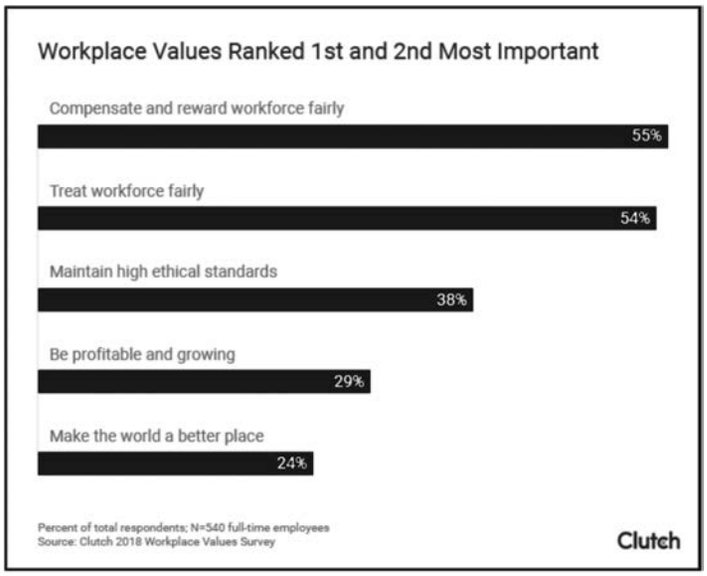
2. Employees are less likely to rank other company attributes as first- or second-most important, including that the company maintains high ethical standards (38%), stays profitable and growing (29%), or makes the world a better place (24%).

3. Rankings aside, nearly all employees agree that fair treatment (94%), fair compensation (93%), and high ethical standards (93%) are '"very" or "somewhat important."

4. The majority of employees (72%) perceive that their company has a positive impact on the world.

Employees Prioritize Competitive Pay

People work to make money. Unsurprisingly, our research shows that employees value fair pay (55%) more than all other workplace attributes.



A salary reflects an employee's perceived value within an organization. Employees want to be recognized for their performance through fair compensation.

Workers who feel underpaid will lose their incentive to

work and eventually quit. Almost 70% of workers cite low salary as the most likely reason to leave an employer, according to the HR and payroll company Paychex Worx. High wages attract high-quality employees, and fair pay ensures that they are motivated to work their best.

In the past, many people have suggested that millennials are willing to work for less if given a chance to make an impact. While age does affect how much people value "making the world a better place," our research shows that money, regardless of age, is the primary driver when choosing an employer.

The disparity between what people expect younger workers to value and what they actually value has contributed to job dissatisfaction. Millennials and Gen Z are resigning at higher rates than other demographics, in part because of pay disparities.

Fair pay also helps to offset the negative effects of workplace stress, which is on the rise. Employees are anxious about the current political climate, under pressure to adapt to new technologies, and fear losing their jobs to artificial intelligence (AI). Low wages further add to this stress.

Companies must make compensation a top priority. Yet, trends suggest that companies don't always understand the importance of competitive pay.

Employers & Employees Have Opposing Viewpoints on Workplace Values

Management and employees differ greatly in the perceived importance of fair pay. This divide has negatively impacted job satisfaction, leading to increased turnover.

According to a survey by risk management company Willis Towers Watson, employees consider low pay to be the second greatest source of workplace stress, behind inadequate staffing.

Meanwhile, surveyed employers said that low pay is only the ninth greatest source of workplace stress.

This discrepancy leads employees to feel overworked yet underpaid, says Shelly Wolff, senior health care consultant at Willis Towers Watson.

"Employees seem to be saying, 'support me, pay me, and direct me,' but employers are focused on other stress factors," Wolff said. As organizations expand the responsibilities of workers, they risk high rates of turnover unless compensation increases to match.

For this reason, it's crucial that employees feel like they have opportunities to advance. With a raise in sight, employers can better satisfy employees without immediately increasing pay.

"Employees perform best when the environment is conducive to growth," said Victor Lipman, whose work has appeared in Forbes. He is also the author of "Type B Manager: Leading Successfully in a Type A World." Financial growth is most desirable, but personal or professional growth can substitute if times are lean.

"I found many individuals highly motivated by loftier titles, added responsibilities, plusher offices, and the respect of others in the organization," Lipman said. This means that companies can be creative about how they offer advancement to employees.

Lipman concludes: "Some growth opportunities are costly. Others have a cost of zero."

Companies should always offer a fair wage, but opportunities for professional growth can help keep employees satisfied.

Comprehensive Benefits Boost Employee Happiness

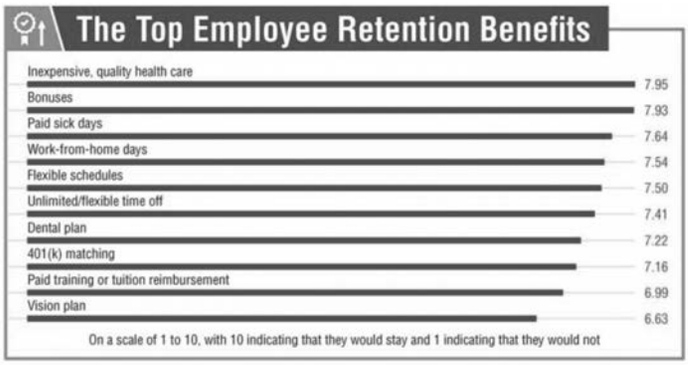
To attract and retain the best talent without adding to payroll, companies must offer desirable benefits. According to a survey by the job search site Glassdoor, more than half of employees (57%) said that benefits and perks are a key factor in deciding whether to pursue a particular job.

Though providing benefits can seem expensive, compare this to the cost of employee turnover. Replacing a single employee costs approximately 20% of that employee's salary, according to estimates from The Center for American Progress.

Benefits cost money but reduce turnover, perhaps leading to more revenue for your company.

Consider paid maternity leave, a widely discussed benefit in the U.S. The benefits of offering more than what the law requires are both attractive and financially feasible.

Sonya Merrill of ZestFinance, an AI automation company, said that the cost of offering extended, paid maternity leave is sizable but ultimately worthwhile – especially if it can prevent an employee from leaving the company.



Source: Paychex Worx

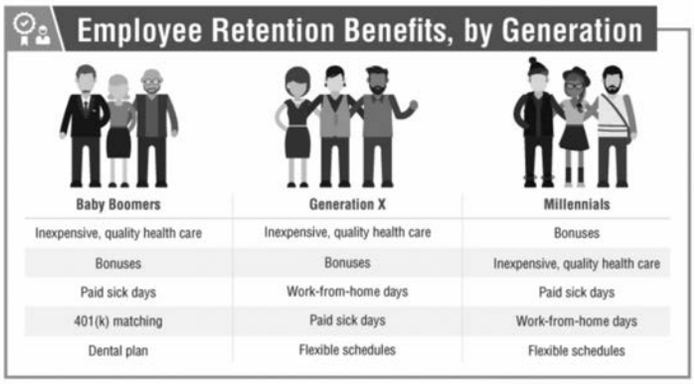
"The important question really is: What's the cost of not offering these extended benefits?" Merrill said. "The several

months it would take to find a replacement, along with the cost of manpower to recruit and interview, heavily outweighs the cost of providing this benefit."

Companies should align their benefits with their workforce. The easiest way to understand what employees want is to ask – whether via surveys or a one-to-one meeting.

A study by the HR and payroll company Paychex Worx found the most sought-after benefit among employees is inexpensive, quality health care.

Other priority benefits include bonuses, paid sick days, and work-from-home flexibility. These top benefits vary by age, however.

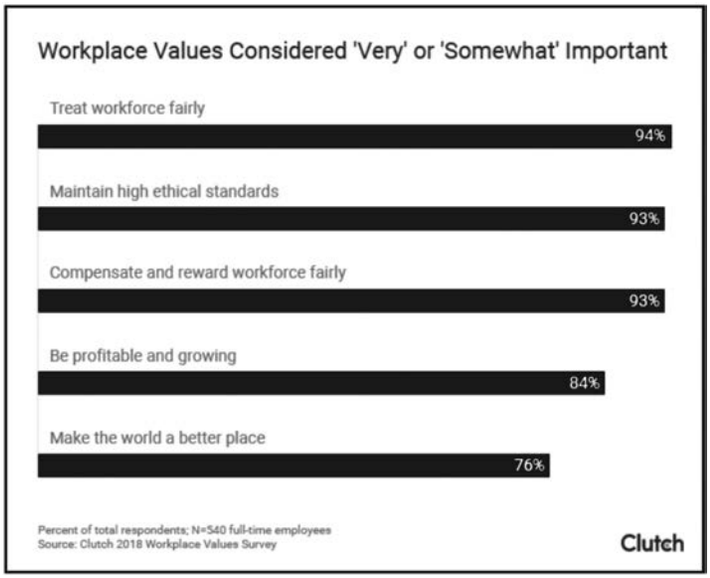


Source: Paychex Worx

For example, millennials value bonuses over inexpensive, quality health care, a trend that's swapped for baby boomers and Generation X.

Most of these benefits would otherwise be out-of-pocket expenses for workers. A desirable benefits package helps employees feel appreciated and lets companies demonstrate that they care.

Fair Treatment Is Key to Employee Motivation



Workers know they're worth more than money, so fostering an environment of respect is critical to employees' performance and retention.

Our research shows that 93% of employees think that being rewarded and compensated fairly is 'very' or 'somewhat' important, compared to 94% who think that fair treatment of the workforce is 'very' or 'somewhat' important.

Workers who identify with a company's values are more productive, innovative, and loyal to the organization.

Equality provides the foundation for a happy, sustainable workforce.

Lori Goler, head of people at Facebook, calls this the psychological contract of the workplace, or "the unwritten expectations and obligations between employees and employers." Fairness is necessary for a high-functioning workplace.

"When that contract is fulfilled, people bring their whole selves to work," Goler said. "But when it's breached, people become less satisfied and committed. They contribute less. They perform worse."

When a company lacks fairness, employees feel discouraged to participate beyond mandatory responsibilities. Employees who feel marginalized will become disaffected, disengaged, and resentful. The result is a toxic workplace that suffers from high rates of turnover.

A culture of fairness closely correlates with how companies provide compensation.

Mark Fulks, a labor and employment lawyer at Baker Donelson, discussed how compensation must be based on the work and skill of employees, not their demographics or privileges.

"When it comes to salary, employees favor performance-based pay, skill-based pay, and experience-based pay," Fulks said. "They also favor equal treatment among similarly situated employees and [oppose] age, gender, and race-based disparities. In other words...employees want to be treated fairly."

Employers must provide the necessary resources to support employees.

This means investing in employees who enter at a disadvantage, such as women and people of color.

"Companies need to have a strategic framework...with goals, targets, sponsors, and support networks, and with clear leadership from the top," Jane Nelson wrote recently in Fast Company. Nelson directs Harvard's Corporate Social Responsibility Initiative.

Inclusive businesses earn greater profits, but only if em-

ployees feel they've been encouraged to succeed within the larger group. Organizations struggle to implement initiatives that promote advancement for disadvantaged workers, however.

To foster an environment of empowerment, companies can:

- Focus on leadership training for women and people of color
- Establish mentorship programs to connect individuals at different levels of business
- Create strategies to hire, recruit, and promote in ways that encourage equal opportunity

Offering equal opportunities for advancement is key, as this demonstrates that everyone is rewarded according to their merit. Conversely, any unreasonable pay differences or failures to discipline or dismiss non-performers will demotivate staff and harm the work culture.

To avoid any perceived unfairness and encourage positive morale, companies should make clear how they distribute benefits and privileges. They might also underscore the importance of fairness in a company meeting or via a series of emails from leadership.

Encouraging feedback about fairness, either with anonymous surveys or through the compliance department, will help companies gauge whether employees feel they are being treated fairly.

A fair and equal workplace encourages employees to stay and perform their best.

Employees Want an Ethical Workplace

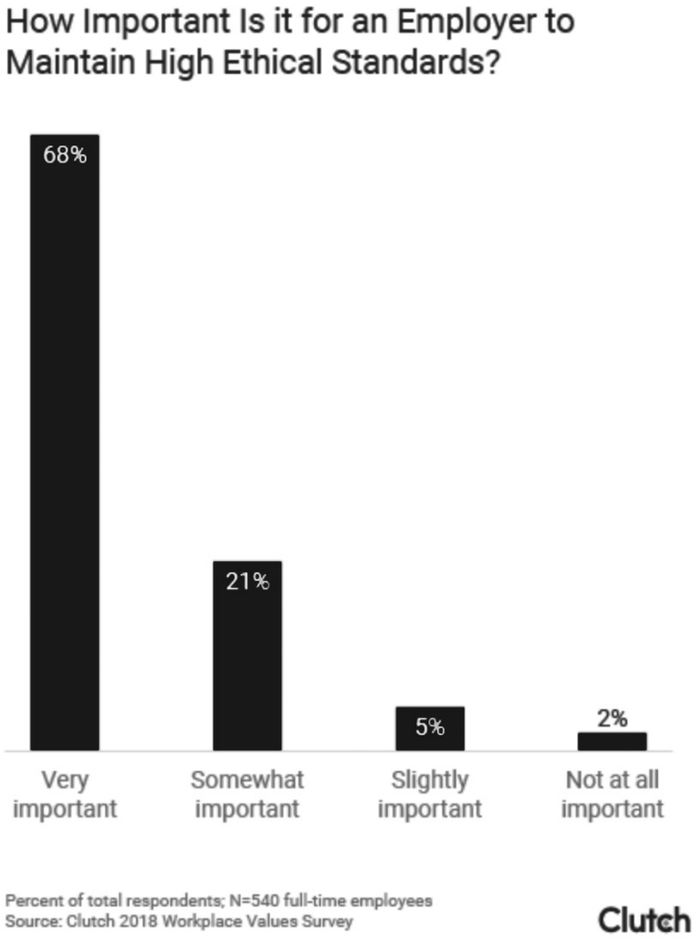
People spend more time at work than anyplace else outside the home. Workplace ethics are critical because they provide employees with a sense of purpose and integrity.

Our research shows that 68% of employees consider maintaining high ethical standards to be "very important"," while 38% consider ethical standards to be a first- or second-level priority in the workplace.

Workplace ethics are integral to employees' well-being because it lets them feel proud and honest in their occupation. This is critical as people's jobs are becoming a larger part of their lives.

"Because of the proliferation of technology, our work isn't something that ends when the clock strikes 5:00 p.m.," said Patsy Doerr, global head of D&I at Thomson Reuters. "Work is, more than ever, embedded in our identity as individuals and we want to take pride in our jobs and in our workplaces."

Integrity is a word that's used loosely in corporate culture but is increasingly predictive of long-term success.



"We've also seen time and time again that companies that don't act ethically don't stick around for the long term, and employees want to be a part of something that's built to last," Doerr said.

Ethical practices are more sustainable and help companies secure the most talented employees.

"Certain firms are more likely to be chosen on principle rather than pay," said Jane Cote, academic director and associate professor at the Carson College of Business.

"The first thing students looked for when choosing among accounting firms is which one shared their values," Cote said. "The question for the students was, 'How can I find a firm that aligns with the kind of person I want to be?'"

Management should lead by example when it comes to ethics and integrity. Employees watch their leaders closely for signals of behavioral norms. An easy first step toward an ethical culture is to model the behaviors expected from all within the organization.

"For most companies, efforts to improve culture start at the top with senior executives, ensuring they exemplify strong ethics in interactions and communications with their teams," said Brian Lee, legal and compliance leader at Gartner.

While management must inspire ethics, the greatest source

of influence on employee ethics is from peers. According to Gartner, only 25% of employees trust their peers to model and practice the right ethical behaviors. The key differentiator between companies with strong workplace ethics and those without is a healthy company culture that promotes integrity.

How Can Companies Promote Strong Ethics?

Companies should frequently demonstrate their commitment to ethics. For example, to create an open and honest company climate, companies can:

- Create a code of ethics
- Use management to signal the importance of accountability
- Implement clear policies and procedures that support ethical conduct
- Reward positive behavior in the workplace
- Refer staff to the compliance department as a resource

Ethics might not always have been so important to employees.

"It's interesting to note that these results probably would have been different 10-15 years ago. The further back you go, the fewer employees would have cared (or they would have turned a blind eye perhaps) to their work's ethical standards," said Nate Masterson, CEO of Maple Holistics, a bath and beauty company.

Greater emphasis on the need for equality in the U.S. overall has led to an increased need in the workplace.

"With a rising awareness of the need for equality now, more than ever before, employees are looking to ensure their workplace is meeting their corporate citizenship and ethical standards," Masterson said.

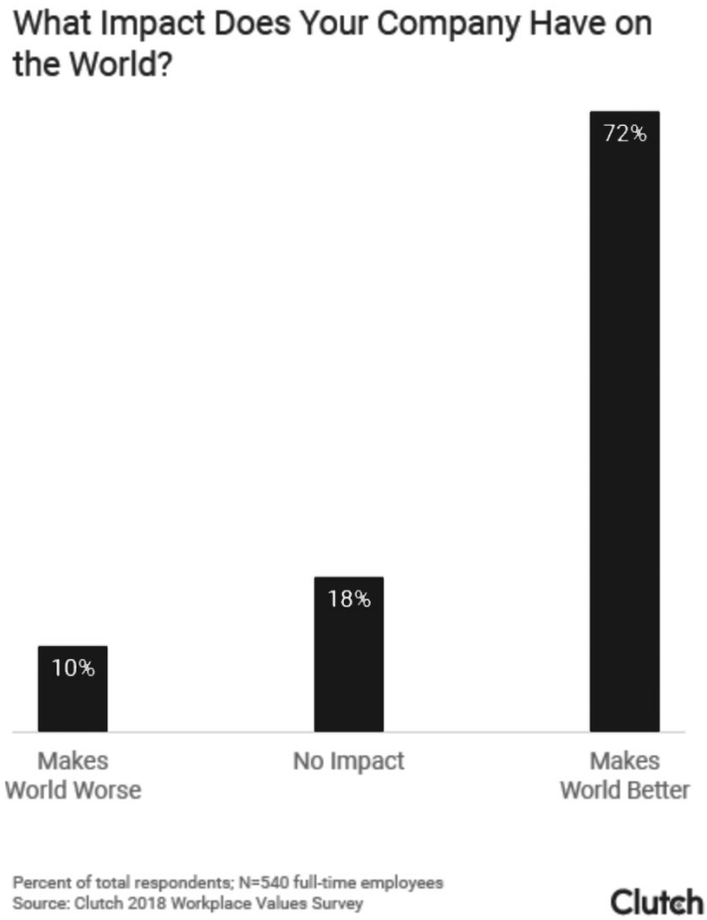
To encourage ethical action, companies can tap the influence of key employees. A company with a strong code of conduct will attract and grow with employees of similar values.

Social Impact Ranks Low Overall But Higher With Gen X and Millennials

Jobs that provide a sense of purpose are increasingly valued. After all, we want what we do to matter. Despite this, a company's social impact ranks as the least important of all workplace values.

Only 24% of employees surveyed ranked that their employer makes the world a better place as the first- or second-most important workplace attribute.

Surprisingly, a full 72% of surveyed employees already believe that their company makes the world a better place.



Thus, social impact may rank low because most employees believe their company is presently making a difference. These employees are more comfortable putting priority on other workplace attributes.

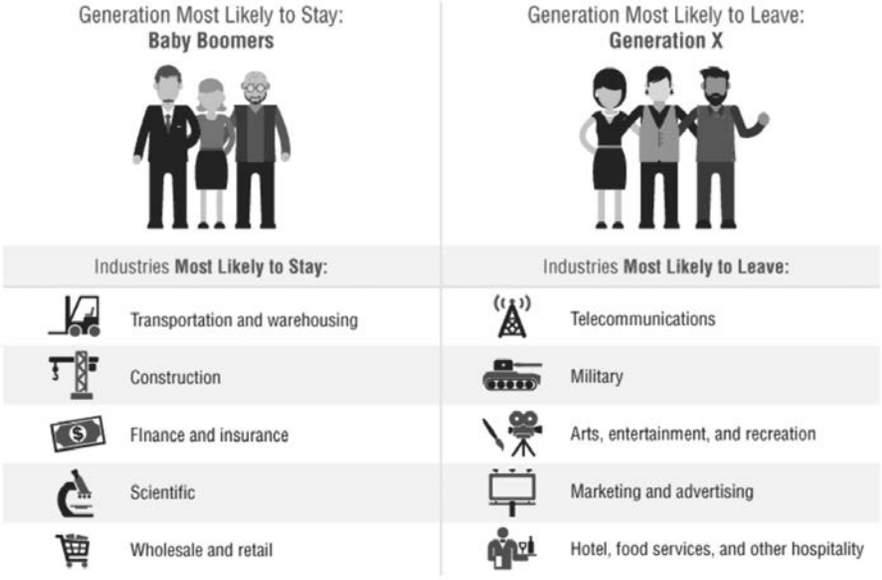
The desire to think of your job as part of a solution is reflective of a larger shift in culture, said Thea Ducrow, Ph.D. at Ducrow Consulting.

"As Gen X and millennials are in positions of power, the importance of authenticity is coming to the forefront," Ducrow said.

Given the surging importance of corporate responsibility, organizations can benefit from aligning with social causes. Regardless of genuine impact, the perception of making a difference will enhance a company's status with the business community, employees, and potential hires.

Our research confirms that socially impactful companies are most valued by Generation X (22%), followed by millennials (21%) and then baby boomers (4%). This gap between the older and younger generations indicates a difference in values and practical realities.

Baby boomers are less flexible in their careers and enjoy less job security. Gen Xers often have the time, dynamic skills, and mobility to pursue new career options. Gen Xers are the most likely to leave a job in favor of another position, while baby boomers are the least likely to leave, according to Paychex Worx.



Source: Paychex Worx

Be aware that impact is relevant to employees, but remember that a social agenda is no replacement for competitive pay.

Create a Retention Strategy Based on Employee Values
Experts predict that resignations will continue at about the same rate in 2022. To adjust, companies must think more about their retention strategies. By listening to their employees' values and compensating them accordingly, they can reduce their turnover rates.

Keep in mind that employees value fair pay and fair treatment more than all other workplace attributes. This contradicts misled popular theories that overemphasized how workers value social impact

Generational differences do exist, though. Gen Xers are more likely to value the social impact of a company than Baby Boomers, though not enough for it to be a driving factor in their decision-making .

Instead, workers make employment decisions based on compensation, benefits, and company ethics. Ultimately, employees who feel appreciated will perform in a way that bolsters the health and success of their companies.

Companies must provide fair pay and fair treatment to attract and retain the best employees.

About The Survey

Clutch surveyed 540 full-time employees of all ages and from businesses of all sizes.

Respondents were split nearly evenly across millennials aged 18 to 34 (42%) and Generation X aged 35 to 54 (43%). Only 14% of respondents were baby boomers aged 55+.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (61%) were associates or managers at their companies.

Females represented 60% of respondents.

In a 'workers economy,' who really holds the cards?

Emma Goldberg, The New York Times, November 3, 2021

Zella Roberts was one of the highest-performing waitresses at the Sonic drive-in in Asheville, North Carolina, her manager told her, but there were days during the pandemic when Roberts questioned whether she could continue her job. The customers were unruly and often unmasked; the base pay was $5 an hour. Then one afternoon in November 2020, a man coughed in her face as she served him a hot dog. Roberts went home and cried.

Some of her colleagues were quitting — often walking out midshift — and Roberts, 22, could tell that the managers were "sweating" trying to figure out how to staff the restaurant. So instead of leaving, she wrote a petition. She asked that Sonic make it easier for customers to tip their carhops. Weeks later, her manager pulled her aside to say the Sonic app was being changed to allow credit card tips.

Back at home, Roberts and her friends celebrated by blasting an old union song, Pete Seeger's "Which Side Are You On?"

"Workers are fed up, and restaurants are desperate," Roberts said. "We're scarce, we have higher standards, and that gives us more power than we've had before."

With the country's labor force down by more than 4 million people and resignations at a high, employers are desperate to make hires. The share of job postings on ZipRecruiter offering retirement plans is up 30% since before the pandemic; posts advertising flexible scheduling grew threefold; the share offering signing bonuses went from 2% to 12%.

Still, the flood of people leaving their positions has kept rising. In August, 1 in 14 hospitality workers quit their jobs, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, a quit rate more than 50% higher than before the pandemic.

Today, job seekers find nearly 50% more openings than they had pre-COVID, and many can expand their search beyond their hometowns because of newly flexible workplace arrangements across industries.

Flush with options and frustrated after laboring through lockdowns, workers are feeling a sense of possibility. Some are resigning. Some are waiting for a prime gig. Others are flexing their muscles — requesting raises or remote work options — while still clocking in. Employers are noting the jump in demands and in some cases catering to it, during a shift in power they realize may be long-lasting.

"People don't realize the scale of what has changed," said Julia Pollak, chief economist at ZipRecruiter. "If you take even one chair away in musical chairs, it changes the entire dynamic of the game. That's what we're seeing now, where the 50% increase in job openings has given job seekers dramatically more leverage."

Businesses are scrambling to offer new benefits, including bonuses and family insurance plans; some hospitality companies are promising managers "stay bonuses" as high as $75,000 to prevent poaching. Workers, meanwhile, are taking the chance to make bolder requests of their bosses.

Adam Ryan, 33, who works at a Target in Christiansburg, Virginia, has been trying to organize his co-workers, who are not unionized, to ask for better pay and conditions since he started at the store in 2017. Before the pandemic, Ryan used to see a look of fear creep over his co-workers' faces when he asked them to sign his petitions.

But in recent weeks, Ryan's colleagues have been eager to hear his ideas. When he approaches them — at the trash compactor, in the clothing aisles, as they are restocking shelves — many agree to join his campaign requesting $2 hourly in hazard pay for working during the pandemic.

"Folks feel that they've been through a lot and have less to lose," Ryan said. "With the labor shortage, people feel more valuable and harder to replace."

Last month, Target announced that it would pay employees an extra $2 hourly during peak days of the holiday season, which Ryan saw partly as a response to the pressure employees like him put on the company. He calculated that the bonus could earn his co-workers at most $180 extra for the season, so it has invigorated him to continue making larger demands.

Target is part of a swell of companies facing employees who want higher pay, better benefits or more flexible working arrangements. There have been strikes against 178 employers this year as of mid-October, according to a Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations tracker.

But for all the new assurance that workers like Ryan feel in making demands, they know that the bosses still hold a fundamental kind of leverage: the jobs. And at some companies, workers have received warning signs that organizing too noisily or publicly could put their roles at risk.

At Netflix, a former program manager who is transgender was fired last month, and the company said it was for leaking internal documents. A Google researcher said she was fired last year after criticizing bias in artificial intelligence systems as well as the company's approach to hiring minorities. At Apple, one of the leaders of an internal push to improve working conditions called #AppleToo was recently fired, which the company told her was for violating policies

on interfering with investigations.

"I suspect that one of the goals of my termination was to send a message to other employee activists," said Janneke Parrish, 30, the Apple employee, who had helped organize a 7,500-person Slack channel advocating for remote work.

This week she filed a charge with the National Labor Relations Board alleging that Apple had retaliated against her.

Even in what economists have christened a "workers economy," many tech and service workers are at-will employees and can be fired with little warning. And when workers have managed to sustain wins, the improvement they see in working conditions or earnings is often marginal. Weekly wages for restaurant workers, for example, have increased as the hospitality industry struggles to find staffing. But that has brought annual earnings for nonsupervisory workers up to roughly just $22,000 as of September.

"There's a lot of momentum right now, but there are some very serious obstacles toward workers actually acquiring sustained levels of power," said Heidi Shierholz, president of the Economic Policy Institute, noting that less than 11% of American workers are represented by unions.

"Employers are trying on for size this idea that the pandemic has been hard on everyone," Shierholz added. "It's a window for them to claim they don't have power. But we absolutely know that employers hold the cards."

But if some of the power that workers feel right now is limited or even illusory, the debates over remote work arrangements have given them some concrete victories.

At 3M, a multinational manufacturing company based in Minnesota, internal polling showed that 87% of employees valued flexibility in where they could work; in August, while the delta variant was spreading, the company announced a new approach to remote work that lets employees set their own terms on when to come to the office, if at all. At PWC, more than 40,000 employees learned last month that they could work anywhere they want within the United States.

Even at companies that put a high value on in-person work, the realities of recruiting in this market have changed the calculus.

"To some degree we're catering to the expectations and wishes of law students and our younger lawyers," said Brad Karp, chair of the law firm Paul, Weiss, which is requiring most employees to be in the office at least three days a week starting this month but is far more flexible on remote work than pre-pandemic.

The past year has emboldened laborers to tell their bosses where, when and how they want to work, according to Karp.

"At some organizations that might have been more stodgy or hierarchical, you're seeing the March 2020 demarcation as a watershed moment," he said. "The ability of the workforce to speak their minds became actualized."

And some of what workers are pushing for, beyond specific changes, is the chance to keep asking for more. In July, David Barrett, CEO of the software company Expensify, appeared on a panel with Ifeoma Ozoma, who helped push for a California bill signed last month to limit the use of nondisclosure agreements. Ozoma asked the CEO whether he would consider specifying in his employees' contracts that they could speak freely about discrimination, harassment or unlawful conduct in the workplace.

"Sign me up," Barrett responded immediately.

Ozoma dropped sample contract language into the Zoom chat.

"You can share it with your general counsel, who's probably a bit nervous right now," she said.

To Barrett, it was an opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to free expression for employees without fear of being fired; to others, it might have seemed like the sign of a distinct moment.

"Economists are going to be looking back at this time for centuries saying, 'What the hell was going on?'" Barrett said. "I was in a restaurant yesterday, and there was a sign that said, 'We're short-staffed so please be polite with our employees.' I've never seen anything like that ever. That's a company taking a very public and pro-employee stance."

What do employees value most in the workplace?

Rafael San Román Rodríguez, Ifeel, October 13, 2021

Have you ever wondered what do employees value most in the workplace? If you're in the HR sector, specifically recruitment, you certainly have. And it is also likely you have not found a specific answer.

It is clear that we do not always have the opportunity to work in something that we like, that motivates us, and is well paid. However, that doesn't stop us from knowing how to distinguish what we like from what we don't like when we assess the company we work for. We do like a lot of things. Or, at least, we liked them in our previous job and we would love to get them back.

There are hundreds of positive aspects that an organization's employees can highlight. However, here are the 8 aspects we've narrowed down when asking what do employees value most in the workplace and what they like about the place where they work. You will surely be able to relate to more than one of them.

What do employees value most in the workplace?

1. Enjoy a good work environment
A positive work environment in the workplace is essential for good work. Therefore, it is not surprising that it is one of the factors that always appears on the list of elements when considering what do employees value most in the workplace. This is important both when working face-to-face in the office and when working from home and interactions are more distant.

It doesn't matter how interesting, important or enjoyable the task is: if interpersonal relationships don't work, workers feel bad, are in conflict with each other, and find it more difficult to cooperate. Of course, their performance will also never be as good as if the atmosphere, i.e. the "emotional environment" in the company, were positive.

2. Be taken into account as an employee
When companies structure their social benefits policy, also known as "emotional salary", they do not do it in any old way. On the contrary, they include elements in that incentive program that make a worker feel that they are not just a mere workforce, but that they are taken into account.

In fact, when asked what do employees value most about the companies they work for, it is to be considered in a personalized way and not as a number. In other words, they feel that they are involved in decision-making processes, that they are given responsibilities based on trust, that their achievements are rewarded and that, in short, they are treated well.

3. Ability to adapt to the worker's needs
In addition to getting positive reinforcement and being treated with proximity and trust, people like to know that their jobs are not like a prison. Far from that, most workers attach great importance to the company's ability to adapt to their needs, with flexibility and generosity, always within a framework of reciprocity in which the worker also adapts to the company's needs to the best of their ability.

The classic examples of this adaptation are the possibility of making adjustments in the timetable or in the healthy approach to working from home according to continuous daily needs or those that appear suddenly, in a punctual way.

4. Have a good salary
One of the classics that cannot be missed when asking what do employees value most in the workplace is, naturally, their salary. Beyond the minimum that we can all consider as essential to living, a good salary is characterized by how well it is adjusted to the task performed and the responsibilities the worker has.

Normally people are realistic and know what the salary range is within their category and sector. That is precisely why they know how to recognize when a company pays its employees well, or even very well, and include this characteristic among those most highly valued in this context.

5. Have a good manager
In a previous paragraph, we talked about the importance of creating a good work environment by building positive relationships. One of these relationships, in fact, one of the most important, is the relationship that managers and their employees have with each other.

A good boss is a person who does not make serious mistakes if they aspire to lead a team, not only in terms of tasks but also in terms of relationships and affections, through their good leadership example and also their personal charisma.

Employees do not usually have the possibility of choosing who will lead or coordinate them in a given task, nor can they influence this when they do their interview in the middle of a selection process. However, they all positively highlight the fact of having a "good manager" when asking

what do employees value most.

6. To work towards something meaningful
Earlier we mentioned the importance of salary and also the value of relationships. Another element that is crucial to a fulfilling work experience is the task. It is not just a question of whether what we do is more or less easy or pleasant, but whether it is important to us or to others.

Working on a project that goes beyond the purely utilitarian is motivating for many people, even in those situations where pay or other conditions falter significantly.

Taking it a bit to the extreme, it is those situations in which someone says: "I would have done it for free" or "I should have paid for it myself". It is especially when we feel that what we are doing moves us and generates a really important good for many people.

7. Offer a good service or a quality product
Even if the task doesn't consist of anything very momentous, many people simply like the feeling that they work at a place that does things right and takes their job seriously. It doesn't matter if what they do isn't a matter of life and death by any measure.

It's about the love of things done well, regardless of how much they cost, who is going to buy them, or how relevant they will be. That's why many workers find it demoralizing to feel that they work for a company that is chaotic, sloppy, or doesn't care about its customers but only tries to take advantage of them.

8. Values that shape the company
No company is exempt from having a company culture. Within this frame of reference in which everything takes place, we include the values upon which the actions that are carried out are based.

Although companies that belong to really different sectors may share certain values, from the inside the workers have a good sense of what the prevailing principles are and their consistency with the task and the treatment given to staff. In other words, not all jobs are structured around the same values. That's why people like to work in companies that not only have values that are in line with their own but that can be embraced by a large number of people.

Even if you agree with these 8 points we just talked about, chances are that you have not been able to relate to all of them in your current reality as a worker. It doesn't matter: perfect jobs don't exist, it's not easy to translate the question of what do employees value most in the workplace into reality.

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

The Delayed American Dream

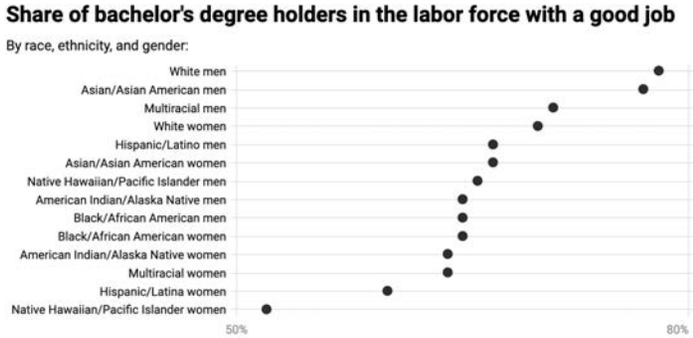
Anthony P. Carnevale, Georgetown CEW, June 15, 2022

Young people really do have it harder these days. It's taking them longer to get a good job compared to generations past.

While just over half of older baby boomers had a good job by age 27, older millennials aren't achieving the same milestone until age 30.[1] This has downstream effects, influencing the jobs that young people take and when they get married, have children, buy a home, or start a business. The rules of the game just aren't the same anymore.

Our research highlights the enduring inequalities that make the road to financial independence even longer, and more bleak, for some members of society. The likelihood of holding a good job breaks down in predictable ways across race and gender — the groups who have historically been shut out of the American dream remain less likely to hold a good job at all levels of educational attainment. These include Black, Latino, and Native American people. Women are less likely to have a good job than men across every racial and ethnic group (Figure 1).

Figure 1. At every education level, young women are less likely to have a good job than young men within the same racial/ethnic groups.



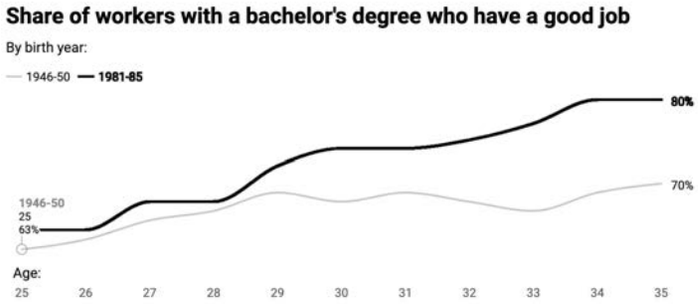
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19 (pooled).

Note: Data are for 25-to-35-year-olds in the labor force. Nationwide, young workers with good jobs are those with earnings of $35,000 or more. The good jobs threshold has been adjusted based on cost-of-living differences among states, using data from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), "Living Wage Calculator," 2020.

The data also emphasize just how critical some form of postsecondary education has become to attain a good job. Young people with bachelor's degrees are the only educational group more likely to hold a good job than similarly-educated baby boomers were at the same age (Figure 2).

The importance of college reinforces the need to strengthen existing pathways to postsecondary education, whether that be to community college, a credentialing program, or a four-year degree. From an equity perspective, it also speaks to the need to improve postsecondary access for racial and ethnic minorities at a time when existing pathways are at risk of being weakened should the Supreme Court ultimately rule against the use of affirmative action in college admissions.

Figure 2. Only young workers with a bachelor's degree or higher are consistently more likely than those in the previous generation to have a good job.

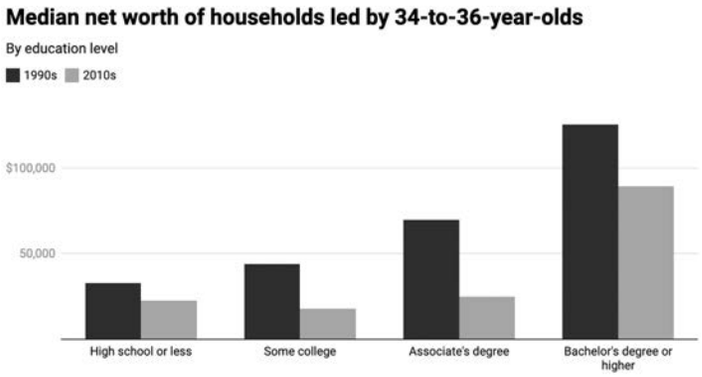


Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 1972–86, 2007–20.

Note: Data are for 25-to-35-year-olds in the labor force. Nationwide, young workers with good jobs are those with earnings of $35,000 or more. The good jobs threshold has been adjusted based on cost-of-living differences among states, using data from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), "Living Wage Calculator," 2020.

Although earning a bachelor's degree is the best bet for a remunerative career, the compound effects of slower progress toward a good job and growing debt levels are putting a damper on young people's ability to save across all educational levels. In the 1990s, the median net worth of households headed by bachelor's degree holders in their mid-30s was $125,500 (Figure 3). Fast forward to 2010, and the median net worth of similar households had fallen to $89,500. Put differently, the median net worth of households headed by similarly-educated thirtysomethings dropped by 29 percent in just over a decade.

Figure 3. A bachelor's degree is associated with more wealth for young households, although the advantage is smaller than in the 1990s.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF) 1989, 1992, 1995, 1998, 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019.

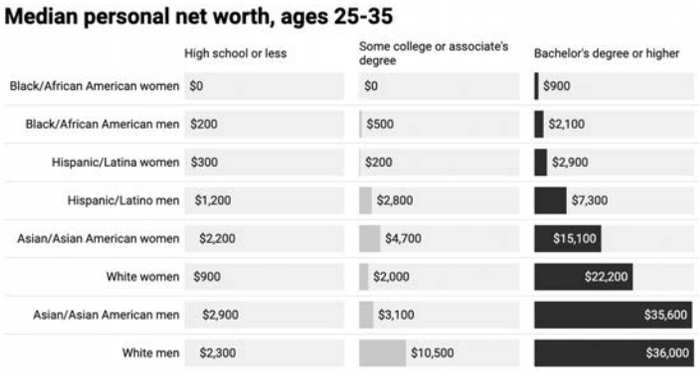
Note: The data are restricted to 34-to-36-year-old adults and

inflation-adjusted to 2019 dollars. The series labeled "1990s" shows the data for 1989, 1992, 1995, and 1998 (pooled); the series labeled "2010s" shows the data for 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019 (pooled).

Despite this loss in median net worth, bachelor's degree holders nevertheless still come out well ahead of their peers who have no more than a high school diploma or associate's degree. Among households led by 34-to-36-year-olds with an associate's degree, median net worth fell a precipitous 64 percent from the 1990s to the 2010s, making the 29 percent loss experienced by bachelor's degree holders over the same time period seem relatively mild.

Yet even among those who have gotten a bachelor's degree, there is a stark divide in wealth across race and gender (Figure 4). At the far extremes, young Black/African American women with bachelor's or graduate degrees have a median net worth of just $900, while similarly educated young White men have a median net worth of $36,000.

Figure 4. Young Black women have less than $1,000 in median net worth at all levels of educational attainment, while young Black men and young Latina women have less than $3,000.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), 2014 (wave 1) and 2018 (wave 1).

Note: The data are inflation-adjusted to 2019 dollars. We have excluded data on the wealth of American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander young adults due to small sample sizes.

Student loans have increasingly become a roadblock on the path to financial security, saddling too many young people with debt just as they are setting out on their adult lives. As college costs have spiraled, so has student debt. In the first quarter of 2022, federal student loan debt sat at $1.59 trillion, a figure that jumps to $1.7 trillion when taking private loans into account. Small wonder, then, that younger college-educated adults are less likely than those ages 60 and older to say that the benefits of attending college outweigh the expense.

This creates a catch-22 situation for many young people. While some form of postsecondary education undeniably gives young people the best shot at getting a good job, the resulting debt burden can hinder their ability to build up a nest egg. Or it might deter them from seeking out further education at all, believing that it is financially out of reach. And again, from an equity lens, certain groups tend to be more likely to need to take out loans and leave school with higher levels of debt, such as Black and Latina women.

Many of the disparities across different racial and ethnic groups and by gender are long-standing structural problems. These include but are not limited to the persistent racial wealth gap, the discrimination that women and members of racial/ethnic minority groups face in the labor market, occupational segregation, and limited guidance along the pathway from high school to a career.

There is no easy solution to these broader problems. Generally speaking, students are more or less on their own to chart a career path as they progress from high school to college and beyond. Those with the social capital and familial wealth necessary to navigate the existing system will, by default, continue to have the best chances of success.

However, certain interventions hold promise. These include:

1. **Student loan forgiveness:** Student loans have clearly played a role in impeding young adults' financial security and reinforcing racial and ethnic disparities in financial well-being. Still, blanket forgiveness would not fundamentally alter the problem of systemic inequality. Many student loan borrowers are wealthier than those who do not borrow for college. However, linking loan forgiveness to earnings, as the Biden administration appears to be considering, would be a more effective means of helping to relieve some of the financial burden that young adults in lower-income and, too often, Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities face.

2. **College affordability:** College attendance should not require students to take on exorbitant debt. Recognizing this, 31 states have rolled out a range of "free" college programs, such as those that offer scholarships to cover tuition at community colleges and other public institutions. Such programs, coupled with an expanded Pell grant, can help make college attainable for more students and encourage students who might otherwise have thought college was not affordable. Strengthening the connections between community colleges and four-year institutions, along with incremental credentialing programs, would help smooth the pathway for students.

3. **College and career counseling:** Young people need better guidance and assistance in obtaining information about education and training options for fields of study and occupations they are interested in pursuing. Powerful tools already exist, such as the Education Department's College Scorecard, but this information is not necessarily making its way to students who would benefit from it the most. Data-informed, person-to-person counseling would take advantage of new data on student labor-market outcomes to support students in making more informed decisions on the path toward greater academic and workforce success.

For further information about this topic, read two new reports from Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce: How Limits to Educational Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Career Counseling Impede Progress toward Good Jobs and How Racial and Gender Bias Impede Progress toward Good Jobs. The full release for both reports can be found at https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/pathway/.

[1] We define a good job as one that pays at least $35,000 per year and a median of $57,000 for young workers (ages 25 to 35) nationwide, with adjustments based on cost-of-living differences among states.

What Your Younger Employees Are Really Thinking

Adrian J. Rivera and Patrick Healy, The New York Times, May 3, 2022

They have political views but aren't interested in talking politics at the office. Some like working from home and others prefer the office, but most agree that they communicate better with colleagues when at the office. They want bosses who give constructive criticism, but some think their bosses are scared of them. "They don't want to hurt feelings," a 30-year-old who works in auto sales said. Added a 33-year-old office manager, "You're not going to hurt my feelings by telling me you'd like me to go in this direction or that direction."

Most of all, they have power, perhaps more than any previous generation their age — and they know it.

In the latest Times Opinion focus group, 12 millennial Americans — ages 26 to 33 — discussed how the pandemic had upended and shaped their young careers, not all of it bad. Several said they quickly realized what they valued most in life when they found themselves working from home. In some cases, instead of looking after their own families or health or finding professional satisfaction, they worked long hours with unsupportive managers or faced the expectation of returning to the office prematurely. If earlier generations focused on paying their dues and putting up with tough treatment at work, some of the 12 focus group participants reveled in trying their luck in what a 29-year-old auditor called "the open market" of better-paying and more-fulfilling jobs.

"Prior to the pandemic, I think employers thought that employees were expendable and worked for their benefit. And now with the Great Resignation, I feel like it's kind of turned the tables," said a 26-year-old credit analyst. "Employees have a lot of power. And so I think employers need to be able to show employees that they do care and value them."

This is the ninth group in our series America in Focus, which seeks to hear and understand the views of cross-sections of Americans whose voices are often not heard in opinion journalism. We conducted the discussion with Margie Omero, who does similar work for political candidates, parties and special interest groups. (Times Opinion paid her for the work.) This transcript has been edited for length and clarity; an audio recording and video clips of the session are also included. Participants provided their biographical details.

Margie Omero: What word or short phrase would you use to describe your concerns about the country right now?

Ryan (29, white, auditor, New Jersey): Division.

Brittney (33, Black, customer service representative, Tennessee): It's all a mess.

Cameron (32, white, customer success manager, California): Hopeless.

Adam (29, white, independent insurance agent, Indiana): A lot of uncertainty.

Bettina (33, Latino, property management, Arizona): Concerned for the next generation.

Margie Omero: Now fill in the blank: I feel blank about how things are going for me personally.

Patrick (32, white, business development analyst, Virginia): Anxious.

Bettina: Still fortunate.

Niccolina (30, white, paralegal, Ohio): Somewhat lucky.

Alexa (26, white, credit analyst, Texas): In the middle — not good or bad.

Brittney: Nervous.

Margie Omero: People seem to feel — not everybody — more positive about themselves than they feel about the country overall. Tell me a little bit about that, anybody.

Alexa: I feel fortunate because I know a lot of people have it worse than I do. I tend to get caught up in what's going on in my life. I've been able to keep a job during Covid and be relatively healthy.

Brittney: That's why I feel nervous, because I've made it through the pandemic fairly easily compared to a lot of people I know. But my situation is always teetering. It's one bad bill, one health issue, and everything could just be gone.

Tina (33, white, office manager, Georgia): My family and I have gotten through the pandemic better than some people. But now the way the economy is going, with everything spiking and student loans potentially coming back, I'm nervous.

Margie Omero: Let's shift gears a little. How about this fill-in-the-blank exercise: I feel blank about my job these days.

Bettina: Burned out.

Cameron: Bored.

Niccolina: Overworked.

Patrick: Slightly optimistic.

Dontavious (30, Black, auto sales lead, Georgia): Secure.

Alexa: Nervous.

Adam: Empowered.

Brittney: Frustrated.

Emily (white, 33, business analyst, Wisconsin): Happy.

Ryan: Comfortable.

Vikas (28, Asian, computer technician, New Jersey): Concerned.

Margie Omero: A mix of positive and negative. Adam, you picked "empowered." Tell me about that.

Adam: Since the pandemic, we've brought about new ways of communicating with people. The work I'm in, I'm really relationship-driven. So it's given us a lot of new ways to work with folks and to help folks out. The pandemic wasn't a good thing, but it definitely brought about new ways of working with people.

Ryan: I said "comfortable." I started off fully remote, but since we've gone back to the office, I've gotten a lot more comfortable with the people that I'm working with and the people that I'm leading. And I'm also comfortable being in the office three days a week instead of five, which is, prepandemic, what we were doing.

Margie Omero: What about the folks who said that they felt burned out and frustrated? Bettina?

Bettina: We're approaching returning to the office more or less full time. And within this transition, because we went through a hiring freeze, we have some shortages in some positions I oversee. So I have to directly cover or find coverage for those gaps.

Cameron: My word was "bored." I'm just tired of sitting at home. I'm very bored with the Zoom calls. I'm very over the current situation. I'm comfortable. I'm very fine and good at my job. But I'm just tired of sitting here and doing it, honestly.

Margie Omero: Have your views toward your career and the kind of work that you do changed during the pandemic?

Alexa: Yeah. I made a career change and a relocation in August. During Covid, I realized that my former employer pushed me to burn out pretty quickly. I felt like my work was becoming my life. It was having a negative effect on my physical and my mental health, especially. I wanted to kind of step back and reprioritize what was important to me and my life, and just get to a place where I'm not dreading going to work every day — just wanting to actually live my life, and not wake up every day just to go to work.

Margie Omero: And how do you feel since you've made that change?

Alexa: So I know I used the word "nervous." I only feel nervous because things have been going great. I'm thinking, everything's too good to be true at my current job. There has to be a point where something bad happens, because I had it so bad at my last position.

Margie Omero: Other folks who have had a similar change in how they view their work or their career?

Dontavious: Working from home was very new to me. It wasn't hard to get used to. Typically, I have to work on a computer all day, every day anyway. If I wasn't at my desk in my room right now, I'd be at the desk in my office. A job is a job.

Niccolina: I did have a change of view, but it's kind of the opposite of what everyone is saying. At my company in 2020, I was like, we can absolutely do this job working from home. There's no reason for us to be in the office. Then I applied for this job back in February of 2021. And I was like, there's absolutely no way I can do this job from home. I actually wanted to go into the office because it gave me a sense of normalcy. It gave me that separation of work and home. So everything kind of shifted in the midst of the pandemic, if I can even say that, because it's still ongoing.

Margie Omero: Has anybody else had that experience of wanting to be back in the office?

Ryan: There's a certain level of personal connection that you're going to make and maintain a lot better if you are consistently going to the office, where you have that human touch, rather than just sitting on a computer all day and then going on with the rest of your day once you've done what you need to do. There's no time for small talk on a Zoom call, unless it's right before a meeting and we're waiting for people to get into the room. For me, it's something that I value. And it might not be revenue generating, but it's definitely morale boosting in some way.

Margie Omero: Cameron, that sounds familiar to you?

Cameron: Absolutely. When I relocated last year, I was actively hoping to be able to get a job where I could go in person at least sometimes to meet my co-workers. And I was really unhappy in my previous role because of the remote nature of it. And that is explicitly the reason why I'm in the job that I'm in now, because they had the opportunity to work in office.

Margie Omero: I want to get a show of hands. How many people think that they feel more productive when they're in the office?

[Six raise their hands.]

How many people feel more productive at home?

[Five participants raise their hands.]

Margie Omero: How many people feel that they have better communication with their colleagues when they're in the office?

[Nine participants raise their hands.]

OK. And how many people feel they have better communication with their colleagues — or it's the same, no different — when they're remote?

[Three participants raise their hands.]

Adrian J. Rivera: How many of you have heard of the Great Resignation? What comes to mind when you hear that phrase, the Great Resignation?

Ryan: I think it's people realizing that the open market is where they can get the most value. I moved jobs during the pandemic, and it certainly was the case for me. People get a lot more money than they were making before.

Alexa: Since there was a lot of downtime during the pandemic, people had time to reflect on their values and where they wanted to be with their career. I'm really proud to be part of something that's actually been coined a term now. The pandemic has been a wake-up call for me as far as, how much time do I want to devote to my career? What do I really want to be doing? Am I really getting paid for what I'm worth?

Adrian J. Rivera: Does anybody have negative feelings about this idea of the Great Resignation?

Bettina: Within our organization, when they assessed their values, a lot of individuals decided it was best to retire. We had so much history within the organization, we didn't see a lot of turnaround, and so we didn't realize that we didn't have a lot of systems in place. They left with all of their knowledge. And they left the rest of us trying to figure out how to do a job without having the process and procedures in place. So for us, it's basically a wealth of knowledge that we're losing as an organization.

Cameron: I hear what Bettina said. I had pain from the loss of all of this historic knowledge and legacy employees. But honestly, take it with you, leave, make more money and screw the company that didn't pay you enough and didn't treat you well enough while they were looting all the profits. I think it's wonderful. I celebrate it. I truly cannot stress enough it's the greatest thing that I've seen in my lifetime.

Dontavious: For me, before it got to the point where people were actually being furloughed, there were people who were quitting because they were afraid of getting sick. From my understanding of the Great Resignation, one factor is just fear and concern about how companies are handling the coronavirus: What is the company going to do to try and keep us safe? How are they going to make sure that the facilities are cleaned, and things like that?

Margie Omero: How many people here have felt like they were thinking about their returning-to-work plan through the lens of, is it safe for me to go back to work right now? How many people said that that was a concern for them?

[Six participants raise their hands.]

Margie Omero: Brittney, why don't you tell us a bit more?

Brittney: I ended up pregnant very early in the pandemic. So I spent the majority of my pregnancy at work in a place where a lot of the people, they didn't want to wear masks, they didn't want to follow protocols. We did end up putting dividers in between our desks. And a lot of the older people retired, so it kind of cut down the amount of people we had in the office. But it just really scared me for a while. I was able to convince them to let me work from home toward the back end of our pregnancy, but once it came time for me to come back after my maternity leave in March of '21, there was no, OK, well, you can work from home to try to keep you and the baby — I have a newborn child in my house. I have a 7-year-old, 6-year-old at the time. And there was no understanding and no concern for the fact that I really was trying to look out for myself and my children. It was just, "No, you need to be here." If I felt like I had a safety net, I guarantee you, I would have left my job, because it felt so inconsiderate. They didn't really care about me as a person. They just needed my body there, so that way the work could get done.

Margie Omero: What does the phrase "work-life balance" mean for folks?

Cameron: I mean, when I hear it, I just think of corporate jargon nonsense. It doesn't really mean all that much.

Tina: I think that work-life balance is something that I've been striving to attain. Once I had my second child, it became, for me, even more off balance. And I was trying to get back and to make it even remotely balanced. But I feel like I'm not there yet.

Margie Omero: And how do you know it's not balanced?

Tina: It's this sense of guilt that I feel sometimes if I'm not doing something with my little baby, or even my older daughter. I think if there's any time that I just want to kind of relax, or if I'm working from home and I'm like, hey, I'm in a meeting, I can't, then I just feel that sense of guilt sometimes.

Adrian J. Rivera: You said you're striving to attain work-life balance, Tina. Do you think it's possible to achieve that balance?

Tina: I do think that it's possible. I feel that I've listened to others, even in conferences or motivational speaking sometimes, where they're like, it is attainable, you can do this, and giving different tips and things, so I do think that it is attainable.

Adrian J. Rivera: Show of hands: How many of you say, I think work-life balance is attainable?

[All participants raise their hands.]

Margie Omero: How many people say that their work environment is casual?

[Eight people raise their hands.]

Cameron: Oh, my workplace is super casual, like mind-blowing casual. It's actually been a bit of a really rough adjustment for me in my new role. I worked for a company that serviced Fortune 50 companies and worked with really big-name companies. And we were very formal, or much more formal. And now, I work for a much smaller organization where project managers will join customer calls wearing tank tops. I once had a project manager join from vacation in a bikini top. I had to pick my jaw up off the floor. I was just in absolute disbelief.

Tina: Zoom calls were very new to me, but I would never speak to a client in a bikini top — ever.

Margie Omero: What kind of relationships do you want with your work colleagues? Do you want to be friends with them? Do you want to talk about your lives outside the office?

Alexa: I was definitely a lot more open at my last job. And I learned the hard way that that was kind of my downfall at some points. So I've definitely been a little more reserved at my current job, and just maintained a more professional image, still being friendly, still sharing about my life, but kind of picking and choosing what exactly I want to share with my co-workers.

Adrian J. Rivera: Alexa, it sounds like you're talking about boundaries. And so I'm curious, boundaries that people have set for themselves in terms of how personal you can be with your colleagues?

Brittney: I do not do social media with people that I work with. You don't need to see what my mom ate for breakfast. And then I go into the office, and you're like, your mom's omelet looked delicious. No.

Emily: No social media attachments. I do think it's OK to talk about what you're going to do on the weekend or more generically. But if there's something personal going on, or a problem that my family is having or something, health reasons or health concerns, I don't talk about any of that.

Adrian J. Rivera: How do people feel about physical contact in the office? Shaking hands, hugs, a pat on the back?

Dontavious: There's a pandemic out here. It's kind of hands off. That's fine with me, too, because it's not necessary to touch people.

Ryan: I've definitely noticed a pretty significant drop-off, even with people that I'm closer with, with shaking hands. Like my boss and I are very close. We meet in person frequently. We play golf together. No virus-related concerns, but we don't shake each other's hand. And I think that's because I started during Covid, during the pandemic. With my old boss, I'd shake his hand all the time, but that was prepandemic. I am kind of indifferent to it. I'm not going to force a handshake on somebody that doesn't want one. But there's definitely some kind of gray area awkwardness that I still feel.

Adam: For a while, I was famous for the Disney wave, you know? Or that humility — like meeting somebody for the first time, that little head bow or that head nod or making yourself smaller in somebody new's presence or something like that. I've noticed a lot more of those nonverbal gestures.

Brittney: I was never big on touching before the pandemic. One of the few good things to come about from this was the six feet of distance, honestly. I'm not against the handshake. But I work in a smaller place where we have a lot of vendor representatives that come through. And this is probably their fourth stop of the day. And I just don't trust everybody to take those precautions, so I would rather not. We can find ways, like you said, the bow, the wave.

Adrian J. Rivera: Great. How important to you is it that your company or that your workplace shares the same political values as you?

Dontavious: So I don't care if my company has the same views as I do. The biggest thing — and it doesn't matter what side of the fence it's on — the biggest thing is just respect. Don't be mean. Don't be disrespectful to any person from any background. The biggest thing for me is just treating everybody with respect, regardless of whatever it is that they believe in, so.

Cameron: I don't think that my employer needs to share my exact political views, and I don't use my personal political views as kind of a barometer of what employers I will and won't work for.

Margie Omero: To what extent are you researching what your company or a potential company is doing on politics?

Brittney: I'm not looking into it, especially because I tend to end up working for very large companies. And the deeper you dive into it, the worse it's going to be. So I would prefer to not know. If I find out and it's something that is directly in opposition to me and what I feel is right and wrong strongly, I probably couldn't. But I'm not going to

go searching for it.

Margie Omero: OK. Vikas, then we'll go back to Adrian.

Vikas: I like to look at the mission statement of the company. I like to go on their website and look through things of that nature. I also think that politics shouldn't be talked about in the workplace, because it can kind of alienate people.

Margie Omero: Have you felt that politics has an impact on how you've been treated at work?

Brittney: Honestly, I live in a Southern state, I'm in a red state, and I am the only person of color out of about 45 people in my office. There was a point in time throughout this pandemic where conversations have come up regarding this president or this protest. And every time, I have to excuse myself, because the comments that I hear coming from my co-workers definitely makes me look at quite a few of them differently. And it's just — I don't consider it to be completely uncomfortable, because I know this is, living where I live, this is a possibility that I'm going to face just about anywhere I go. But at the same time, it also makes me know there's just certain people — I didn't need to know that about you. I didn't need to know that was how you operated in your personal life. And it really does make you question the people that you spend so much of your time with.

Margie Omero: What would you say are the top qualities of a good boss, a good manager?

Alexa: I would say a manager who listens, who instills a lot of trust in me so that I can do my job well, that gives me the tools necessary to succeed in my role, that's flexible if I'm having an issue, either in the workplace or out of the workplace, that I can know that I'm not going to be micromanaged, or that I can just have flexibility with hours if needed. And someone who definitely supports my career path, regardless of whether they think I'm going to be working directly under them in the next five to 10 years. Someone who looks out for my best interest and sees potential in me and kind of steers me on the path that I want to go, instead of just managing me for their sake and for the position that I'm currently in.

Niccolina: I obtained this job a little over a year ago. And this is someone who took me in knowing that I had very little knowledge in the field that I am in. And he took the time to walk me through everything. He built up my confidence. He would explain everything. Here's what I think you're doing great. Here's a thing that could have some work on. But nothing's an issue. He's never gotten mad. He's never fully blamed me. And he's always just appreciated. And he kind of boosts my ego. He lifts me up. And he just totally has all my respect. It's been great working with him.

Adrian J. Rivera: Raise your hand if you agree: I am comfortable speaking my mind in the office, including openly disagreeing with management.

[Seven participants raise their hands.]

Adrian J. Rivera: What would you say to your managers if you could give them some feedback on how they were doing?

Dontavious: Don't be afraid to criticize. The business that I'm in, we have to provide — professionally, of course — criticism for a performance to be better. And I know some managers that are afraid to do that.

Adrian J. Rivera: Why do you think they're afraid?

Dontavious: Because they don't want to hurt feelings. You can still provide the feedback that's necessary without hurting feelings. It's developmental, and that's what we're here for.

Tina: I'm getting a, "good job, you're doing great," from management. But I'm not getting anything else. I know that I'm not perfect. But I'm not getting any criticism or, "We'd like you to be doing this better or that better." And we need that as well. You're not going to hurt my feelings by telling me you'd like me to go in this direction or that direction.

Alexa: I'm definitely valued by my direct manager. But I feel like upper management just uses people at the bottom of the food chain as people who are going to get work done and bring the company profitability. Prior to the pandemic, I think employers thought that employees were expendable and worked for their benefit. And now with the Great Resignation, I feel like it's kind of turned the tables. Employees have a lot of power. And so I think employers need to be able to show employees that they do care and value them, and that they're treated well, they're paid well, and they're given an overall good environment to grow in.

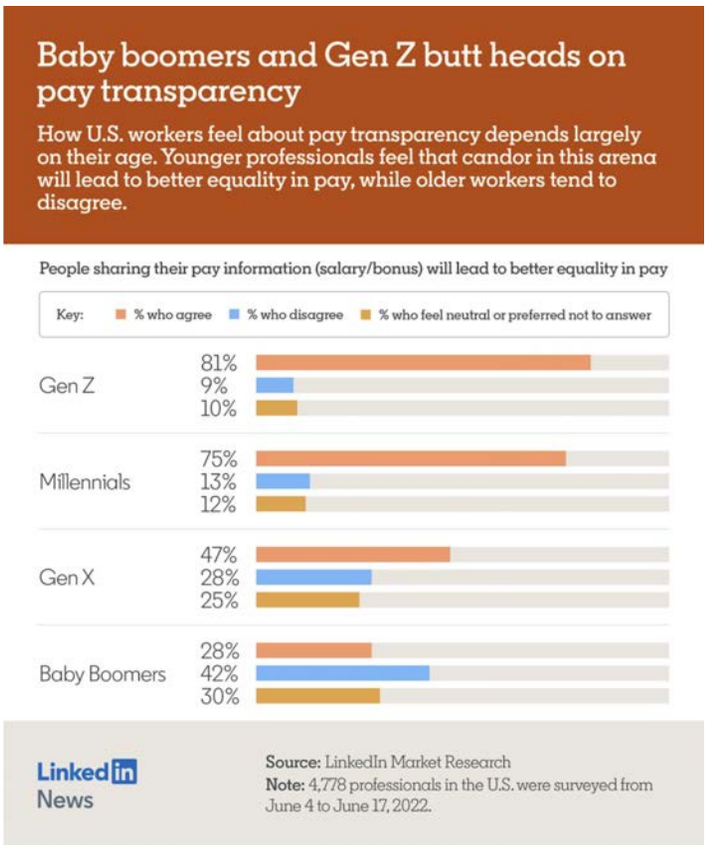
Boomers hate to talk about pay, but 81% of Gen Z welcomes full candor

George Anders, LinkedIn News, July 13, 2022

Microphone in hand, Williams chats up everyone from a tattoo artist making $150,000 a year to a teacher getting by on $57,000. Williams's sunny presence at street fairs is so irresistible that subjects ranging from business consultants to donut slingers bubble up precise details for public enjoyment.

These mini-videos aren't just entertaining — they're also a blunt reminder of how much America's younger workers are shaking free of old-style reluctance to let others know what they earn. Many of the people in Williams's videos are her age, or perhaps a little older. Nobody shows any hesitation about opening up.

Dig deeper, and as the latest edition of LinkedIn's Workforce Confidence survey reveals, America's workplace generations are staking out sharply different positions about the key question: Will sharing information about individuals' specific earnings and bonuses lead to better equality in pay?



Some 4,778 LinkedIn members in the U.S. were surveyed from June 4 to June 17, 2022. As the chart above shows, America's youngest workforce generations see a lot that can go right in a world where pay transparency is common. By contrast, older generations find a lot more to worry about.

Specifically, 81% of respondents in Gen Z (age 25 or younger) see candor as being good for pay equality. That's the highest showing of any generation, edging out the 75% support from millennials (ages 26 to 41), and pulling way ahead of the 47% for Generation X (ages 42 to 57).,

As for baby boomers (ages 58 to 76), the idea of talking openly about pay is as uncomfortable as a full day wearing biker shorts. Just 28% of boomers see an upside to being forthright about pay, while 42% don't want to go there. (The rest are either neutral or declined to offer any opinion.)

Right now, U.S. employers' approach to pay transparency varies enormously. At one extreme, a handful of employers, such as Whole Food Markets (owned by Amazon) pull back the curtain so it's easy for employees to know what all their colleagues are making. Such disclosure exists for many state government jobs, too, though it takes a bit more rummaging through websites to find detailed information.

At the other extreme, some workplace cultures reinforce the sense that individual pay rates are a private matter. A 2010 survey by the Institute for Women's Policy Research found that 66% of private-sector respondents felt constrained from talking openly about pay, even though such conversations can't be forbidden under federal employment law.

Gen Z welcomes full candor on pay

Each generation in the workplace has a different view on pay transparency and who (if anyone) it is appropriate to speak with about salary and/or bonus information.

Who, if anyone, would you share your pay information (salary/bonus) with?	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby boomers
Family member(s)	55%	58%	62%	53%
Close friend(s)	46%	45%	34%	22%
Mentor(s)	21%	25%	22%	11%
Peer(s) I trust (at other companies)	26%	29%	20%	10%
Coworker(s) I trust (where I work)	32%	24%	17%	9%
Anyone who asks	34%	24%	7%	4%
No one	4%	7%	15%	25%
Prefer not to answer	1%	3%	4%	8%

LinkedIn News

Source: LinkedIn Market Research
Note: 4,778 professionals in the U.S. were surveyed from June 4 to June 17, 2022.

Across all age bands, the Workforce Confidence survey found respondents are most comfortable telling family members what they earn. That's standard practice for 62% of Gen X and 53% of boomers, with Gen Z (55%) and millennials (58%) fitting in the middle.

As the chart above shows, gaps are much bigger when it comes to confiding pay information to a work colleague. Some 32% of Gen Zers are comfortable doing so, versus just 9% of boomers. Some 24% of millennials will open up to colleagues they trust, versus 17% of Gen X.

A few more signs of how big the generational differences can be: Fully 34% of Gen Zers are willing to share pay information with anyone who asks, versus just 4% for boomers. Turning that dynamic around, 25% of boomers say they won't share pay information with anyone. That contrasts with a mere 4% of Gen Z.

Several studies have found that greater transparency can shrink pay gaps that disadvantage women relative to men. Such candor might also shrink disparities between pay of workers who are white, able-bodied and straight, versus those who aren't. In general, pay differentials tend to diminish once specific salaries are out in the open, according to research cited recently by Quartz.

Such impacts are exactly what TikTok star Hannah Williams is aiming for. (She's a former data analyst who — at least for a while — is making TikTok her primary career. With more than 12 million likes already on her content, it's easy to see why she'd walk away from a $110,000-a-year desk job to do so.

By pouring so much energy into TikTok, "our goal is to make sure that as many people talk about [pay transparency] as possible," Williams recently told The Washington Post. Greater candor "really helps to close the gender pay gap and remove discrimination opportunities that women and people of color face " she added.

Methodology

LinkedIn's Workforce Confidence Index is based on a quantitative online survey distributed to members via email every two weeks. Roughly 5,000 U.S.-based members respond to each wave. Members are randomly sampled and must be opted into research to participate. Students, stay-at-home partners and retirees are excluded from analysis so we can get an accurate representation of those currently active in the workforce. We analyze data in aggregate and will always respect member privacy. Data is weighted by engagement level to ensure fair representation of various activity levels on the platform. The results represent the world as seen through the lens of LinkedIn's membership; variances between LinkedIn's membership and the overall market population are not accounted for.

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Survey: Office workers getting harder to find

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, May 6, 2022

Workforce shortages persist but have taken a new turn. Now, it's office workers who are in short supply.

"Over the last few years, we've seen headline after headline focus on the dwindling supply of manual and trade services workers. But our most recent survey reveals that office and professional workers have become a scarcer commodity," said Robin Erickson, vice president of Human Capital at The Conference Board.

Office workers are now significantly harder to both find and retain than just one year ago, U.S. human resource executives reported.

The Conference Board survey found that 84% of organizations hiring professional and office workers are struggling to find talent, an increase from 60% in April 2021. And the percentage of organizations striving to retain office workers more than doubled in the past year, from 28% to 64%.

The survey of more than 175 U.S. human resource executives is the fourth in the Reimagined Workplace series, which explores the long-term effects of the pandemic on both the workforce and workplace.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the job openings rate for professional and business services jumped to 8.8% in March compared to 7% one year earlier. The only industries with a higher rate in March 2022 were accommodation and food services (9.9%), leisure and hospitality (9.7%) and health care and social assistance (9%).

The Conference Board survey found there has been a sixfold increase in the hiring of fully remote workers. Half the organizations surveyed are willing to hire fully virtual employees, up from only 8% pre-pandemic. Another 38% still prefer to hire remote employees who can occasionally commute into the office.

"To remain competitive, companies should further leverage hybrid and fully remote work arrangements," Erickson said.

Other insights from the survey include:

- Only 4% of organizations are requiring all workers to return full time, while 60% made working completely remotely optional.
- Fifty-seven percent of human resource leaders report they believe productivity has increased since the start of the pandemic.
- More than 3 in 4 respondents reported an increase in employees identified as being burned out, up from 42% in September 2020.

"Since the outbreak of the pandemic, employee well-being has declined and burnout is on the rise," said Rebecca Ray, executive vice president of Human Capital at The Conference Board. "To retain workers, HR leaders will need a strong focus on improving the employee experience. That includes both allowing and encouraging employees to integrate their work and personal lives in a way that works best for them."

According to new study commissioned by the enterprise automation software company UiPath, the majority of global office workers are feeling increased pressure at work due to colleagues resigning in the past year.

The survey shows 83% have had to take on up to six new tasks outside of their job descriptions due to their co-workers resigning, and 77% of Americans reported they do not know what their responsibilities are anymore.

As a result, 48% of respondents say they would consider resigning from their jobs in the next six months.

"Burnout at work is real, and it's happening more now than ever," writes Angela Copeland, a leadership and career expert. "For many people, the urge is to quit their current job."

Copeland advises, "Take control of how you want to handle your burnout."

If it's time to find a new job but you are too stressed to look for one, consider using vacation time. "Take time off to apply for jobs and recharge. Focus on your search, so you can create a positive path out as quickly as possible."

Job openings fell in June, suggesting that the labor market is cooling

Ben Casselman, The New York Times, August 2, 2022

The number of job openings fell for the third consecutive month in June, a sign that the red-hot U.S. labor market may be starting to cool off.

Employers posted 10.7 million vacant positions on the last day of June, the Labor Department said Tuesday. That is high by historical standards but a sharp drop from the 11.3 million openings in May and the record 11.9 million in March. It was the largest one-month decline in the two decades that the government has kept track of this data, other than the two months at the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

The drop was concentrated in retail, the latest sign that the sector is struggling as consumers shift their spending from goods back to services as the pandemic ebbs. But job postings have also fallen in leisure and hospitality, the sector that was the most strained by labor shortages last year.

The job market remains strong by most measures. There were still nearly twice as many job openings as unemployed workers in June, and employers are raising pay and offering other incentives to attract and retain staff. Layoffs remained near a record low in June, suggesting that employers were reluctant to part with staff they worked so hard to hire. And the number of workers voluntarily quitting their jobs remains high, although it has fallen from last year's peak.

The recent decline in openings is likely to be encouraging news for policymakers at the Federal Reserve, who have been trying to slow down the economy in an effort to tame inflation. Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, and other officials have pointed to the number of vacant jobs as evidence that the labor market is too hot. They are hoping that employers will start posting fewer jobs and hiring fewer workers before they begin laying people off, allowing the job market to cool down without causing a spike in unemployment.

Still, any slowdown in the job market will mean that workers have less leverage to demand raises when pay is already failing to keep up with inflation. Slower wage growth, in turn, could lead consumers to spend less, increasing the risk that the United States could slip into a recession.

The labor market "is definitely losing momentum, and that's what is chipping away at people's ability to spend," said Tim Quinlan, a senior economist for Wells Fargo.

Economists and policymakers will get a more up-to-date picture of the job market on Friday, when the Labor Department releases data on hiring and unemployment in July. Forecasters surveyed by FactSet expect the report to show that employers added about 250,000 jobs last month, down from 372,000 in June.

Reversing the brain drain: Local nonprofit works to keep talent 'inTulsa'

Michael Overall, Tulsa World, July 18, 2022

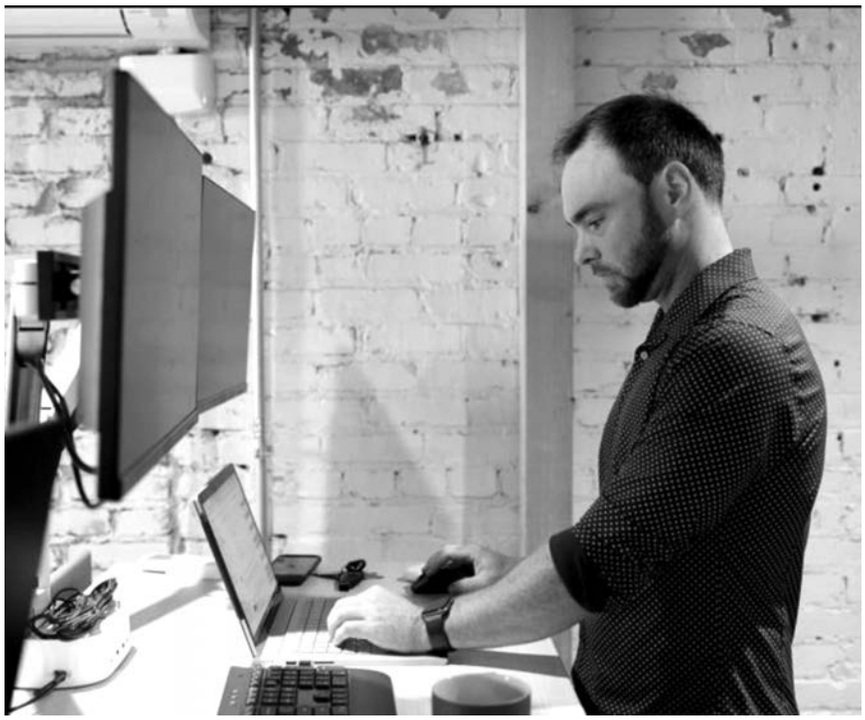
While trying to lure Tesla a couple of years ago, officials put together a portfolio of resumes from hundreds of engineers who said they would be willing to move to Tulsa if the electric car company built a plant here.

"That was a huge part of our pitch," said Aaron Miller, a former program officer for the George Kaiser Family Foundation, which contributed to the Tesla campaign.

Ultimately, of course, it didn't persuade Tesla, and the company chose Austin over Tulsa for a $1.1 billion Cybertruck factory. But GKFF officials had gained valuable experience in job-matching and looked for a different way to put the lessons to use.

"We said, 'Well, we need to be ready for the next big push,'" Miller explained. "'We need to create more of an ongoing system that can link talent to companies.'"

Tulsa Remote, a GKFF-funded program that literally pays people to move here, was already working to bring new talent to the city. A nonprofit formed in partnership with GKFF, called inTulsa, focuses instead on keeping the talent Tulsa already has.



InTulsa Director of Research and Analytics Jake Cronin. Photo by Mike Simons, Tulsa World

InTulsa helps connect local talent with tech jobs, letting people seek higher salaries and advance their careers without moving away. Since spinning off as a separate effort in 2021, the group has helped hundreds of Tulsans find new jobs and has an active talent pool with more than 5,000 candidates, said Miller, inTulsa's head of strategic partnerships.

"We don't want our super talented people to leave," he said. "We want to find opportunities for people to stay here."

Dating back at least as far as 2013, Tulsa had faced a "brain drain" with college graduates moving away at higher rates than they were moving into the city, according to inTulsa data. The trend seemed to be improving by the late 2010s, however, and it reversed itself after COVID-19 gave a tremendous boost to the popularity of remote work.

"Since the pandemic has started," said Jake Cronin, director of research and analytics, "Tulsa has actually reversed this brain drain to where you are seeing a positive trend of college graduates moving into the area at higher rates than they are leaving."

Remote work alone can't necessarily account for the trend, but it certainly helps that people no longer have to leave Tulsa to work for companies that aren't located here. InTulsa, however, doesn't want to keep people here just to work for far-away companies.

A better talent pool will attract new employers and encourage local start-ups, creating more high-tech jobs in Tulsa, Cronin said.

"We monitor job postings analytics data, so we can sort of monitor the demand for tech jobs in Tulsa," he said. "The demand is growing and is growing at a pretty quick pace."

For more information, go to talent.intulsa.com.

How This Economic Moment Rewrites the Rules

Ben Casselman, The New York Times, August 6, 2022

To understand the strange, conflicting signals being sent by the U.S. economy right now, it helps to look at Williston, N.D., in about 2010.

North Dakota was in the midst of an oil boom. Scores of rigs were drilling hundreds of wells, filling up train cars with crude because there hadn't been time to build a pipeline. Pretty much anyone who wanted a job could find one, even the teenagers who dropped out of high school to work in the oil fields. Wages soared. Fast-food restaurants offered signing bonuses. State coffers filled up with tax revenue.

Yet as good as the economy was, it also felt unstable. Restaurants couldn't hire enough workers. Housing was in short supply, and costly. Local infrastructure couldn't withstand the sudden surge in demand. Prices for practically everything soared.

"It was chaotic," said David Flynn, an economist at the University of North Dakota who lived through the boom and has studied it. "The economy was doing well, revenues for the local areas were up across the board, but you were still short of workers and businesses were having trouble."

"That sounds a lot like the stories you've been hearing at the national level for the past couple years," he added.

Economists and politicians have spent weeks arguing about whether the United States is in a recession. If it is, the recession is unlike any previous one. Employers added more than half a million jobs in July, and the unemployment rate is at a half-century low.

Typically, in recessions, the problem is that businesses don't want to hire and consumers don't want to spend. Right now, businesses want to hire, but can't find the workers to fill open jobs. Consumers want to spend, but can't find cars to buy or flights to book.

Recessions, in other words, are about too much supply and too little demand. What the U.S. economy is facing is the opposite. Just like North Dakota in 2010.

The underlying causes are different, of course. Williston was hit by a surge in demand as companies and workers flooded into what had been a small city in the Northern Plains. The United States was hit by a pandemic, which caused a shift in demand and disrupted supply chains around the world. And the comparison goes only so far: Williston's population roughly doubled from 2010 to 2020. No one expects that to happen to the country as a whole.

Still, whether local or national, the most obvious consequence is the same: inflation. When demand outstrips supply — whether for steel-toe boots in an oil boomtown or for restaurant seats in the aftermath of a pandemic — prices rise. Mr. Flynn recalled going out to eat during the boom and discovering that hamburgers cost $20, a feeling of sticker shock familiar to practically any American these days.

There is also a subtler consequence: uncertainty. No one knows how long the boom will last, or what the economy will look like on the other side of it, which makes it hard for workers, businesses and governments to adapt. In Williston, companies and governments were reluctant to invest in the apartment buildings, elementary schools and sewage-treatment plants that the community suddenly needed — but might not need by the time they were complete.

"Think of it as a situation of every day, seemingly, was a new shock, so you couldn't even adjust before a new one was hitting," Mr. Flynn said. "It's that constant adjustment. Completely unpredictable."

Businesses have now spent two and a half years in a state of constant adjustment. In early 2020, practically overnight, Americans traded restaurant meals for home-baked bread, and gym memberships for socially distanced bike rides. Those shifts caused huge disruptions, in part because businesses were reluctant to make long-term investments to address short-term spikes in demand.

"That was always going to cause its own problems on prices and shortages," said Adam Ozimek, chief economist for the Economic Innovation Group, a Washington research organization. "Businesses were never going to be like, 'I'm going to build 10 new bicycle factories right now because we're in a long-term bicycling boom.'"

Some other shifts caused by the pandemic are likely to prove longer lasting. But it is hard for businesses to know which.

"I think businesses are correct that the current state of the economy can't really hold — something has to give," Mr. Ozimek said.

To most people, of course, this doesn't feel like a boom. Measures of consumer confidence are at record lows, and Americans overwhelmingly say they are dissatisfied with the economy. That perception is grounded in reality: High inflation is eroding — and in some cases erasing — the benefits of a strong job market for many workers. Hourly earnings, adjusted for inflation, are falling at their fastest pace in decades.

"I know people will hear today's extraordinary jobs report

and say they don't see it, they don't feel it in their own lives," President Biden said Friday. "I know how hard it is. I know it's hard to feel good about job creation when you already have a job and you're dealing with rising prices — food and gas and so much more. I get it."

Tara Sinclair, an economist at George Washington University, said the United States wasn't experiencing a true boom. That would imply a virtuous circle, in which prosperity begets investment, which begets more prosperity and makes the economy more productive in the long term — a rising tide that lifts all boats.

Instead, the lingering disruptions of the pandemic, uncertainty over what the post-Covid economy will look like and fears of a recession have made businesses reluctant to make bets on the future. Business investment fell in the most recent quarter. Employers are hiring, but they are leaning heavily on one-time bonuses rather than permanent pay increases.

"It's not an economic boom in the sense of wanting to invest long term," Ms. Sinclair said. "It's a boomtown situation where everyone's just waiting for it to get cut off."

Indeed, the Federal Reserve is trying to cut it off. Jerome H. Powell, the Fed chair, has described the labor market, with twice as many open jobs as unemployed workers, as "unsustainably hot," and is trying to cool it through aggressive interest rate increases. He and his colleagues have argued repeatedly that a more normal economy — less like a boomtown, with lower inflation — will be better for workers in the long term.

"We all want to get back to the kind of labor market we had before the pandemic, where differences between racial and gender differences and that kind of thing were at historic minimums, where participation was high, where inflation was low," Mr. Powell said last month. "We want to get back to that. But that's not happening. That's not going to happen without restoring price stability."

Mr. Biden and his advisers, too, have argued that a cooling economy is inevitable and even necessary as the country resets from its reopening-fueled surge. In an opinion article in The Wall Street Journal in May, Mr. Biden warned that monthly job growth was likely to slow, to around 150,000 a month from more than 500,000, in "a sign that we are successfully moving into the next phase of the recovery."

So far, that transition has been elusive. Forecasters had expected hiring to slow in July, to a gain of about 250,000 jobs. Instead, the figure was above 500,000, the highest in five months, the Labor Department reported on Friday. But the labor force — the number of people who are either working or actively looking for work — shrank and remains stubbornly below its prepandemic level, a sign that the supply constraints that have contributed to high inflation won't abate quickly.

Ms. Sinclair said it shouldn't be surprising that it was taking time to readjust after the coronavirus disrupted nearly every aspect of life and work. As of July, the U.S. economy, in the aggregate, had recovered all the jobs lost during the early weeks of the pandemic. But beneath the surface, the situation looks drastically different from what it was in February 2020. There are nearly half a million more warehouse workers today, and nearly 90,000 fewer child care workers. Millions of people are still working remotely. Others have changed careers, started businesses or stopped working.

"We have to remember that we are still sorting that out," Ms. Sinclair said. "It was a big economic shock, and the fact that we came out of it as quickly as we did is still incredibly impressive. These residual pains are us just still adjusting to it."

Protecting Oklahoma's economy requires labor force-oriented solutions

Josie Phillips, OK Policy Blog, June 24, 2022

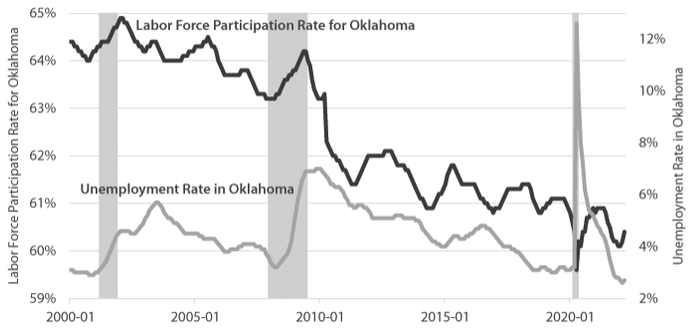
To protect the long-term health of our economy, Oklahoma's lawmakers should enact policies that will strengthen Oklahoma's labor force participation, which has been declining for more than a decade. Policies that invest in our workforce — such as guaranteeing paid family and medical leave, increasing access to child care, investing in mental health care/substance abuse treatment, and bolstering the state Earned Income Tax Credit — will provide Oklahomans the support they need to reenter the workforce, creating a healthier, more prosperous economy for everyone.

Labor force participation is the backbone of our economy

Our labor force is the people within our economy who are trying to engage in paid labor to support themselves, their families, and our entire society. While there are many important ways outside of the formal economy through which people can support those around them, people engaged in the labor force earn the income that all of us need to survive.

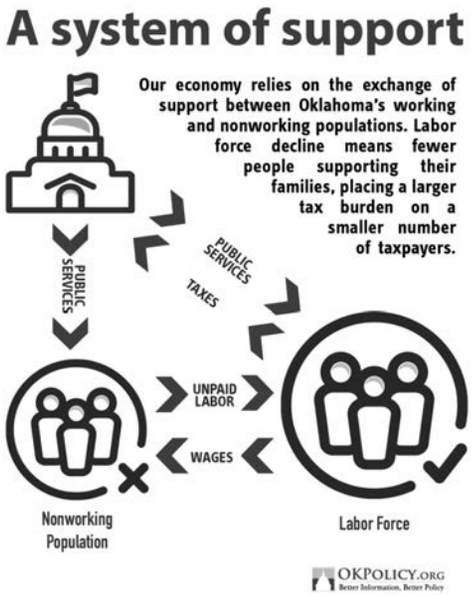
In technical terms, the labor force participation rate is the share of the civilian (non-military), noninstitutionalized, working age (15-64) population that is either currently working or actively searching for work. Essentially, it measures the percentage of people who want to be working out of all of the people who are hypothetically able to work. This metric is in contrast to the unemployment rate, which measures the proportion of people who don't have a job out of all the people who want to be working (including those already working). Labor force participation and unemployment are related; when people drop out of the labor force, for instance, they are no longer counted in unemployment statistics. However, the two measures are distinct metrics of an economy's health. For example, the unemployment rate is a good indicator of whether or not an economy is in a recession, whereas the labor force participation rate is an indicator of whether there are structural forces keeping people from looking for work entirely.

While labor force participation and unemployment are related, they are not synonymous



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Note: Shaded areas indicate U.S. recessions. OKPOLICY Oklahoma Policy Institute

Maintaining a healthy labor force participation rate is important because our labor force financially supports our non-working population (such as children, people with disabilities, and the elderly). More people in the labor force means more people providing for their families and supporting the state services upon which we all rely through tax revenue. Conversely, fewer people in the labor force means the burden of supporting social services is placed on a smaller number of taxpayers. If we want to maintain state economic output and our families' current quality of life, then we need to convince more people to join the workforce, remove barriers to employment for those who wish to be employed, or increase the productivity of those who remain employed.

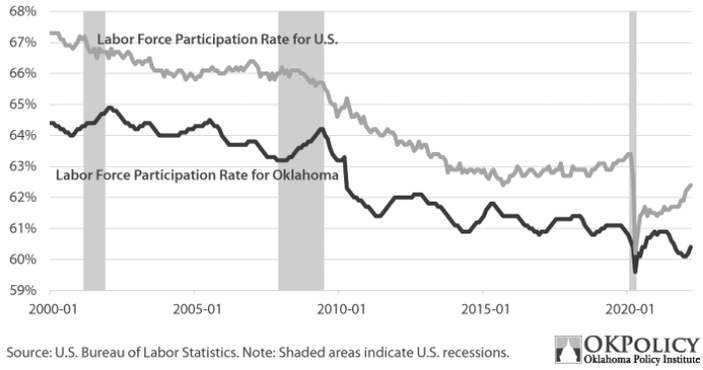


Oklahoma's labor force participation rate is declining, but this decline isn't entirely inevitable

Labor force participation is declining in Oklahoma and across the country for a variety of reasons, including some that could be managed by forward-planning public policy. The most prominent reason for the decline is our aging population. As the average age of our population increases, the proportion of our labor force that is retired does as well.

Health-related factors are also keeping Americans out of the labor force. A 2020 study found that two in five prime-age (25-54) men who hadn't worked in the previous year were not working due to health conditions, which could include a variety of conditions such as back injuries, disability due to mental health, or other chronic conditions. Americans generally have poorer health outcomes than citizens in other

Labor force participation has been declining within our state and country for over a decade



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Note: Shaded areas indicate U.S. recessions. OKPOLICY Oklahoma Policy Institute

developed countries, and Oklahoma ranks lower in public health relative to most other states in the country. Substance abuse issues have also inhibited people's ability to work. The opioid crisis caused potentially up to half of the decline in labor force participation since 2000, and pandemic-related increases in substance abuse may have caused between 9 and 26 percent of the decline since February 2020. An additional pandemic-related health cause behind the labor force decline is symptoms related to "long COVID," which may account for one in seven unfilled jobs nationally.

Finally, Oklahoma's affordable child care crisis is likely preventing Oklahomans — especially single mothers — from getting back to work. Access to child care in Oklahoma is declining while child care becomes more expensive than college and may cost workers with children more than they would earn at their job, removing much of the incentive for parents to return to the workforce. One Federal Reserve analysis estimates that by the end of 2021, 15 percent of the working-age people in the U.S. outside the labor force remained out due to home or family responsibilities.

Investing in our workforce will help to reverse the decline in labor force participation

Oklahoma's business leaders have identified workforce development as the biggest challenge facing Oklahoma's economy. Fortunately, our policymakers don't need to reinvent the wheel to figure out which targeted investments will be the most effective in bolstering our state's workforce and economy. Using evidence from other states, we can identify multiple policies that will increase labor force participation in Oklahoma:

- Creating a state paid family and medical leave program would give people with health conditions or family responsibilities the flexibility they need to return to the workforce. Therefore, it is no surprise that increasing access to family and medical leave increases labor force participation, especially among women.

- Increasing access to child care has been proven to increase labor force participation, among other economic benefits. Increasing subsidies to families and reimbursing providers based on enrollment would help to get parents back into the workforce.

- Investing in mental health care would help to reduce the negative economic (and health) impacts of substance abuse disorder in Oklahoma. There are multiple strategies our policymakers can pursue to undo the damage caused by our long history of disinvestment in access to care.

- Tying Oklahoma's Earned Income Tax Credit to 10 percent of the federal EITC would increase the value of low-wage jobs. This helps to pull into the labor force workers who would otherwise be discouraged by a lack of good-paying jobs. This is particularly important, given Oklahoma employers' disproportionate reliance on low-wage employment.

Our declining labor force participation rate is a longstanding issue, but with prudent public policy, it can be addressed. Investing in Oklahoma's workforce will not only provide relief to our families — it will safeguard the future of our economy.

Rebuilding the Economy Around Good Jobs

Zeynep Ton, Harvard Business Review, May 22, 2020

In countries hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, customer-facing service businesses don't just face a tough two to three months; they face a tough two to three years. Because people will still be nervous about catching the disease until a vaccine is widely available, demand is likely to be depressed, while costs — due to measures needed to keep employees and customers safe — will be higher.

Making the challenge even tougher, many of these businesses rely on a "bad jobs" model for frontline workers whose hallmarks are low wages, low productivity, high turnover, and difficulty adapting to changing customer needs and technologies. Now more than ever, they need a new labor approach. They need a "good jobs" system that combines investment in people with operational choices in order to maximize employee motivation, contributions, and productivity.

Bad Jobs = Bad Performance

As the tussle over federal pandemic assistance in the United States has made clear, many service companies, even those whose financials looked fine, were already in trouble. A big part of that trouble was a focus on labor-cost minimization, which led to low wages and benefits, inadequate staffing, and as few full-time positions as possible. In this "bad jobs" system, frontline employees are inadequately trained, often underequipped, and disrespected. They can't focus on the job when they constantly worry about paying medical bills or putting food on the table. They leave when there's another job that pays $1 more an hour. Unit managers are busy fighting fires due to high turnover and operational problems, with too little time to develop staff and really manage the business. This bad jobs system keeps customers underserved (and, in some contexts puts them at risk), deprives the company of a compelling value proposition and prevents it from adapting to changing customer needs. Combined with a weak balance sheet these reasons drove many bankruptcies, including Borders, Toys "R" Us, Sears, and most recently Neiman Marcus, J. Crew, and J.C. Penney.

For retailers, there is an extra layer of post-pandemic danger. Lockdowns have forced a massive shift to online shopping. Some customers will go back to store shopping once they can, but many will have established new shopping habits. When stores reopen, retailers will need to adapt quickly to a new intensity of e-commerce, which comes with many operational challenges.

Further, the in-store experience will need to provide clear value that the customer cannot get online. That value requires capable and motivated workers whose work design enables them to serve customers well. The more their company invests in them through a good jobs system — with higher wages and benefits, more training, more hours and a regular schedule, a work design that maximizes employee productivity and contributions, and sufficient staffing — the more they will repay that investment through higher in-store sales and customer loyalty and improvements in products, services, and work processes. A bad jobs system that was muddling through before the pandemic may well fail under these new stresses.

A Moment for Change

The widespread use of the bad jobs system has long been a costly (and sometimes fatal) problem, but the pandemic offers a unique chance to do something about it. Why?

For a little while, there is a spotlight on frontline workers because so many have kept working — even at risk of their own infection — and kept so many useful parts of the economy running. At the same time, news coverage of strikes at meatpacking plants, Whole Foods, and Amazon has made customers aware of widespread bad working conditions. Customers may now find it unacceptable to buy from companies that treat their workers poorly — especially if there are competitors that offer just as low prices but also good jobs.

The bad jobs system is now going to prove fatal to many hard-hit companies if they don't change. They'll need their front lines fighting for them, working hard to serve every customer as well as possible, to improve every product, service, and process as much as possible, and to identify new ways to attract customers. They'll need to be adaptable because so many things are going to be different in ways we can't begin to predict.

One thing we can predict: Customers who are struggling economically will be looking more than ever for good value. This will give the companies that start building a good jobs system a competitive advantage over those that don't. After the financial crisis of 2008, Mercadona — Spain's largest grocery chain and a model good jobs company — reduced prices for its hard-pressed customers by 10% while remaining profitable and gaining significant market share. Hard work and input from empowered front lines had a lot to do with it.

The pandemic is likely to accelerate the ongoing shakeup of U.S. retailing. The United States has 24.5 square feet of retail space per person versus 16.4 square feet in Canada and 4.5 square feet in Europe. This is almost certainly too much and the mediocre — the ones that don't make their customers want to keep coming back — will not survive.

The pandemic is likely to speed up the adoption of new technologies. Although typically seen as a way to reduce headcount, adopting, scaling, and leveraging new tech-

nologies require a capable and motivated (even if smaller) workforce.

There is an alternative: A good jobs system that has already proven successful. Long before the pandemic, there were successful companies — including Costco and QuikTrip — that knew their frontline workers were essential personnel and treated and paid them as such. Even in very competitive, low-cost retail sectors, these companies adopted a good jobs system and used it to win.

There's a strong financial case for good jobs. Offering good jobs lowers costs by reducing employee turnover, operational mistakes, and wasted time. It improves service, which increases sales both in the short term and — through customer loyalty — in the long term. All these improvements can more than make up for the large investments in better wages, benefits, training, and scheduling. Indeed, in a recent paper, Hazhir Rahmanidad and I show that above-average wages can be a profit-maximizing approach even in low-cost service businesses. In addition, a good jobs system makes a company more resilient and more adaptive, as companies like Costco, Mercadona, QuikTrip, and H-E-B demonstrate. These qualities will be much called upon during and after the pandemic.

It Can Be Done

But is it possible to offer good jobs — to seriously increase labor spending and improve work — when companies are already in a financially precarious situation and when demand won't snap back to normal for a while? Yes, it is.

An extended period of low demand will actually make it easier to make and then tinker with operational changes with less risk. A period of low demand will also be a period of low performance pressure; Amazon, for example, just announced that it will likely make no money next quarter. These may be just the circumstances in which CEOs and boards can undertake a transition that will not boost earnings in the next quarter or two and explain why.

Granted, like most change efforts, it takes time to implement a good jobs system and to reap the benefits. But as the recent good jobs journey at Sam's Club shows, smart sequencing of the changes can allow a company to make significant wage investments without raising prices or lowering profits. Sam's Club raised the wages of thousands of employees from around $15 an hour to as high as $22 an hour. At the same time, they simplified operations by reducing their product variety by as much as 25% and redesigning work processes to make employees more productive and customers more satisfied. This is what made the higher wage investments possible for a retailer that already has tight profit margins. Mud Bay, a regional pet retailer, raised employee wages by 30% and significantly improved employee benefits while operating with less than 2% profit margins.

At a moment when trust in businesses and institutions is particularly low and when many criticize the gap between executive pay and workers' pay, this is the time for more leaders to have the courage and commitment to rebuild their businesses with good jobs. We know now that they already have great people working for them.

Notes

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Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Section 2

The Current Workforce Climate

OKLAHOMA WORKS

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Governor's Council for Workforce & Economic Development (State Workforce Development Board)

Board Functions -

- Develop, implement, and modify the state plan.
- Review and recommend actions to align workforce development programs in the state supporting a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system.
- Develop and continuously improve the workforce development system in the state.
- Produce and review statewide policies affecting the coordinated provision of services.
- Implement strategies for aligning technology and data systems across programs to enhance service delivery and improve efficiencies.
- Develop statewide objectives enhancing the performance of the workforce development system in the state.

Title I Average Funding $23.4M

Youth - $8,373,575
Adult - $7,932,369
Dislocated Worker - $7,131,990

Current Discretionary - $1,949,999

Oklahomans Served

Career Services -
Youth - 406
Adult - 714
Dislocated Worker - 179

Training Services -
Youth - 535
Adult - 1054
Dislocated Worker - 284

Title I Performance Metrics

Participants Employed 6 months after program completion -
Youth - 73.4%
Adult - 71.7%
Dislocated Worker - 70.4%

Participants Employed 12 months after program completion -
Youth - 76.7%
Adult - 68.2%
Dislocated Worker - 70.7%

Participants with an Industry recognized crediential after program completion -
Youth - 57.1%
Adult - 67.6%
Dislocated Worker - 78.2%

Other Title I performance metrics -
- Average median earnings
- Measurable skill gains

Federally mandated metrics -
- 75% of youth training expenditures must be spent on Out-of-School youth participants
- 20% of youth programmatic expenditures must be spent on qualified work-experience activities

State mandated metrics -
- 40% of all Adult and Dislocated Worker programmtic expenditures must be spent on direct participant training

Governor's Council for Workforce & Economic Development Strategic Plan Objectives

- Remove structural barriers to optimize workforce system performance
  - Align workforce system organizational structure
- Optimize services and resources to achieve a high performing workforce system
  - Strengthen workforce system infrastructure and capacity
- Integrate and use workforce and economic development data to streamline services, track progress, and measure success
  - Improve data sharing, increase data capacity, and overcome data limitations
- Ensure the workforce system is easily accessible through one consistent brand and message
  - Improve joint communications, messaging, and branding
- Integrate resources and align policies to ensure a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of job seeker and business customers
  - Implement customer-centered service design and delivery
- Expose Oklahomans of all ages to the education, training, career options and pathways available for entry into and advancement within a demand industry or occupation
  - Engage, upskill, and retain Oklahoma's current and potential workers

OKLAHOMA Commerce

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WIOA Objectives

- Providing access to jobseekers, particularly those with barriers to employment, to: employment, education, training, and supportive services.
- Aligning workforce development, education, and economic development to create a comprehensive, high-quality, workforce system.
- Provide employers with the skilled workers necessary to succeed in a global economy.
- Promote and implement improvements to the structure and delivery of the workforce services to better meet the needs of employees, employers, and jobseekers.

WIOA Core Partners

Title I: Workforce Development Activities
(Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development/Oklahoma Dept. of Commerce)

Title II: Adult Education and Literacy
Oklahoma Department of Career Technology and Education

Title III: Wagner-Peyser
Oklahoma Employment Security Commission

Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services

WIOA Title I Administration

Statewide Initiatives & Highlights

- **Business Service Investment**
  - $750k annually distributed to the Local Workforce Development Boards to expand capacity for business engagement ensuring the provision of business services such as incumbent worker training, layoff aversion, rapid response, and customized training
- **Sector Partnership Grants**
  - $1M annually awarded for the development of sector partnerships including education, workforce development, economic development, and community organizations to address the needs identified by business
- **Innovation through Partnerships**
  - $275k pilot program with the Oklahoma Department of Libraries to increase the number of adults with a high school diploma
  - $100k pilot program with the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to fund emergency supportive service needs otherwise resulting in dropout
  - Pilot program with the Oklahoma Department of Corrections to develop employability while preparing for work-release
- **Apprenticeship Expansion**
  - $1.9M in federal discretionary grants for the expansion of registered apprenticeships, and pre-apprenticeships
- **Governor's Council Sub-Committee Expansion**
  - Executive; System Oversight; Youth; Healthcare; Centers of Excellence; Career Pathways; Board Development; Advocacy (Legislative, etc.)

Save the Date

September 27-30, 2022 -

Oklahoma Works
Partners Conference
Embassy Suites Convention Center
3233 N.W. Expressway
Oklahoma City, OK 73112

November 17, 2022 -

Annual Alumni Celebration
House Chamber
Oklahoma State Capitol
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd.
4th Floor
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
(Reception to Follow)

Workforce Development Month
September 2022

National Apprenticeship Month
November 2022

America's Workers Find Their Voice: State of Work in America

Grant Thornton, 2022; Summarized by Craig Knutson

According to this report, a total of 68.9 million workers left their jobs in 2021, with nearly 70% of them doing so voluntarily – a one year record. November and December 2021 were particularly volatile, with nearly 10 million workers quitting their jobs at year's end.

The phenomenon shows little signs of slowing. While the unemployment rate continues to fall, another 4.3 million left their jobs in January of this year.

Clearly, today's low unemployment rate and high job turnover indicates that employees are looking for and finding new working arrangements at an unprecedented level. This makes understanding what employees seek from their jobs particularly important today, as the "war for talent" is still at high pitch. Attracting and retaining high-performing employees must be a priority for businesses to succeed, Grant Thornton (GT) asked questions to gauge worker attitudes about workplace experiences, but expanded the survey to uncover how employees' attitudes and desires have been effected by America's Great Resignation. Over 5,000 American workers, across a wide range of industries and demographics, participated in this survey. All respondents were full-time workers with benefits.

The full report was too lengthy to include in this document so what follows are some of the key findings that are pertinent to our Town Hall discussions.

Of those who took a new job in the past year, reasons for leaving your former employer, in descending order of importance: Base pay (37%), Advancement opportunities, Benefits (other than health and retirement), Bonus or Incentive Compensation, Autonomy, and Feeling undervalued as an employee (16%). When asked how many offers did you receive before accepting your current job, 2 offers was the highest response (31%), followed by 1, then 3&0 (16%). When asked why other offers were turned down, Base Pay was the most frequently mentioned (42%), followed by Benefits and the Company took too long to make an offer. Concerns around Covid-19 protocols was the least answered response.

In response to these findings, the Director of HR Transformation at GT stated: "Focusing on career development and providing employees opportunities to advance their career through training, job shadowing, and rotational opportunities helps drive productivity and engagement, and will help employers with the war for talent."

The respondents were then asked to a rank a series of 12 statements about their employer and job. The three statements that received the highest "Agreed" or "Completely Agreed" were: I get a sense of accomplishment from my work, I enjoy my day-today work, and the tools and resources I have at work allow me to be as productive as possible. Those were in the 61-65% range. The three statements with the fewest "Agreed" or "Completely Agreed" were: I am actively looking for a new job at a different company, I am not actively looking for a new job, but would consider a switch, and I am optimistic about the future. Those were in the 29-53% range. The report summarized those findings as higher levels of restlessness; seeking greater employee feedback is essential to alleviating this restlessness issues (28%), mental health (22%), daily inconveniences (21%) and ability to retire (20%). Separately, 28% identified their manager as the single most stressful part of the day! Top reasons: personality, work expectations, micromanagement, lack of experience, and harassing/discriminatory behavior.

The survey the addressed new workplace preferences. Respondents were asked rank five statements as "Agreed" or "Completely Agreed." Their preferences, in descending order of importance, were: I want flexibility on where and when I conduct my work (80%), I have generally enjoyed working from home (77%), working from home has improved my work-life balance (75%), I will look for another job if I am forced to physically return to full-time work (464%), and I am looking forward to physically returning to work (38%).

While the labor market remains volatile, businesses face novel challenges to make sure they attract and retain the workforce they need to sustain and grow. With the likely continuation of opening of the economy, businesses must regard talent attraction and retention as a top priority.
This means companies have an unprecedented but limited opportunity to quickly improve the quality of their workforce if they learn, exhibit, and effectively communicate what qualities should differentiate them from competitors. This may be a "job-seekers market," but smart companies will recognize how to turn that apparent negotiating disadvantage into the kind of growth that can have long-lasting positive effects.

They concluded their report by providing a list of actions companies should adopt/incorporate if they are not otherwise present. First, find out what your employees want; listen through focus groups and surveys to understand opinions and attitudes. Second, streamline your sourcing, recruiting, onboarding, and off-boarding processes; automating the processes as much as possible and where possible keeps all candidates updated on the process. Third, recognize your company's individuality. The goal is not to match your competitors but discover how your company is unique (e.g., benefits and rewards). Fourth, Create an employee value proposition unique to your company that is distinctive and employee led. Finally, Recognize and respect employees' power. Make your company a place where employees want to work and capitalize on the strong labor market.

https://www.grantthornton.com/insights/work-place-evolution/state-of-work-in-america

What's driving today's workforce: The Current state of the Labor Market

Grant Thornton, Economics of the Changing Workforce podcast, March 25, 2022; Summarized by Joy Rhodes

The job market proved remarkably resilient through the end of 2021. Even with COVID case rates hitting new highs due to the Omicron variant, unemployment is at or near what the Fed considers full employment; there were 1.7 job openings for every job seeker in December.

At 7.5% in January, inflation continues climb. "Workers are starting to ask if they're being compensated for inflation," said Grant Thornton Chief Economist Diane Swonk. "It's reminiscent of the wage push inflation we saw in the 1970s."

And the misnamed Great Resignation also continues. "Workers aren't really leaving the workforce," said Tim Glowa, Grant Thornton Director of Human Capital Services. "But they are switching to better jobs." Grant Thornton's latest State of Work in America survey, fielded in February 2022, found that 21% of the workforce left one job for another in the last 12 months — and 59% of them received three or more job offers. And it's not over — 29% of workers report they are now looking for positions with a different employer. "When you consider that the job market didn't really start to heat up until the spring, that 21 percent number is probably low," said Glowa.

The following is a summary of what Grant Thornton's proprietary research says about what workers want now taken from the Economics of the Changing Workforce podcast.

The current state of the labor market:

Remarkable Resilience: "Even in the face of a pandemic the unemployment rate stayed extremely low"

- Federal Reserves has two mandates, one is to control inflation and the other is to ensure that we have a full labor market recovery
- As a result, there are tight labor market conditions
- Energy prices are compounding and spilling over causing service sector inflation, but the Federal government doesn't have control over this
- However, we must remember that higher food and energy prices are controlled by the federal government
- New hires are receiving higher compensation, but existing workers are not seeing such
- Demand is far outpacing supply of workers, along with the loss of educational attainment and loss in immigration causing a great gap due to the pandemic

What the employees are facing:

Compensation for inflation

- 21 percent has left their job or 1 out of 5 Americans
- 29 percent of Americans are actively seeking for another job currently
- Compensation not meeting the needs of workers, or the company's value and did not make an offer quick enough
- Upward pressure on wages
- 3 out of 10 Americans think their managers to be the single most stressful part of their day
- Only 50 percent of Americans feel like their voice is heard at the job
- No career advancement opportunities

Women and people of color are more likely to want to work remotely because at the same time this population of people tend to prefer more empathetic employer

What the Employers can do:

- Take a lesson from those in the marketing department
- 60 percent employees do not think that the company they work for is utilizing them to their full potential
- People want to be engaged and challenged to advance careers and expertise
- There need to be a sense of loyalty for the relationship between employers and employees.
- Aligning social causes and values at a company to be more attractive

"It's time for workers to have their time in the sun"

"A rebalancing of power that is allowing more people to be engaged"

Assessing the state of American workers

Grant Thornton, September 30, 2021

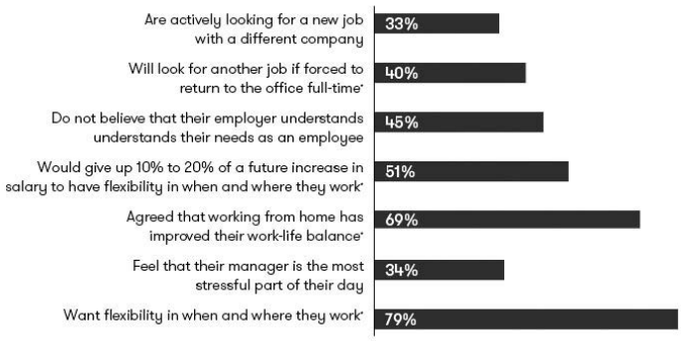
Understanding the needs of employees is often a primary goal of companies across America, but one that may be difficult to do objectively given the understandable reluctance employees may have to provide an honest assessment of their employer and workplace. An objective tally of employee wants and desires can be a valuable tool for companies to gauge what American employees really expect in this post-pandemic work environment.

Towards that end, between June 28 and July 2, Grant Thornton surveyed 1,584 Americans who work full-time and receive benefits as part of their pay. Grant Thornton asked them a broad range of questions, covering hybrid work, healthcare, total rewards, culture and work-life balance. We have the findings and we describe them in our new State of Work in America report.

One key data takeaway is that employees are taking charge of what they want from their employer and are pushing for flexibility in when and where they work. Our survey uncovered many other findings about employee workplace needs, some that may require companies to re-examine workplace policies.

We hope you enjoy the Grant Thornton State of Work in America report.

1. The State of Work in America - War for talent



A recent Grant Thornton survey found that one-third of CFOs were planning to return employees to the office full-time, inconsistent with the desires of workers, as expressed in our survey. The vast majority of workers surveyed want flexibility in where and when they work, and half would give up a salary increase for more flexibility.

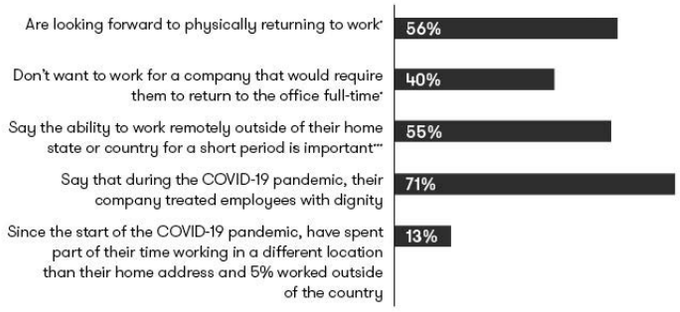
"The way we manage people and career development has to change when people are working remote," said Tim Glowa, a principal in Grant Thornton Human Capital Services. "There needs to be more trust and accountability, as many managers still believe that employees aren't as productive if they're working remotely and can't be seen."

The fault could be with the managers themselves, as our research shows that a third of employees feel their manager is the most stressful aspect of their work. "The reality is that not everybody is qualified to manage people and a career path doesn't always have to include people management," Glowa added.

This is where metrics and measurement are so important. Companies need to decide how they're going to manage productivity and performance in the future in a virtual environment, and not just by having workers in office seats. There have been varied strategies in handling compensation for remote workers. Some companies may reduce compensation if a remote worker moves from a high cost of living city such as New York to a lower cost of living city. Other companies have established annual pay review cycles, and since the war for talent started in the spring of 2021, they may not have the opportunity to adjust salaries until the end of the calendar year. This could place them at a competitive disadvantage.

"Retention is critical across all industries, but there needs to be a greater understanding that we can't just let the older worker population retire," said Angela Nalwa, a managing partner in Grant Thornton Transformation. "They are needed for many reasons, and we've got to find ways to keep them engaged as we don't have a supply of talent for one-to-one replacement at this time." To win the war on talent, organizations need to be comfortable using data to address all aspects of the employee life cycle — from attracting people, engaging and rewarding them and ultimately retaining them. It is critical to understand their needs and differentiate the value proposition meaningfully in the eyes of employees.

2. The State of Work in America – Returning to work



Employees want flexibility. But flexibility does not mean working from home 100% of the time, and physically returning to work does not mean being in the office five days a week. Flexibility also includes the hours and days they work. Workers may need to work around eldercare or childcare issues. One spouse may want to work traditional

hours while the other spouse wants to work a more tailored schedule.

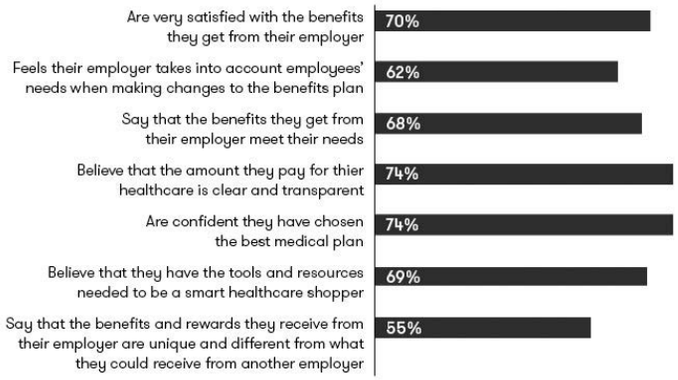
"The challenge that companies face is creating an engaging experience for all employees whether they are working in an office or remotely," said Jennifer Morelli, a principal in Grant Thornton Transformation. "Most of us have become used to engaging with teammates or clients when everyone is virtual. However, when returning to a hybrid environment where only some of the workforce is back in the office, we need to create an in-office experience that goes beyond sitting in front of a computer on virtual calls all day. Employees need to come into the office with a purpose, perhaps through in-person working sessions, an important meeting or a team building event. Organizations need to make sure they are providing meaningful opportunities and reasons to come into the office." Another issue is determining if there should be a different reimbursement policy for traveling to the office for flex or hybrid employees. The initial reaction is that it may be costly, but when considering the potential savings from an office footprint reduction that hybrid delivers, the overall costs likely balances out.

Giving employees enough lead time announcing return to work also is important. "Alerting workers one-week prior is not going to help in that process," said Hal Bellovin, a managing director for Grant Thornton's Human Capital Services. "Keep in mind that employees hired over the last 18 to 20 months have never been in the office, which means delayed onboarding for new hires." The welcoming event needs to be seamless and last for several weeks, especially with staggered returnees. For smaller offices, it could be one week, as most will return on a different day. Out-of-state or out-of-country hybrid workers can create tax issues for a company.

"With employee demands for greater flexibility, including working out-of-state and out-of-country, tax becomes a serious and central issue for organizations," said Richard Tonge, a principal for Grant Thornton Global Mobility Services. "Even a small percentage of employees working out-of-state or out-of-country could trigger significant corporate and employer tax risk, and challenges to sustainability of an organization's hybrid working model."

Importantly, as organizations respond to the demands for flexible working arrangements and the ability to be less geographically bound to employer work locations, the tax landscape has yet to respond and start catching up with this new way of working. With COVID-related tax reliefs for remote working expiring in the U.S. and globally, organizations need to navigate a path through tax rules that can be restrictive for remote and hybrid work, balancing risk while enabling change. Similarly, the tax enforcement environment is still developing. A handful of countries, including Israel and New Zealand, have targeted non-resident workers informing them of a liability to tax and the need to meet compliance obligations. Companies need to keep tax central to their return to work strategy, plan for and monitor developments longer term for the tax risks associated with remote and hybrid working.

3. State of work in America – Benefits



The benefits landscape has changed over the past 18 months as employers navigate their return to their offices and evolving employee preferences. Most times, these shifts have redefined what employees really value. While traditional benefits have ongoing value to many, employers have leveraged special offers and voluntary benefits that have not previously been used, or have little traditional value associated with it. Food delivery allowances or tutoring benefits for children at home are a few nontraditional type benefits offered during COVID-19.

There are some interesting patterns and trends associated with a portion of the workforce. For example, about 30% each indicate they are not satisfied with their benefits, feel like the amount they pay for healthcare is not transparent, and are not confident that they have chosen the best medical plan. The benefits landscape has changed over the past year and a half regarding what employees really value. It's not so much the traditional benefits that are valued, but rather the value is placed on ancillary or voluntary type benefits with no traditional dollar value associated with it.

"Workers feel that the amount they pay for their healthcare is not transparent, are not confident in how they chose their medical plan and feel that they don't have the tools and resources to make correct benefit decisions," said Bob Lemke a director for Grant Thornton Human Capital Services. "Not surprisingly, about a similar amount are disengaged and are interested in looking for a new job." And even though two-thirds say they have the tools and resources, they need to be smart healthcare shoppers. We are seeing a general benefits trend where employers are giving workers more decision-making tools to decide their healthcare options, either through the medical provider or through an actual enrollment provider.

Reevaluating benefits

Just like any investment portfolio, the investments required to fund benefit programs need periodic rebalancing to ensure they are delivering the results expected during the post-pandemic era.

"By creating benchmarks with external industry segments and

internal performance metrics, employers can gain additional insights to guide benefits program decisions," said Ashley Edwards, a senior manager for Grant Thornton, Human Capital Services. "The key to solid, accurate benchmarking is to analyze internal metrics and surveys so human resource leaders can identify inefficiencies and determine where employee experience has deteriorated."

Organizations need to think critically about the employees they want to attract and retain. But many outstanding questions remain about the future of the American workforce. What does the worker of the future look like? Will the changes be purely demographic, resulting in a much-younger workforce? Or will the change in demographics lead to significant changes to how companies do business? The COVID-19 pandemic has led many companies to expand and enhance their internal communications capabilities. If they didn't before, organizations now realize how crucial it is to convey timely, detailed and relevant messaging that helps their people do their jobs and remain happy and healthy. For some companies, this means a shift to active listening: open and ongoing conversations with employees.

4. State of Work in America – Stress

Five distinct attributes stand out as causing individuals the most stress. The analysis revealed that personal debt, medical issues, the ability to retire, work/life balance and mental health were the most stressful issues for people.

To confront these issues, Glowa advises a fresh approach to the human resources function.

"Attracting and retaining employees, especially in a tight labor market, requires thinking like a marketing professional," Glowa said. "You need to understand employee pain points, then brainstorm potential solutions to address them. If you can fix that pain point, you've made a big difference in the eyes of employees — ideally, in a way that is difficult for competitors to replicate, at least in the short term."

Organizations can take this thinking and apply it to the HR space in delivering better value propositions for employees. The result could be a revamped benefit and total reward package, or a new focus on workplace culture. It's really about addressing the overall employee experience, and part of this positive experience is addressing employee drivers of stress -- what keeps employees up at night. This approach allows an organization to "own" a particular benefit or workplace feature, where the business becomes known for this feature. Too many organizations will state that their goal is to be at the 50th percentile of benefits, meaning they want to be "average" in their market. But when you do that, you "own" nothing and in a war for talent, you're not providing employees any incentive to stay.

"If organizations can identify these pain points, brainstorm potential solutions, they can then differentiate that employee experience or value proposition in an incredibly meaningful way," said Edwards. "But we can't do this with just 50th percentile benefits, 50th percentile total rewards and a lackluster employee experience. Organizations have to stand out for something. For example, GE built a reputation for being a 'leadership' company; if you worked at GE, they turned you into a leader."

Regarding health care concerns, in China, it's very common for employee medical coverage to also covers parents. So, when employees are thinking about medical issues for themselves or a loved one, are there innovative ways to think through ways to address this that might differentiate your organization -- something that takes away this medical stress pain point?

Companies only need to look as far as one major Texas-based hospital. Nurses saw the hospital providing world-class care to their patients, but often were frustrated that their own parents weren't as fortunate. The hospital conducted an employee preference optimization study to determine the interest in a program where the parents of any employee could access to a healthcare provider within the system free of charge. After implementing, employees viewed it as the equivalent of a 22% increase in salary and turnover dropped by half.

"With big drivers of stress, the fix isn't necessarily a hard button like benefits and total rewards compensation packages," said Alex BeMiller, a Grant Thornton tax associate. "It could be as simple as the culture within the organization, work-life balance or quiet hours during certain times of the day so employees can catch their breath. Or matching contributions to organizations that employees connect with."

Sometimes the phase "War for Talent" is overused, but there is a lot of truth to it. Any business's enemy is its competitor because they're trying to take the best employees away in hiring and retention. Don't fight on their terms. Find a weakness that can be exploited (through offering a solution) to attract and retain the best people. Easing employee stress is a great place to start in winning this battle.

5. State of Work in America - Culture

Measuring culture requires company leaders to ask themselves two key questions: Are we who we think we are? And if not, why not? It's not unusual to uncover a gap between leadership's perception of how it is to work in their business and what's actually happening in the company.

"Employees understanding how they fit into the overall strategy and how they advance firm goals is a large driver of culture and employee satisfaction," said Melissa Dimitri, a managing director in Grant Thornton Strategy. "We are seeing a lot of challenges with leadership modeling, where they're saying one thing in promoting corporate values, but then are behaving very differently." Leadership might not be as in touch as they should be, or not listening as well as they could be. This is not surprising given that such a large percentage of employees don't feel that their voice is heard at work. Companies may not have an outlet for employees to voice their opinions, give suggestions or have any input into decisions across the organization.

Managers need to communicate clearly. They should connect with employees, helping address unique needs, providing guidance on flexibility. To do this, an organization must help managers be successful. Managers should have the information they need to address concerns from employees and help them with work/life balance.

What is the organization doing and what else do they need to do to retain their people? Turnover could be symptomatic of problems with pay and benefits, lack of recognition, measuring results and alignment with the mission and vision values.

"The internal culture influences and is influenced by your external brand," said Kim Jacoby, a director for Grant Thornton Employee Listening and Human Capital Services. "When you say you have a customer-centric culture, and if that's actually true, then it should be projected. At Amazon, all of their employee-facing processes – including their training and their policies – are designed to incentivize and cultivate employees to provide an exceptional customer experience to customers."

Conversely, there are examples of companies attempting to embrace a certain type of culture – whether that is innovative, agile/continuous improvement, or something else – and the external brand reflects something completely different. Often, the missing link is because of a misalignment between the type of culture an organization is aspiring to and the reality of the employee experience.

Last, remote workers are not feeling connected, leading to negative conclusions. If employees don't hear from their manager for a couple of weeks, they assume their manager is unhappy with them and the employee starts feeling guilty. Remote work has limited our communication in some respects, and that lack of communication could have a negative influence on an employee's perception of their value in an organization.

To conclude, the shocks of the past two years, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, were cited by respondents as new sources of stress and uncertainty in their lives outside of work. Our State of Work in America survey, overall, saw American workers reacting to these stresses by favoring workplace conditions where they could exercise a level of control and choice that seemed, at times, lacking outside of work.

****Indicates that the number of participants that saw/answered the question was less than the total and between 1,100 and 1,200.***
*****Indicates that the number of participants was between 500 and 700***
****** Indicates that fewer than 50 respondents saw and answered this question***

Do Oklahomans really not want to work anymore in 'The Great Resignation'? Not so fast.

Jessie Christopher Smith, The Oklahoman, May 23, 2022

When Wesley Renfroe first moved to central Oklahoma from Florida in 2014, he was a 18-year-old high school student, gearing up to pursue a degree in biomedical engineering. He found work almost immediately as a waiter at one, and then two, diner-style restaurants, where he took orders, served food, cashed out tickets and occasionally washed the never-ending pile of dishes.

The work was tiresome, with frequently long hours and sometimes rude customers, but the tips he made as a server more than made up for it, ensuring his loyalty to the job for years. His position as a server allowed him to pay bills while juggling a tedious course schedule as a college student and still put some money into savings.

By spring 2020, that was no longer the case.

"When the pandemic hit initially, I found out we were closed through a coworker who was telling me he wasn't going in, and then I had to call management to figure out if I still had a job, which is not the way that should have happened," Renfroe said. "And business fell off drastically, but as long as the government was willing to pay for it, we were given CARES Act money. But when that ran out, we didn't really get anything else. It was quite a drop, and because of that we had a lot of people leave."

Replacements did not come quickly, and even when Renfroe tried to pick up extra shifts, they were understaffed, with not enough customers coming in the doors, and not enough of them tipping well. Renfroe stuck it out for a year, hoping the situation would improve, but it did not. By summer 2021, he'd had enough — and quit.

Renfroe was among a massive wave of workers, in Oklahoma and across the U.S., who decided during the pandemic that they'd had enough. Since early 2021, millions of U.S. citizens have quit their jobs in what has now been called "The Great Resignation."

"I'd had enough of waiting tables," Renfroe said. "I'd had enough of people not adjusting their expectations. I'd had enough of being asked to do more, even though there were less of us and even less time to do what we needed to do it in. That's why I went to look for a different job."

According to a recent survey by Oklahoma State University, an estimated 45% of respondents said they were considering leaving their current jobs, too, in the next 6 months.

At first glance, results of such studies might bolster the common criticism during "The Great Resignation" that "no one wants to work anymore," an oft-heard accusation hurled by many business owners at young people and even echoed by some politicians.

But Travis Roach, an economics professor at the University of Central Oklahoma, disputes this criticism, saying the charge is akin to a false accusation that doesn't align with deeper factual analysis.

"It's funny the moniker that something can get out of nowhere," Roach said. "To a labor economist, the way I see it framed better is as 'The Great Reallocation.' What we're actually seeing is a lot of labor market churn, which is honestly a really great sign of a healthy labor market."

Roach pointed to the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or "JOLTS," report published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics for January. The data separates "hires," "separations," "quits" and "fires," allowing researchers to better understand what job openings are initiated by employees or employers.

"Reading the tea leaves on this, it looks like it's mostly employee-motivated, which means that these are people moving to better opportunities," Roach said. "I cannot stand the current narrative with the idea that no one wants to work. There is literally no evidence of that."

Roach urged people to remember that the U.S. is still digging its way out of "the greatest recession of (his) lifetime," but that an economy in which "We're Hiring" signs are plastered everywhere is a sign of a much healthier economy than one plagued with "We're Closed" signs.

Experts also point to an ongoing battle for higher wages at multiple high-profile companies, driven by a renewed sense of self-worth among workers, who now value more work-life balance, adequate pay and decent employee benefits after a global pandemic.

"I think it's also just what we now expect out of work, where we want to work and some of the non-monetary benefits that come with work," Roach said. "That could be who you're working alongside, how close it is to your home, how flexible it is, if you can spend time with your children if they get sick or have to take school online. I think we've just had a big reconsideration of what we expect from our jobs."

Renfroe agrees, saying he now enjoys his full-time job as a tutor at Oklahoma City Community College's Math Lab more than he ever did during his several years in the food service industry.

"From what I've seen, it's really a worker's market right now," Renfroe said. "If you're looking to find a better job, there are a lot of places hiring, and it wasn't that way a year ago. If you've got the opportunity and you think you want to switch, go for it, because you don't know how long it'll be before the balance tips back out of our favor."

How can US solve 'Great Resignation'? Create better jobs, Labor Secretary Marty Walsh says.

Paul Davidson, USA TODAY, January 21, 2022

Labor Secretary Marty Walsh says he has a simple remedy for both the record job-quitting and severe worker shortages upending the U.S. economy.

Create better jobs.

"There's been a lot of talk about the so-called 'Great Resignation'. That's not the real story," Walsh said Friday at at the U.S. Conference of Mayors' winter meeting in Washington, D.C. "The truth is workers between the ages of 25 and 54 are returning to the labor force at a higher rate than in previous recoveries. America is back to work."

Workers, he says, just need better jobs – with higher pay, better benefits, safe working conditions, training opportunities, predictable hours and more – to draw them into the market. And, he says, the Labor Department can help pave the way for those things.

Walsh, of course, is right – at least partly. Prime-age workers did return to the labor force last year at the fastest clip in recent memory. The share of people age 25 to 54 who are working or looking for jobs rose to 81.9% in December, up from 81% a year earlier.

But that's still well below the prepandemic mark of 83%.

COVID-19 created so much economic upheaval that much of it is being repaired even while big gaps remain. For example, the U.S. has recouped 18.8 million, or 84%, of the 22.4 million jobs lost early in the pandemic. But that still leaves the nation 3.6 million jobs shy of its pre-crisis level.

Nearly 6 million Americans have returned to the labor force since April 2020 but that means the total supply is still 2.3 million workers below the pre-COVID high.

Broadly, however, Walsh is pushing back at the belief some may people harbor that workers are simply quitting jobs en masse and don't want to work, leaving the U.S. with its most dire worker shortage in decades – a deficit that's curtailing economic growth.

The data shows that workers are resigning to take new – and often better-paying jobs," Walsh said. "Workers are seeking better opportunities in ways we haven't seen in decades. They are looking for opportunities to learn the skills they need. They want a seat at the table. They are demanding better pay, safer working conditions, more benefits and flexibility."

In an interview, Walsh added, "Americans want to work – but it's not enough to just bring more people into the workforce. We must ensure the jobs that workers access provide more than a paycheck – good benefits, safe workplaces and a pathway to the middle class."

Labor force may remain smaller

Millions of Americans remain outside the labor force a variety of reasons, including COVID fears, the lack of affordable child care, career changes, decisions to become entrepreneurs and early retirement. While many are expected to stream back in this year as the pandemic fades and more people are vaccinated, others, such as most early retirees, won't ever come back, economists say.

The labor force participation rate – the share of adults working or job-hunting – is expected to rise from 61.9% to 62.8% by the end of this year but will likely never reclaim its pre-COVID level of 63.4%, according to Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody's Analytics.

As a result, employers are struggling to hire as never before, prompting them to sharply raise pay and beef up benefits. In November, employers posted a near-record 10.6 million job openings and a record 4.5 million workers quit, typically to take higher-paying positions. Some, however, simply bolted, figuring the job market is so good they'll be able to find another position, often in another field.

Twenty percent of workers surveyed by Joblist last year quit to pursue new career paths, a transition that may take time as employees learn new skills and leaves them on the sidelines for months. For example, many restaurant and retail workers have grown weary of the low pay and health risks that come with their jobs and are shifting to technology or warehouse jobs. More than half of last year's job switchers changed industries, according to LinkedIn.

Walsh believes that at a significant part of the labor shortages can be addressed if all employers provide well-paying jobs with robust benefits. And the Labor Department, he says, can help.

On Friday, Walsh unveiled a "good jobs initiative." As President Joe Biden's administration rolls out its $1 trillion infrastructure plan, passed by Congress in November, Walsh says Labor will work with other federal agencies and federal contractors to ensure the millions of jobs created will be "good jobs."

That means good pay, a safe working environment, training opportunities, predictable schedules, the ability to join a union and freedom from racial, gender, age or other discrimination as required by existing laws, Walsh says. He also wants to make it easy for workers to learn their rights by providing such information online, he says.

Labor, he adds, wants to extend that "template" to interested states and cities and even the private sector, though he says the details of how that will happen are still being ironed out. Biden's Build Back Better social spending bill would mandate paid family leave and provide billions of dollars to subsidize child care but the chances of passage appear slim amid opposition from Democratic senators Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Krysten Sinema of Arizona.

"In the last 50 years, an inequity has grown in our society from when we used to have a strong middle class to a kind of upper class with a little bit of a middle class and pretty much everyone else," Walsh said in the interview. "We want to change that scenario."

Drama in 3 acts: How job-separation rates ended up 28% above old norms

George Anders, LinkedIn News, April 27, 2022

If you're stuck in a job that's full of frustrations, when is it wisest to get out, so you can start the next chapter of your life no matter what? And when is it safer to stick with what you've got, flaws and all?

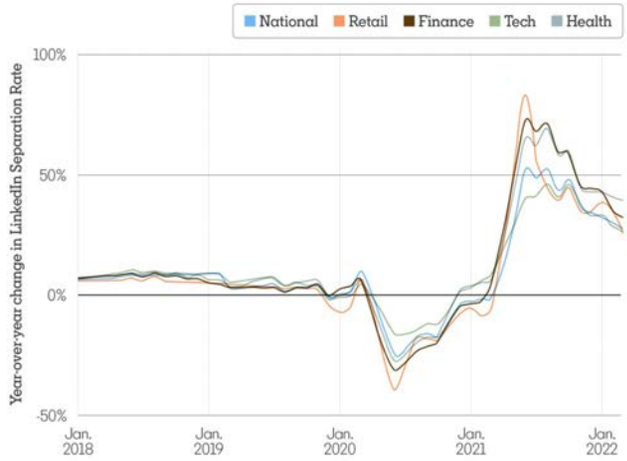
Over the past 2 ½ years, U.S. workers have wrestled with those questions as never before. In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic – when the U.S. economy was in freefall, hardly anyone left of their own accord. (Plenty of people did suffer involuntary layoffs.)

Turn the clock forward to the first half of 2021, and U.S. workers en masse were breaking free of jobs they didn't like, in favor of fresh starts elsewhere. What's now known as the Great Reshuffle was in full swing.

And now? A new analysis by LinkedIn's Economic Graph team documents each stage of this workplace drama in three acts – including the latest twist. The newly launched LinkedIn Separation Rate is powered by data on 11.5 million employees' departures since 2018. It covers both those who left voluntarily and those who were involuntarily terminated.

Professionals are still leaving their jobs in spades

The Great Reshuffle still has workers leaving their jobs at higher rates than they were pre-pandemic. Here's how four industries' separation rates compare to the national average.



LinkedIn News

Source: LinkedIn Economic Graph

Note: The LinkedIn Separation Rate (LSR) is an economic metric by the Economic Graph team to measure the rate at which employees are leaving their positions. It is calculated by analyzing the number of positions that end each month, removing seasonality and other effects. The metric is indexed to the average of 2016.

As seen in the chart above, the year-over-year variation in the U.S. Separation Rate hardly budged before the COVID-19 pandemic set in. Then it sunk as low as -25% in June 2020, when U.S. employment was at double-digit levels and severe, "shelter-in-place" restrictions were common.

By 2021, however, the U.S. economy was bouncing back, and the most intense COVID-related restraints on ordinary activity were being relaxed. Job mobility became a lot easier, and workers reacted accordingly. The separation rate's year-over-year trend switched direction in a hurry, hitting a high of +53% in June 2021.

Looking at industry-by-industry variations, the retail sector saw the greatest fluctuations. The year-over-year percentage change in its separation rate bottomed out at -39% in June 2020, only to rocket ahead to +83% in the following June. Finance also turned out to be a sector with extreme lows and highs.

By contrast, fluctuations in tech's separation rate were relatively subdued. Tech workers in June 2020 weren't all that hesitant about leaving jobs (with a slowdown in the separation rate of just -16%) and they weren't especially eager to move on a year later, when the year-over-year separation rate peaked at +46% in August 2021.

The restless nature of U.S. workers' mood last year was captured in a Pew Foundation survey published last month. It found people quit for three main reasons: low pay, lack of opportunities for advancement, and a feeling of being disrespected at work.

These days, job departures remain brisk – and well ahead of the pre-pandemic pace – although last year's extreme ramp-up seems to be abating. The latest reading of the separation rate, for this March, showed a year-over-year rise of 28%, well down from last summer's highs.

The new tempo is especially pronounced in retail (26% in March). Since the start of the pandemic, wages in retail and other frontline, "desk-less jobs" have risen 7% to 10%, a team of researchers led by management consultant Deborah Lovich recently noted in a Harvard Business Review article.

While those boosts won't make every retail worker's' pay frustrations vanish, highly publicized wage increases at retailers such as Target and Amazon maybe seen as a step in the right direction.

Meanwhile, health care currently stands out as the sector where worker restlessness remains most intense. For March, the year-over-year rise in the separation rate remained elevated, at nearly 40%.

Methodology

The LinkedIn Separation Rate is calculated by Economic Graph researchers to measure the rate at which employees are leaving their positions. It analyzes LinkedIn member profiles to determine the number of positions that ended each month, removing seasonality and other effects. The metric is indexed to the average for 2016.

Recruiters Respond to the Great Resignation in 2022

Roy Maurer, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM),February 14, 2022

The Great Resignation may taper off later this year, but turnover is expected to remain elevated, providing talent acquisition professionals with a stellar opportunity to lure talent to the organization and to play a more critical part in retaining that talent.

The post-pandemic hiring recovery will continue to be tumultuous in 2022, exemplified by intense hiring demand, fierce competition for talent and an overhaul of the employee experience to meet candidate expectations.

"2022 will pose its own challenges, but the market gives us in recruiting a fantastic chance to refresh our message and go out there and highlight the reasons we work at the companies we do," said Jennifer Shappley, vice president of global talent acquisition at LinkedIn. "This could be a once-in-a-career situation where talent acquisition is so central to the business's success and TA leaders can step more into that business leader role."

Todd Bavol, president and CEO of Integrity Staffing Solutions, a nationwide staffing firm based in Newark, Del., said there will be a smoothing of the level of urgency in 2022, but hiring will not get easier. "I think it will be harder," he said. "Not only will quality candidates continue to be in high demand, but there will also continue to be a large number of job openings and competition will be even tighter than in 2021."

He pointed to the latest labor market data that shows the economy is still about 3 million jobs shy of pre-pandemic levels with about 4 percent unemployment and a depressed labor force participation rate.

What had been a job-hopping trend pre-pandemic—employees looking for a new position after two or three years—was exacerbated by the upheaval of the past two years. "With the rise of work from anywhere, hire from anywhere and an easier interview process all done virtually, there's no reason for employees not to be looking for a better opportunity," said Evan Sohn, CEO of Recruiter.com, a hiring platform based in New York City. "Companies now need to be thinking about having a constant stream of potential candidates to fill their workforce."

The bottom line is that the supply chain of talent will cost more in 2022 than in prior years, Sohn concluded. "And employers will need to invest more in recruiting and hiring. This is one of the reasons why we have seen a surge in hiring recruiters and talent acquisition professionals."

Communicating What Workers Want

It's being realized that people want more from their employers. Job seekers want flexibility, well-being and purpose on top of competitive pay, good working conditions and skills development. It's up to recruiters to signal to candidates how their organization will meet their expectations.

"Recruiters must make sure that in their outreach, in their job postings, in interviews with candidates, that they are very attuned to what is top of mind for those candidates," Shappley said. "We're seeing a significant increase in views and applies for job ads that mention flexibility and work culture."

Bavol agreed that employers must work toward their brand being hyper-focused on what workers want and delivering on that promise. "This is a perfect time to get in front of the wave of quitting that is going to continue this year," he said. "Recruitment messaging should be speaking to the needs of today's workforce, showing that the company is putting people first. It's also a great opportunity for recruiters to look at where people are leaving—and building relationships with those folks now."

Lenka Burnett, vice president of global client services at international recruiting firm Korn Ferry in London, noted that many employers that were still in a reactive mode in 2021 are taking a more structured and focused approach to hiring and turnover challenges this year.

"TA teams are looking at articulating and bringing their EVP [employee value proposition] to the forefront of their hiring process and in engagement with candidates," she said. "Last year, companies were focused on hiring numbers. They had to fill demand. The focus is shifting now to candidate and employee experience."

Shappley said boosting employer brand has taken on a renewed focus. "So much of what an employer saw as their culture to be communicated has fundamentally changed over the last couple of years," she said. "This is a real opportunity to go back and refresh that messaging. It's important to have a partnership between TA and the marketing/communications team when doing this work. Activating your entire employee base is the biggest way to get your message out there."

Job seekers are clamoring for flexibility in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. "For the roles that allow it, hybrid working will continue to spread its roots in 2022," said Johnny Campbell, CEO of Dublin-based SocialTalent, a learning platform for recruiters. "Workers are craving flexibility, in all its forms. There is a lot of work and structure involved in getting flexibility to function, but it's better to plan with this in mind and stay ahead of the curve. Talent is demanding it."

And employers know this: There was an 83 percent increase in job posts mentioning flexibility in 2021 over 2019, according to LinkedIn, and 343 percent more mentions of flexibility in company posts during that time. For their part, recruiters need to know the ins and outs of their company's flexible work policies and how the organization supports remote and hybrid workers, Shappley said.

Retention Role

Employers must also focus on retaining their existing employees in today's highly competitive job market. As the gatekeepers of their organization, recruiters can play a big part in supporting retention.

The epic talent migration that is taking place is a challenge but also another opportunity for recruiters to help preserve and evolve their own organization's culture, Shappley said. "It's crucial to make sure new hires are adding to, rather than subtracting from, your culture," she said.

John Vlastelica, founder and managing director of Recruiting Toolbox, a global management consulting and training firm in Seattle, recommended every company pressure-test their EVP. "Spend time thinking about this question: 'Do we really deliver the experience and opportunity we sell as recruiters?' " he said.

Additional ways recruiters can support retention include being authentic when engaging with candidates and participating in onboarding.

"When engaging with applicants, it's very important to ensure candidate fit and promote the uniqueness of the organizational culture," Bavol said. "Ensuring that there is a synergy between what is important to a candidate and the organization's interests will help support retention down the road."

Onboarding is another key piece of the candidate experience, Burnett said. "Companies should focus on personalizing communications with new hires and invest in digital onboarding tools."

Shappley added that talent acquisition leaders should consider refreshing onboarding materials and even re-onboarding the recruiting team as they prepare for a new year of work. "The world has changed, and recruiters must know the organization's latest changes in order to prepare the right message," she said.

Hidden in Plain Sight

Facing talent scarcity, employers have begun to examine the people they already have on staff to fill open roles.

"Organizations are realizing that you can't just bring in people externally," Burnett said. "There has been an increase in interest in internal mobility since the onset of the pandemic, and in 2022, companies are looking at workforce planning and talent acquisition more holistically."

Internal mobility programs are in the spotlight as a retention tool as more data shows that employees are more likely to stay in their jobs if they see investment in their careers and professional development.

LinkedIn found that employees at organizations with high internal mobility stay at their companies almost two times longer.

"With the current crisis, it's never been more important to upskill, reskill and invest in your employee base," Campbell said. "By building internal mobility programs, you are demonstrating how serious you are about the development and progression of your staff, the absence of which is a top reason why people leave a company."

The shift to remote work may be making internal mobility more of a challenge, however.

"Internal mobility is a no-brainer but can be difficult when there isn't a constant visual on your employees," Campbell said. "Less interactions with managers could hurt hybrid and remote workers if organizations don't adapt to this new structure of work. Proximity bias needs to be eliminated in order to allow a fair and equitable process."

He recommended establishing new methods of nurturing employees, being transparent in sharing opportunities and regularly checking in with direct reports about their career goals.

The Great Resignation is becoming a "great midlife crisis"

Rani Molla, Vox, May 3, 2022

With prices soaring and analysts predicting a recession on the horizon, it might not seem like the best time to quit your job. But that's not keeping American workers, especially older, more tenured ones, from doing so.

Higher-paid workers are increasingly quitting their jobs, as the Great Resignation — also known as the Great Reshuffle — enters its second year. Earlier in the pandemic, the trend was led by younger, less-tenured workers in low-paying industries like retail, food service, and health care. Now, the main growth in quit rates is coming from older, more tenured workers in higher-paid industries like finance, tech, and other knowledge worker fields, according to data from two separate human resources and analytics companies. These workers say they are searching for less tangible benefits like meaning and flexibility.

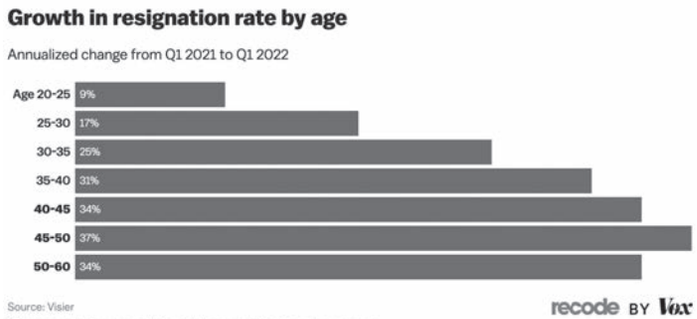
That changing composition of who is quitting paints an increasingly complicated picture of the state of work in America and suggests that while quit rates had decreased slightly from their highs last year, the phenomenon is not going away just yet. Indeed, new Bureau of Labor Statistics data for March, the most recently available month, saw the overall quit rate return to its previous high of 3 percent of all employment, with a record 4.5 million people leaving their jobs that month. More than half of the growth in quits compared to a month earlier came from the higher-paying business and professional services sector.

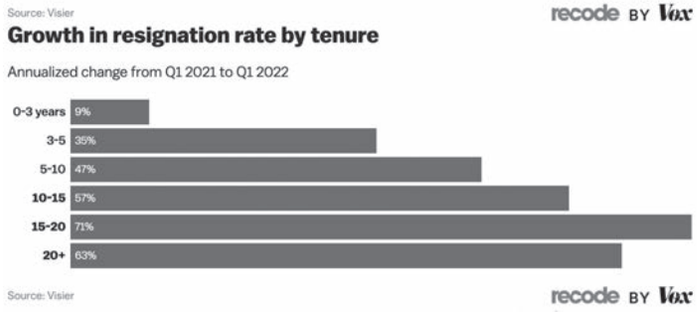
"The Great Resignation is almost like a train, where it's built all this momentum and it's hard to slow down, but certain workers are getting off the train and new workers are coming on," said Luke Pardue, an economist at Gusto, which provides payroll, benefits, and human resource management software to small- and medium-sized businesses.

Rates of quits are always highest among younger, less senior workers — those who tend to be less invested in their jobs and whose lives are less stable. This was true during the early stages of the pandemic when these workers quit their jobs amid heightened demand to eke out better wages and conditions elsewhere (though those gains are unlikely to be permanent). But those quit rates have been declining. Data from Gusto, which typically works with companies that have around 25 employees, shows that the average tenure of people who quit has grown in every age group and in nearly every industry. In other words, older people who've worked at a job longer are also quitting.

A similar change is happening at bigger companies, according to data from people analytics provider Visier.

Between the first quarter of 2021 and 2022, the greatest growth in resignations was among people aged 40 to 60 and those with a tenure of more than 10 years, a Visier dataset





from companies with over 1,000 employees shows. Older and more tenured people are especially likely to be quitting in knowledge worker industries like finance and tech.

Their reasons are myriad.

"Don't look for one thing that's driving the Great Resignation," Ian Cook, Visier's vice president of people analytics, told Recode. "It's actually made up from a combination of different patterns and will continue to change as the labor market changes and as the economic recovery changes."

Among the more financially stable set, quits are being driven by everything from a desire to continue working remotely to a greater search for meaning to simply having the means to do so.

Columbia Business School professor Adam Galinsky calls this iteration of the Great Resignation the "great midlife crisis."

"At the midpoint of life, we become aware of our own mortality, and it allows us to reflect on what really matters to us," said Galinsky. The pandemic has amplified that effect. "A global pandemic obviously makes people reflect on their own mortality in terms of being afraid of dying themselves or having a loved one or family and colleagues pass away."

Importantly, the people who quit to hold out for the jobs they want or forgo work entirely are usually the ones with the financial means to do so.

Galinsky, who is currently on sabbatical in Hawaii, says he's seen it among his peers and among other high-earning knowledge workers now working from his island getaway.

He mentioned a Bloomberg employee who quit after the finance publication called workers back to the office and who now works on a pasta truck.

Such workers, either due to savings or a spouse's income, have the freedom to look for other work, including gig work or starting their own business. A Gusto survey of new businesses shows that they've shifted from e-commerce startups earlier in the pandemic to more professional services, like, say, an accountant starting her own firm rather than working for someone else.

Many of these workers, especially those who are older and more stable in their careers, now have the perspective to consider what they really want out of their lives and work.

After more than two years of successfully working from home, many knowledge workers are loath to come back to the office, and some are jumping ship if they feel they have to do so. That makes sense. Data from Slack's ongoing survey of 10,000 knowledge workers just found that with a third of them now back in the office five days a week, their work-related stress and anxiety has reached its highest level since the survey began in 2020.

Growth in knowledge worker quits also might just simply be a case of people copying one another.

"Workers who have this experience, that switched a job, that became more flexible, talk about it and how they had a great experience, and that leads their neighbor or their friend to do the same," Pardue said.

They're also quitting because there are a lot of jobs out there for them. The number of business and professional services job openings is at a record high, according to BLS data. According to job site Indeed, the number of high-paid job postings has not cooled as much as postings for low-paid jobs (postings for both remain above pre-pandemic levels).

So while the future might look grim, the present looks just fine for these workers, who are confident in the current tight job market. As Galinsky put it, "People believe less in global warming on days it snows."

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Why workers are choosing big pay packets over flexibility

Anna Jones, BBC, May 4, 2022

Flexibility has long been touted as the 'it' perk. But as pay packets swell, workers are increasingly prioritizing bigger salaries over other benefits.

For many workers, flexibility has become paramount. Now that millions of employees have enjoyed the ability to work remotely and shape their schedules, workers are increasingly reticent to give up flexibility – and would consider making sacrifices to have accommodating jobs. Earlier in the pandemic, large swaths of workers reported willingness to take a pay cut if they secured the benefits they wanted.

But in recent months, a shift has occurred: while flexibility is still high on the list, pay is moving centre stage as a priority for job-seekers. Both knowledge- and blue-collar workers with particularly in-demand skillsets are enjoying sharp salary rises, as labour shortages impact some industries. These hikes are coming as workers of all stripes are facing rising living costs – and wondering if they, too, could find a better-paying role elsewhere.

Right now, say experts, in sectors where workers have leverage, companies are having to pay more to secure the personnel they need. And as people worry about paying their bills, salary levels are moving ahead of flexibility as the most important factor in attracting and retaining talent.

A perks and salary 'arms race'

"The money that's being thrown around at the moment is ridiculous – it's the craziest I've ever seen," says Chris Adcock, the Solihull-based managing director for Reed Technology, the IT branch of Reed Recruitment in the UK.

Adcock says there's been something of a benefits "arms race" in the past few years, as companies adjusted to new demands brought about by the pandemic. At first, flexibility around working hours or location, or a positive company culture that supported work-life balance, were portrayed as unique selling points; a reason for candidates to join up. Almost overnight, however, these "perks" became minimum expectations for job-seekers.

And while everyone was focusing on flexibility and benefits, they've "kind of ignored the elephant in the room, which is people tend to move for pay, especially when their pay is exponentially higher than they would be expecting", says Adcock. Once everyone is offering what were once considered perks, "there's no other benefits left so we're back to the one thing we know, which is money, and that's where the arms race of salary comes in".

As the world slowly emerges from the pandemic, labour shortages are hitting some sectors hard, particularly areas like technology, engineering, sustainability, healthcare and skilled trades. That means for in-demand jobs, we're now in a situation "where salaries being offered by businesses are 10, 20, even 30% higher than market standards, just to attract people", says Adcock. Across the UK, March saw the steepest rise in starter salaries on record.

Adcock says flexibility and company values are still important factors for workers, but that "realistically, they're only the difference-maker when the salaries are comparable. If the salaries are within X percent, and they're looking at two roles, and one's got all the benefits and all the work-life balance pieces they want then yes, they're probably going to go for that one", he says. "But if one company is offering 10K, 20K out, unfortunately still the main decision-maker is salary."

'People will move to protect themselves'

A major upwards driver of salaries, says Adcock, is the rapidly rising cost of living, which is forcing people who might not have prioritised pay before to do so now. The IMF recently revised down its world economic forecast for 2022 and 2023, citing the effects of the war in Ukraine. US inflation has already hit 8.5% and UK inflation is expected to hit 8% later this year, pushing up prices across the board.

And despite some record-busting salary increases, most workers will not see their salary rise faster than inflation this year. About half of UK workers say they are already living pay-slip to pay-slip, a recent survey from TotalJobs showed, and a third (37%) were considering changing jobs to keep up with the rising cost of living. In the US, research by Robert Half recruitment found that 62% of workers intended to ask for a pay rise this year, 30% of them saying this was to help them adjust to rising prices.

Gaelle Blake, director of permanent employment at Hays recruitment agency in the UK, believes that despite the recent focus on quality and flexibility of work, salary never stopped being a priority for workers. But in the next few months, she says, with inflation causing workers' pay to drop in real terms, "we'll see almost a re-evaluation of those top-five reasons why people move jobs", with salary "firmly being number one. The companies "winning the race" for staff will be those who can offer both the work-life balance policies workers say they want and competitive pay.

"I think what we'll see is people moving to protect themselves," says Blake, or making sure they secure better deals from their current employer. This is something that a "sen-

sible employer" will need to anticipate, she says, by proactively offering above-inflation pay rises or other incentives, rather than delaying until workers vote with their feet. "If they lose them, it's very hard to recruit again," she says.

Industries that can't readily offer perks like flexibility are particularly reliant on pay to secure staff. The UK construction industry, for example, saw the sharpest increase in weekly earnings of any sector last year, driven by a skills shortage and a demand boom. Bina Briggs, a construction HR specialist based in Luton in the UK, says her clients have been "really struggling" to recruit, as workers make the most of the competition for their skills.

Recently, one of her clients received just 10 replies to a job posting. Of the two suitable candidates, one repeatedly failed to show up for an interview, while the other was offered the job almost immediately on generous terms. But the next morning, she says, the candidate rejected the job, having been offered significantly higher pay elsewhere. Right now, says Briggs, "It's a case of if you've got somebody good, hold onto them."

Long-term risk versus short-term gain

Adcock warns that in the long-term, some of these high salaries may not prove sustainable.

"It's hard to say without sounding cruel, but there are people who are being offered salaries much higher than they're worth in any market," he says. "At some point, the market will change – it's always cyclical. And then you've got a real risk of people in all roles, whether it's technology, HR accountancy or recruitment, suddenly becoming very vulnerable because they are being paid well above market rates."

Paul McDonald, senior executive director at Robert Half, based in LA, highlights other potential problems; he says more than half (56%) of executive managers in a recent survey said they were starting to be faced with pay compression, where existing staff end up on lower salaries than new recruits. "Companies in all industries, particularly those with lower unemployment rates, need to be cognisant of these pay gaps and salary trends," he says.

But it's unlikely that jobseekers right now will be thinking about longer-term issues; realistically, they'll be watching other people get recruited at much higher salaries and trying to secure their own piece of the better-salary pie.

If people who wouldn't necessarily be looking to move are finding their bills are going up and everything's getting more expensive, says Adcock, it might well make them think "well, maybe more money right now would be really appealing".

Notes

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Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Fewer Than 1 in 3 Employers View Mental Health Support as a Top Priority

Matt Gonzales, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), April 12, 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged mental health in the U.S.

Public health actions, such as social distancing, are necessary to reduce the spread of COVID-19 but have engendered feelings of isolation, loneliness and anxiety nationwide, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Yet only 32 percent of HR professionals say offering mental health resources such as employee assistance programs (EAPs) is a "high priority" for their organization, according to a joint survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), the SHRM Foundation and global health care company Otsuka Pharmaceutical Co. Ltd.

"In this hypercompetitive labor market, organizations need to make providing mental health resources a priority," said Rocki Basel, the report's lead researcher. "It's a win-win situation—businesses can benefit by recruiting and retaining top talent, and workers benefit by having access to resources that will improve their lives."

The survey, Mental Health in America: A 2022 Workplace Report, found that nearly 78 percent of organizations currently offer or plan to offer mental health resources in the next year. Those who do not offer these benefits can limit an employee's access to psychological services, exacerbating the mental health crisis in the U.S.

Among companies that did not offer mental health resources:

- 33 percent said their organization hasn't thought about offering these resources.
- 27 percent indicated their company is unsure which benefits to provide.
- 18 percent said their organization is unsure how to find or choose a plan.
- 21 percent said their company doesn't have the resources to address mental health.

About 83 percent of U.S. workers suffer from work-related stress, and businesses lose up to $300 billion yearly as a result of this stress, according to the American Institute of Stress. Failing to address workplace stress can damage a company's productivity and morale.

"It is clear that the need to establish mental health as a top priority within our organizations is essential," said SHRM Foundation President Wendi Safstrom. "We must act now if we wish to create a world of work that allows both employers and employees to thrive and lead healthy, productive organizations."

Which Industries Are Most Stressed?

HR professionals in the health care sector (61 percent) were most likely to indicate that their workers experience more mental health problems than employees in other industries, the SHRM report indicated.

SHRM's findings align with a 2020 report by Mental Health America showing that 93 percent of health care workers reported experiencing stress, 86 percent reported dealing with anxiety, 76 percent reported exhaustion and burnout, and 75 percent said they were overwhelmed.

HR professionals who claimed that their employees are more likely to experience mental health issues than workers in other industries worked in sectors such as:

- Nonprofit (47 percent).
- Government/public administration/military (41 percent).
- Education (39 percent).

Survey respondents most frequently cited high-pressure work environments for contributing to mental health problems among employees in their respective industries.

It's Not All Bad News

Most employers see the benefits of providing mental health resources.

About 94 percent of HR professionals believed that offering mental health resources can improve the overall health of employees, 88 percent said these benefits can increase productivity and 86 percent opined that these resources can improve employee retention, the SHRM report found.

The survey showed that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered more employers to offer mental health resources. Of organizations that provided these benefits:

- 73 percent offered mental health coverage as part

of employee health care plans prior to the beginning of the pandemic, with an additional 11 percent introducing the benefit after the pandemic began.

- 73 percent provided EAPs prior to the beginning of the pandemic, with an additional 10 percent introducing the benefit after the pandemic began.

- 26 percent offered workshops on mental health and resilience prior to the beginning of the pandemic, with an additional 21 percent introducing the benefit after the pandemic began.

The report stated that communication is critical in the implementation of EAPs and other benefits. Employers can leverage surveys and one-on-one interviews to learn what employees need and then adapt their action plans based on workers' responses.

Dr. Anna Gibson, organizational well-being and consultation lead for health care company Modern Health in San Francisco, said companies can no longer afford to assume that it isn't their responsibility to care for the mental health of their employees.

"Mental health impacts every aspect of an employee's ability to do their job effectively," she said. "And when considered in aggregate, the company's business goals are ultimately at risk the larger the number of employees who struggle with their mental health."

Gibson explained that mental health struggles have ripple effects across communities. Even when a single employee is struggling with mental health, it impacts other workers and business processes as well.

"Mental health does not exist in isolation," she said. "It is infused into every moment of our work lives."

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Toward a Racially Just Workplace

Laura Morgan Roberts and Anthony J. Mayo, Harvard Business Review, November 14, 2019

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which [one] has overcome while trying to succeed."

Booker T. Washington, the educator, author, activist, and presidential adviser, wrote those words more than a century ago as a way of encouraging his African American compatriots — many of them recently emancipated from slavery — to persist in the fight for equal rights and economic opportunities. He was proud of what he and his peers had achieved. He surely believed there was satisfaction in struggling against and surmounting bad odds. And yet we must also assume that he, along with millions of other freedom fighters, wanted future generations of Black Americans to suffer fewer hardships. He hoped today's Black leaders would find easier paths to success.

Has that dream been realized? Having spent the past 20 years conducting and reviewing research on African Americans' advancement, particularly in the workplace, and having collected our work and others' into a book, we must report that the answer is partly yes but mostly no.

No doubt, there has been progress. Civil rights laws have been passed and affirmed. Companies are committing to and investing heavily in diversity, because more corporate leaders acknowledge that it makes good business sense. And several Black billionaires and CEOs sit on the respective ranking lists.

However, according to both quantitative and qualitative data, working African Americans — from those laboring in factories and on shop floors to those setting C-suite strategy — still face obstacles to advancement that other minorities and white women don't. They are less likely than their white peers to be hired, developed, and promoted. And their lived experience at work is demonstrably worse even than that of other people of color.

These challenges might, as Washington said, make success sweeter for the few who overcome them. But a huge gap remains between what organizations are saying and doing to promote inclusion and the outcomes we're seeing for many Black workers and managers. If leaders want to walk their talk, they must spearhead much more meaningful change. Instead of undervaluing and squandering Black talent, they must recognize the resilience, robust sense of self, and growth mindset that, studies show, African American people — as one of the most historically oppressed groups in the United States — bring to the table. They should work even harder to seek out and support them, from entry-level recruitment to CEO succession.

We have not identified any major company that is doing this well on a broad scale. But research and lessons gleaned from other contexts can point the way forward. In our work with leading management thinkers and practitioners across the country, we have arrived at a four-step strategy to help companies move toward greater and better representation for Black leaders. It involves shifting from an exclusive focus on the business case for racial diversity to embracing the moral one, promoting real conversations about race, revamping diversity and inclusion programs, and better managing career development at every stage. Given the increasing importance of purpose and social impact to employees, customers, and other stakeholders, we believe there's no better time to make this transformation. We also believe our framework can be adapted for other marginalized groups in the United States and around the world.

Taking these steps won't be easy; executives will need to think deeply about their ethics and corporate culture and exert extra effort for a cause they may not consider central to their business. But the reward will be great: maximizing the human potential of everyone in the workplace.

Underrepresented, Unsupported, Unfulfilled

At most large U.S. and multinational organizations, diversity and inclusion (D&I) has become an imperative. Companies are pushing for minority recruitment, paying for antibias training, and sponsoring nonwhite employees for high-potential leadership-development programs. Research has shown, and a great many executives now understand, that a heterogeneous workforce yields more innovation and better performance than a homogeneous one does.

And yet 55 years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act and decades into these corporate D&I efforts, African Americans' progress toward top management roles and greater economic well-being and influence remains slow to nonexistent. Let's look first at the demographics.

What the numbers say. Yes, we can point to the rise of several prominent Black leaders, from media figures Oprah Winfrey, Robert Johnson, and Jay-Z to financiers Ken Chenault and Robert Smith and sports-stars-turned-businesspeople Serena Williams, Michael Jordan, and LeBron James. Most notably, America elected its first African-descended President, Barack Obama, in 2008 and reelected him in 2012. The number of African Americans earning bachelor's and graduate degrees continues to increase. And Black people account for 12% of the U.S. workforce, close to their 13.4% representation in the general population.

However, in the words of leaders from the Toigo Foundation, a career advancement organization for underrepresented

groups, such evidence merely gives us " the illusion of inclusion." In fact, research shows that in the United States, the wealth gap between Blacks and others continues to widen; experts predict that Black families' median wealth will decrease to $0 by 2050, while that of white families will exceed $100,000. Just 8% of managers and 3.8% of CEOs are Black. In the Fortune 500 companies, there are currently only three Black chief executives, down from a high of 12 in 2002. And at the 16 Fortune 500 companies that report detailed demographic data on senior executives and board members, white men account for 85% of those roles.

Black leaders have struggled to make inroads in a variety of influential industries and sectors. At U.S. finance companies, only 2.4% of executive committee members, 1.4% of managing directors, and 1.4% of senior portfolio managers are Black. A mere 1.9% of tech executives and 5.3% of tech professionals are African American. Black representatives and senators account for 9% of the U.S. Congress. The average Black partnership rate at U.S. law firms from 2005 to 2016 was 1.8%. Only 7% of U.S. higher education administrators and 8% of nonprofit leaders are Black. And just 10% of U.S. businesses are owned by Black men and women. As the Toigo Foundation points out, all this has a cascading impact on economic development, housing, jobs, quality of schools and other services, access to education, infrastructure spending, consumer credit, retirement savings, and more.

What it's like at work. Underrepresentation is bad enough. But even worse, according to extensive research, is the lived experience of Black employees and managers in the U.S. workplace. African Americans continue to face both explicit racism — stoked by the rise of white nationalism in the past few years — and subtle racism on the job. In the latter category, University of Utah professor emeritus Arthur Brief points to "aversive" racism (when people avoid those of different races or change their behavior around them) along with "modern" racism (when people believe that because Blacks can now compete in the marketplace, they no longer face discrimination). Microagressions — for example, when a white male visitor to an office assumes that a Black female executive is a secretary — are also common.

Although companies claim they want to overcome these explicit and implicit biases and hire and promote diverse candidates, they rarely do so in effective ways. When Harvard Business School's emeriti professors David A. Thomas and John Gabarro conducted an in-depth six-year study of leaders in three companies, they found that people of color had to manage their careers more strategically than their white peers did and to prove greater competence before winning promotions. And research by Lynn Perry Wooten, the dean of Cornell University's Dyson School, and Erika Hayes James, the dean of Emory University's Goizueta Business School, shows that Black leaders who do rise to the top are disproportionately handed "glass cliff" assignments, which offer nice rewards but carry a greater risk of failure. Other research, such as Duke University professor Ashleigh Rosette's studies of Black leaders, has shown widespread racial differences in hiring, performance ratings, promotions, and other outcomes.

There is also an emotional tax associated with being Black in the American workplace. Research by the University of Virginia's Courtney McCluney and Catalyst's Dnika Travis and Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon shows that because Black employees feel a heightened sense of difference among their mostly white peers, their ability to contribute is diminished. "The sense of isolation, of solitude, can take a toll," one leader told them. "It's like facing each day with a core of uncertainty… wondering…if the floor you're standing on is concrete or dirt…solid or not."

Many Black professionals have reported to Toigo that they are expected to be "cultural ambassadors" who address the needs of other Black employees, which leaves them doing two jobs: "the official one the person was hired to do, and a second one as champion for members of the person's minority group," as one put it. Across industries, sectors, and functions, they also experience the "diversity fatigue" that arises from constantly engaging in task forces, trainings, and conversations about race as they are tapped to represent their demographic.

And Black leaders in particular struggle with feeling inauthentic at work. Research by McGill University's Patricia Faison Hewlin shows that many minorities feel pressured to create "facades of conformity," suppressing their personal values, views, and attributes to fit in with organizational ones. But as Hewlin and her colleague Anna-Maria Broomes found in a survey of 2,226 workers in various industries and corporate settings, African Americans create these facades more frequently than other minority groups do and feel the inauthenticity more deeply. They might chemically relax (straighten) their hair, conform with coworkers' behavior, "whitewash" their resumes by deleting ethnic-sounding names or companies, hide minority beliefs, and suppress emotions related to workplace racism.

As a result of all the above, Black workers feel less supported, engaged, and committed to their jobs than their non-Black peers do, as research from Georgetown University's Ella Washington, Gallup's Ellyn Maese and Shane McFeely, and others has documented. Black managers report receiving less psychosocial support than their white counterparts do. Black employees are less likely than whites or Hispanics to say that their company's mission or purpose makes them feel their job is important, that their coworkers will do quality work, and that they have opportunities to learn and grow. Black leaders are more likely than white ones to leave their organizations. It's clear that the norms and cultural defaults of leadership in most organizations create an inhospitable environment that leaves even those Black employees who have advanced feeling like outsiders — and in some cases pushes them out the door.

Relatively high pay and impressive pedigrees don't help much: According to a survey of diverse professionals with bachelor's or graduate degrees and average annual incomes of $100,000 or more that one of us (Laura) conducted with

colleagues at the Partnership, a nonprofit organization specializing in diversity and leadership development, African Americans report the lowest levels of both manager and coworker support, commitment, and job fit and the highest levels of feeling inauthentic and wanting to leave their jobs. Studies of Black Harvard Business School and Harvard Law School graduates have similarly found that matriculating from highly respected institutions does not shield one from obstacles. When surveyed years and even decades after graduating, Black Harvard MBAs expressed less satisfaction than their white counterparts with opportunities to do meaningful work, to realize professional accomplishments, and to combine career with personal and family life. "Perhaps it sounds naive, but [coming out of HBS] I did not expect race to have any bearing in my career," one told us. "I was wrong."

Leading Change

As we said earlier, diversity and inclusion efforts have been gaining traction, and workforces are becoming increasingly multiracial. But given the dearth of Black leaders, we would like to see companies jump-start their efforts in four ways.

First, move away from the business case and toward a moral one. The dozens of D&I executives we talked to in the course of our research tell us they sometimes feel they've taken the business case for diversity as far as it can go. When Weber Shandwick surveyed 500 chief diversity officers at companies with revenue of $500 million or more, results confirmed that proving that ROI — showing that inclusive teams yield more-creative ideas that appeal to broader customer bases, open new markets, and ultimately drive better performance — is one of the biggest challenges.

The research on this is clear. A 2015 McKinsey report on 366 public companies found that those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely than others to have financial returns above the industry mean. Various studies have shown that teams composed of both white and Black people are more likely to focus on facts, carefully process information, and spur innovation when the organizational culture and leadership support learning across differences.

With the right knowledge, skills, and experience, African American employees and managers can add as much business value as anyone else. They may have greater insights about creating and selling offerings for minority consumer groups that end up appealing to white consumers as well. As one of us (Tony) showed in research with Nitin Nohria, now the dean of Harvard Business School, and Eckerd College's Laura Singleton, some of the most successful Black entrepreneurs are those who — in some cases because they were marginalized — built companies to serve their same-race peers, particularly in the personal care, media, and fashion arenas. Examples include the 19th-century Black-hair-care trailblazer Madam C.J. Walker, Black Entertainment Television's Robert and Sheila Johnson, and Daymond John, who launched the FUBU clothing line.

So, experts agree that diversity enhances business outcomes when managed well. But given the limited progress African Americans have made in most of corporate America, it seems clear that the sound business arguments for inclusion are not enough. At many companies, D&I executives still struggle for airtime in the C-suite and for resources that can move their organizations beyond the tokenism of, say, one Black executive in the senior ranks. Their business cases don't appear to have been as persuasive as those presented by their marketing, operations, and accounting colleagues, which have a more direct effect on the bottom line.

And in more-progressive companies — ones truly committed to inclusion — a different kind of pushback sometimes occurs: If a team incorporates women, Asians, Latinos, and representatives of the LGBTQ community alongside white men, if it has data geeks and creative types, extroverts and introverts, Harvard MBAs and college dropouts, able-bodied and physically challenged members, isn't it diverse enough? Our answer: Not when teams, especially those at the highest levels, leave out the most marginalized group in the United States.

Thus we turn to the moral case. Many in the U.S. business community have begun to push for a more purpose-driven capitalism that focuses not just on shareholder value but also on shared value — benefits that extend to employees, customers, suppliers, and communities. This movement, toward what the University of Toronto's Sarah Kaplan calls the 360° Corporation, wants corporate leaders to consider both the financial and the ethical implications of all their decisions. We believe that one of its pillars should be proportionate representation and wages for Black Americans.

Why this group in particular? As the New York Times' excellent 1619 Project highlighted, we are exactly four centuries away from the start of slavery — the kidnapping, forced labor, mistreatment, and often murder of African people — in the United States. And we are just 154 years away from its end. Although discrimination based on race and other factors was outlawed by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the effects of slavery and the decades of discrimination and disenfranchisement that followed it continue to hold back many descendants of enslaved people (and those from different circumstances who have the same skin color). Alarmingly, racism and racist incidents are on the rise: According to the FBI, the number of hate crimes committed in the United States rose by 17% from 2016 to 2017, marking the third consecutive year of increases.

We also can't forget that a compelling business case can be — and has been — made for all the atrocities listed above. Indeed, when invoked absent humanistic and ethical principles, a "business case" has legitimated exploitative actions throughout history. White landowners argued that the economic welfare of the colonies and the health of a young country depended on keeping Black people in chains. White business owners in the Jim Crow South and segregated neighborhoods across the country claimed that sales would suffer if Black customers and residents — who in the absence of land and good jobs had amassed little wealth — were al-

lowed in, because that would turn rich white customers away. And white executives have long benefited because people of color with less access to high-quality education and high-wage employment were forced into low-paying commercial and household jobs, from coal mining and call center work to cleaning, cooking, and caregiving.

So the case for racial diversity and the advancement of African Americans can't be solely about increasing innovation or providing access to and legitimacy in minority markets to maximize revenue and profits. We can't simply ask, "What's the most lucrative thing to do?" We must also ask, "What's the right thing to do?" The imperative should be creating a context in which people of all colors, but especially those who have historically been oppressed, can realize their full potential. This will involve exploring and understanding the racist history that has shaped various groups' access to resources and opportunities and that undergirds contemporary bias. It means emphasizing equity and justice.

How might this work? Starbucks has made some attempts. In the wake of protests following the 2014 fatal shooting of Michael Brown by police in Ferguson, Missouri, the coffee chain announced RaceTogether, which aimed to spark a national conversation about race relations by having baristas write that phrase on customers' cups. The campaign fell flat because it was perceived more as a profit-minded marketing stunt than as a good-faith effort to change the status quo. Subsequent initiatives, perhaps designed with ethics more squarely in mind, have garnered a more positive response. In 2015 Starbucks launched a hiring program to recruit disadvantaged youths, including African Americans; in 2017 it expanded that program and added one to recruit refugees; and after a racially charged incident at one of its cafés in 2018, it closed all its U.S. cafés for a day of employee antibias training. Consider, too, Nike's decision to launch a marketing campaign headlined by Colin Kaepernick, the NFL quarterback who failed to get picked up by a team after he began kneeling during the national anthem to protest the unfair treatment of African Americans. The campaign created a backlash among anti-Kaepernick consumers and a #BoycottNike hashtag, but the sports apparel brand stood by its tagline: "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything." We applaud these steps and hope organizations will go even further in learning how to practice racial inclusion in their workplaces.

Some organizations have invoked the moral case for action in other contexts. Think of how Patagonia supports environmental protections by committing to donate either 1% of sales or 10% of profits (whichever is larger) to advocacy groups. And recall that Dick's Sporting Goods pulled assault weapons and high-capacity magazines from its stores following the Parkland, Florida, school shooting, even though it projected — accurately — that the move would mean a $250 million hit to sales. (It's important to note that over the long term, none of those companies suffered from their choices.)

Such stances take courage. But by combining the business case and the moral one, leaders can make a more powerful argument for supporting Black advancement.

Second, encourage open conversations about race. As Dartmouth College's Ella Bell and the University of Pretoria's Stella Nkomo note in the introduction to our book, "organizations are in society, not apart from it." And although President Obama's election brought some talk of a post-racial era in the United States, the stories and statistics that have come out in the past few years show that racism still exists, which means that race still matters and needs to be discussed, candidly and frequently, in the workplace.

Those conversations will not immediately feel comfortable. Research shows that although many people are happy to talk about "diversity" or "inclusion," their enthusiasm drops significantly when the subject is "race." Most of us don't like to think very hard about where minorities sit and what power they wield (or don't) within our organizations — much less discuss it. When we examine who has been excluded in what ways over what period of time, the concept of white privilege might come up. And majority-group employees might express concerns about reverse discrimination. (According to an Ernst & Young study of 1,000 U.S. workers, one-third of respondents said that a corporate focus on diversity has overlooked white men.) Charged topics like these can provoke resentment, anger, and shame. But we need real exchanges about them if we want to dispel the notion that corporations are pure meritocracies and to ensure that everyone feels heard, supported, and authentic at work.

Senior leaders — most of whom are white men — must set the tone. Why? In one survey, nearly 40% of Black employees said they feel it is never acceptable to speak out about experiences of bias — a silence that can become corrosive. Another study showed that among Black professionals who aspire to senior leadership positions, the most frequently adopted strategy is to avoid talking about race or other issues of inequality, for fear of being labeled an agitator. Other research has indicated that the only CEOs and lower-level managers not penalized for championing diversity are white men.

To create a culture of psychological safety and pave the way for open communication will require a top-down directive and modeling through informal and formal discussions in which people are asked to share ideas, ask questions, and address issues without fear of reprisal. Managers down the line will need training in encouraging and guiding such exchanges, including inviting Black employees and leaders to share their experiences — the good, the bad, and the ugly. Participants should be trained to prepare for such conversations by reflecting on their own identities and the comments and situations that trigger strong emotions in them. As detailed by Columbia University's Valerie Purdie-Greenaway and the University of Virginia's Martin Davidson, the goal is to shift the entire organization to a racial-learning orientation.

Again, a movement from another context — #MeToo — sheds light on how to do so. Revelations of abuse and harassment and the outpouring of women's stories that followed,

many about incidents that happened in the workplace, forced corporate leaders to focus on those issues. Bad actors were fired, women felt empowered to speak up, and awareness of gender discrimination increased. Although #BlackLivesMatter has had similar success highlighting and sparking discussions around police brutality, there is no #BlackLivesAtWork. There should be.

We see some positive signs on this front. Over the past few years several prominent leaders, including PwC's Tim Ryan, Interpublic Group's Michael Roth, Kaiser Permanente's Bernard Tyson, and AT&T's Randall Stephenson, have initiated companywide discussions of race. For example, PwC brought in Mellody Hobson, president and co-CEO of Ariel Investments and a prominent African American leader, to talk to employees about being "color-brave" instead of "color-blind" at work, and it has offered guides for continuing the discussion. At Morgan Stanley, global head of D&I Susan Reid has promoted intimate conversations about race in networking groups and an hour-long forum on race in the current social climate. The latter was moderated by the company's vice chairman and featured its chief marketing officer, its head of prime brokerage, and a Fortune reporter who covers racial issues; it was attended by 1,500 employees, and videos of the event were shared across the firm. Greenaway and Davidson also point to a mostly white male financial services firm that instituted Know Us, a program of small-group cross-race dialogues on racially relevant topics.

Over time these conversations will start to happen informally and organically in groups and among individuals at all levels of an organization, deepening interpersonal cross-race relationships. In one consulting company cited by Greenaway and Davidson, non-Black employees started a book club open to all but focused on Black writers; the group has visited African American museums and historical sites. One-on-one interactions can be even more meaningful, as the psychologist colleagues Karen Samuels (who is white) and Kathryn Fraser (who is Black) describe. "It was important to name our racial and cultural differences and to examine how my perspective was naive regarding her reality," Samuels explains.

Third, revamp D&I programs. Any corporate diversity and inclusion program is better than none, but most that exist today are not designed to sustain a focus on racial equity. Many are siloed within the HR department, lack C-suite support, or are given to women or people of color to manage in addition to their day jobs. Some are more show than go, resting on philosophical statements about inclusion rather than outlining concrete steps for advancing nonwhites. Others limit their efforts to antibias and cultural competence training — preempting problems but, again, not propelling anyone forward. Most take a broad-brush approach to diversity, attempting to serve all minorities plus white women, LGBTQ employees, and those who are neurodiverse or disabled and offering uniform training and leadership development that ignore historical patterns of exclusion, marginality, and disadvantage for each group. They might focus too heavily on recruitment and retention — filling the pipeline and high-potential groups with Black employees but failing to support them past middle-management roles. Most troubling, as Courtney McCluney and San Francisco State University's Verónica Rabelo have shown, a significant portion of D&I programs try to "manage Blackness" — that is, impose "desirable" and "professional" (read: white) norms and expectations on rising African American stars, thus preserving rather than shifting the status quo. They train Black executives to fit into the existing organizational culture rather than encourage them to broaden it by bringing their true and most productive selves to work.

How can we improve such programs? By tackling their shortcomings one by one. Here are several steps organizations can take.

- Give D&I sustained C-suite support and recognize and reward the people who contribute to its initiatives — for example, by having your chief diversity officer report directly to the CEO and tracking inclusion initiative participation in performance reviews and promotion and pay raise discussions.

- Equip and invite white men to take up the mantle — say, by bringing them into D&I programs and assigning some of them to leadership roles.

- Challenge those running D&I efforts to set clear goals for how representation, organizational networks, and access to resources should change across functions and levels over time and how Black employees' perceptions, engagement, and well-being should improve, and then measure the efforts' effectiveness with data analysis and qualitative surveys.

- Shift from preventative measures, such as antibias training, to proactive ones, such as upping the number of Black candidates considered for open positions and stretch roles.

- Abandon one-size-fits-all and color-blind leadership-development practices in favor of courses and coaching tailored to specific groups — or better yet, adopt personalized plans that recognize the multifaceted nature of each individual.

- Help Black employees and rising leaders throughout their careers, including teaching managers the skills they need to support D&I efforts.

- Stop asking Black employees to blend in; instead, emphasize the value of a workplace that embraces all styles and behaviors.

In sum, D&I needs to be an ethos that permeates the entire organization, championed not just by the HR department but by everyone, and especially managers, so that its importance is clear. The Toigo Foundation's leaders draw a parallel between this idea and the total quality management movement of the 1980s, which, with top-down support and the establishment of key performance indicators, became a pervasive way of work-

ing and thinking that filtered down to every function and level. Few companies to date have taken diversity and inclusion that far. But some are moving in the right direction, including JPMorgan Chase, which in 2016 launched a board- and CEO-supported Advancing Black Leaders strategy — staffed and managed separately from other D&I initiatives — focused on filling the firm's pipeline with Black talent and retaining and promoting those workers. SAP's Black Employee Network helped launch its partnership with Delaware State University through Project Propel, which offers tech training and skills development to students from historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), with the goal of building an employee pipeline. The Network also encouraged SAP to sponsor Silicon Valley's Culture Shifting Weekend, which brings together more than 200 African American and Hispanic executives, entrepreneurs, innovators, and social impact leaders to discuss diversifying the tech industry. Pfizer tracks numerous D&I metrics and notes that 21% of its workforce — 21,000 people — are actively involved in its D&I efforts.

Finally, manage career development across all life stages. African Americans today are securing good university educations in record numbers. HBCUs, in particular, create a sizable pipeline of young talent for organizations to tap into. Companies can, of course, step up their campus recruiting efforts, but efforts to advance Black leaders must extend far beyond that.

If more African Americans are to rise through the ranks, robust — and careful —investment in retention and development is required. Research by the University of Georgia's Kecia Thomas and colleagues has shown that many Black women get this kind of support early in their careers, but it comes with a price: They are treated like "pets" whom white leaders are happy to groom, but the further they progress, the more that favored status begins to undermine them. Those who reject the pet identity, meanwhile, are perceived as threatening and face hostility and distancing from coworkers.

Mentoring is useful, and our study of Black HBS graduates shows that they were more likely than their white peers to have been formally assigned to mentors. But they derived less value from the relationship and said that informal mentorship — having senior executives (white or minority) connect with them naturally through work groups or common interests — was more effective. "A mentor helps you navigate the power structure of the firm, especially when there is no one in senior management who looks like you," one study participant told us.

Early in their careers, Black employees need safe spaces to grow and develop and to experience authentic failures and successes without being subsumed in narratives of racial limitation. Managers and mentors can provide the necessary cover. We found that the Black Harvard MBAs who did reach top management positions (13% of women, 19% of men) had been bolstered by networks of supporters.

Sponsorship — that is, recommending Black employees for promotions and stretch assignments — is even more important. Other key factors that have propelled Black Harvard MBAs into senior executive roles are line or general management experience and global assignments. With many qualified and ambitious people vying for such opportunities, politics often plays a role. So African Americans need more influential people in their corners, pressing their cases to decision-makers.

Candid feedback early on is also critical. This doesn't mean pushing protégés to assimilate (to look and act "more white"); as we've shown, that's counterproductive. It should focus on identifying and enhancing their unique strengths, overcoming skill or knowledge weaknesses, and positioning them to realize their full potential.

At later stages of their careers, Black executives should be seriously considered for high-stakes and high-profile positions and supported in the pursuit of outside interests, such as board seats, that enhance visibility. And while taking care not to tokenize but rather to create opportunities for multiple candidates, organizations can highlight those executives as role models who redefine norms of leadership and can encourage them to pass that baton by transferring connections and endorsements, sharing wisdom through storytelling, and creating opportunities for the next generation to assume senior roles. Needs differ by career stage, a fact that most published models of diversity and inclusion do not address but that is embedded in impactful programs such as the Toigo Foundation, the Partnership, and the Executive Leadership Council.

Despite antidiscrimination laws and increasing corporate investment in diversity efforts, race continues to be a major barrier to advancement in the U.S. workplace. We are far from realizing the principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy. Rather than looking to the few Black leaders who have succeeded as exemplars of exceptionalism who have beaten almost insurmountable odds, we must learn from their insights and experiences along with the experiences of those who didn't make it to the top. Perhaps more important, we need to understand why existing inclusion initiatives have made so little difference. If organizations really want a representative workforce that includes more than one or two Black leaders, their approach must change.

Our hope is that once companies understand the reality of the Black experience, they will embrace and champion policies and programs that actually help to level the playing field — and that where there aren't yet best practices, they will begin the conversations and experiments that will lead to them. This will be hard and often uncomfortable work. But we believe it's worth it, not only for African Americans but also for the many other underrepresented or marginalized groups. Now more than ever before, organizations and society should strive to benefit from the experiences, knowledge, and skills of all, not just a few. And while government policies can help, we believe that corporate leaders can have a much more powerful and immediate impact. As then-Senator Obama said in 2008, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Guest Column: Program to help small businesses, nonprofits

Kenton Tsoodle, The Journal Record, April 12, 2022

Kenton Tsoodle

Next week, we are launching the OKC Rescue Program to help Oklahoma City small businesses and nonprofits with COVID-19 economic recovery.

The Alliance has administered several other COVID relief programs for the business and nonprofit community since spring 2020, and we recently completed a survey of organizations that received funding. More than 95% of respondents reported that programs were important in supporting their stability. Funds helped them to maintain jobs and payroll, purchase equipment or technology or complete renovations to adapt their physical space. Some 88% said they still need financial assistance and assistance with marketing, payroll, equipment and operational support.

In our past work with relief programs, we've seen firsthand how small businesses and nonprofits that are provided advice, support and hands-on expertise have been able to rebound from COVID and increase their capacity. Some of the most requested services are for marketing, including with websites and outreach to customers, and for human resources to find talent and help with policies for virtual and hybrid work and updated leave policies. Recipients also ask for IT support to upgrade software and systems to handle online transactions, remote team collaboration and more virtual service delivery. Many businesses need a combination of services.

That's why the new OKC Rescue Program includes technical support funds where we match businesses and nonprofits with pre-screened, local experts who can provide advice and help for these most-requested services. Also included for small businesses is reimbursements for outdoor facade improvements, new ventilation, outdoor seating and other facility modifications.

We designed OKC Rescue to help the smallest and most vulnerable businesses. Research shows that minority-owned businesses have been negatively impacted by COVID-19 at a higher and more severe rate, so our programs have low barriers in the application process. To qualify for OKC Rescue, the business or nonprofit must be located in Oklahoma City with 100 or fewer employees. Applicants must either be a minority-owned business, be located within a Qualified Census Tract (majority low-income neighborhoods) or demonstrate economic impact of COVID-19.

The OKC Rescue Program will be administered by the Alliance for Economic Development for Oklahoma City and is funded by the city of Oklahoma City's allocation from the federal American Rescue Plan Act. Next week's column will focus more on the types of support available and how to apply.

Kenton Tsoodle is the president of The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City.

Local services help Tulsa refugees build new lives

Tim Stanley, Tulsa World, August 18, 2022

When he fled Afghanistan last year along with his parents and siblings, Shakib Qadri had no clear plan for the future.

And that uncertainty didn't suddenly go away upon arriving in the U.S.

"In my mind I thought 'What if there is no one there to meet us, to help us? What will we do?' I was a little scared for my family," he said.

But looking back now, Qadri added, it's clear it all served a purpose: It made him that much more suited for what he's doing today.

One of a handful of new YWCA Tulsa case managers who came to Tulsa as refugees, Qadri now works on behalf of fellow refugees. And one year since the U.S. withdrawal and mass evacuations from his country, it couldn't come at a better time.

With their immediate basic needs handled, Afghan refugees in Tulsa are entering a new, equally challenging phase of life in their new home. Among the concerns in front of them now are job support, transportation, language classes and becoming permanent U.S. residents.

To help, YWCA Tulsa, the official refugee support services provider for the eastern half of Oklahoma, expanded its Immigrant and Refugee Services division staff and recently opened a new south Tulsa location, 1323 E. 71st St. in the Riverbridge Office Park.

"It's an area where we know many refugee and immigrant families call home," YWCA Tulsa CEO Julie Davis said.

"We know that transportation can be a huge limitation in families receiving YWCA resources, so we are looking forward to providing more access to our services by being closer in proximity."

The Tulsa area received more than 870 of the state's Afghan refugee allotment of 1,800, and the YWCA is working with all of them, Davis said.

Services provided include case management, employment placement and support, interpretation and translation, English language classes and other general support services.

The staff expansion included 14 new employees, among them one new refugee program manager, one transportation coordinator, 10 caseworkers and two staff interpreters.

Qadri, 23, started in June. He has grown more comfortable in his new role as his English has improved, he said.

Shakib Qadri is among new YMCA Tulsa case managers who came to Tulsa as a refugee. He now works on behalf of fellow refugees from Afghanistan. Mike Simons, Tulsa World

And the fact that he has gone through a similar experience to theirs helps him gain clients' trust.

'Peace of mind'

For most Afghans, the next step toward permanent residency is applying for asylum, which allows anyone forced to flee a country for fear of persecution to legally remain in the U.S.

So far nationally, asylum petitions for Afghans are being approved at a 95% rate.

In Tulsa, under the oversight of Catholic Charities' immigration legal services program, 69 attorneys have been recruited for the project and to date have donated almost 1,200 hours of legal work.

Between all of them, Tulsa's Afghan evacuees account for 220 asylum cases, and the goal is to file all petitions by mid-2023.

"It is quite the tall task," said Tulsa attorney Kojo Asamoa-Caesar, who is leading the volunteer effort. Qadri, 23, started in June. He has grown more comfortable in his new role as his English has improved, he said.

And the fact that he has gone through a similar experience to theirs helps him gain clients' trust.

"But this is such a vital and urgent need, and I am so pleased to see the legal community in Tulsa step up in such a big way."

Each refugee family is assigned a pro bono attorney to begin the process of filing a petition.

Within 45 days of filing, an interview is scheduled in Fort Smith, Arkansas, with an asylum officer at the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services office. The result is typically received within 150 days.

With asylum comes "an accompanying peace of mind," Asamoa-Caesar said. Now on the legal path to permanent residency, "they can build their new lives and pursue their enduring dreams here in Tulsa."

'My biggest dream'

No one knows better about fleeing harm than Qadri, who is currently awaiting word on his own asylum application.

His father worked for a U.S.-based organization in Afghanistan, he said, which made the entire family a target for likely Taliban reprisals.

For weeks after the takeover, the family — including Qadri and his eight siblings — moved around, staying with different relatives and trying to keep out of sight.

Finally, it worked out for them to leave from Kabul Airport.

"We left everything behind," Qadri said. "But when you are afraid for your family, you don't care about your property. You just take care of your family."

Qadri, who was in his fourth year as a medical student when he left Afghanistan, said he hopes to soon resume his studies here. One day, he would like to be a doctor and operate a free hospital for those in need.

"That is my biggest dream," he said.

For now, though, Qadri is happy to help other refugees set goals and dreams of their own.

He tries to be "motivational," he said.

"Every time when I'm meeting my clients, I'm telling them: 'Work hard. Everyone is nice here, but you have to be self-sufficient. Just do your work. Do your best, as much as you can.'"

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Bans on Affirmative Action Led to Fewer Black, Hispanic Doctors

Robert Preidt, HealthDay News, May 4, 2022

State bans on affirmative action have prompted a precipitous decline in the number of U.S. medical students from racial/ethnic minority groups, a new study finds.

"We know that a more diverse physician workforce leads to better care for racial- and ethnic-minority patients," said lead researcher Dr. Dan Ly, an assistant professor of medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine and Health Services Research at the University of California, Los Angeles. "But we have made such poor progress in diversifying our physician workforce."

The study shows that bans on affirmative action "have had a devastating impact on the diversity of our medical student body and physician pipeline," Ly said in a UCLA news release.

The researchers analyzed enrollment data from 1985 through 2019 for 53 U.S. medical schools at public universities, which would be affected by bans on affirmative action that apply to post-secondary schools.

Thirty-two of the medical schools were in 24 states without affirmative action bans, and 21 were in eight states that banned affirmative action from 1997 to 2013: Arizona, California, Florida, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and Washington. Texas' ban was reversed in 2003.

In the year before the bans were implemented, minority students accounted for an average of 14.8% of the total enrollment of those states' public medical schools. Five years after the bans were implemented, minority student enrollment fell by 37% at those schools.

The study was published May 3 in the journal Annals of Internal Medicine.

"As our country has spent the last two years weaving through the twin pandemics of racial health disparities amplified by COVID-19 and structural racism at large, our findings are critically important," said study co-author Dr. Utibe Essien, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh.

"As we observed, affirmative action bans have resulted in a loss of underrepresented physicians, who could have been at the front lines of caring for vulnerable populations throughout the pandemic and helping to alleviate disparities in care," Essien said in the release. "My hope is that our findings will help provide policymakers with the tools to push back against affirmative action bans, not just for the diversity of the physician workforce, but for the equal and just health of our society."

Editorial: Pryor industrial park a stunning success story for Oklahoma

Editorial Board, Tulsa World, June 5, 2022

One of the biggest business development success stories in Oklahoma is leading to the transformation of northeastern Oklahoma.

Pryor's MidAmerica Industrial Park has become home to numerous large-scale projects, with billions of dollars of investment from companies representing anything from manufacturing to high tech.

The industrial park is the focus of attention for another manufacturer that could bring thousands of new jobs and billions more in investments.

Lawmakers approved and Gov. Kevin Stitt signed legislation to provide nearly $700 million in incentives in order to lure the company, thought to be Panasonic, which is looking for a U.S. site to build electric vehicle batteries.

But even without this development, the industrial park has been the landing spot of numerous, enviable projects.

In 2011, MAIP welcomed Google, which built a massive data center there. Since then, the tech giant has invested about $3 billion at the park and expanded its data center.

Another tech company, Northern Data AG, plans to build its North American headquarters at MAIP, bringing with it a $275 million investment and 150 jobs.

Electric vehicle maker Canoo has broken ground on its planned $482.6 million, 3 million-square-foot automobile factory, which is slated to bring 1,500 jobs to Mayes County.

These large projects have had a spin-off effect. With such a heavy influx of new jobs, developers are busily adding retail, housing and parks to the mix. The Cherokee Nation is spending $16 million on a child care center at MAIP. MidAmerica has spent more than $15 million on education and workplace training since 2017.

And now comes the possibility of MAIP's biggest tenant yet. If recruitment efforts are successful, the officially unnamed manufacturer could spend up to $6 billion on a factory that would create 6,000 jobs making EV batteries.

These developments have not only boosted employment in the area, but enhanced opportunities for local businesses and increased land values for area schools. Pryor Public Schools has seen its valuation increase tenfold since 2009, helping it secure funding for district-wide improvements.

All this change brings some growing pains as area communities rush to keep up with the influx of new workers and their needs. But while some change can be uncomfortable, we see this as a worthwhile exchange for the opportunities that have arisen.

High-tech services and electric vehicle manufacturing are forward-looking industries that diversify the state's economy and provide high-paying jobs. MAIP is on a roll right now, and northeastern Oklahoma stands to benefit in a major way.

'Land of opportunity': Pryor builds on foundation for growth with new wave of investors, jobs

Rhett Morgan, Tulsa World, May 2, 2022

Dave Miller feels a buzz around Pryor these days, and it's not just from the beer he brews as an entrepreneur.

"It really feels like something is going to happen here," said Miller, co-owner of the local Fat Toad Brewing Co. "A lot of it's generated by OOWA (Oklahoma Ordnance Works Authority). But also, Pryor Main Street is revitalizing.

"So for us, being entrepreneurs, we know that it brings people to our city. This is really the first time that we thought, 'OK, things are happening. There's dirt moving.' This kind of feels like a tipping point, I guess you would say."

Pryor has been riding an economic development wave the past 10 months. Over that span, more than $750 million in investment has been announced at the local MidAmerica Industrial Park (MAIP) from electric vehicle maker Canoo ($482.6 million), tech company Northern Data ($270 million) and the Cherokee Nation ($16 million).

MAIP also is a finalist for an unnamed manufacturer that, according to the industrial park, could spend $6 billion on a factory that would create 6,000 high-paying positions.

"Pryor is a great town and all, but there in the past haven't been those jobs for younger people," Miller said. "This gives kids who leave (town) the hopes of maybe coming back to their hometown and having a nice job."

Miller and his wife, Angela, along with neighbor Chris Harrison and his wife, Kim, started a small tap room across from the industrial park in 2018. As they begin to outgrow their space, park operator OOWA asked the group if it wanted to be part of the MAIP-inspired District, a 162-acre development that incorporates retail, residential, parks and trails.

Fat Toad hopped on the chance, moving in September into a larger space and adding wood-fired pizza to its mix.

"They wanted us to kind of cater to a crowd that they wanted to help bring out there," said Miller, whose day job is assistant principal at Pryor Middle School. "That's where we landed and that's where we are.

"OOWA and (head of MAIP) David Stewart and his group showed faith in us and reached out to us. We realized what our dream was and kind of compared it with their dream of commerce out this way in the district and foot traffic and people enjoying the quality of life in Pryor. It's been there, but it hasn't been there to near the level of what we think we're about to see."

GETTING TO WORK

MAIP will have to hustle to fill the at least 1,650 jobs that Canoo and Northern Data plan to bring.

To that end, the park in January announced the addition of former Oklahoma CareerTech State Director Marcie Mack to its workforce development team. Among those supporting her efforts is Director of Workforce Development Scott Fry, who leads MidAmerica Delivers, a comprehensive workforce strategy.

Since 2017, MidAmerica has invested more than $15 million in its education and workforce training programs. Its on-site workforce partners include the Cherokee Nation, Rogers State University and Northeast Tech. In addition, the MidAmerica Center of Excellence serves as a one-stop career center to provide direction to job applicants.

"We're making sure that with our recent announcements, we are holistic in our approach and making sure that we are continuing to provide support for our current companies that have provided great workforce and great working opportunities for individuals in the region," Mack said.

"The partnerships that we have across the region and across the state and nationally are going to be vital in making sure that are helping to connect the talent that the companies are looking for. It takes all of us to make this happen."

Fry estimates about 160 jobs are open at the park, many of which are entry-level production positions that stay open regularly because of high turnover rates.

"There is no doubt that this is going to be a challenge," he said. "But we have some fantastic partners that are on board with us, and Marcie is putting together some great strategies that will help us reach outside our typical boundaries to attract people to the community.

"I think it's the land of opportunity. That's only going to grow as the park continues to grow. The opportunities for people to be successful locally are going to be absolutely endless."

CHEROKEE NATION ASSIST

The Cherokee Nation stands to figure prominently in any area labor push, particularly with Canoo. Company CEO Tony Aquila has said he wants 50% of his employees to be war veterans and Native Americans.

"He (Aquila) sees the value in the Cherokee Nation, particularly our ability to do what we've done for other compa-

nies, which is help recruit a workforce and in some cases, help train a workforce," Cherokee Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said. "Canoo is very much a future-looking company.

"We're talking about an industry that is going to be a dominant presence in the company for years to come: electric vehicles and adjacent industries and technologies. The Cherokee Nation wants to be a part of that and that's the reason we're poised to help that investment out."

For many, building a career and living the American dream means having a family. Recognizing that, the Cherokee Nation last month announced plans for its $16 million child care center to be built on land donated by MAIP.

The 27,000-square-foot facility will generate 50 jobs.

"We looked at what they're doing at The District there for retail, housing, amenities like parks and trails," Hoskin said. "That looked like a great fit for us to expand our child care offering."

The head of the Nation has said that only 20% of working parents in Pryor have access to available child care.

"A lot of families have to make a decision about entering the workforce based on whether it makes economic sense for the household," Hoskin said. "Part of that calculation is child care."

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

The Pryor area has witnessed this large-scale industrial bump before.

Google, the California-based internet services firm, built its first data center at MAIP in 2011. Eight years later, the company announced a $600 million expansion, thrusting to $3 billion its total investment in Mayes County.

Google's presence has provided far-reaching benefits to the area, particularly to Pryor Public Schools in the form of property tax revenue.

From 2009 to 2022, the school district's net assessed valuation has gone from about $80 million to more than $844 million, greatly increasing the district's bonding capacity and allowing it to make a substantial investment in facilities across the district without raising property taxes, said Lisa Muller, superintendent of Pryor Public Schools.

A prime example, she said, is an $81 million bond issue approved earlier this month that will finish renovations to two elementary schools, upgrade the middle school and make significant additions to the high school, including a new football stadium.

The staying power of companies such as Canoo, which will build in the Chouteau-Mazie school district, and Northern Data (Pryor district) ultimately could generate similar outcomes.

"What I hear from families all the time is they want their children to be able to stay here in the area and not feel like they have to move elsewhere to have those good jobs," Muller said. "We, of course, have a lot of opportunity already in the industrial part, and the companies moving in just add to that."

Legislation to Create Pathways to Employment Signed into Law

Communications & Public Affairs, Oklahoma House of Representatives, May 10, 2022

Bipartisanship opened doors for a new law that creates employment opportunities for Oklahomans recently released from state custody.

House Bill 3002, by Sen. Zack Taylor and Rep. Cyndi Munson, was signed into law on Wednesday.

The new law amends the requirements and qualifications for five occupational licenses. The licensure changes involve the Oklahoma scrap metal dealers, the Oklahoma Alcoholic Beverage Control Act, motor vehicle dealers, used motor vehicle dealers, and the Oklahoma Micropigmentation Regulation Act.

"Oklahoma's unemployment rate is low, which is great. However, the pandemic decimated our workforce," said Munson, D-OKC. "Removing unnecessary barriers to employment, especially those in high demand, can help our economy. This new law is a step in that direction."

The law maintains each licensing entity's ability to consider criminal history. However, the entity must identify if the crime relates to the occupation and is a threat to public safety.

"It's important that we streamline our occupational licensing requirements and allow all Oklahomans opportunities to succeed," said Taylor, R-Seminole. "This measure will allow Oklahomans that have felonies on their records to have more employment opportunities but not at the risk of public safety. We included important safeguards to ensure the licensing board must take past crimes into consideration and make sure an applicant does not pose a public safety risk performing the job for which they've applied. This measure really opens the door for non-violent offenders and allows them to re-enter society and earn an honest living."

Oklahoma benefits from a low recidivism rate compared to other states. However, the state's high incarceration rate means the number of people who return to prison in Oklahoma is still a large population.

"This bipartisan effort to prioritize employment opportunities for individuals recently released from state custody will change lives," Munson said. "Financial stability is often the difference between a happy, productive life and prison. I hope we continue to build on this momentum to create a criminal justice system that focuses on rehabilitation."

Governor signs expungement bill in effort to ease re-entry to the workforce

Hogan Gore, The Oklahoman, May 4, 2022

A new law is designed to help Oklahomans with criminal records attain a clean slate.

In an effort to more easily share information between arresting agencies and the state's courts, House Bill 3316 creates an avenue to automatically expunge certain criminal cases. Gov. Kevin Stitt signed the bill on Monday.

Those expungements will be contingent on a series of requirements already laid out in state statute. But for cases that do meet the new law's standards, those criminal records will be automatically sealed beginning in November 2025.

After passing both the House and Senate floors with a combined five votes against, the bill aims to take a financial and future burden off of those that have served their time.

"There was certainly a general consensus that, you know, this this isn't anything that's partisan related; what it's about is it's about humans," said Rep. Nicole Miller, R-Edmond, the bill's primary House author. "So this is really a measure to help people."

Under the bill, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation will comb through records data monthly and send a list to arresting and prosecuting agencies, including all clean-slate eligible cases.

After receiving the list, those agencies have 45 days to object to a record's expungement. For uncontested tested cases, following a judicial review, an expungement order will be issued within 45 days.

"These people are just trying to get back on their feet," Miller said. "If you check the box (on a job application) that you have some something on your record, you're only 50% likely to be called back and even less likely than that to get a job."

Notable exclusions from clean-slate eligibility include sex crimes, pending charges and those currently serving a felony charge.

Prosecutors and law enforcement officials can challenge based on the case falling short of clean-slate criteria, evidence the person in question continues to participate in criminal activity or that a person still owes restitution fees.

"It doesn't change who qualifies for expungement. If you won't qualify today, you won't qualify when this goes into effect," said Marilyn Davidson, director of Right on Crime in Oklahoma, about the expungement bill.

While Davidson said the process is not technically automatic on account of standards and possible contests, she feels it will help take away the cost for people seeking to seal their records.

Typically, someone looking to expunge a criminal record needs an attorney to properly make the request.

And even though nonprofits in Oklahoma have helped to provide legal counsel for those requests, an overwhelming number of people seeking those services showed a need for a change.

The legislation is modeled after similar bills that were implemented in Utah and Louisiana by Clean State Initiative and Code for America, two national groups focused on expungement reform.

Davidson said the point of the bill is to help people get back into the workforce and to alleviate the financial burden associated with the criminal justice industry.

"If you're applying for a large national company and you have to check that box for a felony crime, you're kicked out of consideration," Davidson said. "There's a lot of highly qualified individuals in our state who are missing out on good-paying jobs because they have to click that felony box."

Moving forward, many of those individuals' cases will be sealed three years after law goes into effect on Nov.1 of this year.

House Bill 3316

Miller, Talley, Echols, Fugate, Stark, Waldron, Goodwin & Lepak of the House and Pugh & Rader of the Senate

An Act relating to expungements; amending 22 O.S. 2021, Sections 18 and 19, which relate to the expungement of criminal arrest records; providing for the automatic sealing of records under certain circumstances; defining term; providing procedures and guidelines for the automatic expungement of certain eligible cases; requiring the submission of certain report to the Legislature; requiring the promulgation of rules; providing for the filing of expungement petitions and unsealing of records apart from the automatic expungement process; prohibiting any cause of action for failing to identify eligible cases; and providing an effective date.

SUBJECT: Expungements
BE IT ENACTED BY THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA: SECTION 1. AMENDATORY 22 O.S. 2021, Section 18, is amended to read as follows:

Section 18. A. Persons authorized to file a motion for expungement, as provided herein, must be within one of the following categories:

1. The person has been acquitted;

2. The conviction was reversed with instructions to dismiss by an appellate court of competent jurisdiction, or an appellate court of competent jurisdiction reversed the conviction and the prosecuting agency subsequently dismissed the charge;

3. The factual innocence of the person was established by the use of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) evidence subsequent to conviction, including a person who has been released from prison at the time innocence was established;

4. The person has received a full pardon by the Governor for the crime for which the person was sentenced;

5. The person was arrested and no charges of any type, including charges for an offense different than that for which the person was originally arrested, are filed and the statute of limitations has expired or the prosecuting agency has declined to file charges;

6. The person was under eighteen (18) years of age at the time the offense was committed and the person has received a full pardon for the offense;

7. The person was charged with one or more misdemeanor or felony crimes, all charges have been dismissed, the person has never been convicted of a felony, no misdemeanor or felony charges are pending against the person and the statute of limitations for refiling the charge or charges has expired or the prosecuting agency confirms that the charge or charges will not be refiled; provided, however, this category shall not apply to charges that have been dismissed following the completion of a deferred judgment or delayed sentence;

8. The person was charged with a misdemeanor, the charge was dismissed following the successful completion of a deferred judgment or delayed sentence, the person has never been convicted of a felony, no misdemeanor or felony charges are pending against the person and at least one (1) year has passed since the charge was dismissed;

9. The person was charged with a nonviolent felony offense not listed in Section 571 of Title 57 of the Oklahoma Statutes, the charge was dismissed following the successful completion of a deferred judgment or delayed sentence, the person has never been convicted of a felony, no misdemeanor or felony charges are pending against the person and at least five (5) years have passed since the charge was dismissed;

10. The person was convicted of a misdemeanor offense, the person was sentenced to a fine of less than Five Hundred One Dollars ($501.00) without a term of imprisonment or a suspended sentence, the fine has been paid or satisfied by time served in lieu of the fine, the person has not been convicted of a felony and no felony or misdemeanor charges are pending against the person;

11. The person was convicted of a misdemeanor offense, the person was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, a suspended sentence or a fine in an amount greater than Five Hundred Dollars ($500.00), the person has not been convicted of a felony, no felony or misdemeanor charges are pending against the person and at least five (5) years have passed since the end of the last misdemeanor sentence;

12. The person was convicted of a nonviolent felony offense not listed in Section 571 of Title 57 of the Oklahoma Statutes, the person has not been convicted of any other felony, the person has not been convicted of a separate misdemeanor in the last seven (7) years, no felony or misdemeanor charges are pending against the person and at least five (5) years have passed since the completion of the sentence for the felony conviction;

13. The person was convicted of not more than two felony offenses, none of which is a felony offense listed in Section 13.1 of Title 21 of the Oklahoma Statutes or any offense that would require the person to register pursuant to the provisions of the Sex Offenders Registration Act, no felony or misdemeanor charges are pending against the person, and at least ten (10) years have passed since the completion of the sentence for the felony conviction;

14. The person has been charged or arrested or is the subject of an arrest warrant for a crime that was committed by another person who has appropriated or used the person's name or

other identification without the person's consent or authorization; or

15. The person was convicted of a nonviolent felony offense not listed in Section 571 of Title 57 of the Oklahoma Statutes which was subsequently reclassified as a misdemeanor under Oklahoma law, the person is not currently serving a sentence for a crime in this state or another state, at least thirty (30) days have passed since the completion or commutation of the sentence for the crime that was reclassified as a misdemeanor, any restitution ordered by the court to be paid by the person has been satisfied in full, and any treatment program ordered by the court has been successfully completed by the person, including any person who failed a treatment program which resulted in an accelerated or revoked sentence that has since been successfully completed by the person or the person can show successful completion of a treatment program at a later date. Persons seeking an expungement of records under the provisions of this paragraph may utilize the expungement forms provided in Section 18a of this title.

B. For purposes of Section 18 et seq. of this title, "expungement" shall mean the sealing of criminal records, as well as any public civil record, involving actions brought by and against the State of Oklahoma arising from the same arrest, transaction or occurrence.

C. Beginning three (3) years after the effective date of this act and subject to the availability of funds, individuals with clean slate eligible cases shall be eligible to have their criminal records sealed automatically. For purposes of Section 18 et seq. of this title, "clean slate eligible case" shall mean a case where each charge within the case is pursuant to paragraph 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14 or 15 of subsection A of this section.

D. For purposes of seeking an expungement under the provisions of paragraph 10, 11, 12 or 13 of subsection A of this section, offenses arising out of the same transaction or occurrence shall be treated as one conviction and offense.

E. Records expunged pursuant to paragraphs 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 of subsection A of this section shall be sealed to the public but not to law enforcement agencies for law enforcement purposes. Records expunged pursuant to paragraphs 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 of subsection A of this section shall be admissible in any subsequent criminal prosecution to prove the existence of a prior conviction or prior deferred judgment without the necessity of a court order requesting the unsealing of the records. Records expunged pursuant to paragraph 4, 6, 12 or 13 of subsection A of this section may also include the sealing of Pardon and Parole Board records related to an application for a pardon. Such records shall be sealed to the public but not to the Pardon and Parole Board.

SECTION 2. AMENDATORY 22 O.S. 2021, Section 19, is amended to read as follows:

Section 19. A. Any person qualified under Section 18 of this title may petition the district court of the district in which the arrest information pertaining to the person is located for the sealing of all or any part of the record, except basic identification information.

B. The process for the automatic expungement of a clean slate eligible case as defined in subsection C of Section 18 of this title is as follows:

1. On a monthly basis, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation shall identify cases which are clean slate eligible by conducting a search of the criminal history repository records of the Bureau;

2. The Bureau shall, on a monthly basis, provide a list of clean slate eligible cases to the prosecuting agency and the arresting agency;

3. The prosecuting agency, arresting agency, and the Bureau may, no later than forty-five (45) days from the day on which the notice described in paragraph 2 of this subsection is transmitted, object to an automatic expungement and such objection shall be transmitted to all parties. An objection may be made for any of the following reasons:

> a. after reviewing the agency record, the agency believes the case does not meet the definition of a clean slate eligible case,
> b. the individual has not paid court-ordered restitution to the victim, or
> c. the agency has a reasonable belief, grounded in supporting facts, that an individual with a clean slate eligible case is continuing to engage in criminal activity, whether charged or not charged, within or outside the state;

4. If an agency identified in paragraph 3 of this subsection objects for a reason described in paragraph 3 of this subsection within forty-five (45) days of the day on which the notice described in paragraph 2 of this subsection is transmitted, the record shall not be expunged. Once a year, the Bureau shall submit a report to the Legislature with a list of all cases where a record was not expunged pursuant to this paragraph; and

5. After forty-five (45) days pass from the day on which the notice described in paragraph 2 of this subsection is sent, the Bureau shall provide to the courts a list of all cases where responses from all parties were received and no parties objected.

The court shall review this list and provide to all agencies that have criminal history records a signed expungement order for all cases approved. Upon receipt of a signed expungement order, each agency shall seal the relevant records.

The Bureau and the Oklahoma Supreme Court may promulgate rules to govern the process for automatic expungement of records for a clean slate eligible case in accordance with this subsection.

C. 1. Nothing in this section precludes an individual from filing a petition for expungement of records that are eligible

for automatic expungement under subsection C of Section 18 of this title if an automatic expungement has not occurred pursuant to subsection B of this section.

2. An individual does not have a cause of action for damages as a result of the failure of the Bureau to identify a case as eligible for automatic expungement.

D. An automatic expungement granted under subsection B of this section does not preclude an individual from requesting the unsealing of records in accordance with subsection O of this section.

E. Upon the filing of a petition or entering of a court order as prescribed in subsection A of this section, the court shall set a date for a hearing and shall provide thirty (30) days of notice of the hearing to the prosecuting agency, the arresting agency, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, and any other person or agency whom the court has reason to believe may have relevant information related to the sealing of such record.

F. Upon a finding that the harm to privacy of the person in interest or dangers of unwarranted adverse consequences outweigh the public interest in retaining the records, the court may order such records, or any part thereof except basic identification information, to be sealed. If the court finds that neither sealing of the records nor maintaining of the records unsealed by the agency would serve the ends of justice, the court may enter an appropriate order limiting access to such records. Any order entered under this subsection shall specify those agencies to which such order shall apply. Any order entered pursuant to this subsection may be appealed by the petitioner, the prosecuting agency, the arresting agency, or the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation to the Oklahoma Supreme Court in accordance with the rules of the Oklahoma Supreme Court. In all such appeals, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation is a necessary party and must be given notice of the appellate proceedings.

G. Upon the entry of an order to seal the records, or any part thereof, or upon an automatic expungement described in subsection B of this section, the subject official actions shall be deemed never to have occurred, and the person in interest and all criminal justice agencies may properly reply, upon any inquiry in the matter, that no such action ever occurred and that no such record exists with respect to such person.

H. Inspection of the records included in the order may thereafter be permitted by the court only upon petition by the person in interest who is the subject of such records, the Attorney General, or by the prosecuting agency and only to those persons and for such purposes named in such petition.

I. Employers, educational institutions, state and local government agencies, officials, and employees shall not, in any application or interview or otherwise, require an applicant to disclose any information contained in sealed records. An applicant need not, in answer to any question concerning arrest and criminal records, provide information that has been sealed, including any reference to or information concerning such sealed information and may state that no such action has ever occurred. Such an application may not be denied solely because of the refusal of the applicant to disclose arrest and criminal records information that has been sealed.

J. All arrest and criminal records information existing prior to the effective date of this section, except basic identification information, is also subject to sealing in accordance with subsection C F of this section.

K. Nothing in this section shall be construed to authorize the physical destruction of any criminal justice records.

L. For the purposes of this section, sealed materials which are recorded in the same document as unsealed material may be recorded in a separate document, and sealed, then obliterated in the original document.

M. For the purposes of this section, district court index reference of sealed material shall be destroyed, removed or obliterated.

N. Any record ordered to be sealed pursuant to this section, if not unsealed within ten (10) years of the expungement order, may be obliterated or destroyed at the end of the ten-year period.

O. Subsequent to records being sealed as provided herein, the prosecuting agency, the arresting agency, the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation, or other interested person or agency may petition the court for an order unsealing said records. Upon filing of a petition the court shall set a date for hearing, which hearing may be closed at the discretion of the court, and shall provide thirty (30) days of notice to all interested parties. If, upon hearing, the court determines there has been a change of conditions or that there is a compelling reason to unseal the records, the court may order all or a portion of the records unsealed.

P. Nothing herein shall prohibit the introduction of evidence regarding actions sealed pursuant to the provisions of this section at any hearing or trial for purposes of impeaching the credibility of a witness or as evidence of character testimony pursuant to Section 2608 of Title 12 of the Oklahoma Statutes.

Q. If a person qualifies for an expungement under the provisions of paragraph 3 of subsection A of Section 18 of this title and said petition for expungement is granted by the court, the court shall order the reimbursement of all filing fees and court costs incurred by the petitioner as a result of filing the expungement request.

SECTION 3. This act shall become effective November 1, 2022.

Passed the House of Representatives the 9th day of March, 2022.

Passed the Senate the 27th day of April, 2022.

Parental Participation in a Pandemic Labor Market

Olivia Lofton, Nicolas Petrosky-Nadeau, and Lily Seitelman, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, April 5, 2021

Gender gaps in labor market outcomes during the pandemic largely reflect differences in parents' experiences. Labor force participation fell much less for fathers compared with other men and all women at the onset of the pandemic; the recovery has been more pronounced for men and women without children. Meanwhile, labor force participation among mothers declined with the start of the school year. Evidence suggests flexibility in setting work schedules can offset some of the adverse impact on mothers' employment, while the ability to work from home does not.

One defining aspect of work during the COVID-19 pandemic has been whether or not people can work from home. Public health policies and private decisions regarding how to contain the spread of the virus have required a shift in where and how people work. Another defining aspect of the pandemic has been the widespread disruption to schooling that has required parents to shift when they work. With schools either fully closed or using some mode of partial remote learning, parents have been required to shift a portion of their available time to supervising their children's education.

This Economic Letter discusses findings in our recent paper (Lofton, Petrosky-Nadeau, and Seitelman 2021) on the pandemic's disparate impacts on mothers and fathers and their contributions to widening gender gaps in the labor market. Detailed microdata on prime-age workers from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Current Population Survey (CPS) show labor force participation fell much less for fathers as compared with women and nonparent men in spring 2020, during the initial strict containment measures that were implemented to slow the spread of the virus. The subsequent recovery in participation has been more pronounced for men and women without children, particularly with the start of the school year. Overall, we find that, if mothers had experienced a recovery similar to that of nonparent women, their December 2020 participation rate would have been 2 percentage points higher than the actual rate. That is, approximately 700,000 additional prime-age women would have returned to the workforce. We further find evidence that the ability to set work schedules, more than the availability of work from home possibilities, provides mothers with the flexibility needed to return to the workforce during the recovery from the pandemic.

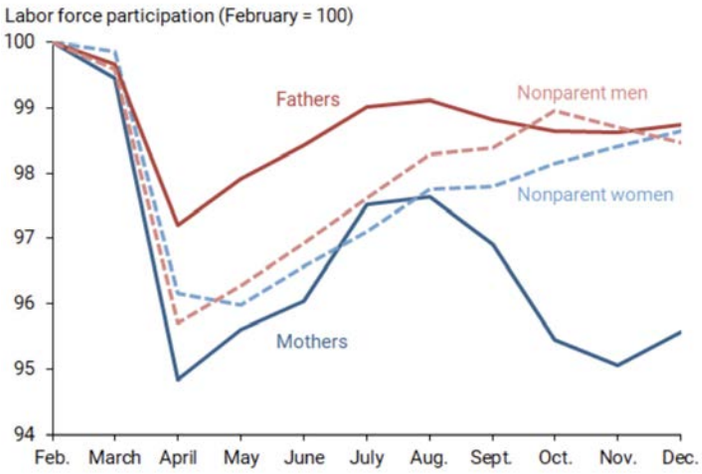
Parents working in a pandemic labor market

The onset of the pandemic and massive disruption to economic activity affected women to a greater extent than men (Alon et al. 2020, Cajner et al. 2020). Following sharp declines in April 2020, labor force participation rates for prime-age men and women—individuals between ages 25 and 54 who compose the bulk of the workforce—had recovered half of their earlier declines by midsummer. Since July, the participation rate for men has remained at the same level, about 1% lower than the pre-pandemic level. Women's participation, however, fell again to around 75%, a 2.2 percentage point decline from before the pandemic.

These gender differences are driven by the differential impacts of the pandemic on parents. Figure 1 shows the evolution of participation in the labor market for mothers and fathers during the pandemic relative to their respective rates of participation in February 2020 (solid blue and red lines). The figure also shows the rates of participation for women and men without a child at home (dashed blue and red lines).

Figure 1

Evolution in labor force participation during the pandemic



Source: Authors' calculations using data from Current Population Survey.

The initial impact of the pandemic was much more pronounced on mothers' participation in the labor market than on that of fathers. And while mothers' participation partially recovered during the summer, it reversed course with the start of the new school year, falling back to April lows. This contrasts with the participation patterns of nonparent women and men: nonparents experienced similar declines at the onset of the pandemic and were slightly below pre-pandemic rates in December, alongside fathers.

Fathers account for about one-third of the 1 percentage point decline in men's labor force participation rate since the start of the pandemic. This contrasts dramatically with the impact on mothers, who account for nearly three-fourths of the 2.2 percentage point decline in women's participation rate. If mothers had experienced a recovery similar to that of other women, their participation rate would have been approximately 73% in December 2020, 2 percentage points higher than their actual rate. That means approximately 700,000 additional prime-age mothers

would have been in the workforce at the end of the year.

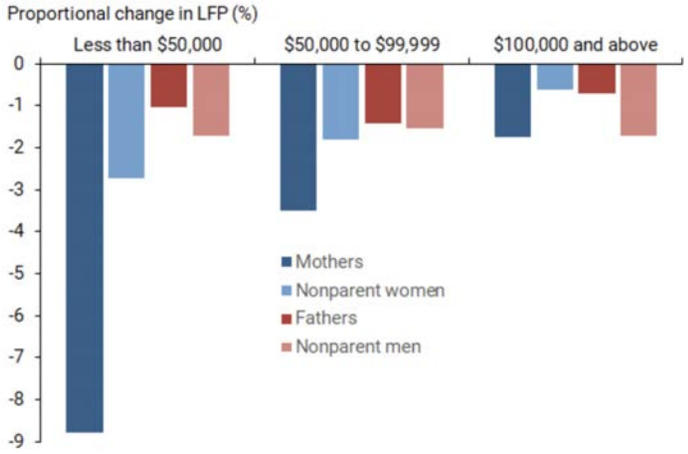
The disproportionate burden of the pandemic recession on women, especially mothers, contrasts sharply with the situation during the Great Recession. The participation rates for men, especially nonparents, fell more than for women during the three years covering the Great Recession and the initial recovery period. The paths for mothers and fathers were similar overall, with fathers faring slightly worse during the first couple years of that period.

Unequal impact across demographic groups

Labor market outcomes vary significantly across demographic groups during recessions in general, and a pandemic recession in particular. The disparate gender and parental labor market impacts of the pandemic are amplified across the household income distribution. To study this, we restrict the population to households with two or more adults and sort individuals into three groups defined by the distribution of household income before the onset of the pandemic. Figure 2 reports the change in labor market participation between February and December 2020 for parents and men and women without children at home according to income.

Figure 2

Labor force participation by income group in the pandemic



Source: Authors' calculations using data from Current Population Survey. Data show proportional change in labor force participation (LFP) between February and December 2020.

Mothers in the lowest income group exited the labor force at a rate four times that of mothers in the highest household income group (dark blue bars in Figure 2). That is, participation for mothers in households with an annual income below $50,000 per year declined nearly 9%, while mothers in households with incomes above $100,000 per year fell a little under 2% below their pre-pandemic participation rate.

Meanwhile, the decline in participation for fathers (dark red bars) was smaller than for mothers across all household income groups. One sharp contrast is within the lowest income group, with participation for fathers suffering only a fraction of the losses experienced by mothers. By comparison, changes in participation across the household income distribution were similar for men and women without children at home (light blue and light red bars). These differences may in part reflect the particular manner in which the pandemic has affected how people work.

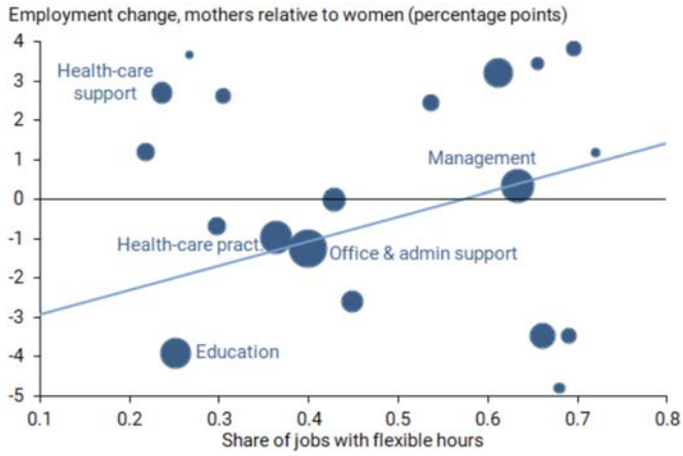
Telework and flexibility in setting work schedules in a pandemic

Pandemic-related health measures have placed constraints on in-person work. At the same time, the additional childcare burden caused by school and day care closures have placed greater importance on flexible work schedules, as parents have been required to shift part of their available time to supervising their children's education. Survey evidence points to a large shift toward mothers being the sole providers of childcare since May 2020, even in dual-earner households (Zamarro and Prados, 2021). The same surveys find that women—particularly mothers—who remain employed have not reduced the numbers of hours they work on the job during the week.

These responsibilities create conflict when jobs require a physical presence (Mongey, Pilossoph, and Weinberg 2020), but also when flexibility in work schedules is limited. We examined the relation between the ability to do work from home, flexibility in setting work schedules, and changes in parental employment during the pandemic. We did so by complementing detailed CPS employment microdata with measures of the degree of telework ability and work flexibility using responses to the BLS American Time Use Survey Leave Modules. In particular, we perform two sets of rankings: first, we rank occupations according to the share of jobs that can be done from home, and second, we rank occupations based on the share of jobs that provide flexibility in setting start and end times.

Figure 3

Flexible job schedules more supportive for mothers



Source: Authors' calculations using data from Current Population Survey and American Time Use Survey job leave module.

We find that the second ranking, flexibility in setting work schedules, offsets some of the adverse impact of the pandemic on mothers' employment, whereas the availability of teleworking did not. Figure 3 plots the ratio of the change in mothers' employment relative to the change in women's employment for a given occupation from February to December 2020 on the vertical axis, and the share of jobs with flexible hours for that occupation on the horizontal axis. The figure shows that, in occupations with flexible work schedules such as management, the ratio of mothers' to women's employment did not change significantly during the pandemic. In contrast, occupations with rigid work schedules—such as education—saw pronounced declines in mothers' relative to women's employment within the same occupation.

Conclusions

The pandemic recession differentiated parents from the rest of the workforce and adversely affected mothers in particular, as the effects of the virus on society persisted. Prime-age men and women without a child in the household experienced broadly similar labor market dynamics from the onset of the pandemic through December 2020. Prime-age men with a child at home fared better than all other groups. By contrast, prime-age women with a child at home experienced a significantly weaker labor market recovery. In addition, flexibility in work schedules appears to have provided a better support than the ability to work from home as one way to help mothers stay employed. This is likely due to inflexible childcare hours during periods of remote schooling.

If the pandemic persists, further delaying women with children from returning to the labor market, there is a risk that the delay could damage their future earnings potential and reduce the number of mothers who eventually return to work. Moreover, if household behavioral adaptations—a reversion to older gender norms of household tasks and responsibilities—are sustained beyond the recession, the pandemic could prevent a cohort of mothers from fully recovering their former roles in the labor market. Finally, the lack of childcare support and flexibility laid bare by the pandemic may affect the labor supply decisions of future parents, with long-lasting implications for gender equality in labor force participation, employment, and earnings gaps.

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Balancing Hopes, Dreams and a Low-Paying College Major

Anna Helhoski, NerdWallet, June 3, 2022

Humanities majors are more than a punchline. Not everyone can or wants to be a STEM major, and the world would be a poorer place if they were.

To have great things to read, music that inspires, perspectives that challenge us — to have a sense of reward and meaning in life — we must have students who pursue college degrees that don't lead directly to a big paycheck.

That turns the pursuit of intellectual curiosity and artistic appreciation into a balancing act: the likelihood you'll make a good living versus the debt you incur along the way.

"I encourage students to find this balance between what they like and what pays," says Nicole Smith, research professor and chief economist at the Georgetown University Center for Education and the Workforce. "I'm not discounting how beneficial these positions are to our society as a whole, but if you can't pay back your student loan, you'll be in a serious state," Smith says.

Liberal arts grads face longer odds compared with science, technology, engineering and mathematics degrees, but a well-chosen humanities major doesn't have to be a vow of poverty.

How long does it take to recoup what you paid?

To assess the value of earning a specific degree at a specific institution, consider the concept of price-to-earnings premium, spearheaded by Michael Itzkowitz, senior fellow of higher education at Third Way, a center-left think tank.

It measures what you pay out of pocket, including loans, against the amount you'll earn each year above the earnings of a typical high school graduate. The results show how quickly you can get a return on investment in your college major.

The majority of liberal arts degrees lead to a "pretty good ROI," says Itzkowitz, but the specific program you graduate with and the type of degree you earn will affect individual outcomes.

The bachelor's degree programs that allow graduates to recoup their costs within five years or less include what you'd expect: Registered nursing, electrical engineering and dental assistants all make the list.

Among the programs with no economic ROI at all: drama, fine arts and anthropology.

Itzkowitz says the majority of college programs enable students to recoup costs within 10 years or less. "College is still worth it the vast majority of the time," he says.

Unfortunately, his research also found nearly one-quarter of all college programs of study show graduates failing to recoup their costs in the 20 years after graduation.

There are several tools that can help you compare data on costs, earnings and debt:

- The College Scorecard, a data tool from the U.S. Department of Education.
- An interactive map of price-to-earnings premiums from Third Way.
- The Buyer Beware tool from the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.

Of course, education and major aren't the only predictors of income. Your wages will also be affected by where you live, your gender and race, whether you work in the public or private sector, and your experience level.

Should you get a graduate degree?

Your humanities degree could go much further if you get an advanced degree — generally, the more education you have, the greater your earnings, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

But you should continue to weigh cost versus benefit since it's also easier to rack up debt. A graduate degree may increase your earning potential, or it may just increase your debt.

For example, if you majored in liberal arts for your bachelor's degree you can expect a median annual wage of $50,000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

But if you get a graduate degree in law, taking on more debt, you could earn a median of $126,930. A master's of fine arts, on the other hand, is unlikely to yield higher earnings: The annual median wage is $42,000.

Your other options could include a minor in a field with higher earnings, an internship to get on-the-job experience or finding less-expensive graduate programs if your intended field requires it.

If you're taking on additional student debt, remember that the federal government offers payment plans that tie the size of your payment to your income. Most private loans don't.

What are your options if your earnings are low?

If you're already working in a low-paying field and you have student loan debt, look at how you can lower payments or discharge your debt.

If you're having trouble making payments, consider enrolling in an income-driven repayment plan, which ties payments to your monthly income. Your payment amounts will increase as your earnings do, too.

Those working in public sector fields should learn the ins and outs of public service loan forgiveness, a red-tape-laden process of getting your loans discharged after 10 years of payments on a qualifying payment plan while working full time in a qualifying field.

Editorial: Don't expect HB 1933 to help employers fill jobs

Editorial Board, Tulsa World, July 25, 2022

If Oklahoma wants to help employers hire workers to fill long-vacant positions, don't expect House Bill 1933 to offer much help.

The bill, which goes into effect on Jan. 1, would cut the span that jobless Oklahomans can receive unemployment benefits from 26 weeks to 16.

As noted recently in a report by the Oklahoma Watch nonprofit news outlet, HB 1933 was touted as a way to help employers save money on unemployment insurance, and it may well succeed in doing that once Jan. 1 rolls around.

But the expectation that it will nudge people into the workplace doesn't take into account the complexities of the state labor environment or the challenges job seekers face.

The common narrative pushing legislation like HB 1933 is that people are unwilling to work if they are receiving unemployment benefits that are too generous. There are a number of holes in this argument.

Oklahoma's unemployment rate now sits at 2.8%, which is near historic lows. Labor force participation, now at just over 60%, is on par with historical averages dating back four decades, and not too far below national averages.

In short, most people who want jobs are working, and are doing so at rates that are historically consistent.

So, why are some jobs so hard to fill? The reasons are numerous.

For starters, Oklahoma has long had challenges with workforce development. Many jobs require skills and education that are not being met. This is an ongoing concern in Oklahoma, so it's no surprise that demand for high-skill workers is not being supplied.

There also is fierce pay competition. Some jobs, particularly in service industries, have not offered the same pay of other employment sectors.

Medical marijuana provides a valuable example. That industry, which has only been around since 2019, employs nearly 17,000 Oklahomans — about twice that of construction — and boasts average pay ranging between $43,000 and $49,000 a year. Lower-paying or more difficult jobs are losing out to industries like this.

Some job-seekers have to make difficult life decisions. Those needing child care to work will pay more than $8,500 average a year for care; costs rise for infants and toddlers. It's also difficult to find care for odd-hour shifts. It's understandable how a parent of two or more children may have to forgo employment.

When coupled with ongoing pandemic concerns and older workers opting to retire, it's no wonder some employers are having trouble with staffing.

What can be done?

Businesses will need to compete, for sure. But Oklahoma policymakers need to double down on workforce development and invest in common education, CareerTech and higher education. Our minimum wage, unchanged at $7.25 an hour since 2009, is embarrassingly low.

Being the cheapest place to do business doesn't make Oklahoma the best place to do business. Employers need more, better-trained workers, and the state needs to support people who will fill these roles — including those currently out of work.

We can appreciate wanting to lower businesses' unemployment insurance costs, but we're woefully behind in boosting the prospects of those we wish to employ. Undercutting the unemployed is not the answer.

Understanding America's Labor Shortage

Stephanie Ferguson, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, August 19, 2022

In 2021, businesses added an unprecedented 3.8 million jobs. But at the same time, workforce participation remains below pre-pandemic levels, meaning we have 3.4 million fewer Americans working today compared to February of 2020.

We hear every day from our member companies—of every size and industry, across nearly every state—they're facing unprecedented challenges trying to find enough workers to fill open jobs. Right now, the latest data shows that we have over 10 million job openings in the U.S.—but only around 6 million unemployed workers.

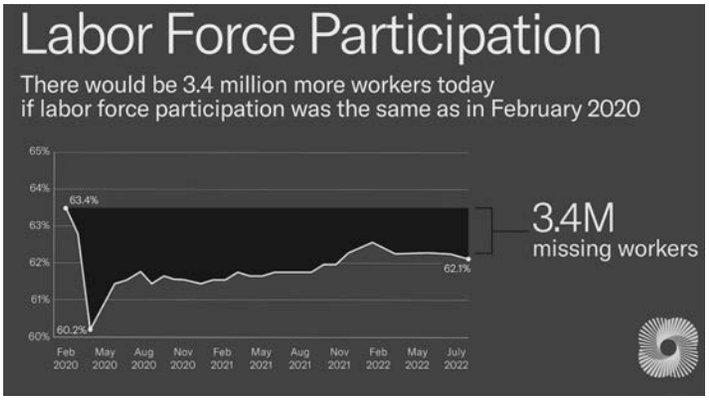
We have a lot of jobs, but not enough workers to fill them. If every unemployed person in the country found a job, we would still have 5 million open jobs.

The U.S. Chamber is capturing the trends on job openings, labor force participation, quit rates, and more, for a quick understanding of the state of the workforce in our America Works Data Center.

Read on for an analysis of the state of the workforce on the national level. For an in-depth look at how the worker shortage is impacting different industries, click here.

How did this happen?
At the height of the pandemic, more than 120,000 businesses temporarily closed, and more than 30 million U.S. workers were unemployed. Since then, job openings have steadily increased since January 2020, while unemployment has slowly declined.

Overall, in 2021, employers ended up adding an unprecedented 3.8 million jobs. But at the same time, millions of Americans have left the labor force since before the pandemic. In fact, we have more than three million fewer Americans participating in the labor force today compared to February of 2020.

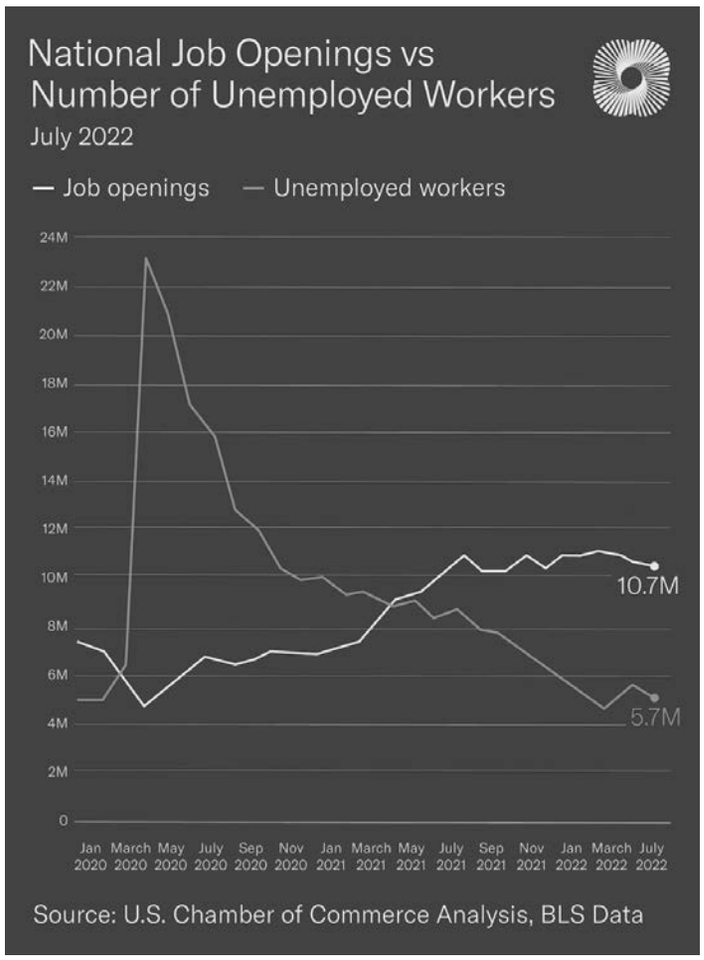


Understanding the Gap

Right now, the labor force participation rate is 62.1%, down from 63.3% in February 2020. It's clear that able workers are being overlooked or sitting on the sidelines. But there's not just one reason that workers are sitting out, but several factors have come together to cause the ongoing shortage.

The U.S. Chamber surveyed unemployed workers who lost their jobs during the pandemic on what is keeping them from returning to work. Nearly one in three (33%) women indicated that the need to be home and care for children or other family members has made the return to work difficult or impossible. More than a quarter (28%) of men indicated that their industry was still suffering and not enough good jobs were not available to return to work.

In addition to the factors outlined below, the survey also revealed some are still concerned about COVID-19 at work, indicate that pay is too low, or are more focused on acquiring new skills and education before re-entering the job market.



Factors Contributing to the Labor Shortage

An increase in savings

Enhanced unemployment benefits, stimulus checks, and not being able to go out and spend money during the Lockdown all contributed to Americans collectively adding $4 trillion to their savings accounts since early 2020. The extra few hundred dollars a week from enhanced unemployment benefits (which ended in Sept. 2021), specifically, led to 68% of claimants earning more on unemployment than they did while working.

In the Chamber's survey, 28% of women cited others in the family making enough money that working full-time is not as critical as the reason they have not re-entered the workforce. Just 17% of men said the same. Higher income and savings bolstered people's economic stability—allowing them to continue sitting out of the labor force.

Early retirements

As of October 2021, the pandemic drove more than 3 million adults into early retirement. In all, the number of adults 55 and older being detached from the labor force due to retirement grew from 48.1% in Q3 of 2019 to 50.3% in Q3 2021.

Lack of access to childcare

Even before the pandemic, a lack of access to high quality, affordable childcare was an issue. Research from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that due to breakdowns in the childcare system, the states surveyed (Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Missouri, and Texas) missed an estimated average of $2.7 billion annually for their economies.

A recent report from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation and The Education Trust shows that the pandemic created a vicious cycle for the industry; to return to work, workers need reliable childcare, but providers are facing immense challenges themselves. The pandemic forced many childcare providers to close or scale down: between February and April 2020, the industry lost 370,600 jobs — 95% of which were held by women. Unfortunately, the recovery has not been swift; as late as September 2021, childcare industry employment remained 10 percent lower than pre-pandemic levels.

Additionally, women are participating in the labor force the lowest rates since the 1970s. In the spring of 2020, 3.5 million mothers left their job, driving the labor force participation rate for working moms from around 70% to 55%. This number is improving – but it has not fully rebounded.

New business starts

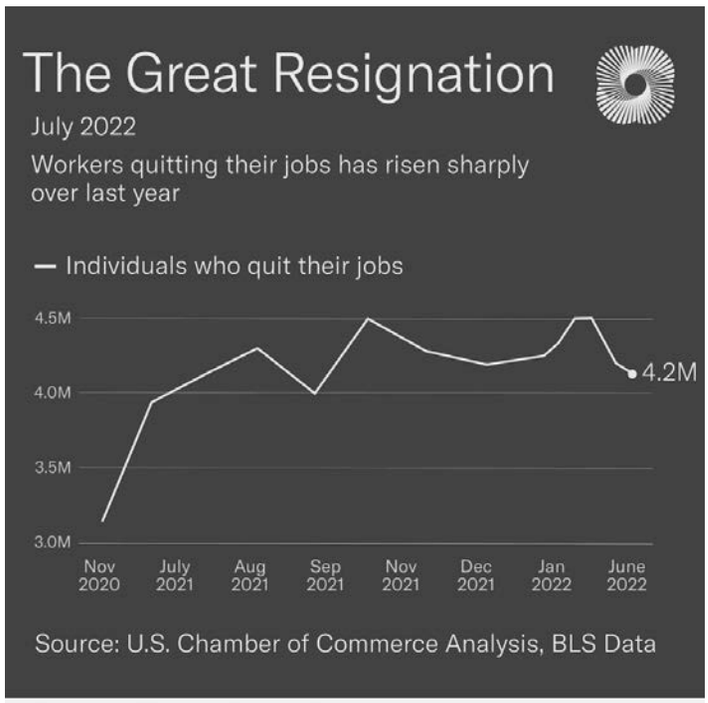
In the spirit of entrepreneurship, some employees either left work or stayed unemployed to open their own businesses. Over the last two years, nearly 10 million new business applications were filed and in 2020 alone more than 4 million new business were started.

The Great Reshuffle

Meanwhile, there has been a "Great Reshuffle" among workers. 'The Great Resignation' worked its way into our vocabulary as the shift of our labor force started to become apparent—and the hashtag #quittok even went viral as social media users posted about quitting their jobs in search for more free time or better opportunities.

A full 4.4 million people quit their jobs in May 2022, but hiring has outpaced quits since November 2020 (hovering around 4.4%).

These reasons above help illuminate the current labor shortage landscape, but the examples are non- exhaustive.



Skills to Help You Advance in Any Career

Alex Janin, The Wall Street Journal, April 2, 2021

Every professional experience can teach you something. Whether you are applying for your first job, trying to get a promotion or switching industries, there is no better way to enter a role with confidence than by identifying transferable skills you have gathered throughout life. The good news is that three of the most important skills you can take into the workplace are strengths you have likely been developing to some degree since childhood. Often known as soft skills, they offer a pivotal starting point for anyone hoping to achieve success in the workplace. You can then learn to develop your professional skills on the job.

1. One of the most valuable work skills is problem solving.
A willingness to rise to challenges will serve you well wherever you go, says Michele A. Knox, Brooklyn Program Director at The HOPE Program, a New York-based job training program for adults in marginalized and underserved communities. Ms. Knox reminds her students often: If you aren't sure how to solve a problem, do your research. That could include asking your boss or colleagues for help, especially when it comes to company-specific policy, but often the answer is easy to find.

"We had a student who wanted to be a [building superintendent], and didn't have a lot of experience. But he was a smart guy," says Ms. Knox. When the student got a job opportunity, he went in search of how-to tutorials online when he needed to learn a new skill quickly, she says. "I remember him coming back to visit and saying, 'YouTube is my friend.'"

Tips for improving your problem-solving skills:

1. **Be self-sufficient.** Use the internet, company resources or completed work to guide you.
2. **Know when to ask for help.** Sometimes, solving problems effectively means taking the time to ask the right person the right questions. Your boss or human resources representative may be able to help you determine who the right person is.
3. **Practice managing conflict.** You can exercise conflict avoidance and resolution skills with anyone from your parents to your colleagues. Practice addressing concerns directly and productively rather than ignoring conflict or going around the person who disagrees.
4. **Be prepared to compromise.** Working through problems with the people you work with will often require you to compromise. "You can be right or you can be employed," Ms. Knox jokes.

2. Prioritize kindness and integrity in your working relationships.
You will never regret treating someone with respect. A co-worker may not remember the ins and outs of a presentation you gave, but she will likely remember your thoughtful compliment when she was having a bad day or a personalized card on her birthday. Just as you should be compassionate with others, it is important to be kind to yourself. This goes for people at all levels of leadership, says Dr. Jim Loehr, a performance psychologist who helps train leaders from different industries on how to achieve success.

Dr. Loehr has noticed a pattern among CEOs and other high achievers in the world of business with whom he has worked at the Johnson & Johnson Human Performance Institute, which he co-founded. Even for the highest achievers, so-called soft skills are, by their own account, often their greatest indicators of performance.

Dr. Loehr says that while working with leaders, he has often used an exercise that asks them to describe a time when they were most proud of themselves. "Invariably, what they related to was their treatment of others: 'When I am kind.' 'When I am generous.' 'When I am humble.' 'When I am trustworthy.'" he says. "Virtually none of them put down, 'When I'm winning.' 'When I'm making more money.' 'When I'm famous.'"

The psychologist says that, "By itself, extrinsic achievement was really not the scorecard that people really kept to determine their success."

Just as demonstrating integrity can be the skill that sets you apart, showing that you lack it could be your downfall. A 2018 study of incoming CEOs at the world's largest 2,500 public companies by Strategy&, the strategy consulting business unit of PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, found that more chief executives were dismissed for ethical lapses than for financial performance or board struggles.

3. Go above and beyond to develop your work skills.
Make "yes" one of your favorite words. Overachievers who are willing to demonstrate an eagerness to learn and contribute (even outside of their job description) often move up quickly, says Ms. Knox, who has witnessed this not only in her students but also in her own work experience.

Ms. Knox, who joined The HOPE Program as an instructor in 2012 and is now a program director, says: "When I first came to HOPE I was really interested to learn more, so anytime they asked if somebody wanted to go to a certain meeting or a certain training, they could barely get it out of their mouths before my hand was raised."

However, you can only go above and beyond if you are given the opportunity to do so. Ms. Knox knows from her experience working with marginalized communities that employees from underrepresented groups aren't always offered the same opportunities as their colleagues.

Her message to employers is: "Get flexible and creative," and "have an open mind."

On the Job: Prospective employees yearn for training

Jim Priest, The Journal Record, July 29, 2022

Myka knew she needed a new start. A new city. A new job. She was emerging from personal struggles but she needed help. She didn't just need a job; she needed a recovery program and she needed job training.

Goodwill has a partnership with the local City Rescue Mission to help individuals in CRM's substance abuse recovery program find work. Goodwill provides employment training to City Rescue Mission's clients as part of their path to recovery. Myka sought recovery at City Rescue and job training at Goodwill. Goodwill is more than a store. Goodwill helps people overcome challenges to employment through job placement and job training.

More on Myka's journey in a moment.

What is the biggest challenge facing American business, industry and nonprofit organizations? You might immediately answer "Finding employees!" and you'd be almost right; it is a major challenge. But the biggest challenge is one that is less visible but more dangerous. Along with the lack of employees there is a profound lack of job training and development. And it's dangerous because without job training, our shortage of workers will continue.

Goodwill Industries International recently commissioned a national survey of adults to determine what's keeping job seekers from finding jobs.

Here are a few of the findings:

- Unemployed respondents looking for work say help finding jobs, help with childcare, and trainings, classes and certificates are among their top needs.
- 57% of job seekers say a lack of skills and training prevented them from applying for jobs.
- 94% say it's important or very important for people to have access to job training and skills as an alternative to college.
- Nearly six in 10 workers said a lack of skills prevented them from applying for a job they wanted in the last two years.

Steve Preston, President and CEO of Goodwill International, said "84% of our respondents who are unemployed stated they would like help gaining the skills, training and support they need to enter the workforce."

U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh agrees: "Industries are having trouble getting workers right now; a lot of that is that they're not skilled up or trained to do work in those industries. Right now is the time to make sure we continue to make investments in workforce development, job training."

Low to moderate income workers especially need training. People like Myka who, thanks to City Rescue Mission and Goodwill, received that training and landed a good job: "I want to show the class at Goodwill works and without it I wouldn't have got the job I have now."

The lesson for businesses and nonprofits? Make it a priority to invest in job training and workforce development in your organization and in your community.

For more on Myka's story, go to https://youtu.be/p73NozQvPy0.

Jim Priest is president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma.

The Urban League is HERE (Helping Empower and Retain Employees

Valerie Thompson, MBA, PhD, President/CEO, Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City, Inc.

The Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City's (ULOKC) core mission is focused on economic mobility by assisting people of color and the poor to achieve social and economic equality through a variety of programs that serve over 8500 people annually. For 75 years, the ULOKC has been the premier social service agency and subject-matter expert in the African American community in Oklahoma providing affordable housing, minority business support, workforce development, employment, and education services. The Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City's Workforce and Career Development (WFCD) program empowers African-Americans and others in underserved communities to achieve their highest earning potential and secure economic self-reliance. 96% of the Urban League's WFCD clients are African American or another minority. 95% of the Urban League's WFCD clients are in one or more of the following poverty rankings: working poor, living in low-income communities, or experiencing generational poverty; and 30% are or have been justice-involved or incarcerated. The Urban League's WFCD program has a long successful record of disrupting poverty in Oklahoma's African American community. The Urban League's WFCD program focuses on strategic partnerships with criminal justice organizations, community colleges/ vocational training centers, employers, client linkages to adequate support services, and trauma-informed approaches to case management. The Urban League's WFCD career coaches understand that typically when people come to the Urban League, they struggle to meet basic needs and are often confronted with daily emotional and social challenges that create barriers to employment. The Urban League's WFCD program is employment-focused and exceptionally well at providing supportive services to remove the obstacles to employment. The Urban League's WFCD program also connects justice-involved clients to diversion opportunities and gives them the ability to change behaviors and obtain a second chance to achieve their goals. Some examples of our work are highlighted by the stories of Tiffany, Derrick, and Vernisa.

Tiffany completed the Urban League's expungement process. Tiffany had a minor felony on her record since 1994 and says she hasn't been in trouble since. A felony she received in making a decision she thought was her only choice to take care of her younger siblings 28 years ago. Tiffany shared with the Urban League that her felony record made it difficult to find a job. "It's been hard because they judge you by your past," said. "Even if you've paid your debt to society, they still judge you by your past regardless." With a clean record now, Tiffany has begun the process to become a pharmacy technician.

At 25 years old, Derrick had a part-time job as a machine operator. He was grateful to have a job and he enjoyed the work but, the job did not offer benefits such as health insurance, the pay rate was barely above minimum wage, and the job offered no path to career advancement. Derrick experienced the death of his mom when he was a teenager. Being raised by a single parent, his father taught him the principles of leadership and told him to always lead by example. Derrick knew that he wanted more for his future and his family.

Derrick came to the Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City (ULOKC) seeking help with obtaining better employment. Derrick participated in the Urban League's WFCD program and work readiness training. He worked with his career coach to plan and implement a new career plan to assess his professional strengths and weaknesses, and to learn to present skills, experience, and abilities on his application and interview. He also participated in the ULOKC's "Diversity and Inclusion" session which helped him prepare for working with diverse ethnic groups. With the assistance of his ULOKC career coach, Derrick gained an interview and was hired as a groundsman by a sub-contractor for a local utility company. The utility sub-contractor was impressed with his preparedness and professionalism. After working a few weeks with the sub-contractor Derrick continued to work with his career coach and earned his CDL license. In less than 2 months of working with the sub-contractor, Derrick's rate of pay has jumped to $20/hour. Derrick loves the job and says that there are many opportunities at the company that can prepare him for advancement and a leadership role.

21-year-old Vernisa came to the ULOKC, looking for employment assistance. Even though she was still young, she experienced several years of trauma and emotional abuse. Despite major challenges, she managed to be the first in her family to graduate from high school. She was proud of herself for overcoming many obstacles, but she

felt she needed help starting a career path and guidance to move forward to reach her goals. Having grown up in a large low-income household, she began taking on a parenting role as a teenager. With the assistance of her ULOKC career coach, Vernisa enrolled in courses at Oklahoma City Community College. Transportation and additional school/life finances quickly became new and discouraging obstacles facing Vernisa. She did not have a driver's license and did not have the funds to pay for her books. Through the ULOKC's Young Adult Re-entry Program, (YARP), she was able to complete a driver's education course at no cost to her. She worked with her career coach to apply for federal financial aid to help out with tuition and books and she received utility and other support assistance from the ULOKC to help her cover some of her living expenses while she focused on passing her classes. With the assistance of her ULOKC career coach, Vernisa was able to obtain part-time employment at Fed-Ex, working evenings and weekends. She is still enrolled at Oklahoma City Community College and pursuing an associate degree to become a Physical Therapist Assistant.

Oklahoma has tremendous human potential to enhance and expand our workforce. Too often, we forget that one of our best assets is our strong work ethic and the "Oklahoma Standard". Too often, we overlook individuals who have the potential, with a little assistance or direction, to become long-term and dedicated employees. Too often, Oklahoma's workforce solutions have focused on traditional methods with limited cultural focuses for nontraditional workforce populations. Too often, workforce programs are planned for diverse communities without the input and participation of the population the programs are intended to impact.

The Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City (ULOKC) understands that some people, especially young people, can experience internal and external obstacles from past experiences, current interpersonal problems, and system-related challenges. The ULOKC programs have defined counseling and case management goals and objectives, including creating each participant an individual plan that defines his or her own goals in critical areas of life. The ULOKC case management staff have experience emphasizing counseling, the capacity to work with diverse populations, cultural competence, excellent listening skills, and patience. The Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City continues to meet the demands of a diverse and growing workforce population. The Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City believes that our growing and diverse Oklahoma population has untapped human potential for a strong and vibrant workforce.

The Oklahoma Black Chamber of Commerce's focus on Workforce

Joanne M. Davis, Executive Director, Oklahoma City Black Chamber of Commerce

The Oklahoma Black Chamber of Commerce's focus is on the creation, development, sustainment of Black Businesses in the Oklahoma City and surrounding areas. Our purpose is to be a useful resource to not only our members, but to our communities. We believe that small businesses are the engines of our economy and COVID showed that to be true. They support the flow of cash in and out of cities and towns.

OKCBCC focuses on Black and minority businesses because they often are unaware of the resources available to them. We actively advocate for them in multiple spaces and places with people and institutions that could and do make decisions that often affect their businesses. We bring their voice and their issues to those conversations. Any member of OKCBCC has access to our social mediums and so job openings, special events they hosts are shared. Through our corporate sponsors we offer Webinars that assist them in with various processes and procedures to ultimately garner success. We also share any and all available resources to our members that will help sustain them.

Because Black and Brown businesses are often overlooked in discussions on issues related to small businesses, so are the benefits that they generate to their respective communities inclusive of the economic benefits they bring to our city and our state. Some of the benefits of our Black and Brown businesses are.

1. Statistically, they hire more women. Probably, because they largely fall within the service industry.

2. They are quick to hire teenagers. Thus, giving them their first exposure to a work environment.

3. Many hire those who have been involved in the justice system

4. They also hire "day" workers and many times find themselves feeding homeless/unhoused people in exchange for small jobs.

5. Black and Brown Businesses often have knowledge of the pulse of the community. In other words, they know what is going on, in and around their establishments.

Per various resources, nationally, Black and Brown businesses make up 10 % of the number of small businesses nationally. While the years of staying in business is on average is 5 years for small businesses, for Black and Brown businesses is 2-3 years.
Articles written abound about the Great Resignation. There are a plethora of reasons for this phenomenon and it all started with COVID. While corporate America has recognized the difficulty in getting and maintaining employees, they have the wherewithal to shift and make changes that ultimately increases their ability to get more employees. It often includes, offering remote jobs, increase in pay, hiring bonuses, and increase in benefits.

Small business and particularly Black and Brown businesses do not have the luxury of offering competitive salaries like $17 per hour as many corporate fast food establishments do. There is no such thing as remote jobs and their budgets cannot even consider a bonus just to get hired. Their pool of applicants, as stated previously, are women and teenagers.

Let's focus on women and the issues that face them in this current environment. In multiple discussions with Black Businesses in and around OKC, workforce is the number one issue. Hiring and keeping employees has and still is paramount and it affects their ability to operate effectively and in turn, hinders their sustainment and growth.

Most of their employees are usually between the ages of 15-35. This is also the child bearing, child-rearing ages for the women they hire. Time and time again, particularly during COVID and when kids returned to school, their inability to come to work was severely hampered by their children's exposure to the virus and those who ultimately contracted it. All in all, it meant they had to stay home. This cycle would be repeated and then the employee would either quit or the employer would be forced to hire someone else.

While the virus is somewhat at bay, and things are going back to normal, child care and lack thereof is fueling their inability to work. If child care is not available, easily accessible (near home or job, or bus line), and reasonable in cost or income based….why work???? BECAUSE THEY CAN'T…THERE IS NO OPTION!

Pre-pandemic, the United States ranked 32nd out of 40 industrialized nations for employment of mothers of young children and, below average for those with minor children of any age. This alone tells a nationwide lack of focus of childcare. Again, COVID pulled the Band-Aid and now the impact bleeds over everything from airlines, to supply chain breakdowns to the "Great Resignations" and of course, to our small businesses whether urban or rural.

Putting no emphasis for years on childcare and looking at the rate of women in our nation's workforce, literally has imploded. All because we have not prioritized children and their care. What is ironic about this issue is that these children are our future workforce. Corporations cannot be

expected to do it by themselves. This issue must be addressed by governmental agencies nationally and by states and cities.

The answers are as multifaceted as the problem. Somehow, we must infuse dollars in child care centers. We must pay child care workers reasonable living wages. Corporations or companies coming into our communities, cities and states, must be required to address child care in their proposals. Perhaps mandating they have child care centers on site or provide stipends for their employees, or contract childcare centers for their employees are ideas that could be explored.

Why can't we make public schooling start at PreK-3? Multiple schools systems and space is going under-utilized. Early childhood education is a major degree program in most of our colleges. Why not work with universities to find a way to use these students to work in these child care centers as part of their degree program?

When Corporate America is impacted, small businesses feel enormous pain, but Black and Brown businesses' rate of survival teeters on the edge. We are in crisis mode. Our economy may bounce back, but at what cost, in the meantime. We say as a nation, that children are our future. If we truly believe that then we must focus on their care NOW! If we don't then the engines of our economy, which is small businesses (Black, Brown, White, Asian, Native American, Veteran Owned, and Woman-Owned) will not survive. We must see this as economically advantageous to our economy not only as it addresses the need of our current workforce, but as key to preparing and readying a prospective workforce.

Statistics…Guidant Financial and Washington Post (June 30, 2022)

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma

Jim Priest, J.D., President and CEO, Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma

In an increasingly innovative economy beset by worker shortages and a critical need to engage, motivate and maximize the productivity of employees, the central ingredient is insuring—and continuously working toward—a positive workplace culture that addresses and prioritizes employee needs. It's not soft side stuff. It grows the bottom line.

Let's play a guessing game. Try to guess what I'm describing. Here are your clues:

- It makes you want to get out of bed and go to work.
- It makes your job enlivening while you're there.
- It makes you lose track of time while working.
- It drives down employee turnover and drives up retention.

What is it? Positive work culture.

Workplace culture is king, especially in the aftermath of the pandemic. A recent study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management found two out of three companies are having trouble keeping employee morale up and another one-third reported keeping workplace culture strong was a major challenge. SHRM reports, "There's a strong correlation between workplace culture, satisfied and engaged employees, and business productivity and profits. When an organization's culture is toxic, everyone loses."

> ***"There's a strong correlation between workplace culture, satisfied and engaged employees, and business productivity and profits. When an organization's culture is toxic, everyone loses."***

You'd expect SHRM to say that, wouldn't you? Those touchy-feely HR types are always spouting off about the importance of workplace culture. But all bottom-line oriented people will pay attention when Harvard Business Review talks about it.

Strategy and culture are among the primary levers at top leaders' disposal in their never-ending quest to maintain organizational viability and effectiveness. Culture expresses goals through values and beliefs and guides activity through shared assumptions and group norms. Culture, however, is a more elusive lever, because much of it is anchored in unspoken behaviors, mindsets, and social patterns. For better and worse, culture and leadership are inextricably linked. – The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture (hbr.org)

Culture is not the exclusive province of the Human Resources Department. In fact, culture begins with the letter "C", meaning that C-suite executives must play a leading role in defining and ensuring a positive workplace culture. Whether you're currently a C leader or aspire to be, this message is for you.

Dr. Edgar Schein, MIT professor and recognized management consultant, says, "The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture."

Get that? The ONLY thing.

So how do we implement and maintain a positive work culture (PWC)? Here's a starting place:

- **Decide.**
Creating a PWC requires the C-suite to make a conscious decision whether "culture" is the top priority for your workplace. Not A priority. The TOP priority.

- **Connect.**
Creating a PWC means leaders connect with everyone. Staying in touch and keeping it real. Walking the floor. Listening more, talking less.

- **Cultivate core values.**
Creating a PWC requires C-suite leaders to live and breathe common core values. Clearly communicating "This is who we are" and "That's not who we are."

- **Use common language.**
Creating a PWC requires the C-suite leadership to use common language where words mean something. "Employee First" must be more than a catchy slogan.

- **Value accountability.**
Creating a PWC requires the C-suite leaders to be accountable to everyone.

In the worst organizations no one holds anyone accountable. In the good organizations the boss holds people accountable, but in the best organizations everyone holds everyone accountable. –Al Switzler, New York Times bestselling author

- **Embrace humility.**
Creating a PWC means the C-suite leaders must recognize and live out the importance of humility, the very core of servant leadership. Jim Collins, in Good to Great, says humility is the common denominator among Level 5 leaders.

Supporting employees holistically

In a January 2021 article in the Harvard Business Review, Brian Kropp, Chief of Research for the Gartner HR practice, forecasted nine trends that would shape our work world in 2021 and beyond. 9 Trends That Will Shape Work in 2021 and Beyond (hbr.org)

Two of them especially caught my eye because of the way we work at Goodwill and they are two trends worthy of adoption.

First, Kropp says "Employers will shift from managing the employee experience to managing the life experience of their employees." That sounds a bit like George Orwell's 1984 until Kropp explains. "The pandemic has given business leaders increased visibility into the personal lives of their employees, who have faced unprecedented personal and professional struggles over the last year. It's become clear that supporting employees in their personal lives more effectively enables employees to not only have better lives, but also to perform at a higher level."

Kropp points to a 2020 survey conducted by his company indicating employers that support employees with their life experience see:

- a 23% increase in employees reporting better mental health
- a 17% increase in employees reporting better physical health
- a 21% increase in the number of high performers compared to organizations that don't provide the same degree of support to their employees.

The other trend that caught my eye was: "Mental health support is the new normal...**employers are more aware than ever of the impact of mental health on employees and by association, the workplace.**" Kropp reports 68% of organizations have recently introduced at least one new wellness benefit for employees and predicts employers will go even further to expand mental health benefits and de-stigmatize mental health concerns.

These things just make sense, don't they?

It makes sense that if an employer can support (rather than "manage") their employees' life experiences there will be positive benefits all around: to both the individuals and to the business.

At Goodwill we operate a program called "Begin at Home" in partnership with a company called WorkLife Partnership which supports our employees in dealing with issues causing stress or confusion outside the workplace. Many of our employees face baseline challenges that others take for granted. Food scarcity. Housing insecurity. Transportation challenges. Legal hurdles. Through Begin at Home and WLP we offer to be a liaison and networker, connecting employees with partner agencies and other external services which offer potential solutions. Here's a brief excerpt of a report I received on how the program is working:

> *7 new clients are interested in the program. Four of them will sign up next week, and 3 signed up this week. We had some successes! One employee is getting his gas turned back on! I have been assisting him the last six weeks in getting emergency assistance. We hit several road blocks but I continued to support him and remind him (when he began feeling defeated) that persistence was key. He was so excited and grateful to the Begin at Home program for this long-awaited relief.*
>
> *We had a new hire who recently became homeless. His manager called me and I met him immediately. I was able to help him and he stated how impressed he was that Goodwill took such care of their employees. He has never witnessed such a selfless act from an organization and was so happy he joined the Goodwill family.*

In my view, this is simply an extension of the successful Southwest Airlines principle: Take good care of your employees and they will take good care of your customers.

At a minimum, every organization should have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Once this baseline is established employers can ask what types of support employees need. The key is to assist employees in solving their own challenges rather than jumping in with well meaning but ill-fitting solutions.

If you want to take this up a notch read Matthew Kelly's book The Dream Manger, a business novel based on the real life experiment of Jancoa, a janitorial company in Cincinnati which hired a "Dream Manager" to assist their employees accomplish their dreams, like owning their own home. Jancoa reports turnover was drastically reduced, employee engagement was dramatically increased, and efficiencies and profits rose. "We're not just in the janitorial business, we're in the people development business" says owner Mary Miller.

Organizations need to be respectful of employee privacy and not paternalistic in their attempts to assist. Instead, we need to recognize the inevitable intersection of personal life and work life and take action, where we can and should, to promote our employees not simply "up the organizational ladder" but to a higher plane of living.

The Value of Value Based Leadership

We, at Goodwill Industries of Central Oklahoma, have been involved in something called Values Based Leadership Training. It emphasizes the importance of having a values led organization rather than a profit driven one. Our VBL

training has reminded me, once again, of the ultimate importance of making decisions based on values, not money. It's true in both the nonprofit and the for profit world.

The text book example of VBL is the Tylenol scare faced by Johnson and Johnson in 1982. In that year seven Chicagoans died after consuming Extra Strength Tylenol that had been infected by a third party with cyanide. Within a week the decision was made to pull all 31 million bottles of Tylenol off the shelves. J&J's CEO was warned such a decision would be financially disastrous but he determined it was the values based, "right thing" to do.

Rhiannon Bell wrote in her 2017 article Values Drive Culture and Strategy in Times of Crisis:

> *Deciding to recall the product—at great financial cost to the corporation—was simple because the core values of the company demanded it. At the height of the crisis, Johnson & Johnson's acting CEO, Jim Burke, read the corporation's Credo aloud to a room of panicked executives. The Credo details the core values of Johnson & Johnson, declaring that the company's responsibility is first and foremost "to the doctors, nurses and patients, mothers and fathers, and all others who use our products and services". With this focus on responsibility to communities, the leaders immediately pulled the drug from all shelves. This decision demonstrated the influence of a values-driven culture.*

But it's not just in a crisis that organizations need VBL. It's every day.

VBL is needed in creating and sustaining a thriving workplace culture. It's required in addressing worker shortage issues that haunt our economy. VBL is imperative as a baseline for how stakeholders are treated: customers, employees, board members, stockholders, even vendors and suppliers.

How do we create and maintain Values Based Leadership? Here are some suggestions:

1. Articulate your values out loud. Write them down and talk about them frequently. I'm not talking about some dusty credo posted on the reception room wall that no one knows or pays attention to. I'm talking about a living breathing document that discussed frequently enough it becomes part of everyday conversations. Goodwill has four core values: Respect, Integrity, Commitment, and Innovation. We try to talk about and live them each day.

2. Recognize those who live it. Find ways to give a shout out to someone who lives the values in a way that shows up in the workplace. A few months ago one of our Goodwill employees named Andrea found $42,000 in cash mistakenly wrapped up in a donation given to Goodwill. Andrea could have kept d the money for herself, but she turned it in. Goodwill could have kept the money since it was "donated" even if mistakenly. But Goodwill and Andrea are committed to integrity and we made sure the money found its way back to the chagrined donor. We celebrated Andrea for her integrity.

3. Cultivate a culture that speaks truth to power. In most organizations it is extremely difficult for people to speak up. They think it won't make a difference or they'll get in trouble if they point out a company credo is not being lived out. Leaders must listen and then act on complaints and suggestions. Workers must be assured candor is not fatal. This takes time and consistency and persistence. Trust is built one act at a time.

This is an ideal time to reflect on whether your organization is a values-led or profit-driven one. It's true what they say, "No money, no mission." We can't ignore the balance sheet. But we also can't allow money to dictate direction, especially when it runs counter to our values. Leaders set the tone at the top of this kind of culture by displaying Values Based Leadership.

Workplace Culture is king. It involved the tone at the top, an emphasis on employee support, and a genuine effort to center decisions on articulated values. Now more than ever. It's not just a feel-good thing. Culture positively impacts the organization's bottom line. It is a key ingredient—likely THE key ingredient to help us enhance our workforce for an increasingly innovative economy.

Long live the king.

Utilizing Accessibility as a Catalyst for Workforce Development and Innovation

Ashley Howard, MAEd, NewView, Oklahoma

NewView Oklahoma (NVO), established in 1949, is a non-profit organization whose mission is to empower individuals who are blind or have low vision, maximizing their opportunities for independence through all stages of life. NewView provides rehabilitative services statewide, and those services are provided through their mobile clinic, and through low vision clinics located in both Tulsa and Oklahoma City. In addition to providing rehabilitative services, NVO also strives to provide employment opportunities to citizens living with vision loss. They do this through their manufacturing plant in Oklahoma City, in addition to ten service contracts across nine states. These service contracts offer mailroom and call room services to a variety of military installations in addition to reclamation and contract management services. Through all these efforts, NVO employs 194 individuals and 96 of those employees are blind or living with low vision (LV/B), making them the largest employer of LV/B individuals in the state of Oklahoma.

An Untapped Workforce

According to the American Federation for the Blind (AFB), the unemployment rate from January through August 2020 for the LV/B population averaged 67%. AFB also reports that of this population, 15 percent of people with vision loss are recorded as having a college degree or higher compared to 30 percent of people with no disability.

The most recent data available through AFB shows that in 2019 there were 72,753 LV/B citizens in the state of Oklahoma between the ages of 18 and 64. If we apply the unemployment rate of 67%, that is 48,744 people eligible but not participating or engaging in the Oklahoma workforce.

Barriers for engaging this population in the general workforce were identified in the 2017 ACS Public Use Microdata and include: education, networking, mentorship, personal competencies, work commitment, autonomy and the ability to successfully navigate career-related challenges (AFB). In a separate report produced by The Conversation, studies that included 1,000 employers revealed that employer knowledge is limited about how people who are blind can perform basic job tasks, creating perceptions that can influence a company's willingness to hire LV/B citizens.

All of this data points to accessibility (both physical and digital), a lack of proper training, access to necessary services, and employer perceptions as drivers that continue to affect unemployment rates for the LV/B population.

Creating Accessible Workspaces

Innovation and accessibility go hand in hand. When accessibility is pursued with intention, everyone wins. For LV/B employees, a lot can be accomplished with simple adaptations and the implementation of assistive technology.

The use of screen readers, handheld magnifiers, modified lighting and an iPhone can go a long way in making the workplace accessible to LV/B employees, enabling them to engage in administrative functions with as much efficiency as their sighted peers. There is a spectrum for vision loss and the needs of legally blind persons can vary based on their diagnoses and the progression of their vision loss.

Non-administrative careers can also be made accessible. NVO's manufacturing plant offers numerous examples of simple adaptations that can be made to make a variety of manufacturing jobs accessible. Accessibility requires innovation, and in the end that innovation almost always leads to process improvement and workplace efficiencies.

The NVO team continues to leverage technology and produce creative solutions to support the creation of opportunities for citizens who are blind. Some of NVO's adaptations have created 'Aha!' moments that have influenced the manufacturing industry through systems that can be replicated and implemented elsewhere. One example is a device used by NVO that is required for assessing the pressure of hoses; the device only offered visual cues, a gauge with a dial that had to be watched. NewView approached the manufacturer of this device and found a way to incorporate an auditory notification making it accessible for LV/B users. A tone was added to indicate when adequate pressure has been reached. The result was an accidental discovery that an audible reading was significantly more accurate for testing than a visual reading and the manufacturer of that device now incorporates auditory notifications for all their customers.

In addition to creating and offering an accessible workspace, NVO also provides consultative services to corporate environments to support other companies and industries in creating physically and digitally accessible work environments; a service that could be expanded to reach more organizations if adequate funding were available. In addition to utilizing resources through agencies like NVO, employers should be encouraged to take advantage of other existing programs such as the Workforce Investment Act, Targeted Job Tax Credits, and the Job Accommodation Network.

Training and Services

While accessibility presents a challenge, access to occupational therapy, orientation and mobility services, and technology training also play a vital role in engaging this untapped workforce. Without the right training and services, even the most motivated disabled persons will have a rough time re-entering the workforce.

Hands-on immersive instruction for utilizing technology is vitally important. NVO offers transitional programs that support LV/B citizens who are looking to re-enter the workforce. These programs help those with vision loss relearn how to navigate programs typically utilized in the workplace such as Word, Outlook, Excel and Adobe, as well as accessibility programs like JAWS and ZoomText.

Mobility also poses a challenge, and training on navigating the community, using public transportation and ride-sharing are crucial steps that allow and empower a disabled worker to gain and retain employment. It is also worth noting that even with training, transportation continues to be one the greatest obstacles to employment. This is especially true in the state of Oklahoma where there is a significant lack of connectivity between public transportation options. Significant funding will be required to enhance connectivity in major metro and surrounding areas to increase accessibility to transportation for persons with disabilities.

Rehabilitative services and training require infrastructure, trained professionals, and access to technology – and all of these things require funding. NVO is currently the only comprehensive provider of low vision services in the state of Oklahoma, serving all 77 counties. In 2021, NVO served 2,600 clients through their low-vision and mobile clinics, indicating that a considerable number of LV/B citizens are still without access to critical services. Additional funding is crucial for growing services in rural areas where health care access is limited and better reaching individuals in the major metro areas.

Benefits of a More Diverse Workforce

The benefits of engaging this untapped workplace are far reaching. Gainful employment for LV/B citizens, or any citizen living with a disability, means less reliance on government provided benefits and restored dignity for those that want nothing more than to provide for their families and to be self-sufficient. It also means a more diverse workforce. Research shows that diversity in the workplace leads to enhanced creative problem solving, innovation and as a result increased profitability (Indeed). Employers will also find that they experience a much higher retention rate with employees who are living with a disability, offering continued advantages to maintaining a more diverse workforce. In a study conducted by the Chicago Lighthouse, disabled employees had a tenure 1.8 times higher than their non-disabled peers (The Chicago Lighthouse).

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Oklahoma Community-Based Providers

Pat Ownbey, Executive Director, Oklahoma Community-Based Providers

Oklahoma Community-Based Providers (OCP) is the state association for community agencies offering supports and services for Oklahomans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

OCP's mission is to serve Oklahoma's DD Providers so they can ensure those individuals who they serve can lead meaningful lives in whatever they want to accomplish including helping with employment opportunities for the developmentally disabled.

Keeping Provider Education front and center: OCP Meetings are held each quarter to hear from local, state and national policy makers including the latest from DDS on a wide range of important topics; OCP networks with members on a regular basis including questions and answers from providers on topics from business management, COVID and policy issues, to better ways to serve our clients. OCP also offers all of our members DDS Meeting Summaries and the latest Disability News delivered right to your computer several times a week to keep you updated on issues that affect you.

State Policy Issues with the Department of Human Services: One of our main objectives is to remain in constant contact with providers year round while working with DHS management and staff on everything from COVID-19 related issues to provider conflicts. In fact, we work with DHS and the Office of Client Advocacy to find the very best solutions on policy and procedures that you, as a provider, may need assistance on.

Tracking legislation and working with lawmakers face to face: During the last legislative session our work helped lead the way to a 25% provider rate increase which is scheduled take effect October 1st. We also worked with DHS to begin the 20% Retroactive Rate Increase, the first in the nation, that included a presentation from OCP and DHS to members of the national organization ANCOR on how this was accomplished. At the same time, OCP worked to ensure that the Oklahoma State Use Program remained intact, keeping our developmentally disabled individuals employed!

OCP Legislation: Senate Bill 1567 allows the state agency OMES to bid out the management of the Oklahoma State Use Program to a group that possesses the necessary experience in marketing and product management with the goal of improving the quality of work and the numbers in the workforce for those who are visually impaired and developmentally disabled.

OCP Played Defense on Legislation: Halting legislation that would have allowed the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs to opt out of the State Use Program, which if passed, would open Pandora's box with more agencies attempting to follow their lead. OCP also succeeded in stopping legislation from advancing that would have allowed Tourism to do the same. A drop off in the State Use Program would definitely take jobs from those individuals who are visually impaired and developmentally disabled, halting their ability to find real meaning and purpose in everyday life.

Working with the Oklahoma State Department of Health: During the critical time of COVID vaccination distribution OCP was able to negotiate a move for many of our Developmentally Disabled individuals which had been placed as a Priority 2 status to a Priority 1, delivering the vaccines much faster to those who were most susceptible to the virus.

DD Workers and the 14c Waiver: The elimination of the 14c Waiver is inevitable and is likely to happen sooner rather than later. In fact, Providers who don't possess a waiver will no longer be able to get one. Currently, the Department of Labor is only renewing waivers that are already in place. Unless another funding source is tapped, a large number of individuals with the most significant disabilities currently paid under a 14(c) waiver will be unable to maintain employment at full wage. This is an ongoing process to find the most effective ways to keep our visually impaired and developmentally disabled individuals working.

The OCP is completely funded by our provider members that includes well over one-hundred locations across Oklahoma. The last two years OCP have been focused on the Oklahoma State Use Program, participating in a Senate Interim Study on the matter and forming much needed legislation on this issue to ensure those that are developmentally disabled and/or blind can continue their employment, even finding new opportunities in the process.

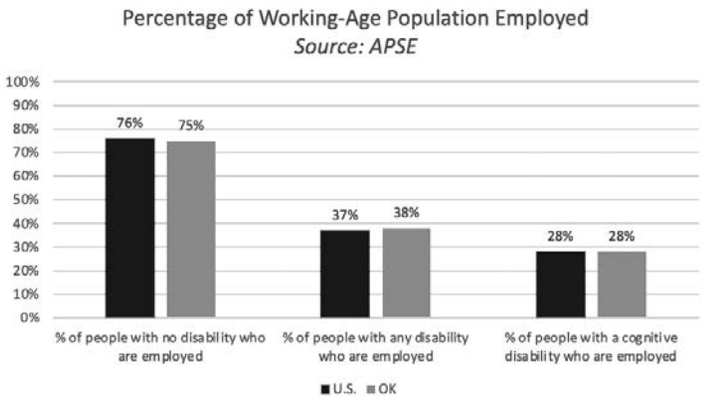
Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities in the Workforce

Deborah Copeland, M.Ed., Executive Director/CEO of Dale Rogers Training Center

Accounting for one billion people worldwide (about 15% of the population), people with disabilities comprise the largest minority group across the globe. Despite diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts gaining significant momentum across the nation, people with disabilities are largely absent from the discussion. According to the Harvard Business Review, while 90% of companies have prioritized diversity efforts, only 4% consider disability in their initiatives. Employers willing to invest in building a more disability-inclusive workforce will reap benefits beyond the employment of one specific demographic. According to a 2018 study by Accenture:

> There are 15.1 million people of working age living with disabilities in the U.S., so the research suggests that if companies embrace disability inclusion, they will gain access to a new talent pool of more than 10.7 million people.

People with disabilities represent a largely untapped workforce in Oklahoma and across the nation. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) experience some of the highest levels of unemployment. In Oklahoma (2018), of the 36,100 "working age" people with cognitive disabilities, only 28% were employed in the competitive workforce. However, the landscape for one of the most marginalized populations continues to advance due to increased attention on equitable employment outcomes for people with significant disabilities.



Federal legislation (HR2373, HR603) to phase out "center-based" or "sheltered workshops" and the payment of subminimum wages (SMW) to people with disabilities looms on the horizon. Vocational providers utilize the SMW certificate for paid training to more than 1,900 individuals with developmental disabilities in Oklahoma.

Understanding the impact of eliminating the SMW paid training option begins with the individuals and their network of support. Historically, individuals with I/DD and their families depended on the stable support of the "center-based" program, which was initially intended to transition people into competitive integrated employment (CIE). However, nationally fewer than 5% of people transition from center-based to CIE. With federal initiatives advancing to CIE, options for individuals and families in Oklahoma will be limited unless a proactive statewide initiative is developed to address their specific needs for support and accessibility to the workplace.

In 2021, DRTC spearheaded a coalition of stakeholders to engage in roundtable discussions with the goal of providing resources and support for sustainable systemic change throughout Oklahoma. The coalition includes executive directors of vocational agencies across Oklahoma, representatives from the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (OKDRS), Oklahoma Community-Based Providers, the Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service at the University of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Disability Law Center, the Developmental Disabilities Council of Oklahoma, and several family advocates. The coalition intends to lead a comprehensive state plan ensuring appropriate services, supports, and accessibilities are available for people with I/DD in the workforce at large.

A major barrier to employment for people living with I/DD is a form of discrimination defined by low expectations, solely based on an over-generalization of their disability. Focus on the defined disability obscures the individual's strengths, abilities, and contributions. Infantilization of people with I/DD is also a common form of ableism impacting perceptions of their place in the competitive workforce. However, employers willing to develop policies and programs designed to include people with disabilities in the workplace, end up benefiting their business and society at large.

Referred to as the "curb-cut" effect, accessibility creates pathways to inclusion for a broad spectrum of workers in the workforce. Inclusion of people with I/DD requires a coordination of efforts and an "open door" to specific supports for employment. A common curb cut for people with I/DD involves evaluating essential functions in job descriptions. By eliminating common but often unnecessary requirements such as having a driver's license, standing up to 8 hours, or lifting 50 lbs, jobs are more accessible for people with various disabilities.

Another accommodation for people with disabilities involves services and supports provided through state and area agencies including nonprofit vocational providers. Employment Training Specialists (ETS) provide support to the person with a disability in obtaining and maintaining employment. Employers gain a valuable employee who is

supported, at no cost the employer, through the interview, onboarding, and training process. DRTC helps approximately 100 people annually through this avenue, including Tammy.

> Tammy, a woman with I/DD, sets a goal to work in a hospital or as a caregiver for the elderly. Personable, methodical, attentive to detail, and highly motivated to work, Tammy subsequently applies for positions with local nursing facilities and medical clinics. Tammy also has the support of an ETS, funded by OKDRS, to assist her in training and integration into the workplace. Filling a critical need in the workforce, many of the facilities are willing to train Tammy on the job.

Resources are readily available for employers interested in a more disability-inclusive workforce. State and local agencies, as well as nonprofits across Oklahoma specialize in providing expertise in accommodations and accessibility to all sectors of business and industry.

Conclusion

Workplace and community DEI discussions are incomplete unless also considering people with disabilities. While people with disabilities overall represent a largely untapped workforce, employment options for individuals with I/DD in Oklahoma are significantly limited in the wake of new federal initiatives. Modernization of services and employment outcomes for people with I/DD, to transition away from 'sheltered' programs into competitive integrated employment, requires a state-wide, multidisciplinary effort. Through resources providing accessibility and accommodations to business and industry, initiatives to employ persons with I/DD will be mutually beneficial. The success of these efforts is contingent on a strong commitment from business and community stakeholders.

DRTC (Dale Rogers Training Center) is an Oklahoma-based non-profit providing vocational training and employment for people with disabilities. Across all DRTC programs, approximately 1,000 people with disabilities earn more than $5 million in annual wages. DRTC's employment programs and services are widely available in the community (> 80%). The remaining (<20%) services include a 'center-based' program with community-integration for 110 individuals diagnosed with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD).

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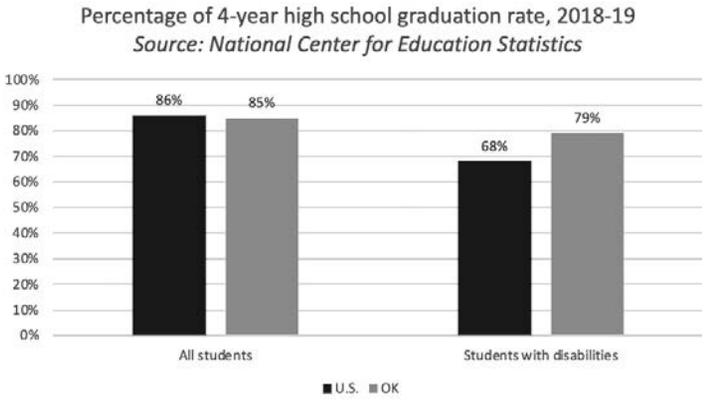
Transitioning to Successful Employment

James Helm, MPA, CPACC, Community Engagement Supervisor of Dale Rogers Training Center

As much as the conversation about innovating Oklahoma's workforce should include people with disabilities, policy makers must also recognize the need for more specialized vocational learning opportunities for teenagers with disabilities. Transition services, which refer to students with disabilities transitioning from school to the workforce, are a key component to improving Oklahoma's labor market. Current programs designed to introduce basic skills and knowledge of work opportunities provide a solid foundation for this population entering the workforce. However, a noticeable gap in services between high school and employment exists that can and should be closed to strengthen Oklahoma's pool of job candidates. Differences between available services in urban and rural areas also highlight the need for more community support to connect future job seekers with opportunities in their area. Focusing efforts on this group can yield big dividends for the state and community but not without making crucial adjustments first.

Background

Every year, tens of thousands of teenagers in Oklahoma begin the transition from high school to the next step in life. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 85% of students in Oklahoma graduated high school on time, compared to 79% of students with disabilities. This latter group may take longer to graduate, seek an alternative diploma, or do not graduate at all.



In high school, students with disabilities may participate in Transition School-to-Work programs offered in conjunction with the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services. Within these programs, students may develop work goals, participate in career exploration by visiting different job sites, and even receive assistance in applying for work, among other services.

Beyond high school, society generally expects graduates to either seek higher education or leap into the job market. Fewer than half of new high school graduates attended post-secondary education in 2016, leaving the remainder to decide how they would enter the workforce. This can be a particularly daunting experience for teenagers with disabilities, especially if they are ill-prepared to navigate the challenges of employment.

DRTC (Dale Rogers Training Center), a nonprofit agency that promotes a more disability-inclusive workplace and community, is on the front lines of connecting students with resources and meaningful career exploration prior to full employment. Originally formed as an educational center, the agency has transitioned to an entrepreneurial business model with the expectation of competitive integrated employment in the community. Through expanded partnerships with nonprofit agencies, state agencies, schools and businesses, these programs have the ability to take Oklahoma to new heights and serve as a model for others.

Existing Services

Pre-ETS

One existing program currently serving high school students with disabilities is Pre-Employment Transition Service (Pre-ETS), offered through the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services. Pre-ETS serves approximately 8,500 students in 140 schools throughout Oklahoma. Through various activities, students explore different components of work such as: job exploration, work-based learning, workplace readiness, self-advocacy, and post-secondary counseling. Pre-ETS, which is designed to supplement but not replace transition services, largely introduces students and families/caregivers to the world of employment beyond high school. Current funding does not allow for Pre-ETS to assist with on-the-job training, creating a gap in services.

Project SEARCH

After high school, qualifying young adults with disabilities may participate in Project SEARCH, an unpaid internship-based program providing on-the-job skills training. This nine-month-long program offers real work experience in a variety of businesses, rotating every 10-weeks. However, one glaring issue with Project SEARCH is its limited scope. This program is only offered in Oklahoma City, Moore, Edmond and Enid. Other towns, notably in rural areas, are not included, creating a division of employment opportunity.

Reimagining Services

Prior to COVID-19, DRTC operated an in-person Transition School-to-Work program through DRS, working with 17 schools in the Oklahoma City metro. Over time, however, participation and outcomes dropped, causing the agency to refocus efforts to better serve youth with disabilities. DRTC is now working with DRS to implement a new career exploration contract that would focus on transitioning into the workforce, pairing an employment training specialist with a single student or small group. Piloting a

successful career exploration program would prove scalable in cities and towns throughout Oklahoma, helping connect students with disabilities to previously unconsidered career opportunities.

An added benefit of career exploration is that it places more emphasis on early intervention—as young as 16 years old. Students can apply for transition services as early as 15.5 years old, but Project SEARCH starts at 18. By providing job discovery opportunities at 16, teenagers with disabilities can have extra time to build skills needed to be successful at work.

Conclusion

Existing services offered in Oklahoma provide a baseline of job exploration for teenagers and young adults with disabilities. Improvements can certainly be made from the lengthy application process, to offering focused career exploration at an earlier age, allowing the necessary time for teenagers to begin laying a foundation that will lead to successful employment. The state's flexibility with innovative programs such as career exploration should continue, focusing on job development to further close the gap in current services. The other component to this equation is business buy-in. In the current labor market, companies can tap into an under-utilized workforce (see previous article by DRTC Executive Director Deborah Copeland) to fill their needs, while benefitting the local community. Simple innovations to adjust current practices can help usher in a new era of productivity statewide.

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Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board

Kyra Rivera, Social Media Specialist, Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board

The Central Oklahoma Workforce Innovation Board (COWIB) is improving lives in our communities by building a quality workforce through education and creating connections between Job Seekers and Businesses.

The COWIB is a nonprofit organization incorporated under the laws of Oklahoma and recognized by the the Governor's Council for Economic and Workforce Development, the State Workforce Investment Board, and the Governor as the proper body to carry out the purposes and functions of the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act of 2014 (Public Law 113-128, July 22, 2014).

The COWIB is the policy and guidance board for the Workforce Oklahoma system in Central Oklahoma. We are business leaders with a goal to establish a highly skilled, productive workforce in our 9-county area.

The COWIB complies with WIOA's Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination provisions which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, childbirth, and related medical conditions, transgender status, and gender identity), national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, disability, political affiliation or belief, or, the basis of citizenship status or participation in a WIOA Title-1 financially assisted program or activity.

The mission of COWIB is to enhance the quality of life in our community through the development of a quality workforce through education. This is done by creating connections between employers and job seekers in our community. It is unfortunate that many people in Oklahoma face barriers in their pursuit of a career; furthermore, a lot of people wish to acquire higher education in order to have a better job and support themselves and their families better, but don't know where to begin.

The COWIB is able to take away a lot of that stress from you by utilizing a career navigator to help you as much as possible. Through this ability, our board is capable of helping you understand your strengths as well as weaknesses. We can match you with desirable jobs in Oklahoma, and pay for your training so you will become educated in the career you have chosen.

It has a number of advantages, including the fact that you do not have to pay for tuition or school fees, books, uniforms, or tools. Once you are ready to graduate, COWIB will match you up with employers seeking to hire individuals with your skills.

Oklahomans with barriers benefit from all of these services free of charge. A barrier can be anything from English not being your first language to having a learning disability to being a teen parent. In addition, we have programs designed specifically for adults as well as those tailored to youth.

Job Seeker Services

Skills Assessment
Our Career Navigators can help you to assess your strengths, skills, characteristics, resources, and interests and how they can be related to your employment goal.

Supportive Services
As part of our skills assessment, we can discuss barriers to employment and education and how to overcome them. We provide referrals to resources to help you gain and maintain employment. This may include assistance with work and school related tools and books.

Job Placement Services
Along with job search assistance, our Career Navigators can make referrals for job placement with partnering companies for our participants.

Follow Up
We want to provide the highest level of care for our participants, so we also provide follow up as a way to provide support to encourage you to reach and keep your employment and education goals.

Labor Market Information
Career research is encouraged and facilitated by our staff to help you become an informed job seeker. This will give you information about industries and occupations that are in-demand in the area and determine what occupation is a good fit for you.

Job Readiness Training
Our staff provides assistance with becoming ready for employment, including interviewing skills, resume writing, and soft skills training. Young Adults are able to complete a course which teaches skills that employers are looking for.

Occupational Skills Training
Referral to colleges, universities, and career techs that can provide education opportunities to gain a credential to gain better employment. This may include funding for training through colleges, universities, or career techs.

Additional Youth Services
Our staff also provides services to improve financial literacy, leadership development, and alternative secondary school services (to gain a High School Equivalency or GED) for our youth participants. This also includes participation incentives - getting paid for learning appropriate work ethics.

Report: Women in Oklahoma workforce are falling behind

Janice Francis-Smith, The Journal Record, July 22, 2022

Half of Oklahoma's workforce is falling further behind, recent studies show, and it's going to take a multifaceted approach to address the situation, according to advocates for Oklahoma women.

With unemployment at an all-time low and businesses struggling to find workers, the state could be doing a lot more to address the issues that keep so many Oklahoma women out of the workforce and in poverty, analysts say.

"I think we could be doing better, for sure," said Erika Lucas, founder of StitchCrew and Vest, organizations that support startup business and female entrepreneurs in particular.

"Entrepreneurship is not just a one policy thing," Lucas said. "If we're not doing well in providing health care, good education, good social infrastructures, then entrepreneurs will not be doing well. It's hard to pull at one thing, because everything impacts entrepreneurship. All those policies absolutely obstruct the ability for women to achieve economic mobility and to launch businesses."

Gov. Kevin Stitt issued an executive order July 11 calling for the creation of the Helping Every Life and Parent Task Force, to study ways the state may support pregnant women in the wake of the state's now total ban on abortion. Stitt's task force is to include a number of his Cabinet members and legislative leaders – all but one of whom are male – or their appointees.

Leaders in the state Senate have approved an interim study requested by state Sen. Jessica Garvin, R-Duncan, entitled Making Oklahoma a Top Ten State for Women.

Both studies are to issue their findings in October.

But the state is far behind in ensuring that Oklahoma women have access to the resources they need to survive, revealed a February report issued by personal finance website WalletHub, which ranked the status of Oklahoma women dead-last on the list of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

The WalletHub study incorporated several factors into the ranking, including earnings, employment, access to health care, life expectancy and more. Oklahoma came in 50th in both women's economic and social well-being and women's health care and safety, according to the study.

With a 2.8% unemployment rate as of May 2022, Oklahoma's overall workforce participation rate continues to hover at 60.7% overall. Between 2015 and 2019, the workforce participation rate for women in Oklahoma was 56%, lower than the U.S. average of 58%, according to a report issued in April 2022 by Oklahoma State University's Spears School of Business.

Oklahoma women earned 75 cents for every dollar earned by a male between 2015 and 2019, compared to nearly 81 cents for women in other states, the OSU report found. During that time period, the gender pay gap narrowed for the U.S. overall, but increased in Oklahoma.

The percentage of women without health insurance increased from 2015 to 2019, while the percentage of men without health insurance decreased in 2019, the study found. Oklahoma ranks 47th in the nation in life expectancy for women, at 78.3 years.

Lack of a steady income and lack of health insurance are the two most common reasons given for women's reluctance to start their own business, Lucas said. The WalletHub study ranked Oklahoma 50th in its percentage of insured women, ahead of only Texas.

Access to child care also factors in heavily to women's participation in the economy.

"Women are not opting out of the workforce, they're being forced out because of the child care situation, which is quite serious," said Shannon Warren, president of the Women's Diversity Initiative of Oklahoma.

"Business leaders need to align themselves with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in trying to promote the opportunities and accommodations women need, because after all, typically we're the primary caregivers, whether as parents or as children" caring for aging parents, Warren said.

During the second quarter of 2020, women's unemployment rate in Oklahoma was about 4% greater than the unemployment rate for Oklahoma men, the OSU study shows.

"Poverty particularly hits working mothers, and it's really hard once you get into that situation to get out," Warren said.

The annual cost of child care for an infant in Oklahoma in 2020 was $8,940, or $745 a month – accounting for about 12% of the income for a married couple with two incomes, or 40% of the income for a single parent.

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data shows unmarried women accounted for 44.7% of births in Oklahoma in 2020. Women are the single head of household in about 22% of Oklahoma families, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

The annual cost of infant care in Oklahoma is greater than the cost of in-state tuition at many public, four-year universities in the state, the OSU study showed.

Only about 19% of Oklahoma women have completed a four-year college education, while 20% of Oklahoma women do not even have a high school diploma. Women hold 29% of management positions in the state's workforce.

The pandemic highlighted just how important the care industry is to the economy as a whole, Lucas said.

"Our global economy depends on the care economy," Lucas said. "Yet, it's a more than $600 billion industry that's an overlooked opportunity."

Several of the companies supported by StitchCrew are revolutionizing the workplace using new systems, technology and means of communication in order to accommodate the needs of today's workforce, Lucas said. The modern workplace was "never designed with us in mind," Lucas said.

"Back then, it was designed for a very unique persona, a persona that could work from dawn till night because they had someone at home caring for the kids, cooking, doing all of those chores," Lucas said. "It didn't take into consideration the broad and diverse workforce we have now. We want to invest in women that are building solutions for future work that are reinventing how we work in the next 10 years."

The WalletHub study also ranked Oklahoma 46th – tied with Louisiana – for having one of the lowest female turnouts in the 2020 presidential election. The study noted that states with poor percentages of female representation in government typically fare poorly in implementing policies that benefit women.

About one-fifth of the Oklahoma legislators were women in 2021, a smaller share than the U.S. average of 31.1%.

Oklahoma's infant mortality rate, at 5.73 per 1,000 live births, ranks around the middle of the 50 states, with Mississippi's rate of 8.27 ranking the worst.

Garvin has also expressed her concern for how the current ban on abortion – which she supported – will affect Oklahoma's foster care system.

Currently there are 9,500 foster children in Oklahoma, with 1,700 in Oklahoma County alone, while the state has only 5,243 approved foster homes in the state and 930 in the county.

Much of Oklahoma's foster care system is attributable to the state's high incarceration rate for women. Oklahoma ranks third in the nation in overall incarceration. Some studies rank Oklahoma as first in female incarceration, with 281 women in prison per 100,000 residents, in 2018, while more recent studies rank Oklahoma second per capita, behind Idaho.

The WalletHub report should not have come as a surprise to lawmakers, Lucas said.

"No offense and with all due respect, but if you're surprised I believe you haven't been paying attention," Lucas said.

Since 1964 Oklahoma has had a Commission on the Status of Women, which was reestablished by executive orders until the Legislature gave it permanent status in 1994. While previous years' reports by the commission examined several statistics for women in Oklahoma, the commission's most recent report does not include such information and instead notes that the group met less frequently during the pandemic.

In recent years, the commission has focused on the issue of human trafficking and the annual Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame ceremonies.

Initiative to examine economic needs of women

Janice Francis-Smith, The Journal Record, July 28, 2022

The organization behind a comprehensive study on the status of women in Oklahoma is launching a two-year, $550,000 initiative to effect real change for women in the state.

Oklahoma State University's Spears School of Business partnered with Missouri-based United WE, an organization that has invested in research about and advocated for women since 1991.

Wendy Doyle, United WE president and CEO, and Laura J. Ahlstrom, assistant professor in the Department of Economics at the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University, held a virtual press conference Thursday outlining how the comprehensive report the partners recently released will be used.

"This will be the single largest effort in the history of Oklahoma to listen and address the economic needs of women," Doyle said.

The group will hold at least five town meetings statewide to hear firsthand from women in all parts of the state about what they are experiencing and what they need. The group also is forming a women's economic development task force, comprising women in a wide variety of industries and areas of the state.

The information gathered from the town halls and the task force will be used to present to policymakers with the information they need to effect change for women, and thereby grow the economy statewide.

"If we can get women back to work, participating as entrepreneurs or back in the workplace, we have the potential to grow Oklahoma's state economy by as much as 15% by 2025," Doyle said, citing a study by the McKinsey Global Institute.

United WE already has conducted similar initiatives in Kansas and Missouri, and the efforts of the group have yielded positive results with policy changes.

The Oklahoma study revealed that the wage gap between Oklahoma men and women is higher than that of other states. And that gap can't be breached as long as child care in Oklahoma costs more than college tuition, the study shows.

Based on the findings of the yearlong study the group conducted in Oklahoma, child care is one of the first issues that must be addressed.

"A significant problem impacting the growth of Oklahoma's economy and workforce development is child care," Doyle said.

"According to data from the Oklahoma Human Services Annual Reports from 2015 through 2021, there has been a sharp decline in the number of licensed child care facilities in the state," the report reads. "In 2015, there were 3,558 licensed facilities in Oklahoma. That number decreased each year until 2021. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sharp decline in the number of licensed facilities, totaling 2,685. A year later, that number increased by over 10% to 2,964, although there were still fewer childcare facilities in the state than in 2019."

The study examines the best practices of other states to see how improvements can be made in Oklahoma. Regulations for child care facilities vary from state to state, county to county and even city to city, Doyle noted.

The initiative will examine how to balance the safety of children with a regulatory system that does not impose undue burdens on entry into the childcare industry.

The group is also forming a nonpartisan advocacy and strategy group.

"We believe it at United Women that it is our collective responsibility to take this research information and identify creative solutions, and then really get to work to educate elected officials, corporate and community leaders, and then roll up our sleeves to impact lasting systemic change," Doyle said.

United WE has so far conducted 22 research studies, advocated for issues resulting in 51 policy actions and supported 180 civic appointments.

United WE projects the cost of the two-year initiative at $550,000 and is seeking partners in the community to help fund and support the cause.

Oklahoma Poised to Become the Next Film Production Hub

Rachel Cannon and Matt Payne, Prairie Surf Media

With streaming's explosive content demand at an all-time high, Studios are looking for lower cost operations to film their productions. Oklahoma is poised to become the next production hub with a new tax credit, a full-service film studio and workforce development programs helping Oklahomans pivot into the industry. There are many states jumping on the Georgia bandwagon to try to duplicate their success with the film and television industry. In 2008, they passed a more competitive film incentive and the private sector started building stages. At the time they had been experiencing around 100M in direct production spend in the state. By 2010 they had landed their first large series, The Walking Dead. By 2015, they had established the Georgia Film Academy to train a larger workforce to work on the incredible influx of productions. In 2021, Georgia reported they had a record breaking $4B in direct production spend. The multiplier showing the economic impact of these productions is staggering. And it's created tens of thousands of good paying steady jobs for their community.

In January 2021, Prairie Surf Media launched a full-service film studio in downtown Oklahoma City with 5 large soundstages and enough production support space to house a larger film or series. In August 2021, SB608 was put into action by our state leadership, providing a $30M tax credit annually for productions to come to Oklahoma. And with partnerships at career techs, colleges and universities pumping out classes to train the workforce, Oklahoma is on its way to becoming a competitive state in the industry.

The insatiable demand for content was only exacerbated by Covid. Streamers are hungrier than ever for more content, and with that comes the need for larger tax rebates, available soundstages and a trained workforce to support this massive increase in production. Oklahoma has an opportunity to continue to grow alongside the demand. The top ten companies alone have a projected $180B in original content spend planned for 2024.

With the influx of high budget series and feature films come a multitude of well paying jobs in a variety of disciplines and trades. When one thinks of employment opportunities in film, one thinks of directors, writers and actors. In truth, films and series create hundreds of jobs in disciplines ranging from seamstresses and construction workers to electricians and camera operators. Prairie Surf, in partnership with Oklahoma's career tech and higher education system, has been working tirelessly to create educational opportunities for Oklahomans to find affordable pathways into high paying and rewarding career opportunities. This industry doesn't require a master's degree, it requires a skillset with certifications. This is a great opportunity for people transitioning out of the military or another career looking for something new.

In 2000, Academy Award winning producer Gray Frederickson established the state's first film education program at OCCC and in the last two decades that program has grown into the driving force in our crew development. Focusing on production management and technical development- camera, electric, sound- and production management, the program boasts a soundstage, the most state-of-the-art equipment and a faculty made up of working professionals. In January 2021, Prairie Surf Media partnered with the college to begin its first Grip and Electric Intensive. The five week program boasted 25 students and was designed for individuals interested in a specific track in the industry instead of a two year associates program.

Prairie Surf has also partnered with Onward OKC to establish programs within the city's five career tech centers (Francis Tuttle, Metro Tech, Moore/Norman, MidDel and Canadian Valley). These courses are designed to be low cost and are marketed towards individuals looking to pivot an existing skill set into the film space where utility wages begin at $26 an hour. Onward OKC's courses thus far include accounting, art department (construction, prop building, set decoration and painting), food styling, and hair and make-up. Upcoming classes include advanced accounting and payroll, transportation, script supervision and location management among others. All twenty-five participants who completed the art department class, taught in part at Prairie Surf Media, were offered utility jobs on one of the state's current series where wages began at $27.00 an hour.

Classroom training is invaluable but the key to success is time spent on working sets. With this in mind, in winter '20 and summer '21, Prairie Surf worked with the Film Education Institute of Oklahoma to put on real-time training workshops where participants worked on a live set under the state's leading union crew members to produce a short film. Over the course of a week, more than 70 participants at each workshop had the opportunity to work in 24 different departments using industry standard equipment both on Prairie Surf's soundstages and on location. Of the seventy participants, 33% went on to work on at least one film project post workshop and many are currently working on either Reservation Dogs or Tulsa King - the state's two largest projects.

Lastly, the Prairie Surf intern program continues to evolve and is creating jobs both within Prairie Surf and in the industry beyond the film studio. In the past 18 months, 46 interns have had the opportunity to learn about the facility, production, script coverage, marketing, cinematography and editing. Participants get to work with PSM equipment to help create marketing assets for the company and additionally work on productions for Prairie Surf Creative. More than 50 students have spent time in Prairie Surf's internship program and currently five are employed with the company in varying capacities ranging from creative services to positions in facility operations.

Oklahoma's Growing Film & Television Industry Brings Big Business to State

Tava Maloy Sofsky, Oklahoma Film + Music Office

Presently, the production of film and television is emerging as one of the Oklahoma's leading industries contributing to both its current cultural renaissance as well as the creation of jobs and economic development across its statewide communities.

Under the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the Oklahoma Film + Music Office (OF+MO) works to promote the state as a viable hub for film, television and music production as well as further develop opportunities for workforce, business, and community growth within these sectors. Oklahoma's robust film incentive program, growing infrastructure, professional workforce, low costs for living and business, central location and diverse landscapes and communities make it a formidable partner for the film and television industry.

The Compete with Canada Act introduced Oklahoma's first film incentive program to the state in 2001. A cash rebate, this program was successful in introducing Oklahoma as a desirable location for film and television, setting the foundation for workforce and infrastructure development for over 20 years. Recent data from Fiscal Year 21 (July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021) shows that 34 film and television productions utilized the state's incentive program under The Compete with Canada Act, creating an estimated 11,004 local career opportunities and $170 million in fiscal impact impacting 40+ statewide communities.

Recent film and television successes to have utilized The Compete with Canada Act include A24's Academy Award winning film "Minari", Participant Media & Focus Features "Stillwater", FX's television series "Reservation Dogs", and Lionsgate's "American Underdog: The Kurt Warner Story" as well as Apple Original Film's forthcoming "Killers of the Flower Moon," the largest motion picture to ever be produced in Oklahoma.

"[…] to be able to tell this story on the land where these events took place is incredibly important and critical to allowing us to portray an accurate depiction of the time and people," said renowned filmmaker Martin Scorsese ahead of the start of production on "Killers of the Flower Moon" in Oklahoma. "We're grateful to Apple, the Oklahoma Film + Music Office and The Osage Nation, especially all our Osage consultants and cultural advisors, as we prepare for this shoot. We're excited to start working with our local cast and crew to bring this story to life on screen and immortalize a time in American history that should not be forgotten."

Based on the program's history of success, a new film incentive program was established in May 2021 with the signing of the Filmed in Oklahoma Act of 2021 by Governor Kevin Stitt. Under this law, the newly created program raised the annual cap of $8 million offered by The Compete with Canada Act to $30 million, and now provides one of the highest rebate percentages in the nation with a return up to 38% offered to approved film and television productions based on their qualifying spend. As the state's most robust film program to date, the Filmed in Oklahoma Act boasts specific mechanisms in place to positively impact rural communities through on-location filming and workforce development, increase infrastructure through use of local soundstage facilities and create additional career opportunities through post-production work and use of Oklahoma music and scoring facilities as well as apprenticeship programs throughout all film department.

"I am optimistic that the success of our thriving film and music industries will continue to flourish through this incentive program," said Governor Kevin Stitt. "These rebates will attract productions that lead to a diversified workforce, high quality jobs and increased revenue for ancillary services. Film and music provide opportunities for Oklahomans, and I look forward to the continued expansion of these valuable industries."

With a sunset date in 2031, the 10-year program marks a new chapter in Oklahoma's film and television production industry, and its longevity better allows the state to market itself specifically to television programming which relies on the security of long-term incentive programs to produce multiple seasons of episodic content. In 2022, Oklahoma crossed a new production threshold seeing the simultaneous production of three full-season scripted series in-state including Sony's Affirm Originals "A Thousand Tomorrows", an untitled Paramount+ Series, and the second season of FX's "Reservation Dogs".

Television production is particularly impactful to Oklahoma's film industry as it creates significant economic impact and tends to create longer term career opportunities for local film professionals. A case study commissioned by the OF+MO on the production of the pilot episode of "Reservation Dogs" in Oklahoma found that one episode of the series resulted in $2.3 million in direct local spending on crew, lodging, supplies, rentals and more in-state. Additionally, the pilot episode also provided 327 local career opportunities over the course of its 6-days of filming. After the successful completion of "Reservation Dogs" pilot episode in Oklahoma, FX Productions announced a full, eight-episode order for the half-hour comedy series, marking the first, full-time scripted network television series to film in Oklahoma at the time of production between April 12 – May 15, 2021. FX renewed "Reservation Dogs" for second season which wrapped photography in July 2022, positively impacting a number of rural communities in Northeastern Oklahoma.

"As the State Representative for House District 16, I appreciate the opportunity to get to know and work with FX/Disney and all of the 'Reservation Dogs' crew members" said Representative Scott Fetgatter of Okmulgee. "Over the past year, seeing the community full of excitement, the hotels full and our restaurants catering on the sets has brought great financial opportunity to the area. I look forward to seeing what the future holds for the series and how we as a state and district can better partner to maximize the potential for us all." He continues, "The impact of Oklahoma's film and television industry, including 'Reservation Dogs', has given our rural area so much hope for the future, I believe together we can produce a better product in content as well as economic growth for our state."

While Oklahoma celebrates the success of its' strongest film

incentive program to date under the "Filmed in Oklahoma Act of 2021", it should be noted the state is in a tight race among other competitive markets in Georgia, Louisiana and elsewhere to recruit film and television business to Oklahoma. Modeling their initial film incentive after Oklahoma's former "Compete with Canada Act" in the early 2000s, New Mexico has seen a tremendous return on their investment into the global film and television industry with compelling production and long-term infrastructure film and television incentives. According to a news report released in July 2022 by the New Mexico Economic Development Department (EDD), total spending in New Mexico from the film and television industry increased by 36% between FY21 and FY22 for a direct impact of $855.4 million. The New Mexico EDD also reported a staggering 660% increase in spending in rural communities from $6.5 million in FY21 to $50 million in FY22. Compared to Oklahoma's annual cap of $30 million, New Mexico's Film Production Tax Credit offers $100 million in annual funding with separate access to uncapped funds via the New Mexico Film Partner Program awarded to production companies like Netflix and NBC Universal which have made commitments to purchase and/or lease a 10-year facility for the production of film and television in-state thereby furthering long-term growth of the state's film workforce, infrastructure and additional resources.

Despite Oklahoma not yet witnessing the economic success of New Mexico's film and television industry, the state's increased investment into the film and television industry has already yielded multiple private and public partnerships among local businesses and organizations who are investing in vital infrastructure and education programs to further support the growing film and music industries in Oklahoma. Evidence of this growth can be seen with the addition of 4 Oklahoma Certified Sound Stages that collectively offer more than 1.3 million square feet of stage facilities as well as increased business registration from local film and music businesses in OF+MO's Production Directories. To date, these sound stages include Prairie Surf Media, Green Pastures Studio, Cherokee Nation Film Studios and Castle Row.

With over 525 registered companies in the Oklahoma Production Directory, film business has grown 78% in Oklahoma from 2014-2021 with the expansion and opening of many businesses providing including critical production needs. Similarly, with over 730 registered companies, music business has grown 62% in Oklahoma from 2014 -2021 with many new and expanding state of the art recording studios, post-sound facilities, event-based equipment providers, venues, schools and more!

Thousands of career opportunities are annually created by Oklahoma's film, television and music industries, and the growth of our workforce remains essential in the continued support of these sectors in our state. The growth in wages paid to local workforce between Fiscal Years 20 and 21 attests to the abounding opportunities for career development with $32.6M spent in FY20 and $170.4M spent in FY21. Increased opportunities are being created to build our local workforce such as our expatriate recruitment efforts which welcomes former Oklahomans back to the state to work in these industries and our apprenticeship provisions which require film and television productions utilizing the state's film incentive program to hire individuals newer to these industries to learn from a master tradesman on a professional production.

With living costs as much as 40% lower than the national average and affordable business opportunities, Oklahoma is setting itself apart from the rest of the pack as the place to be for filmmakers. In fact, Oklahoma's two largest production hubs – Oklahoma City and Tulsa – were named among the nation's top destinations for filmmakers by MovieMaker Magazine in 2022.

Located just south of the geographic center of the United States, Oklahoma is equidistant from Los Angeles and New York City. With 12 distinct eco-regions among its 77 counties, Oklahoma is one of the country's most diverse states with almost 70,000 square miles of land that varies from its trademark Great Plains to unexpected mountains as well as lush forests, sand dunes, plateaus, waterfalls and everything in-between. Highlighting potential filming sites across the state, OF+MO's online Oklahoma Locations Directory currently boasts over 3,300 locations showcasing what it can offer filmmakers. Equally attractive to filmmakers are Oklahoma's welcoming communities, which include certified "film friendly" cities across the state.

An OF+MO initiative, the Oklahoma Film Friendly Community Program seeks to provide the necessary resources and toolkit to communities wishing to further benefit from the impact of the state's booming film and television industry by certifying "film friendly" cities across all 77 Oklahoma counties. Per the program's requirements, certified cities have demonstrated their readiness to support future film and television production by designating a film liaison, establishing a film permit and increasing their community's representation in OF+MO's online Oklahoma Locations Directory. Over twenty communities have been certified 'film friendly' through the reimagined program which began in 2021, and some of these communities have even established their own local film offices, providing even more hands-on support and incentives to promote their cities as a destination for film and television.

In June 2020, an independent study, "Global Screen Production – The Impact of Film and Television Production on Economic Recovery from COVID-19", researched and written by Olsberg SPI, with the support of Media Business Insight and Netflix, found that "screen production" (the production of feature length films and multi-part television series) had a total economic impact of $414 billion in 2019. The study also found on average 67% of production costs are spent in other business sectors outside of "screen production" (food, construction, hotels, real estate, etc.). With the rise in streaming services and content creation, the economic impact of the film and television industry to markets across the world is likewise expected to increase in those regions which offer strong film incentives and policies. As such, the continued support and potential future expansions of the state's film incentive program remains critical to the future growth of Oklahoma's film and television industry.

"From the top down, we're incredibly grateful for the continued support of the state's film incentive program, which has proven to be successful in its efforts to grow the state's workforce, industry and infrastructure," said OF+MO Director Tava Maloy Sofsky in a recent press release regarding the state's film and television forecast for Fiscal Year 23. "We've successfully broken into the television landscape […] our soundstages are being utilized, our film friendly communities are embracing the industry and […] We look forward to continuing the work ahead to build upon the successful foundation being laid."

Oklahoma's Music Industry: Oklahoma's True Natural Resource

Tava Maloy Sofsky, Oklahoma Film + Music Office

New research in Oklahoma's music industry reveals the economic value and opportunities available for Oklahoma's music sector, contributing to both its current cultural renaissance as well as the creation of jobs and economic development across its statewide communities. A recent study conducted by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), a trade organization that represents the recording industry in the United States, cites the national music industry contribution to America's GDP at $170 billion.

Via the RIAA's nationwide economic impact study named the 50 States of Music, state GDP, jobs supported, number of music establishments, royalty recipients and songwriters were accounted for by state, ranking Oklahoma #32 nationally. Oklahoma's music industry GDP measured at $515.9 million at the time of the study, but does not include the large impact of music education in Oklahoma. The 50 States of Music study reveals insight into other states music industry contributions and the potential opportunities for economic growth. A more thorough economic impact study of Oklahoma's statewide music industry is currently needed. Texas music industry economic impact studies for years 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021, are available here.

50 States of Music: State GDPs:

1.	California	$39.5 billion
2.	Texas	$27.3 billion
3.	New York	$19.8 billion
4.	Florida	$7.6 billion
5.	Tennessee	$5.8 billion
6.	Pennsylvania	$4.9 billion
7.	Illinois	$4.3 billion
8.	Massachusetts	$2.9 billion
9.	Ohio	$2.6 billion
10.	Georgia	$2.5 billion
11.	Washington	$2.5 billion
12.	Colorado	$2.4 billion
13.	New Jersey	$2.3 billion
14.	Michigan	$2.3 billion
15.	Minnesota	$2.1 billion
16.	North Carolina	$1.9 billion
17.	Wisconsin	$1.6 billion
18.	Virginia	$1.6 billion
19.	Missouri	$1.6 billion
20.	Arizona	$1.6 billion
21.	Oregon	$1.5 billion
22.	Maryland	$1.4 billion
23.	Nevada	$1.3 billion
24.	Louisiana	$1.2 billion
25.	Connecticut	$1.2 billion
26.	Utah	$1.1 billion
27.	Indiana	$1.1 billion
28.	District of Columbia	$835.6 million
29.	South Carolina	$811.3 million
30.	Alabama	$584 million
31.	Nebraska	$525.7 million
32.	Oklahoma	$515.9 million
33.	Kentucky	$447.7 million
34.	Rhode Island	$413.5 million
35.	Kansas	$401.9 million
36.	Iowa	$381.8 million
37.	New Mexico	$309.1 million
38.	Arkansas	$307.5 million
39.	New Hampshire	$294.6 million
40.	Idaho	$282.4 million
41.	Hawaii	$274.8 million
42.	South Dakota	$250.8 million
43.	Maine	$226.8 million
44.	Alaska	$222.3 million
45.	Vermont	$220 million
46.	Montana	$203.5 million
47.	Delaware	$165.5 million
48.	West Virgina	$148.1 million
49.	North Dakota	$135.1 million
50.	Mississippi	$108 million
51.	Wyoming	$59 million

Additionally, an economic impact study of Tulsa County's music ecosystem was conducted by Sound Diplomacy in 2020 revealing a total output of $335 million and Value Added (GVA) of $198 million in Tulsa County's economy annually. The total number of jobs generated and supported by the music sector in the area is 4,392 (1.39% of employment in the county). Combined earnings equate to $156 million. Every $1,000 of output produced by the music sector indirectly support $379 of the output of other industries in the city and has an induced effect of $557 on other sectors. Although Tulsa's music output per capita is higher than the U.S. average, it is one-third of the output of Austin and New York which have higher flows of music tourism and strongly consolidated industries. An executive summary for the Tulsa Music Strategy can be viewed here.

Further, the Covid-19 pandemic offered federal and state government additional insight into music's economic contribution via the Shuttered Venue Operators Grant program. The $16.1 billion federal grant program funded under the American Rescue Plan Act provided grants to eligible entrepreneurs and entities, including venue operators, theat-

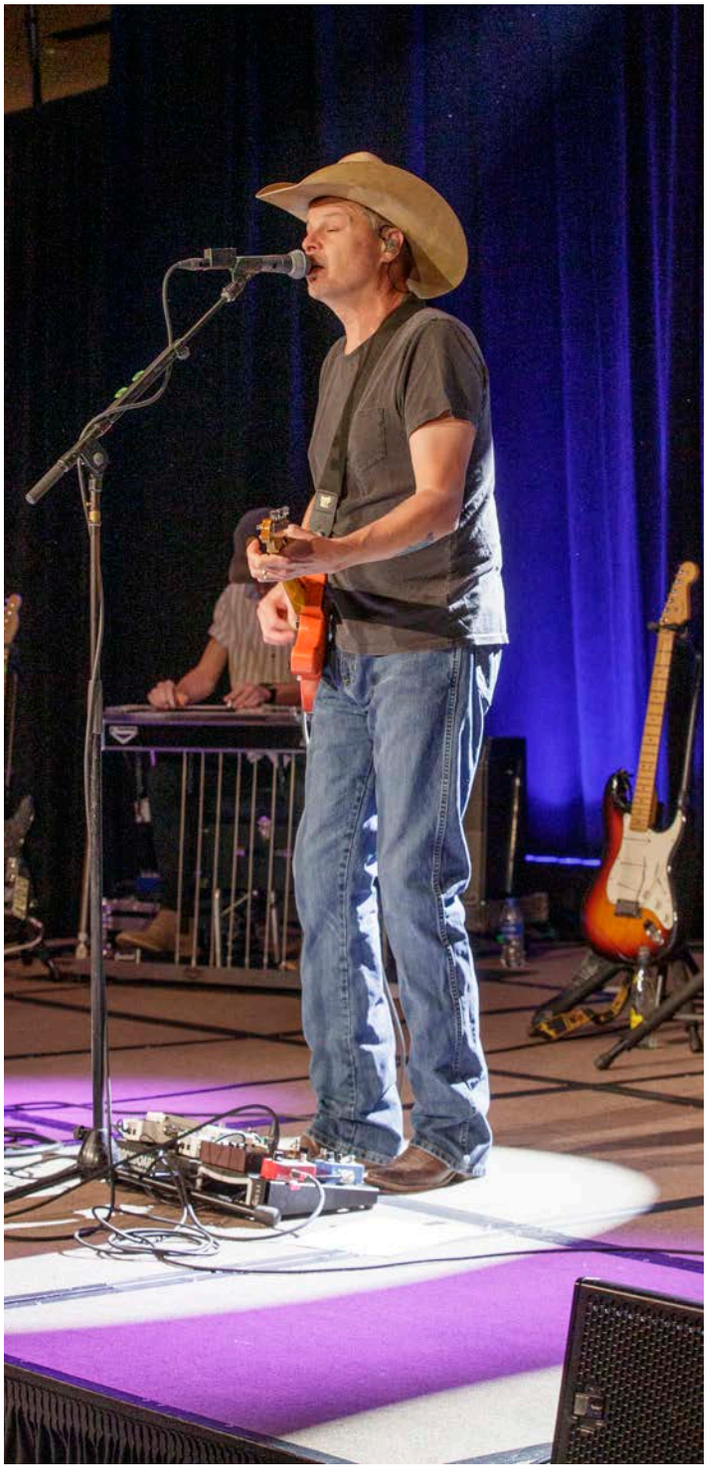
rical producers, museum operators, talent representatives, and other art- related specialties in the live arts and entertainment industry, which reports indicate being the most adversely affected sector during the pandemic in regard to loss of wages and employment. Oklahoma businesses qualified for and received 105 grants totaling $89,392,258. The most recent report of SVOG Initial and Supplemental Awards by State is available for review here.

Oklahoma's film, television, and music industries, together, offer Oklahoma not only an economic opportunity for growth, but a positive cultural benefit to the state's identity. The success of Oklahoma's Filmed in Oklahoma Act of 2021 has provided residual benefits to the music industry and continues to generate business opportunities for both sectors. State and city music incentives can be seen around the nation in Georgia, Texas, New York, Seattle, Indiana, and more. Examples of such incentives include The Texas Music Incubator Rebate Program passed in 2021, the Georgia Music Investment Act.

The State of Oklahoma currently offers a Stand Alone Post Production Incentive for eligible Oklahoma Post-Production expenditures including, but not limited to, sound recording or mixing, music production, recording, mixing or composition, and the licensing of Oklahoma music. The stand-alone post-production incentive offers a 20% base incentive for post-production work done in Oklahoma by projects that were filmed outside of Oklahoma. However, this program has not been utilized fully due to limited rebate funds.

Additionally, Oklahoma offers a number of workforce resources or those looking to further their careers in Oklahoma's film and music industries. Educational resources include more than 20 local universities, colleges, tech schools, specialized programs, as well as an increased number of job postings as the music industry returns stronger post-pandemic. With over 730 registered companies, music business have grown 62% in Oklahoma since 2014 with many new and expanding state of the art recording studios, post-sound facilities, event-based equipment providers, venues, schools, etc.

Named "Oklahoma's True Natural Resource" by the Recording Industry Association of America and with a clear mission from Governor Kevin Stitt and Department of Commerce to achieve Top Ten Status, Oklahoma's music industry is poised for success.



Jason Boland & The Stragglers performing at the 2021 Oklahoma Academy Salute. Photo by Shane Bevel

ARL Bio Pharma, Inc.

Thomas C. Kupiec, Ph.D., President/CEO, ARL Bio Pharma, Inc.

Company Background

ARL Bio Pharma, Inc. is an analytical and microbiological testing laboratory, providing services to pharmaceutical companies, compounding and hospital pharmacies, drug manufacturers, and raw material suppliers. The testing that ARL performs is technical and precise and is supported by a highly educated and trained workforce. Over 75% of our employees hold at least a bachelor's degree, including over 17% who hold an advanced degree. While all testing is performed in our facilities in Oklahoma, 98% of our revenues are derived from customers outside of the state. These metrics mean that ARL is a significant importer of both highly qualified employees and significant revenues into Oklahoma.

ARL's growth has come from the growth in the broader pharmaceutical industry driven by an aging population and increased regulatory and customer demand for quality control testing of pharmaceuticals. In addition, our growth has been outsized relative to the industry because we have gained market share in the pharmaceutical testing sub-industry. That has been possible because of our ability to attract and retain high-quality employees who maintain an unwavering commitment to scientific integrity and excellent customer service. ARL's collaborative culture helps our organization to retain top talent. This demonstrates the need for collaboration to be competitive in today's biotech industry.

The Talent Challenge

Finding the talent to support ARL's growth has been challenging, but as our reputation in the industry, headcount, and the technical requirements of our customers have grown, that challenge is even greater. For entry-level positions in our labs and administrative groups, we can typically source local candidates, products of Oklahoma's K-20 system. However, over the past two to three years, we have noticed a general decrease in individuals seeking employment. Positions that would have had 20 applicants per week three years ago now have a one or two applicants per week.

The lack of qualified entry-level employees seems to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and that situation will continue to improve as we put the pandemic further into the rearview. There are other solutions policy initiatives can assist with, which we outline below.

The situation is even more dire for finding experienced senior scientists. In most cases, we must look outside Oklahoma to find those individuals. From July 2021 to June 2022, ARL hired 12 scientists into our most technically rigorous job function. Only 4 of those individuals came from within Oklahoma.

We have identified two key causes of the lack of experienced scientific talent within Oklahoma.

1. The biotech industry in Oklahoma, while growing, is still fledgling. In more mature biotech markets (Boston, Raleigh Research Triangle, the Bay Area, New Jersey), concentrations of companies create opportunities for cross-pollination and employee growth. While no company likes to lose a good employee, the movement of employees within those markets supports the dissemination of best practices, which is a benefit to all. In addition, because there are limited biotech companies and jobs in Oklahoma, driven individuals who wish to succeed in those fields often determine that a relocation outside of the state is the best way for them to achieve that success.

2. The biotech industry in Oklahoma needs improvement to sell itself to high school and college students in Oklahoma and the educational institutions need to collaborate with the industry to be in front of their students. Many ambitious young Oklahomans have at least some idea of what a career in energy, banking, education, or healthcare looks like. Most, even those who have interest in a scientific field, do not have the same knowledge about a career in biotech, especially in Oklahoma.

Potential Solutions

While the challenges we and other biotech companies in the state face are significant, we believe that the solutions are simple, though not necessarily easy.

First, if the state wants to grow the burgeoning biotech industry in Oklahoma, it should support the hiring of experienced individuals from outside of the state until sufficient talent can be cultivated in Oklahoma. Between recruiter fees, relocation expenses, and H-1B visa transfers/acquisitions, ARL spends almost $40,000 to import a senior scientist from outside of the state to Oklahoma. While ARL bears the burden of this cost, Oklahoma reaps significant benefits in income tax revenues, both from the employee and because of the work the employee produces for ARL. In addition to the direct benefits of the employee, for every

senior scientist we hire, we also need to hire one to two other degreed individuals to support the senior scientist's work. Fortunately, we can often find graduates from local universities for those positions, and often those graduates can eventually progress to senior scientist roles themselves. This creates a virtuous cycle that benefits ARL, Oklahoma, and the biotech industry in Oklahoma.

The catalyst to create that virtuous cycle should be an Oklahoma state income tax credit which allows us, and the other biotech companies in the state, to defray the additional costs of hiring a senior scientist from out of state. We would immediately ramp up our hiring plans and we could be more competitive with companies in traditional biotech markets for that talent. We believe other biotech companies would act similarly.

Second, state agencies should encourage collaboration between institutions of higher learning and the biotech companies in the state. This encouragement should be supported by a small group of state employees responsible for creating forums for exchange of ideas between academia and industry on how to educate Oklahoma's science students on the opportunities available. The responsible group should also develop metrics to determine where we are and let us know if our efforts are proving successful. These metrics should include average starting salaries for science graduates in the state, percentage of students graduating with a science degree, percentage of students graduating with a science degree staying in Oklahoma, and percentage of biotech company employees graduating from Oklahoma institutions.

This approach will take years to bear fruit, and progress will likely be slow, but biotech is projected to be a leading industry for years to come. We should prepare now to ensure Oklahoma is not just competitive but is a leader in the industry. ARL is fully committed to that effort and would be an enthusiastic participant in such a group.

Finally, a common concern we hear from individuals we are trying to recruit into Oklahoma is Oklahoma's rankings in education, health, and women's and LGBT equality and welfare. We encourage our state leaders to take a hard look at these real issues and determine whether our aggressive social policies are detrimental to our stated desire to grow the industry in the state.

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Adapting Manufacturing Workforce to Industry 5.0

Sharon Harrison EdD, Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance

Introduction

Over the past decade manufacturing has seen a renewed political focus both nationally and within the state of Oklahoma. This focus is warranted due to the economic success manufacturing brings to both urban and rural communities and providing an above average living wage for Oklahomans. Oklahoma, like many states, is facing a growing workforce skills gap. Based on current data the state's economic growth figures and the number of skilled workers going through the Oklahoma Career Tech system, the current workforce shortage in Oklahoma's manufacturing is estimated to continue to grow and exceed 2022's projected shortage of 25,000 jobs. This is largely due to low state unemployment rates (below 2.8% [1]), impending retirements, and a limited talent pipeline. Oklahoma manufacturers serve and represent a large variety of industries. According to the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) 2021, there are a total of 3,034 manufacturers in Oklahoma employing 127,000 full-time employees [2].

Manufacturers have constantly had to adapt to new challenges to stay productive and economically viable. Currently, they are having to face a revolution in technology in the digital age that require digital responses to new challenges. In particular, manufacturers across the state need to acknowledge they don't have the workforce that is equipped to design and integrate the digital solutions and transformations that will only increase, which will threaten productivity, employment and economic prosperity.

What is Industry 5.0?

Industry 5.0 is defined as 'people working alongside robots and smart machines. It's about robots helping humans work better and faster by leveraging advanced technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT) and big data. It adds a personal human touch to the industry 4.0 pillars of automation and efficiency' [3]. To emphasize, Industry 5.0 is about supporting humans not replacing them and it is focused on optimizing performance.

As a state, we should encourage manufacturers to embrace quickly. It provides a logical and technical solution to our workforce challenges and at the same time positions Oklahoma as a robust, innovative leader in new technology and related processes. The alternative is to fall behind in the global integration of Industry 5.0.

Problem: Skill Disruption with the Integration of Industry 5.0

Key policy and industry reports (Deloitte, 2018 [4]) predict there will be a skill disruption when a business integrates Industry 5.0. When smart technologies are introduced, skill needs change. Its introduction does bring challenges to manufacturers and a necessary shift in skills. Each operation has its unique impact of technology on production and processes that will affect the nature of the skill disruption. The introduction of automation connected to smart technology presents skill-transition challenges for the manufacturing operation and the individual worker. Fearing how to navigate those skill transitions has led to slow adoption of automation in Oklahoma manufacturing. Manufacturers who are successfully transitioning to Industry 5.0 within their operations are doing so through trial-and-error and developing their own skills inhouse. As a state, we need a strategic workforce plan to support manufacturers as they transition their workforces with the necessary skills to be successful. Subsequently, it will position Oklahoma as a state that embraces innovation.

The skills that will be in highest demand from manufacturers focused on Industry 5.0 integration are technological skills—both basic digital skills and more advanced technology skills centered on programming. In other words, there is a focus on the skills at play in robotics, data, the Internet of Things (IOT) and interrelated functions that impact and connect with human skills. These technology skills required for automation are increasingly referred to as "digital skills."

In order to navigate the interplay of automation, data and processes, there will also be a related demand for higher cognitive level skills, such as creativity and innovation. Oklahoma manufacturers who are successfully integrating Industry 5.0 are allowing time for innovation and creativity within their production schedule and empowering individual workers to learn through trial and error.

All agree the integration of automation into work practices is increasing and its impact on skills cannot be ignored. How policy and practice are adapted and aligned to facilitate this impact and its transition for workers is imperative to government, industry and society in Oklahoma.

Solution: Integration of Industry 5.0 Workforce Plan

The Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance—in partnership with industry and other key stakeholders—is making workforce a strategic priority, addressing the current and future workforce gaps within the state of Oklahoma.

The Manufacturing Alliance is working on a specialized technology and workforce adoption plan focused on facilitating the integration of Industry 5.0 to growing sectors of manufacturing in Oklahoma. Our plan incorporates technology integration and workforce in a framework that will assess, design, implement and evaluate technology integration around the human and process capabilities for a manufacturer. When the human aspects are aligned

with the technology, a workable integration plan becomes achievable. This Skills Development Plan (SDP) emerges from the needs analysis of a Technology Integration Matrix (TIM). It would be used to identify skill gaps including but not limited to the areas of automation, cybersecurity and supply chain.

We see this integration impacting the following core areas of manufacturing:

- Automation (industrial robots, cobots, coding, algorithms, 3-D printing, laser projection technology, etc.)
- Supply Chain (Enterprise Resource Planning systems, logistics planning, modelling, Automated Guided Vehicles, etc.)
- Cybersecurity (vulnerability assessments, network integration of automation)

Our strategy is to align a model for integration of technology centered on Industry 5.0 with a workforce strategy. We propose that these should be integrated as together they position manufacturers to have a targeted workforce plan that is essential to any new technology integration.

Current and Future Impact on Manufacturing Occupations
Manufacturing occupations will be significantly affected by Industry 5.0 integration, especially in a shift away from predictable manual occupations like assembly workers, which represent 46 percent of employment. Occupations such as machine feeders or packaging machine operators could decrease by close to 50 percent .

While occupations are shifting, it is hard to transition to new skills. The new occupations reflect a need for high skills from the workforce as they transition to increase Integration of Industry 5.0. Jobs are disrupted and a skills mismatch occurs. But with retraining in high-level technical skills for the new occupations, a more digitally advanced manufacturing sector is created. This shift in demand for high-level technical skills makes it necessary to support manufacturers in the adoption of a Skills Development Plan as part of their overall workforce strategy.

Conclusion

For Oklahoma to be seen as a manufacturing leader, it needs to make advances in the next generation of technologies and the integration of Industry 5.0. Oklahoma has increased its manufacturing strategy as a state and as a result it predicts growth in several key manufacturing product areas. Looking at the needs we see around the state, we believe it is a logical step to align these strategic areas and create workable solutions for the workforce integration of Industry 5.0.

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Engineering powering Oklahoma's future

John Klier, Tulsa World, March 30, 2022

Everywhere you look engineering touches your daily life. The technology that powers your smartphone, the car you drive, the roads you travel on, the water you drink, the plane you fly in, and the technology of modern medicine are possible because of engineering advances.

John Klier, Ph.D.

Our national defense, economic competitiveness, energy grid and communications depend on our engineering leadership. Now, consider what's beyond your day-to-day reality.

Targeted cancer therapies, abundant clean water, new hydrogen energy from natural gas, advanced radar to protect the homeland and advanced on-demand manufacturing technologies are just a few of the examples. There's a future made possible by engineering that has the potential to enhance our way of life and grow economic opportunity in our state.

Civil, computer science, aerospace, architectural, electrical, industrial, mechanical, biomedical, chemical and petroleum engineering are all part of what makes the world go round. This year, Engineers Week that continues through Saturday, has a fitting theme for the state of Oklahoma – "Reimagining the Possible."

If we had this conversation 20 or 30 years ago, the title might have been "Imagining the Impossible." In Oklahoma, we know the value and the promise of engineering.

The rising aerospace industry and other industries in the Sooner State are generating demand for more than 3,000 new engineers annually in coming years. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects nationwide employment growth for engineers, with nearly 140,000 new jobs expected during the decade of 2016–26.

Seem a little divorced from your immediate life? It's not just the aerospace and high-tech industry where more well-trained engineers are needed.

Oklahoma needs engineers to help rebuild and repair more than 2,200 bridges. The state is set to receive $266.9 million to improve its bridges as part of a new funding program being launched by the U.S. Department of Transportation. Another $825 million will go to tribal transportation projects.

What about the water you drink, cook with, bathe in or give your animals to drink? Civil engineers are today looking at ways to give us all higher quality, clean water.

The Sooner State is eager to strengthen both the state's technology and economic landscapes. As part of this investment, the Oklahoma Regents for Higher Education committed $12.6 million to improve engineering studies at state universities in June 2021.

Thanks to targeted support by state leadership, the University of Oklahoma's Gallogly College of Engineering is making big moves to address the engineer demand. In 2021, OU hired 21 engineering faculty whose expertise range from aerospace engineering, data science and energy to medical devices and next generation microelectronic technology.

Our enrollment is on the upswing, and our mentoring programs have enjoyed immense growth – in fall 2021, the OU Engineering Pathways program instructed 1,000 students in grades 4-12 from 21 different schools.

We know this work is just the beginning in helping Oklahoma transform its economic landscape. But thanks to the state, Oklahoma is on its way to producing more engineers to take us into the next decade – and to the innovations and discoveries of the decades beyond.

The state's continued support will no doubt provide opportunities for our young people and long-term benefits to our state, its economy, and our citizens.

John Klier is the dean of the University of Oklahoma's Gallogly College of Engineering.

Industry-led Workforce Solutions – Workforce OMA

Sharon Harrison EdD, Oklahoma Manufacturers Alliance

Introduction

Oklahoma's manufacturing ecosystem has maintained a competitive edge and is positioned to see major expansion in the aerospace, autonomous vehicles, defense and machinery sectors.

Each of these sectors depends on an ecosystem of suppliers for vital components. In Oklahoma these are often the small and medium sized companies that represent 95% of the 3,034 manufacturers in our state. The ability of these small manufacturers to improve their productivity hinges on having the right talent with the right skills. They are often an ignored section of the manufacturing ecosystem but have been the bedrock of economic life and development since statehood.

Small and medium-sized firms are central to the growth and innovation of manufacturing regeneration in our state. The Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance—through its "Workforce OMA" initiative—has made workforce a strategic priority by creating strategies in partnership with industry and other key stakeholders. The effort is focused on current and future workforce gaps. To support manufacturers in securing the workforce needed to sustain and expand production, an Industry-led Manufacturing Workforce Committee in 2018.

Workforce OMA Committee Charter

The purpose of the industry-led committee is to develop a state-wide solution to identify and drive initiatives for manufacturer's workforce challenges. We have drawn together a committee of 35 C-suite-level manufacturing employers who represent small, medium, and large companies from varied subsectors.

Workforce OMA Committee Purpose

1. Build an industry-led visionary committee that actively seeks industry-created solutions to manufacturing workforce challenges within the state.

2. Serve as the group that informs and directs manufacturing workforce initiatives for state and local partners.

3. Educate and assisting in the adoption of advanced manufacturing technology skills.

4. Act as the catalyst for developing workforce and training solutions for manufacturing in partnership with Oklahoma's workforce agencies, career and technical education, community colleges and universities.

As a result of strategic planning in Q1 of 2022, the committee created a new three-year plan focused around the strategic areas of Manufacturing Career & Education Development, Creating Talent Pipelines and Advanced Technology and Automation.
Objectives and key results are built out from the strategic areas focused on what are priority areas of workforce need. A selection of key areas of strategic focus are detailed below [1].

Increase Adoption of Registered Apprenticeships

Even with low unemployment in our state, thousands of Oklahomans are struggling to find opportunities to enter and advance in careers that provide a livable wage. Many youths,18 to 24 years old are facing high rates of mental illness, low college completion rates, opioid addiction, all of which limit their early exposure to work and impeding their education and career de¬cisions. In addition, due to increasing tuition costs, many enter education while working either full-time or part-time. Work-based learning focused on the 'Earn and Learn' model provides an important link as young people transition from school to work and as workers move through an industry. That is why manufacturers support and promote the expansion of the registered apprenticeship programs (RAPs). Federal incentive grants secured by the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Workforce Office have been helpful but further incentives and tax assistance would help to increase adoption of RAPs.

RAPs are a key component of workforce strategies for three main reasons. First, in a well-implemented registered apprenticeship program, manufacturers have shown great success in retaining the apprentice because a RAP provides "a nurturing component of manager and/or mentor involvement in the skill development throughout the learning process."[2] In Oklahoma, the current retention rate of apprentices two years post training is 65% [3], compared to an overall employee manufacturing retention rate of 35% [4]. Second, apprenticeships are work-based learning experiences that, when adopted in a highly technical industry like manufacturing, provide a tool for skill development. That's because emphasis is placed on informal learning within the workplace, which leads to greater skill development. Third, when apprenticeships are introduced pre-middle adulthood in the life cycle in partnership with education, family, and the workplace, they have greater success in developing technical and socio-emotional skills that are related to employability skills.

Interstate Migration Expansion

Manufacturers in Oklahoma have struggled to find skilled workers—or even workers at all—in an environment of historically low unemployment. Like the runup to the 2008 recession, Oklahoma was less affected by the pre-pandemic "boom" and should be less affected by the bust. The workforces of states that are more strongly affected by the bust

could continue the trend of interstate migration that has grown in recent years.[5] So far, Oklahoma has not had a net influx. But if a recession is hitting other states harder, that will change. Talent Attraction Programs (TAP) that incentivize interstate migration, such as Tulsa Remote and Work In Enid Award, should be expanded and incentivized and targeted for growth ecosystems like manufacturing. Programs can be modified to attract and incentivize relocation of non-degreed individuals to fill open jobs in manufacturing.

Talent Pipelines

As mentioned earlier, manufacturers are challenged by an inadequate supply of workers. One report predicts the state's workforce will contract by 2027 by 0.9% [6]. If this projection is accurate, the state will see an increasing skills' shortage for at least the next five years. Acknowledging the current and continued skill shortage, the Workforce OMA Committee is looking at several talent pipelines underrepresented in manufacturing. The committee has been successful in building a partnership with the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) to establish an open avenue of opportunity for their clients. A current strategic direction is to expand on this partnership by linking RAPs to this population group.

There are approximately 285,000 veterans living in Oklahoma with 134,000 employed in Oklahoma's civilian labor force (47% of veterans) while 151,000 veterans (52% of veterans) [7] are not in the state's labor force. One strategy is to determine the true number of potential employable veterans and work with the Oklahoma Veterans Administration (OVA) to create a more defined talent pipeline. It would include training programs after military disembarkment linked to emerging careers in manufacturing. Veterans that are given the opportunity to work, especially in highly structured work environments like manufacturing, have proven to excel and build solid careers with increased employee retention. That benefits not only their families' financial welfare but also Oklahoma's economy as a whole.

Conclusion

Oklahoma manufacturers continue to adopt the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) and by doing so they are expanding a new pipeline of students with "real-world" experiences. This expansion has the advantage of highlighting the state as an attractive and viable place for workers to seek a career occupation. With additional state support and incentivization to participate in the program, more manufacturers will be motivated to employ apprentices through this avenue.

But manufacturers are not able to find all the workers they currently need from the existing workforce in the state. Efforts should be increased to attract not only degreed professionals but also individuals who can be trained to work entry-level positions and eventually transitioned to high-skill career pathways. The state's unemployment rate is so low and competition for workers across all industries is so high that the available workforce that manufacturers can pull from is critically limited. However, with state support, Talent Attraction Programs (TAP) can be expanded to accelerate the workforce population quickly so manufacturers can find qualified workers to train and meet production schedules.

Finally, the workforce shortage challenge has inspired a renewed effort to find trainable workers from populations that have not been sufficiently tapped. The Oklahoma Manufacturing Alliance, in partnership with private companies and DRS, has worked to help individuals with disabilities enter manufacturing jobs. There are more opportunities to create pipelines from this population and from veterans. DRS and Veterans Affairs are crucial partners in making these emerging pipelines functional.

Successful RAP, TAP and new talent pipelines need continued state support. If enhanced, these programs can be an important recruitment tool for the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and other economic development partners. Additionally, existing manufacturers that have a pipeline of skilled workers (apprentices, newly relocated, or under-utilized populations) can strengthen our economy and position Oklahoma nationally as a center of industry with creative workforce solutions.

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Oklahoma Ranked #1 in State Readiness for Drone Commerce

Brent Skorup, Mercatus Center at George Mason University, June 27, 2022

Commercial drone companies are testing and creating agriculture, medical, and home delivery services in countries around the world. Yet progress in the United States has been slow, in part because of a lack of clarity about federal and state roles in drone and airspace management. To jump-start the drone industry, states can create drone highways—aerial corridors above public roads. In "Is Your State Ready for Drone Commerce?" Brent Skorup presents a state-by-state scorecard.

Creating a System of Drone Highways

Many states have laws that allow cities to lease the air rights above public roads, vest property owners with air rights, and establish avigation easements. With these laws, states can facilitate future commercial drone operations in low-altitude airspace while Congress and the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) develop national drone policies. Creating a clear and coherent framework at the state and local level, such as a system of drone highways, will make parcel delivery faster, improve distribution of medical supplies, and create jobs in the technology and logistics sectors.

Factors for Ranking States' "Drone Readiness"
Skorup uses six factors to score and rank the 50 states' preparedness for commercial drone services:

1. Airspace lease law (30 points): More than one-third of states currently allow state or local authorities to lease airspace above public roads and private property.

2. Avigation easement law (25 points): These laws allow drone flights as long as they are high enough to avoid being a noise nuisance to landowners and passersby.

3. Task force or program office (20 points): States that have a drone program office within their department of transportation or a statewide task force will be ahead of the curve and can anticipate future issues before they become problems for operators and residents.

4. Law vesting landowners with air rights (10 points): These laws clarify property rights, thereby reducing litigation risk for drone operators and homeowners alike.

5. Sandbox (10 points): The term sandbox refers to a designated place to test new technologies under liberal rules for a predetermined duration. A drone sandbox allows early stage companies to show proof of concept to investors and regulators.

6. Jobs estimate (5 points): The number of drone jobs in a state signals future growth in drone commerce.

1 | Oklahoma

Score: 74/100

- Airspace Lease Law: 30/30
- Avigation Easement Law: 0/25
- Task Force or Program Office: 20/20
- Law Vesting Landowners with Air Rights: 10/10
- Sandbox: 10/10
- Jobs Estimate: 4/5

Factors Helping the State Score

- Airspace Lease Law: Oklahoma law allows public authorities to lease low-altitude airspace above local roads, state roads, and state property. Such a law allows state or local officials to create drone highways above these areas.

- Task Force or Program Office: Oklahoma gets full points. In May 2020, a state law created a drone program office—the Oklahoma Advanced Mobility Pilot Program—within the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. Among other things, the program office creates a nine-member advisory council that makes recommendations about drone and electric vertical-takeoff-and-landing aircraft.

- Law Vesting Landowners with Air Rights: Oklahoma law expressly provides air rights to landowners, which reduces litigation risk for drone operators because landowners know the extent of their property rights. The law also affirms the existence of "titles, estates, rights and interests" in airspace, independent of the connection to the property owner of the land.

- Sandbox: Oklahoma's Choctaw Nation has a program that offers airspace access to drone companies, is affiliated with the state transportation department, and has a prominent, open invitation to drone companies to test their hardware and services.

- Jobs Estimate: Oklahoma is in the second quintile when it comes to the number of drone-related jobs per 100,000 people, receiving four out of five points.

Factors Hindering the State Score

- Avigation Easement Law: Oklahoma law does not create an avigation easement, which means drone operators may be subject to nuisance and trespass laws, even if their drones do not disturb people on the ground.

These factors make Oklahoma the most drone-friendly state in the country.

Read full report at https://www.mercatus.org/publications/is_your_state_ready_for_drone_commerce_2022_scorecard

Oklahoma, Arkansas to create hub for growing tech sector

Rhett Morgan, Tulsa World, August 18, 2022

Oklahoma and Arkansas already share a state border.

Wednesday, they announced they are sharing a mission, combining resources to further economic development in this part of the country.

Before a crowd of more than 100 people at the Helmerich Research Center at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa, Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt and Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson signed a memo of understanding, agreeing to position the two-state region as a national hub of advanced mobility (AM), which includes drones, electric and autonomous vehicles, battery manufacturing, and transportation and logistics solutions.

"We are creating a national powerhouse for advanced mobility," Stitt said. "Separately, our states stand out individually. In fact, Oklahoma ranks No. 1 in drone readiness, and Arkansas is right there with us at No. 3. But together, our two states are unstoppable.

"This Oklahoma-Arkansas partnership positions our region to dominate the competition, and it gives companies a clear answer on where they need to be for developing, for testing, for producing or deploying new advanced mobility technologies."

The states' enthusiasm for the AM sector, leaders say, is rooted in its unique urban-rural airspace, legacy aerospace, logistics and retail industries, robust manufacturing workforces and top-tier university research assets.

"The East and West coasts get a lot of attention, from Silicon Valley in the West to the financial centers in New York City," Hutchinson said. "But Middle America has always been in the forefront of transportation. ...

"Because of our geographic location and the entrepreneurial spirit of our people, we have been innovative both in Oklahoma and Arkansas and successful in transportation, delivering goods all across America. Now, we have new opportunities that include electric vehicle manufacturing, drone deliveries, autonomous vehicles and new ways to transport goods that are only in someone's imagination today."

Efforts to establish the AM industry are projected to support up to 55,000 new jobs in careers such as software engineering, cybersecurity analytics, drone piloting, vehicle maintenance, and mechanical and industrial engineering. Average earnings in AM are about 50% higher compared with other industries in Arkansas and Oklahoma, according to a study.

In February, Hutchinson launched the Arkansas Council on Future Mobility, laying the groundwork for the AM initiative. The council is chaired by aviator, investor and entrepreneur Cyrus Sigari, considered one of the world's foremost experts on the future of mobility.

"Moving people and goods cleaner, faster, safer and at lower cost will benefit everyone, everywhere," Sigari said.

Already underway in the region is collaboration being led by Tulsa Innovation Labs, Northwest Arkansas Council and the Runway Group with support from the George Kaiser Family Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation. The venture aims to establish the "412 corridor" as an advanced mobility hub connecting the areas.

Elsewhere, electric vehicle startup Canoo has announced plans to build its headquarters and some operations in Bentonville, Arkansas, as well as a large manufacturing facility at MidAmerica Industrial Park (MAIP) in Pryor.

Through MAIP, Oklahoma also was a finalist for a Panasonic's $4 billion electric vehicle battery factory, which the company announced last month was going to De Soto, Kansas. Oklahoma offered of millions of dollars in incentives to land a factory in an effort called "Project Ocean."

"Oklahoma is well-positioned to attract not only Project Ocean-type projects but other great, great companies," Stitt said. "We have the lowest electricity costs in the country. I'm not saying we've lost anything at this point.

"All the announcement was — and I think people have misunderstood it — was that they are going to put one plant in Kansas. So we're still working together."

As for the state incentives, Stitt said, "it's a pay-as-you-go. If they do this, if they bring these types of jobs, then there were some incentive packages. But those monies are in savings. It can be re-deployed."

Lawton hopes to attract defense contractors with FISTA Innovation Park

Micaela Burrow, NonDoc, May 17, 2022

The Lawton Central Mall sits in the center of a sunken concrete parking lot, its drab exterior marred by the shadowed outline of store signs that were taken down as shops left the facility. On its west side, where Sears used to be, a white canvas draped along the external wall creates a sharp contrast. It reads "FISTA Innovation Park."

City leaders hope that FISTA will help revitalize Lawton's economy. (lawtonok.gov)

The space is slated to be the future home of the Fires Innovation Science & Technology Accelerator, an initiative to boost the local economy by attracting defense contractors, technology companies and researchers to Lawton. The creators of FISTA envision a facility where companies can work closely with military operations at nearby Fort Sill in a high-security environment. They have projected that FISTA will bring hundreds of jobs to the area — as many as 250 in the first two years.

The City of Lawton has shelled out millions to invest in this vision, including purchasing the Central Mall for $14.45 million last year and giving the project another $2 million for construction costs.

These expenditures came as a shock to some Lawton citizens, who have pointed to a lack of other improvements in the aging city and have questioned the use of infrastructure and development funds on the FISTA project.

But the effort has widespread support at the local, state and federal levels. In addition to financial support from Lawton, FISTA received a $1 million federal earmark in the 2022 National Defense Authorization Act. And, regardless of any lingering controversy, interior construction on the facility started this spring, officially kicking off an ambitious, and expensive, attempt to revitalize a central portion of the community.

The vision for FISTA

For Lawtonians, the sound of artillery fire is part of daily life. "That's just Fort Sill," they say, when a loud boom! boom! boom! interrupts a relaxing Sunday morning. For over a century, Lawton has grown up in support of the U.S. Army's Fort Sill military base and the thousands of soldiers who have trained there.

Fort Sill is home to the field artillery training base for the Army's field artillery school. And of the six priorities laid out in the 2019 Army Modernization Strategy, Fort Sill is responsible for two: long-range precision fires and air and missile defense.

According to James Taylor, a Navy veteran who serves as FISTA's director, FISTA will allow contractors to develop defense capabilities tailored to the Army's needs while making the research and development process more economical and efficient.

"This is where it's different from years past," Taylor said. "You would have defense contractors that would come to town with an already developed concept, idea, prototype, an actual production of something and try to sell it to the Army, whether they wanted it or not. They would spend two to three years trying to sell that to the Army. And if it didn't work, they leave town. We can't have that anymore."

So far, 11 defense technology companies are in negotiations for long-term contracts with FISTA, according to Taylor. He said company identities will not be revealed until their leases are finalized. Once that happens, FISTA will provide basic structure and facilities, as well as security to maintain a classified environment. The companies will be responsible for building out office space and installing whatever proprietary equipment they require.

One company, Dynetics, has formally leased a corner of the facility to work on a specialized artificial-intelligence technology called CEMA AI.

Nate Slate, the director of fires and air and missile development at Dynetics, said the company hopes that having

operations in FISTA will help facilitate military contracts.

"We'd like for it to be an easy button for R&D and [science and technology] and a convenient location for [Fort Sill] to influence it in progress," he said.

Once FISTA is up and running, leaders hope defense technology companies and Army officials can sit down together and work out the specifications of systems that supports the military's intended application.

Amid hopes of revitalization, city invests millions

The beginning of construction on the FISTA project represents the fruit of more than three years of planning and development and many more years of community and industry leaders imagining a new character for Lawton.

In 2020, the Lawton City Council approved the creation of the FISTA Development Trust Authority to oversee purchases, planning and other operational and strategic requirements of the project.

"It is a feather in our cap, a tool in our toolbox," said Lawton Mayor Stanley Booker.

He argues that FISTA will improve Fort Sill's resilience.

"We will be seen as a community that supports their defense installation. All of these things work together to protect Fort Sill and the $2 billion impact they have locally," he said.

City leaders also hope FISTA will bring much-needed industrial investments to Lawton, which has been losing businesses in recent years and registered a population decrease in the 2020 census.

The City Council considered several options for housing the FISTA project, including constructing a new facility or retrofitting the abandoned Fairmont Creamery building just a block away from the mall. After Sears went out of business, in 2017, and Dillard's in 2020, the council determined that the mall space would be the most financially viable option.

A loan with Bank of Oklahoma financed the $14.45 million purchase. According to FISTA Development Trust Authority Chairman Clarence Fortney, rent payments from the remaining retailers in the mall have already paid more than $1 million toward that balance.

Lawton deputy city manager Richard Rogalski said the opportunity to regain control of the mall was appealing "from a city planner perspective."

"We saw a prospect of decline that we felt was an opportunity to shore up," Rogalski said. "The ability to further redevelop the mall — we haven't had significant improvements in the mall since 2011."

Rogalski said city planners hope the project will help revitalize downtown Lawton.

"Our other long-term goal is to have additional businesses in the downtown area do some renovations within the property alongside FISTA," said Rep. Daniel Pae (R-Lawton).

Pae said the changes will provide "quality of life and recreational activities" for local families but that the project will take time.

"It will take time for contractor negotiations for construction to be completed," he said. "One thing I've experienced as a policymaker is you want instantaneous change and results as a policymaker, but we have processes in place and just practical challenges. The more investment we put in the front end and diligently work in the beginning stage, the more it will pay off for the community."

The FISTA Development Trust Authority came head to head with the challenge of time last year, as escalating construction costs brought on by global supply chain issues and inflation threatened to push back the project.

The FISTA Authority requested another $5 million from the city in 2021, an amount that was eventually negotiated down to $2 million. The money came from a Capital Improvement Projects (CIP) fund voters passed in 2019 by consolidating two existing sales taxes and designating them for a list of infrastructure and industrial-development projects.

Some Lawton citizens were skeptical of the expenditure and of the money spent on the original purchase of the mall.

"If we're looking to entice businesses to come to Lawton there are better ways of doing it that dropping $14.6 million in the hopes industry and corporations would lease the properties," Timothy Dostan wrote in a Lawton Daily News piece. "We should have had an opportunity to vote on whether or not the city purchased the Central Mall. Sure we voted on the CIP (Capital Improvement Program) awhile back, but if the citizens knew that they were planning to do this with the money it NEVER would have passed!"

Former Lawton Constitution managing editor David Hale offered a similar sentiment in a Facebook post.

"A better explanation to taxpayers is needed," Hale wrote.

According to Booker, Lawton's mayor, the language in the CIP ordinance provides justification for using the money for FISTA.

Though the City Council ultimately approved the additional expense, Councilmembers Sean Fortenbaugh and Kelly Harris were initially hesitant.

"I'm uneasy about where we're getting the money for this

and how we're going to pay for it because we keep dipping into our funds," Fortenbaugh said. "I want to make sure we're doing right for the citizens and we're not hurting ourselves with these CIP funds."

The City Council delayed the vote to allow the FISTA Authority time to answer councilmembers' questions. The measure that passed called for the project to use an approach called "valued engineering," which involves prioritizing price by using the least expensive materials and methodologies available for a construction project. According to Pae, local businesses make up more than 50 percent of contract bids for the construction.

Pae said that approving the funds came down to the construction timeline.

"If it had been delayed, it would have impacted the bidding process, and certainly that would have impacted negotiations with defense contractors," Pae said.

Central Plaza does not feature in an online Citizens Capital Improvements Portal the city constructed so citizens can keep track of progress on construction projects funded by the CIP.

Booker argued that the FISTA project will improve the city's capacity to maintain services and repair degrading infrastructure.

"A community gets its return on the investment through growing the community. The returns come back to the community through an increased economy," he said. "If we come up with 250 high-tech jobs, that's going to bring millions of dollars into the community, and that's what creates the money that can fix the streets and pick up the trash."

Pae agreed.

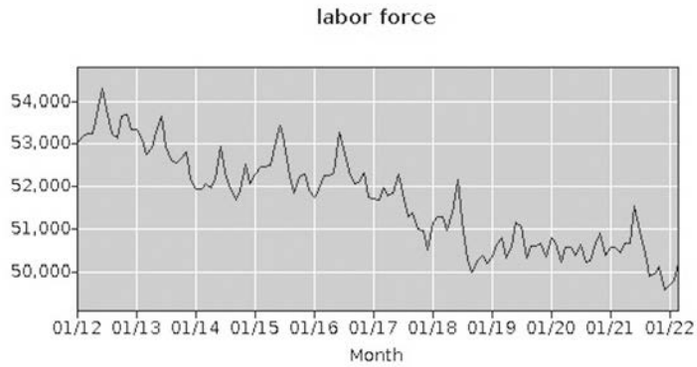
"This arose out of a longstanding conversation with community leaders and serving with the City Council," said Pae. "This is another step moving forward to focus on how we grow as a community."

Bringing people back, bringing Lawton back

The size of Lawton's workforce has been steadily falling for several years, and the supporters of the FISTA initiative hope that it will help keep Lawton natives in the area.

Slate, from Dynetics, is a retired soldier who chairs a community consortium to promote STEM education and is a member of the Lawton Chamber of Commerce. He has also been involved in laying the groundwork for FISTA and has made it a priority for the project to incorporate STEM education for Lawton Public Schools.

In 2011, Slate recalled, Lawton's Eisenhower High School obtained a coveted math and science scholarship sponsored



Data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows Lawton's workforce declining over the past decade. (data.bls.gov)

by Northrup Grumman, where Slate worked at the time. He said the scholarship transformed the school and made the students attractive to universities and companies. But, like many young people with highly marketable skills, those students left Lawton to work elsewhere.

Jared Mulhousen is an unusual case in that respect. He went to high school in Lawton and studied software engineering at the University of Oklahoma. In 2021, he took a job with Dynetics.

Mulhousen said he appreciates being able to work in a high-tech field while staying close to home.

"You always hear about software engineers, how they'll move to big cities and make good money. I just wanted to be near my family," he said. "It was mostly me looking for the best opportunity in a state that I enjoy living in. When you're comfortable and have a good paying job, you can give back to a community that you are familiar with."

Educational opportunities for local students will be built into FISTA, which will include a STEM classroom. The University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University also have plans to establish research programs in the facility, according to Pae.

"The idea is that we can connect our teachers and students to engineers and professionals who are defense contractors," said Fortney, the FISTA Trust chairman. "I have four granddaughters. My reason, why I'm driven, is that I want them to stay in the Lawton/Fort Sill area when they grow up and get jobs."

Slate agreed that education is central to the vision for FISTA.

"If you really want to see the community change and maybe America change, you invest in these kids in the STEM education," he said. "If you want to change the area, you want to get them a high-tech job locally, so they can come back to the community they grew up in and lift it."

Cybersecurity jobs in demand in Oklahoma, globally

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, May 24, 2022

Cyber-threats are growing in number and sophistication and so is the demand for trained specialists to protect businesses and government agencies.

A panel of experts discussed the issue with Journal Record Editor Joe Dowd during a recent JR/Now webinar.

"Every industry is impacted in this space," said Josh Snavely, a cybersecurity and privacy expert and attorney at McAfee & Taft. "No one is safe, unfortunately."

There are 3.5 million unfilled cybersecurity jobs globally and 455,000 in the U.S. right now, Snavely said.

Almost 4,000 of those vacant jobs are here in Oklahoma, said Jeremy Thomas, provost and vice president for student affairs at Oklahoma City Community College. "There's definitely a need," Thomas said.

"As more of these attacks happen it will start to cripple businesses," said Vince Bridges, vice president for academic affairs at OCCC. "The shortage of workers is a serious issue."

Bridges said cybersecurity is growing 33% faster than all other occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics projections for new positions needed by 20230.

These are high-paying jobs with the median annual salary in Oklahoma about $88,000, he said.

OCCC is one of the colleges in Oklahoma that offers cybersecurity programs. John Claybon, dean of business and information technology, said the program was developed to meet the growing demand for "cyber warriors" needed to protect critical information systems.

Graduates earn a two-year degree in applied science in a dynamic, engaging and lucrative career field that is not going away, he said.

That degree and certifications are all that are needed for most private sector jobs, said Jon McHenry, professor of computer science at OCCC. Most federal government jobs require a bachelor's degree, he said.

McHenry said many students are ex-military personnel who already have security clearance, former law enforcement officers, and workers in industries that ebb and flow like the oil field. Young people who are gamers often do well in the program because they "already have the mindset of trying to get around things and break them," he said.

Cybersecurity is not just for coders, McHenry said. There also is the managerial side, people who create policy, analyze and audit. Even the automotive industry needs cyber experts because vehicles are internet capable, he said.

"This is not just a technology problem. It's an executive leadership problem that really needs a wide scale of approaches," Snavely said. "It's an enterprise-wide risk, so you need people across your organization … understanding this."

Snavely – who does incident response for small businesses – said 90% in past three months started with compromised credentials or a phishing attack. In almost every case, the problem could have been avoided if the IT department had deployed multifactor authentication, he said.

In one case it saved a company close to $50,000 based on the records the hackers were trying to view. In another case, not having multifactor authentication cost the company $900,000 in remediation, Snavely said.

Hiring someone who is a cybersecurity expert could be worth $1 million or your entire business, he said, noting 60% of companies go out of business within six months of a ransomware attack.

Why Thousands of Teachers Are Leaving the Classroom

Alan Greenblatt, Governing, July 1, 2022

Alexis Perez-Lane loves kids. Ever since she was a child, she knew she wanted to be a teacher. In college, she got a degree in human learning and development and then started teaching at the elementary school level, first in Atlanta and then St. Louis. "It was kind of my dream job, really," she says. "It's really fascinating to see little kids learn and grow, and watch how they pick up on things."

But Perez-Lane has left teaching. Like many another teacher, she found that the comparatively low level of pay created a strain when it came time to start her own family. She was tired of being at schools that were in danger of being shut down. Finally, during the pandemic, she was ready to do something else. "With COVID, my role shifted and it was really difficult to meet their educational needs and also their emotional needs," she says. "Teaching was the thing that got pushed most to the backburner."

Perez-Lane's story is common these days. More than a half-million teachers have left the profession since the start of 2020. In a typical year, about 8 percent of teachers leave, but this year saw more teachers leave in the middle of the school year than normal. Also, while it's long been common for teachers to quit during their first five years on the job, districts are now losing lots of teachers with lots more experience.

"It's a major problem," says Daniel Domenech, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. "It's the No. 1 issue for superintendents."

As schools seek to recover from the challenges caused by the pandemic — with enrollment in decline and students falling behind on basics like reading and math — it's difficult to find the help they need to do the work. Already, it's common for teachers to have to fill in for absent colleagues out sick or quitting. And, aside from the emotional strain of helping kids deal with all their pandemic-related issues, many teachers now feel under attack as schools become a front in the culture wars.

"You have an anti-school rhetoric that's been consistent throughout the pandemic," says Willie Carver, who was named Kentucky's teacher of the year for 2022 but has just announced he's quitting after being accused by a parent of "grooming" children through his oversight of an LGBTQ student club. "If you happen to be at the convergence of hate — queer and a teacher — then you have to prepare yourself for an onslaught."

Aside from some states putting new restrictions on what teachers can say about racial history or gender identity and sexual orientation, teachers across the country express frustration about being micromanaged by rigid curricula that

turn them into little more than data collectors and standardized-test proctors.

"There was a time when teachers could just close the door and use their best judgment on how to teach a class," says Kevin Welner, director of the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado. "Now, there's a lot more oversight of teachers. That comes with both good and bad [outcomes], but for a lot of teachers, it makes their job feel less professional and less fulfilling."

Meanwhile, with low unemployment and labor shortages in many other fields, lots of teachers recognize they have other options. One of my son's teachers this year left to work in trucking logistics, a field in which he had no prior experience in but which offered him more pay nonetheless.

For districts that are short-staffed, there aren't a lot of spare bodies to put into classrooms. "The problem is, the pipeline isn't there," Domenech says. "When we talk to schools of education, their enrollments are way down."

The Job Is Personal

People who go into teaching tend to be optimists. All the work is about preparing others for the future. It's an attractive path for those drawn to helping others — sometimes based on their own experiences.

Audra DeRidder has a brother who was born with Down syndrome and albinism. They grew up in a rural area that fell short when it came to specialized services. "Just the lack of resources for us is what drew me into teaching," she says. "At first, I thought about the medical field, but I just genuinely like kids."

She became a special education teacher in Iron Mountain, Mich. Although she loved teaching, she felt she got to do very little of it. There are a lot of meetings and paperwork involved, particularly in special ed. Things got worse, she says, during the pandemic. The combination of that strain and the level of pay have her rethinking her career.

"The return to the classroom has been stressful for the teachers, but it's also been stressful for the students," DeRidder says. "Because of that stress, we are seeing a lot of behavior problems because we are pushing them to be at grade level when they are not ready."

Carver, the former Kentucky teacher, was similarly drawn to the field based on personal experience. "I grew up in extreme poverty — literally no running water and no electricity," he says. "My teachers provided for my every need — emotional, physical, spiritual. School was a place where people who didn't know me were taking care of me, and I wanted to be part of that system."

Like many other teachers, Carver says he's always hoped for more parental involvement, particularly when it comes to the kids who need the most help. But he says the current Zeitgeist has parents worked up about the wrong things, "whether gender theory or the idea that teachers are indoctrinating students to be feminists."

He said he used to feel like a "symbol" for students, his mere presence signaling it was OK to be a professional who also is gay. Despite his success — not only his teacher of the year recognition, but having his high school students outperform college students working on the same material — he decided he couldn't stand having "a group of torch-wielding villagers" coming after him.

"I had to think about what it would be like for me teaching the next two years," Carver says. "Will my students see a happy, successful adult who also happens to be gay, or will they see a broken, stressed, defeated person standing there?"

Possible Solutions

It's not yet clear from the raw numbers whether the current exodus of teachers is substantially greater than normal. But it's certain that lots of educators are unhappy and at least thinking about leaving.

In February, the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, released a survey that found 55 percent of teachers were thinking about retiring earlier than they'd planned, due to the pandemic. That's double the number from July 2020. More recently, the RAND Corporation released a survey that found teachers and principals are experiencing frequent job-related stress at about double the rate of most workers.

"We're not in control of the curriculum, and yet we still get the brunt of criticism from society," says Kevin Leichtman, a consultant who quit his teaching job toward the start of the pandemic, and also wrote a dissertation on teacher burnout. "They've been stripped of their autonomy, and now you have this public perception that they're lazy and overpaid."

Flush with cash, a number of states are providing teachers with salary increases — in some cases, the biggest they've seen in years, if not decades. New Mexico raised base salary levels an average of 20 percent. Teachers would see pay increase 14.2 percent over two years, with bonuses, under a budget proposal released by North Carolina legislators this week. Missouri raised the minimum teacher salary all the way from $25,000 to $38,000, although only for one year.

Aside from money, some schools are experimenting with their management models. The American Association of School Administrators is working with Arizona State University to expand a team-teaching model already in place in about 30 Arizona schools. The idea started about five years ago under the theory that "we didn't have an educator shortage problem, we had a workforce design problem," says Brent Maddin, executive director of ASU's Next Education Workforce initiative.

The model of a single teacher standing in front of a room full of kids has been around since the 19th century. Putting teachers together in a shared classroom addresses many issues. They feel less isolated, for one thing, and they don't have to put off doctors appointments or other personal needs until the summer. Not only do more teachers say they like coming to work, but more kids are passing their classes, suggesting that having experienced teachers work with junior peers helps them navigate through the mandated curricula.

"Everything has a COVID-shaped asterisk right now," Maddin admits. "But we have the opportunity to make this a job that people want to run into, as opposed to from, as professional educators."

Aerospace & Defense Industry is 2nd Largest Economic Engine in Oklahoma

Chuck Gray, VP/COO, Frontier Electronic Systems Corp

INTRODUCTION:

The Aerospace and Defense (A & D) Industry is the second largest economic Engine in Oklahoma generating more than $44B annually in economic activity supporting 15% of Oklahoma's jobs. Oklahoma is home to two of the largest Aerospace Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul facilities in the world and one of 10 US Space Ports. Oklahoma is a business friendly, Right to Work State offering a robust portfolio of educational, business and tax incentives to both organic and out-of-state companies to grow their businesses in Oklahoma. Oklahoma's Aerospace business is growing, but its pace could be accelerated by reducing taxes, strengthening incentives for organic business expansion, growing work force participation, emphasizing K-12 Science-Technology-Engineering-Math (STEM) programs and increased employer collaboration with public education.

KEY FACTORS DRIVING OKLAHOMA'S A & D GROWTH INCLUDE:

1. The Air Force Sustainment Center (AFSC) growth in Oklahoma City. AFSC is the largest Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility in Department of Defense (DoD) with 26,000 employees. American Airlines has its MRO Center in Tulsa employing more than 6,000 technical professionals. Complementing these operations are more than 1,100 aerospace and defense businesses throughout Oklahoma.

2. OK's "Heartland location"; pro-business, right to work labor environment; air, land and water transportation infrastructure and an attractive salary structure.

3. Oklahoma's engineering tax credit providing 5 year monetary tax incentives to qualified engineers working in an Oklahoma business and Oklahoma businesses that hire them. Other state and local tax incentives such as Quality jobs are available to businesses

4. Top quality engineering and STEM programs at Oklahoma's Universities, Career Technology Programs developing critical A & D technical skills complemented by initiatives such as Oklahoma sponsored registered apprenticeship programs. OSU was 1st nationally to develop engineering degrees for Unmanned Aerospace Systems (UAS)

5. OK cost of living 12% below the national average coupled and quality of life enhancements contributing too Oklahoma's gain of 100,000 people reflected in the 2020 census.

6. Oklahoma's 2018 legislative initiative to accelerate aerospace and growth and development within Oklahoma by establishing the ACES program under the Oklahoma Department of Commerce.

Through 2021, ACES had facilitated A & D investments of $1B, 4,400 new jobs and $645M in DoD contracts for Oklahoma businesses. Today, 35 projects targeting 6,000 A & D jobs with average salaries of $71,000/year are in work.

FRONTIER ELECTRONIC SYSTEM'S (FES) BUSINESS GROWTH AND PROSPERITY FOUNDATION IS BASED ON A ROBUST CUSTOMER/SUPPLIER NETWORK, PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE, COLLABORATION AND K-20 ENGAGEMENT. OKLAHOMA'S AEROSPACE ENGINEERING TAX CREDIT, OKLAHOMA CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (OCAST) PROGRAMS AND THE RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FEDERAL TAX CREDIT ARE ALSO IMPORTANT. FACTORS DIRECTLY IMPACTING FES SUCCESS INCLUDE:

1. A family centric, AS9100 quality culture prioritizing customer success, employee satisfaction, team empowerment, accountability and community partnerships. FES' Stillwater location offers a family friendly, culturally educationally rich environment.

2. A synergistic business strategy based on a diversified business portfolio targeting a variety of government maritime, aircraft, space, missile and research and development programs.

3. Fulfilling engineering, manufacturing and professional careers with competitive pay, benefits, educational incentives and advancement opportunities.

4. Research partnerships with Oklahoma Universities, robust engineering internships and trusting relationships with customers, suppliers, employees and community partners.

BUSINESS FRIENDLY ECONOMIC POLICIES STIMULATE OKLAHOMA'S A & D INDUSTRY. ADDING PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES AIMED SPECIFICALLY AT "HOME GROWN" A & D BUSINESSES COULD BENEFIT GROWTH:

1. Assessing Oklahoma's OCAST, Quality Jobs Programs, and other tax incentive initiatives should be reviewed with 3 questions in mind—Are they adequately funded when compared to out of state recruitment programs? Are they business friendly to apply for and administer and are they appropriately advertised to businesses in rural areas?

2. Reinstatement consideration of Oklahoma's Economic Development Generating Excellence (EDGE) program which offered small businesses completing OCAST or other research programs an opportunity to secure $25M in over 5 years to transition research outcomes to marketable products.

3. Addressing rural area infrastructure limitations, such as healthcare, transportation, childcare, STEM education etc. that adversely impact A & D labor availability.

4. Advocating a "Career Ready-College Ready academic culture " throughout the K-20 cycle. Make the workplace part of the K-12 system by exposing students to a broad range of careers early in elementary school and developing career focused STEM curriculums that better equip students for preparation of their required Individual Career Academic Plan (ICAP) when entering the 9th grade.

FOUR ISSUES ADVERSELY IMPACT THE GROWTH OF OKLAHOMA'S A & D INDUSTRY.

1. Oklahoma's low workforce participation rate. Only 60.5% of Oklahomans are in the workforce, which is among the lowest in the nation. stands at 60.5%, one of the lowest in the nation. A key goal of the GCWED is to increase labor force participation to 65% by adding 200,000 workers by addressing opportunities below.

a. Previously described infrastructure issues

b. "I'm comfortable at home culture change" driven by COVID 19

c. Slow pace of incorporating candidates with disabilities, justice records, or other special needs Oklahomans into the workforce

2. Inadequate numbers of engineers and other STEM talent. Oklahoma Air Logistics Complex (OC-ALC) leadership communicated the severity of this issue saying that employing every Oklahoma engineering graduate over the next 10 years would only satisfy 40% of requirements. Contributing factors other than increased demand:

a. Declining engineering university enrollment.

b. Lack of early school-employer engagement motivating students toward STEM careers

c. Expansion and increased rigor in K-12 STEM skills development programs.

3. Inadequate non-degreed, technical talent: Openings for machinists, welders, programmers, assemblers, equipment maintenance and other STEM skill sets outnumber applicants. Factors above plus apprenticeship opportunities impact this shortfall

4. Absence of a broad-based Oklahoma aerospace and defense supplier network. Currently, FES' supply chain consists primarily of out of state companies because adequate OK businesses with required quality certifications, technical skill sets, equipment and facilities are not available in state.

FES HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN FINDING BOTH SKILLED AND UNSKILLED TEAM MEMBERS TO FULFILL REQUIREMENTS FOR ONGOING BUSINESS WITHIN ITS 60-DAY AVERAGE REQUISITION TO HIRE CYCLE.

1. High school graduates are hired for manufacturing positions and upskilled by industry qualified FES trainers since training is not available through Career Tech.

2. FES employs a robust internship program in partnership with OSU's College of Engineering providing a skilled pool of candidates for future hiring.

3. Mid-career manufacturing technicians and engineers skilled in software and systems integration are scarce requiring extra time to recruit.

OKLAHOMA'S K-20 EDUCATION SYSTEM IS THE KEY TO PROVIDING FES AND INDUSTRY WITH STEM QUALIFIED GRADUATES TO SUSTAIN AND GROW BUSINESS. FROM AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE, STEM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS REQUIRE MORE ATTENTION, PARTICULARLY IN THE K-12 SYSTEM. TO OFFSET TODAY'S SHORTFALL, EMPLOYERS LIKE FES HAVE ESTABLISHED IN-HOUSE TRAINING PROGRAMS TO DEVELOP THE SPECIALIZED SKILLS REQUIRED FOR THEIR BUSINESS. WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

1. Early emphasis on STEM skills development starting with mathematics to feed University and Career Tech education pipelines.

2. Decrease the 13% K-12 dropout rate. High school equivalency is fundamental to A & D skills development

3. Expanded Industry support of Oklahoma's K-12 STEM career development. Early career motivation engagements with teachers and students, providing teaching aides and offering factory tours, apprenticeships/internships and job opportunities. The GCWED has established career pathways and employer engagement programs to help address this issue.

CONCLUSION:

Aerospace and defense is a vibrant economic engine for Oklahoma's growth and prosperity. Propelled by a business-friendly culture, economic incentives, educational infrastructure, and a skilled labor force, Oklahoma's A & D businesses are well positioned for continued growth and prosperity. Optimizing the pace of growth will depend on Oklahoma's ability to increase the states 60.5% labor participation rate, raise the "career ready-college ready" high school STEM graduation rate, incentivize Oklahoma owned business growth and develop new businesses qualified to produce most products required by the A & D supply chain.

Oklahoma Ranked #1 for High Schools Teaching Aviation Curriculum

Sandra Shelton, Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission, July 12, 2022

While commercial runways were nearly vacant during the early days of the pandemic of 2020-2021, staff from the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission were knocking on the doors of high school superintendents and school counselors across Oklahoma's 77 counties, asking if they could visit about an emerging aviation curriculum available to their students.

Oklahoma Aeronautics has advocated for and implemented this curriculum to support Oklahoma's commitment to solving workforce challenges and to ensure that the state's second-largest industry, aviation and aerospace, will continue to be a major economic driver for the state. The four-year "You Can Fly" High School Curriculum developed by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) is being adopted by independent school districts at a record pace throughout the state.

On Tuesday evening during a four-day training conference, teachers and industry leaders met at OU's National Weather Center to celebrate the growth of aviation and aerospace education in the state, and to discuss ways to partner in the building of programs that will ensure the growth of Oklahoma's aviation, aerospace and defense industry workforce.

Oklahoma Lt. Governor Matt Pinnell announced from the stage that Oklahoma is first in the nation for the number of schools approved to teach the AOPA high school aviation curriculum starting this fall. With AOPA President and CEO Mark Baker and the State Director of Aeronautics Grayson Ardies flanking the stage, AOPA and Oklahoma Aeronautics confirmed that the 58 school districts across the state signed onto the program moved the Sooner State into first place in the United States.

"I want to make Oklahoma a Top Ten state in every category and I am so proud that Oklahoma is ranked first in the nation for high schools teaching the AOPA curriculum," said Governor Kevin Stitt. "Thanks to innovative leadership and the work of Oklahoma Aeronautics, we are helping young people find a passion for aviation and aerospace. As a pilot, I am excited to see what the future brings for the Oklahoma Aeronautics Commission and the aerospace industry in our state."

Many of the school districts are geographically located in rural areas and are readying themselves to implement the curriculum next fall. AOPA's You Can Fly initiative is all about building the aviation community, getting more people into the skies, and keeping them there. The centerpiece of You Can Fly is the unique and free High School STEM Curriculum, ensuring that all of aviation has a bright future.

"From CareerTech certifications to a dozen collegiate programs, Oklahoma has led the way in aerospace education for decades. The implementation of AOPA Aviation Curriculum in high schools across the state marks the next milestone in growing aerospace talent in Oklahoma. The aerospace industry employs more than 120,000 Oklahomans, and our continued investment in education will lead to more high-paying jobs in our state," said Lt. Gov. Matt Pinnell.

You Can Fly plays a vital role in helping to ensure the health of aviation, as the nation faces a looming shortage of pilots and aviation professionals. The latest Boeing Commercial Outlook calls for the need for more than 600,000 pilots and aviation technicians over the next 20 years.

In the past school year, more than 12,000 students in 1,000 classrooms across the country, in all four grades, took the curriculum and learned about exciting opportunities in aviation.

"I'm most proud that 49% of the students in our High School program come from minority backgrounds, and 21% are female. We need more inclusion in aviation," said Baker.

The program is beginning to see real dividends as among its first set of graduates, 58% are pursuing aviation-related careers (including 87% attending college, trade, or technical school).

To support the program, in late 2021 the Commission took on the monumental task to apply for a Workforce Development Grant funded by the Federal Aviation Administration to add support for the implementation of the AOPA program. Staff is working with those 58 schools to distribute FAA funds directly toward classroom supplies. One foundational aspect of receiving the FAA grant was to name five Oklahoma high schools as "Aviation High Schools of Excellence".

The five schools recognized by the legislature during the 2022 legislative session were Ada High School, McAlester High School, Mustang High School, Okmulgee High School, and Pryor High School. They were early adopters of the AOPA program and will serve as mentors for new Oklahoma high schools implementing the AOPA curriculum.

To further advance the program, Sen. Zack Taylor, R-Seminole, and Nicole Miller, R-Edmond, filed Senate Bill 1147 which Gov. Stitt signed into law to direct the State Board of Education to help ensure aviation courses are eligible for non-elective academic credit toward meeting Oklahoma's graduation requirements.

Ardies said, "Oklahoma has a strong commitment to implement educational programming to address aviation, aerospace and defense workforce needs. Many in the industry have called for aviation-focused, primary-level education curriculum to get students started on an early flight plan for joining the aviation or aerospace career field. Number one in the Nation is great, but we are just starting to spread our wings and take flight."

OKC a finalist for federal biotech money

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, May 2, 2022

Partners working to expand the biotechnology industry in central Oklahoma met Monday with a U.S. Economic Development Administration official who quizzed them about their process.

Oklahoma City is a finalist in the EDA's $1 billion Build Back Better Regional Challenge, which could provide a $55 million grant to support further development of bioscience and bio-pharma manufacturing in the region.

"Today we're here to recognize the cooperation that's taking place in Oklahoma City around the bio innovation cluster," said Dennis Alvord, the EDA's deputy assistant secretary for economic development and chief operating officer. "And we're really excited about what we've read and heard about the partnerships that are forming and how you're looking to position your region and your economy for future success."

Alvord commended the Oklahoma City coalition for building a strong public-private partnership that can work to effectively scale the region's biotechnology sector.

The Oklahoma Biotech Innovation Cluster was chosen as one of 60 finalists from 529 applicants nationally and received $500,000 to further develop its plan in support of the grant.

The plan focuses on the dual goals of supporting next-generation drug developers (existing companies) and creating a more favorable environment for commercializing research (new companies). The coalition says integration across the product life cycle – research and development, manufacturing, and clinical trial capacity – will offer a frictionless and cost-effective environment for drug development.

Alvord said the EDA is focusing on disparities in the economy and is committed to supporting equitable outcomes for regions so that "everyone can benefit from these types of opportunities."

"We've learned that we have to think differently. We've got to be innovative in the future in the way we're approaching economic development," he said, noting the BBB Regional Challenge is the EDA's first time to drive place-based, cluster-oriented economic development.

EDA officials randomly selected 13 finalists where they are conducting coalition conversations throughout April and May to learn more about how regional coalitions developed their strategies.

The vision of the Oklahoma City coalition is to invest in infrastructure, including labs and research facilities, a workforce training center and startup/incubator facilities, all with the purpose of addressing and overcoming persistent challenges plaguing the global biotech industry.

"There's an alignment happening here like I've not seen before," said John Hanak, chief innovation and corporate officer at the University of Oklahoma. "There are just some great things here. We need a little more jet fuel to accelerate things."

Hanak came to OU seven months ago to lead a new office focused on integrating the university's efforts in technology commercialization, entrepreneurship, and corporate partnerships for sponsored research and education.

Jeff Seymour, executive vice president of economic development at the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, said he is optimistic about the city's chances to be one of the 20 finalists to receive a grant.

The Oklahoma Biotech Innovation Cluster is based on "what already was a success story in the region and how to scale that" and on the need to build domestic capacity, particularly around pharmaceuticals, he said.

The Oklahoma City region was on a path to address the biosciences sector long term even before the grant program came along, Seymour said.

"Regardless of getting the grant, there are projects that we have to get off the ground," he said. "These dollars would accelerate that."

The plan addresses the disconnect between the Innovation District and people in the surrounding neighborhoods who don't have access to jobs in the district, Seymour said. It calls for establishing a workforce training center to meet the growing demand for skilled labor in the sector and provide non-degreed career pathways into high-wage jobs.

"From a macro level, our economy is doing great now," Mayor David Holt said. But that economic success is not happening equitably across the city and across all demographic groups.

Holt said the city has started doing things to address that – things many other big cities did 30 years ago. "EDA's potential assistance allows us to accelerate that and catch up faster, and for the sake of our residents we want to do that," he said.

A Look Into OKC's Venture Capital Network and Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Innovation District Staff, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber, July 6, 2022

Three years, Willpower and an Ecosystem

"The vision is not only to bring the world to Oklahoma City, but to bring Oklahoma City to the world."

That's what Christian Kanady, a founding partner of Echo Investment Capital, said drives his teams' focus to connect the Oklahoma City venture capital and entrepreneurial ecosystem with global talent, ideas and resources.

And Kanady's team vision is not a siloed, lofty one.

In fact, it is a vision shared by several Oklahoma City venture capitalists and entrepreneurs, another of which is Nathaniel Harding of Cortado Ventures.

"We (Oklahoma City) have the talent and spirit, and now we also have the critical mass of smart money, hungry entrepreneurs and intellectual infrastructure to support tech startups in adjacent sectors," Harding said. "The significance of all this can't be overstated; We're seeing the beginning of what will define OKC for the next 100 years, just as oil & gas defined the city over the last 100 years."

As Harding notes, venture capital and entrepreneurship haven't always been industries the state has been known for (or good at). In many ways, both industries are in their infancy stages, while others paved the way for these industries to gain their footing.

"The state's staple industries have historically been agriculture and oil & gas, while in our more recent history, we've seen increases in aerospace & defense, manufacturing, banking and biotech," James Roller, a Managing Partner at Victorum Capital, said. "The wealth creation of the early 1900's oil & gas industry spurred much of the development of Oklahoma, which can also be said about our more recent economy; Oklahoma oil & gas revenues have bolstered the coffers of individual landowners and local and state governments to fund the expansion of our State's emerging sectors."

And venture capital, along with entrepreneurship, are two keys to those emerging sectors.

"Venture Capital in Oklahoma has seen a significant uptick over the last three years," Roller said. "In the past, there were only a few sources of startup capital in the State, while in today's Oklahoma, there are multiple funds and a more engaged set of corporate & angel investors.

"As high-quality startups continue to be built in Oklahoma, more venture capital funds will be formed here that invest, which is a cycle that should continue to build on itself and

lead to better outcomes for investors, companies and ultimately the state of Oklahoma."

The VC/entrepreneurial cycle Roller references is one that is not easy to spark and one that has been elusive in Oklahoma's past. There have always been, 'Which came first, the chicken or the egg?' questions regarding the start of the cycle's capital and deal flow nature.

"For years we asked ourselves which is first: organized startup capital or deal flow," Harding said. "And we have concluded that the answer is both, all the time, at the same time and in a messy, organic and iterative process - a process that is happening now as Oklahoma City is at the forefront of the 'third wave' of innovation, outside the traditional hubs of San Francisco, New York and Boston."

Oklahoma, and the State's capital itself, is certainly drawing new looks from startups, investors and companies that it previously would not have received, as eyes on the coasts have begun to look to flyover states for more opportunity and a higher return on investments.

"Investors who have previously overlooked states like Oklahoma are rethinking Middle America as the place where things are made," Kanady said. "The capital markets and maker-economy in Oklahoma are stronger than ever, demonstrating that there is not only a desire for high-return investments in cutting-edge companies outside of Silicon Valley and the coasts, but that the conditions in the Middle Coast have never been better positioned to meet that need."

The Oklahoma City Innovation District, along with other key entrepreneurial-focused assets across the city, are

working together to promote the message that Kanady highlights and to help raise awareness that OKC is in the process of becoming a top-tier ecosystem to invest in and for startups to thrive in. Leaders across the city are nurturing the roots of the area's entrepreneurial ecosystem to ensure that it flourishes by doubling down on the number of resources available and increasing OKC's exposure to national audiences through collaborative storytelling efforts of entrepreneurial success stories happening here.

"In recent years, we've seen exponential growth in Oklahoma City's VC network and entrepreneurial ecosystem, where several accelerator and pre-accelerator programs have started or moved here, along with innovation hubs, incubators, maker spaces, coding bootcamps, mentorship programs, pitch events and organized capital of all types," Harding said. "Three years ago, there were just a handful of such providers and programs, and now there are scores.

"The Oklahoma City Innovation District has shown a spotlight on this opportunity and draws on the best to join this growing community, as OKC now has the critical mass in venture capital to continue thriving and attracting the best."

Even transplants to Oklahoma City recognize the numerous resources and perks that entrepreneurs can take advantage of here to make a startup successful. Of those perks, the low-cost of business and funding potential stick out to Bradley Davis, the CEO & Co-Founder of one of OKC's newest and most successful startups, Podchaser.

"One of OKC's main positive attributes for an entrepreneur is the ability to reduce your personal burn rate via low cost-of-living," Davis said. "Additionally, while running a company, both the talent and resources needed to grow your startup are considerably less expensive here.

"I am a transplant (to OKC) and had received funding prior to moving here, but I believe I would have found similar success, likely at an accelerated rate, had I started in OKC. There is a lot of dry powder looking to diversify into scalable tech opportunities all over the area."

When one thinks of 'Top US Cities for Startups & Venture Capital,' Oklahoma City does not typically come to mind with the likes of San Francisco, Austin, Denver or Boston, and at this point, it shouldn't. But OKC's needle is slowly moving, and it is trending in the right direction.

"There are many successful entrepreneurs in the Oklahoma City-area, along with new VCs and multiple startup organizations that are aiming to aggregate all the available resources in one spot." Davis said.

"Oklahoma City is in its early days, but the will is there, and that is crucial to an ecosystem's chance of success."

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Tulsa Remote regeneration: Participant gives back through program for recent grads

Rhett Morgan, Tulsa World, August 20, 2022

Animator Trae Sjogren was bouncing from city to city when something he discovered spoke to him.

"I've moved almost 30 times in my life," he said. "It's a muscle I'm familiar with. Half of it was curiosity. Half of it was just survival. A lot of it was being broke, not having any funds.

"Tulsa Remote really popped up on my radar because I was reading a lot of articles in that vein. I just applied. I just thought it was cool."

Two years ago, Sjogren relocated from Boise, Idaho, to become part of Tulsa Remote, the George Kaiser Family Foundation-funded program that gives people $10,000 to move here.

Now, having set down roots and purchased a home in Tulsa, he is paying it forward. Sjogren is giving that $10,000 back to the community through a program he created called Skill Fund.

It helps recent high school grads start their professional journey by learning a remote-friendly creative skill through a 90-day cohort. Each of the 10 people initially chosen for the program will receive a $1,000 grant and be assigned a network of mentors.

The application process — people can apply at skillfund.co — ends Aug. 31, and the first cohort kicks off with Oct. 1 with a ceremony at 36 Degrees North.

"The idea is for the recipient to pick a creative skill, and we match them to a mentor," Sjogren said of the self-paced curriculum. "It's really supposed to emulate what a current world environment would be like if you are going to be learning or being hired for this skill."

As a partner of Skill Fund, 36 Degrees North will provide a free membership to each of the students, giving them a space to work surrounded by other entrepreneurs.

"Skill Fund is a much-needed program for high-school graduates in Tulsa, and we are thrilled to support Trae in starting this incredibly thoughtful program," 36 Degrees CEO Devon Laney said.

"Our membership is full of creatives who have amazing stories of building their own agencies and working for world-renowned brands; it only makes sense that we utilize this vibrant network to help empower the next generation."

Sjogren's life story is the inspiration for Skill Fund.

Having set down roots here through Tulsa Remote, Trae Sjogren is now giving that $10,000 back to the community through a program her created called Skill Fund. Mike Simons, Tulsa World

Having dabbled in sales, marketing and branding, he began working as an animator right out of high school.

Some of his animation clients include the Green Bay Packers and Fox Sports. He's also done work for Billie Eilish's tour and the new Minions movie.

"(Skill Fund) is about being someone who was thrown into the world, who didn't know what he was doing," Sjogren said. "He wasn't able to get into college. Half of it was my decisions and the other half finances. I just couldn't get the loans.

"I spent the last 10 years just trying to figure out how to carve out a career and be successful. ... I've realized there is a really big opportunity to have more of a process here to help people who were in my situation."

If he can build more funding, Sjogren envisions making Skill Fund a national program. He advises young adults eager to begin their creative journeys to initiate instead of hesitate.

"If you want to do something, just start doing it," he said. "If you want to learn skateboarding, just jump on a board. If you want to learn how to design, just Google 'How to design.'

"The key component for me is just get started. Usually, the momentum builds from there."

Apprenticeships enhance businesses long-term

Don Morris, The Journal Record, June 15, 2022

Business owners across Oklahoma have embraced registered apprenticeship programs over the last several years. Since late 2018 the number of apprenticeship programs in Oklahoma has grown by 200%. Such an impressive growth rate shows not only that statewide recruitment and support are effective but that the programs work well and come as a great benefit to employers.

Don Morris

The impact of all these new apprenticeship programs has been significant. On average, every dollar invested in a registered apprenticeship program returns $1.47 thanks to increased productivity, profitability, and innovation. Staff trained through registered apprenticeship programs stick around, and they perform their jobs exceedingly well.

Moreover, in today's employment climate one of the key benefits of these programs is retention. Nationwide, over 90% of those trained in apprentice positions will stay on with their employer long-term. Consider further that when training is complete, from day one, workers are steeped in the knowledge of a company's unique culture, practices, software, and technology.

A registered apprenticeship program is one that meets employment and training requirements laid out by the U.S. Department of Labor. The structure lends a tremendous amount of support.

At Oklahoma Works, we have invested a lot into helping Oklahoma businesses launch their own apprenticeship programs. We are able to offset the cost of starting a program thanks to $7 million in federal grant funding distributed throughout our state. In fact, our agency took a more proactive approach to promote apprenticeship programs among employers shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Many businesses were able to find some stability among their staff during that difficult time.

Our experts at Oklahoma Works also help create training structures. We assess hiring needs, draw up training plans, and recruit and make connections to technology institutions where classroom education is needed. Employers from a wide range of industries have taken advantage of Oklahoma Works apprenticeship program development services, from aviation to veterinary science, to utilities and public infrastructure to manufacturing.

The recent development of a veterinary program serves as a fantastic case study of Oklahoma works program development. In 2022 an Oklahoma business requested help with training veterinary assistants through an apprenticeship program, which had never before existed under the U.S. Department of Labor's catalog of registered programs. Oklahoma Works invested time and money into creating a program from scratch, and today veterinary assistant apprentice programs are registered federally. Now prospective apprentices in any state across the U.S. can seek out this rewarding career path thanks to a local, Oklahoma veterinarian and the efforts of our employment experts at Oklahoma Works.

The partnership between local businesses and Oklahoma Works – with support from the U.S. Department of Labor – has seen great success so far. Together, with federal funding and local interest and success, this concerted push toward apprenticeship hiring models will continue, and Oklahomans can expect to see this hybrid education and work training model expand in years to come.

Don Morris is the executive director of the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development.

Impact Partnership Grants foster community development

Don Morris, The Journal Record, June 15, 2022

We hold a core belief at the Oklahoma Office for Workforce Development: that the workforce mission is best accomplished at the local level. Our Impact Partnerships are hyper-local, targeted across the state's in-demand occupations and economic driver industries to facilitate connections between business, educational institutions, economic development and community organizations to address workforce needs. Over the past two months, organizations from all industries have applied for Impact Partnership Grants and this week the Governor's Council for Workforce and Economic Development will award up to $175,000 to each of five selected applicants.

Don Morris

These grant funds will convene employers, educators and community organizations to identify workforce gaps and barriers to employment in an effort to develop and strengthen talent pipelines. Impact Partnerships will conduct an assessment of employers' workforce needs and research to determine strategies for growth. These networks of partners are robust and have potential to generate opportunities for generations to come.

Impact partnerships are collaborations between businesses, from the same industry and in a shared labor market region, who work with education, workforce development, economic development and community organizations to address workforce needs in their industry. In short, we help build regional networks that ensure industries and communities find and grow the labor they need to accomplish the great work they already do. Our talented Oklahoma businesses, educators and community leaders do the rest.

One of our best success stories from this type of approach was addressing the nurse shortage during the peak of the pandemic. Many hospitals were hurting for staff, especially in rural areas. Trends like competing for staff by offering signing bonuses to attract health care workers from one hospital to another did not offer a long-term solution, so instead the healthcare industry joined forces to build a pipeline of talent from local universities. These mutually beneficial relationships helped stabilize this industry in crisis, bolstered universities capacity and made communities healthier and safer.

The health care industry's approach was a best case scenario for solving a major problem, and the Oklahoma Office for Workforce Development is ready to expand the approach to all our major industries across the state. Funding on the local level can end competition for resources and put Oklahoma on a trajectory for major growth.

Some industry leaders even help high school students understand the potential for great jobs in their own communities via tours and outreach. Admittedly, growing up in McAlester I had two major employers nearby – Boeing and the Army Ammunitions Plant – that I knew little to nothing about until my adulthood. Ultimately, showing students the potential in their own backyard will help communities hang on to the talent they already have and grow their economies in a thoughtful and intentional way.

In this way, helping employers find people and helping people find employers are two sides of the same coin. They help strengthen Oklahoma companies while Oklahomans find better career opportunities that provide higher wages and better opportunities. And along the way, entire communities grow and thrive.

Don Morris is the executive director of the Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development.

Workforce empowerment the focus of approved interim study

Tyler Talley, Quorum Call News, July 19, 2022

Rep. Forrest Bennett will host an interim study centered on ways of making Oklahoma "an attractive place to work," and potentially give legislators a "list of options" of actions they can take to empower the state's workforce.
Bennett, D-Oklahoma City, told Quorum Call he hopes to representatives for employers, such as the State Chamber of Commerce, for IS H22-020 to ask them, "How's the economy doing? How are employers doing?"

"And then I'd like to have maybe an OPEA [Oklahoma's Public Employees Association] representative come and talk about how things are for state workers and some union representatives to talk about if our wages are keeping up with inflation," he continued. "I'd like to talk to some HR people about the average Oklahoma worker's ability to address their grievances."

Bennett argued Oklahoma has numerous workforce problems "from the workers' standpoint and said he felt by having such a study would allow lawmakers to "throw plenty of noodles at the wall and see what sticks."

He added, "Whatever sticks, I hope we can get some bipartisan effort on addressing."

When asked if he would also look at proposed tax cuts much like the majority party has proposed consistently, Bennett said, "Unless the tax cuts proceed an automatic increase in salary or benefits for workers, I think that's a nonstarter."

He elaborated, "I'm frustrated every time I hear our leaders talk about how strong the economy is when everywhere I look people are hurting, workers are having a hard time and people are not working jobs…that really don't pay the bills."

Bennett's comments came just days before the announcement that Panasonic chose Kansas over Oklahoma as the site for a new electric vehicle battery manufacturing facility, and he emphasized he supported diversifying the state's economy and attracting companies to Oklahoma but noted a business was only as successful and strong as the workforce that makes it happen.

"Are the workers going to be excited about moving here or is just the executives who are excited about the business incentives," he questioned.

When asked if empowering employees included allowing opt outs for employer-issued vaccine mandates which several Republican lawmakers have called for amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Bennett conceded it was an interesting question.

"I would, that I can design this study in such a way, that we're talking about it from that angle. To borrow the famous phrase repeated by some of my colleagues: that's not the intent of this, though I understand it could be a side effect," he said, adding he would consider that angle, however. "I'll have to have an answer for that."

Bennett's study was assigned to the House Business and Commerce Committee.

Fewer file for jobless benefits in Oklahoma, other states

Staff Report, The Journal Record, August 19, 2022

Slightly fewer Oklahomans and other Americans have filed for unemployment benefits in recent weeks as the labor market continues to stand out as one of the strongest segments of the U.S. economy.

In the Sooner State, the Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) reported that initial and continued claims for benefits decreased during the week that ended Aug. 6, while four-week moving averages of both initial and continued claims increased slightly.

"As we have seen over the past several weeks, claims numbers continue to fluctuate, so we will remain vigilant in monitoring unemployment trends," OESC Executive Director Shelley Zumwalt said.

Zumwalt said the focus of state leaders and of the business and education communities on diversifying the state economy has resulted in new employment opportunities for Oklahomans.

"The state continues to stand out nationally for its successful economic recovery efforts," she said. "Due to our long-term focus on diversifying industries within Oklahoma, we're seeing new opportunities for workforce growth across key sectors such as aerospace, aviation, biotech, energy and technology."

For the week that ended Aug. 6, the OESC reported:

- The number of initial claims for benefits, unadjusted, totaled 2,557, a decrease of 921 from the previous week.
- The less volatile initial claims' four-week moving average was 2,799, an increase of 112.
- The unadjusted number of continued claims totaled 11,261, a decrease of 194.
- The continued claims' four-week moving average was 11,336, an increase of 125 from the previous week.

Nationally, applications for jobless aid fell by 2,000 to 250,000 during the most recent reporting period, the U.S. Labor Department reported. The four-week average for claims, which evens out week-to-week volatility, fell by 2,750 to 246,750.

Unemployment applications generally reflect layoffs and are often seen as an early indicator of where the job market is headed.

Hiring in the United States in 2022 has been remarkably resilient in the face of rising interest rates and weak economic growth, officials have said. The Labor Department reported earlier this month that U.S. employers added 528,000 jobs in July, more than double what forecasters had expected. The unemployment rate dipped to 3.5%, tying a 50-year low reached just before the coronavirus pandemic slammed the U.S. economy in early 2020.

That's not to say the U.S. economy doesn't face challenges. Consumer prices have been surging, rising 8.5% in July from a year earlier — down slightly from June's 40-year high 9.1%. To combat inflation, the Federal Reserve has raised its benchmark short-term interest rate four times this year.

Higher borrowing costs have taken a toll. The economy contracted in the first half of the year — one measure suggesting the onset of a recession. But the strength of the job market has been inconsistent with an economic downturn.

Gathering to bring aspiring entrepreneurs to Tulsa

Journal Record Staff, The Journal Record, April 12, 2022

A planned gathering of aspiring entrepreneurs in Tulsa is expected to draw more than 200 people from across the country interested in networking and sharing ideas about starting businesses.

Venture For America, a national nonprofit that supports a two-year fellowship program for recent college graduates, selected Tulsa from among 13 potential destinations for events planned in May. Goals are to build entrepreneurial and leadership skills and for participants to meet with local business community leaders.

In a release, VFA said program fellows and alumni will travel from across the United States to meet in Tulsa. Among other things, they'll also discuss obstacles typically encountered, especially by would-be entrepreneurs in underrepresented communities, and how to overcome them.

Venture For America announced about a year ago that it will expand its programming into Tulsa.

"Considering Tulsa's growing startup ecosystem and sectors where it has a strong presence, we felt that it was a natural fit for our program and wanted to be a part of this world-class community," VFA Vice President for Community Partnerships Carrie Murphy said then. "There's a magnetic energy of collaboration (in Tulsa) and that was a tremendous resource as we dove into the possibilities of adding to the pool of the city's job-ready talent."

Tulsa's "startup incubator," 36 Degrees North, along with the George Kaiser Family Foundation, Schusterman Family Philanthropies, and Atento Capital, signed on as supporters for activities slated May 26-31.

"We've been advocates for Venture For America since they first joined the Tulsa ecosystem last year," Atento Capital Managing Partner Mike Basch said. "We share the same vision of a diverse and equitable startup ecosystem."

Basch said the planned programming should help attendees advance business goals and "ultimately help build the next generation of entrepreneurs in Tulsa."

According to the release, since the founding of VFA in 2011, more than 1,400 fellows from hundreds of universities have worked and gained experiences at more than 450 startups in cities across the country.

"Our mission is to train the next generation of entrepreneurs to give them the know-how and resources to one day go on to found their own companies or lead at others," CEO Eric Somerville said. "We're thrilled to have the partners in Tulsa that make it possible to bring our community together and execute on that mission."

Devon Laney is president and CEO of 36 Degrees North. Before moving to Tulsa, he was based in Birmingham, Alabama, where he served as an advisory board member at VFA's local chapter and helped recruit companies to hire VFA fellows.

"VFA's move to Tulsa brings tremendous opportunity and exponential value to the community, especially as we are seeing a quickly expanding roster of startups and high-growth entrepreneurs building businesses in Tulsa," he said.

To find out more, online visit www.ventureforamerica.org or https://ventureforamerica.org/tulsa/.

TCC unveils new cyberskills initiative targeting underserved job seekers

Tim Stanley, Tulsa World, July 6, 2022

Building up the area's technology talent pool while helping more minorities and underserved Tulsans find rewarding careers is the goal of a new program that has begun taking applications.

Set to launch this fall, the Cyber Skills Center — a project of Tulsa Community College, Tulsa Innovation Labs and other partners — will be free to all Tulsa-area participants and is aimed especially at underserved groups, officials said.

The program will start with a 24-week online "boot camp" designed to accelerate the training process, followed by a paid apprenticeship.

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Various wraparound services will also be provided, officials said. They include child care, transportation stipends, coaching, job readiness support and other services geared toward making education and career transitions more accessible.

Nicholas Lalla, managing director of Tulsa Innovation Labs, said the project partners believe Tulsa can be a model nationally for how tech growth can serve a diverse group of residents while preparing the economy for the future.

The Cyber Skills Center "will be a game-changer in how the city leverages its unique competitive advantages to give Tulsans from every background a chance to access a high-paying career in cyber and data analytics," Lalla said.

Program officials say they are working with nearly 30 local nonprofits and community partners to provide feedback and recruit students for the program.

Participants will be equipped with the skills needed to go directly into jobs in cybersecurity or data analytics, and also, if they choose, to pursue a related college degree, including an associate degree through TCC, or a bachelor's at the University of Tulsa School of Cyber Studies or Oklahoma State University Spears School of Business.

Over the next three years, the program could serve more than 200 Tulsans, officials said.

"We see programs like this as bringing a community

response to a need," said Pete Selden, TCC vice president of workforce development. "That's the way to do it: education, workforce development, businesses — everyone working hand-in-hand together and not just one entity trying to do it all."

Two boot camps, provided through a partnership with edX, a global online learning platform from 2U Inc., will be offered starting this fall, one on cybersecurity and one on data analytics.

The apprenticeship, provided by project partner Skillstorm, will be in the form of a 10-week immersive training program.

Child care and other wraparound services will be available through the support of the George Kaiser Family Foundation. They are a critical piece of the overall picture, Selden said.

"We want to eliminate any roadblocks or barriers or costs that might cause someone to say they can't do this," Selden said.

Lalla added: "TIL is committed to making big investments where opportunities for traditionally underserved Tulsans overlap with industries in which Tulsa has a right to win. This initiative is a home run on both counts."

The Cyber Skills Center will launch its first class in the fall 2022 semester.

Section 3

Education / Training / Skills

By Age 35, Workers With a Bachelor's Degree or Higher Are Almost Twice as Likely as Workers With Only a High School Diploma to Have a Good Job, Georgetown University Report Says

Katherine Hazelrigg, CEW Georgetown, May 19, 2022

As postsecondary education has become more valuable in the labor market, the pathway to a good job has become longer and more challenging for young adults to navigate. The majority of older baby boomers were able to latch onto good jobs in their mid-20s, but most older millennials did not reach this threshold until their early 30s, according to two new reports from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) on The Uncertain Pathway from Youth to a Good Job, both funded by a philanthropy investment from JPMorgan Chase. One report, How Limits to Educational Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Career Counseling Impede Progress toward Good Jobs, explores how the pathway from youth to adult economic independence has changed across generations. The second report, How Racial and Gender Bias Impede Progress toward Good Jobs, examines persistent opportunity gaps among demographic groups.

Only young workers with a bachelor's degree or higher are consistently more likely than those in the previous generation to have a good job—one that pays at least $35,000 per year and $57,000 at the median for young workers (ages 25 to 35) nationwide. Among older millennials in the labor force, 80% of those with a bachelor's degree or higher had a good job at age 35, compared with 56% of those with some college or an associate's degree, 42% of those with only a high school diploma, and 26% of those with less than a high school diploma.

"College costs have risen dramatically just as postsecondary education has become key to finding a good job," lead report author and CEW Director Anthony P. Carnevale said. "We need to improve access to college, work-based learning programs, and career counseling for young people."

To secure a good job, young adults need to acquire more education and high-quality work experience than was necessary for previous generations. However, since 1980, the annual cost of attendance at four-year institutions has roughly tripled, reaching nearly $30,000 in recent years. And, although work-based learning has the potential to improve young people's transitions into the workforce, few young adults (31%) have completed a work-based learning program. Finally, students are not able to make fully informed decisions about their educational and career pathways without sufficient career and guidance counseling, but the student-to-counselor ratio remains too high. There are almost 70% more students per counselor than the recommended level.

The slow journey to good jobs has long-term consequences for young people's economic well-being, including delayed marriage, childbirth, independent living, and homeownership. As a result of the longer transition and higher educational debt, young adults accumulate less wealth than the previous generation; households led by 35-year-olds have less than two-thirds of the net worth that similar households held 20 years earlier. Furthermore, the share of young households with educational debt and the median debt among those households have risen substantially in past decades. Black/African American women are most likely to take out student loans and hold the most student loan debt among major race/ethnicity and gender groups, which contributes to tremendous racial wealth gaps. The median net worth of young White men with no more than a high school diploma is more than 2.5 times that of young Black women with a bachelor's degree or higher.

"There are consequences to the delayed transition to good jobs," said Artem Gulish, report author and CEW senior policy strategist and research faculty. "For many young adults, not having a good job means not being able to buy a house, not being able to pay back their student loans, and not having sufficient financial security to pursue their aspirations while facing life's inevitable mishaps."

Persistent racial/ethnic equity gaps in educational attainment lay the groundwork for equity gaps in the likelihood of attaining a good job. Young White workers are more likely than young Black/African American workers or young Hispanic/Latino workers to have a good job, which was also the case for the earlier generation. In fact, it takes Black/African American workers until their mid-30s to have roughly the same chances of having a good job as White workers have by their mid-20s. And young Hispanic/Latino workers do not have the same chances even in their mid-30s as young White workers have in their mid-20s.

Gender gaps also persist despite widespread generational changes in women's educational attainment. Even though young women are more likely to have good jobs than women in the earlier generation, they are still substantially less likely than young men to have good jobs. These gaps have not closed even though young women have higher levels of postsecondary education than young men. At every education level, young women are less likely to have a good job than young men within the same racial/ethnic group. When race and gender disparities are combined, the gaps in the likelihood of having a good job are even more striking. Young Hispanic/Latina and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women are half as likely to have a good job as young White and Asian/Asian American men.

"Disparities in educational attainment play a bigger role in economic inequality than in the past, but equity gaps by race and gender persist even among young workers at the same education level," said Kathryn Peltier Campbell, report author and CEW associate director of editorial policy and senior editor/writer.

"Young people are our next generation of leaders, yet too many, especially from underrepresented communities, don't have access to the career experiences they need to obtain meaningful employment opportunities," said Monique Baptiste, head of Jobs & Skills Global Philanthropy for JP-Morgan Chase. "As the findings from these reports demonstrate, work-based learning and education are key differentiators in future success for young people. This research will help inform new strategies to address these disparities and identify ways to reconnect young people with the resources and experiences they need to better prepare them for the opportunities of tomorrow."

Factors including academic major, occupation, and working full time also influence workers' likelihood of having a good job and contribute to equity gaps in the workforce. Among young workers with a bachelor's degree or higher, those who majored in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are most likely (78%) to have good jobs, while young workers who majored in arts, liberal arts, and humanities are least likely (59%) to have good jobs. At the same time, across education levels, young workers in STEM occupations are most likely (83%) to have a good job, while young workers in healthcare support and food and personal services are least likely (22%) to have a good job. Working full time increases the chances of having a good job: 60% of young full-time workers have a good job, compared with 10% of part-time workers.

To view the executive summary and two full reports, including seven recommendations for comprehensive reform, visit cew.georgetown.edu/pathway.

The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) is a research and policy institute within Georgetown's McCourt School of Public Policy that studies the links between education, career qualifications, and workforce demands. For more information, visit cew.georgetown.edu.

As businesses hunt for educated workers, states are loosening the purse strings for higher ed again

Jon Marcus, The Hechinger Report, May 13, 2022

"Investing in our conveyor belt for talent." That's how Gov. Gavin Newsom described a proposed spending hike for California's public colleges and universities.

Those few words also help explain a principal reason many states are boosting their budgets for public higher education more than at any time since 2008 and proposing even higher allocations down the road.

Thirty-eight governors raised the topic of higher education spending during their state-of-the-state addresses, an analysis by the National Governors Association found. Collectively, they called for increasing it by billions of dollars over the next five years.

This comes after a decade in which state funding overall for public universities and colleges has languished at a level billions of inflation-adjusted dollars below what it was before the last recession — and at a time when public universities and colleges in many states are the targets of politicians waging culture wars.

But some of those same politicians now are focusing on the need for educated workers to compete in an economy that's short of talent, an imperative as true in red states as in blue ones.

"Economic and workforce development have been disrupted, so proposals that link education and the economy are going to be priorities on governors' agendas," said Tom Harnisch, vice president for government relations at the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, or SHEEO.

"The connection between education and the workforce has become more explicit, and the urgency has become much greater," Harnisch said.

Where the rhetoric around funding higher education has previously been about creating opportunity, much of the new money for public colleges and universities is now being aimed explicitly at training students for fields in which there are shortages of labor.

Some governors and legislatures want more alignment between education and industry. That's the goal of the Utah Cluster Acceleration Partnership, which provides funding to public higher education institutions to develop programs that meet regional or statewide industry needs, and of the Wyoming Innovation Partnership, which encourages collaboration among community colleges, the University of Wyoming, state agencies and economic development groups to support the economy and workforce. Colorado is proposing spending more than $95 million to bring school districts and colleges together to speed up training of the workers employers need.

"We must do more to align our state's K-12, higher-ed, workforce and economic development efforts," said Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb. "There is power in their synergy."

Other states are offering money to their public higher education institutions to bolster workforce training. Under the MoExcels program in Missouri, colleges and universities have begun competing for tens of millions of dollars for "employer-driven education and training programs" for example.

In Oklahoma, Gov. Kevin Stitt said: "We need to reward universities for producing graduates in critical areas."

States are also directing growing amounts of financial aid to students who choose majors that can train them for in-demand jobs.

The new Future Ready Iowa plan, for instance, makes tuition free at community colleges and for certification programs for Iowans training for those kinds of jobs. New scholarships in Kansas are also being created for students in high-demand fields.

Such programs "boost our economy and empower our people," said Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer about similar initiatives in her state.

South Carolina is making tuition at its technical colleges free for students who seek credentials in fields where there are labor shortages, including manufacturing, hospitality, construction, transportation, logistics and criminal justice.

"Access and affordability to higher education are essential to ensuring that our state has the trained and skilled workforce to compete for jobs and investment in the future," South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster said.

Mississippi is steering more money into training people for jobs in fields including commercial trucking, advanced manufacturing and welding. The governor, Tate Reeves, called it "a strategy that will meet the needs of employers and fill the vacancies for jobs that offer above-average wages."

And Connecticut is increasing its spending tenfold for workforce development, including on tuition-free certificate courses "designed by businesses around the skills that they need," said Gov. Ned Lamont.

Many states have put an emphasis on health care. Maine has proposed more money for universities and colleges to expand nursing programs; Georgia and Hawaii, to train more nurses and doctors; and Alaska, to increase the supply of doctors.

College and university officials are cautiously receptive to this approach, which not only means there will be money coming in again but affirms the importance of the credentials they provide.

"Having a more highly educated population in your state is going to be a good thing for your economy and society in general, in the long run," said Paul Johnson, president of the Colorado School of Mines.

On the other hand, said Johnson, "the slippery slope is when you get to the point where you start saying every credential that a university produces has to be directly aligned with some specific sort of occupational return on investment. Then you start to miss out on all the other things, the values, that go along with the experience of a college education."

Still, seeing higher education funding rebound — whatever the reason — "is certainly much better than the opposite scenario," he said.

Most states significantly reduced their support for public higher education in the recession that took root in 2008; by 2018, inflation-adjusted state allocations for colleges and universities remained $6.6 billion below 2008 levels, or down an average of 13 percent per student, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports. In some states, per-student funding fell by more than 30 percent.

Now appropriations are starting to go up, according to an annual analysis conducted jointly by SHEEO and Illinois State University. In the current fiscal year, state support for higher education rose by 8.3 percent, exceeding a collective $100 billion for the first time ever. That was before so many governors and legislators began calling for even more spending in the fiscal year that in most states will begin July 1.

Some of this largesse is thanks to a 15 percent increase in state income tax revenues and federal stimulus funding, $7.2 billion of which went to public colleges and universities over the last three years.

That worries veterans of the whims of budget-making.

"When states have money, higher education tends to get its due," said Dennis Jones, president emeritus of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, or NCHEMS, a nonprofit that provides consulting services to colleges and universities. "Then it's the first thing cut when the states don't have money."

There's also some concern about overemphasizing workforce training, including by using those targeted scholarships to steer students into careers that are in high demand when their interests might lie elsewhere. The people most likely to take up such offers are those from low-income families, while their higher-income counterparts can afford to study what they like.

"Turning out graduates to meet the workforce demand is only part of the challenge," said Taylor Randall, president of the University of Utah, who pointed out that many states are rushing to retrain adults who need or want to change careers.

"That's one way to tackle the problem," Randall said. "The other way to do it is to build that into individuals as they go through their first round of being undergraduates — to create a student who is marketable at the moment but can reinvent themselves in the future." This, he said, requires a broader education that includes the humanities and other subjects. "There are skills you can learn across a lot of majors."

So far the additional state spending on higher education hasn't necessarily supplanted existing scholarship or funding programs, Jones said.

"This is an add-on," he said. "I'm not seeing it as a replacement. What we're seeing is a marginal bump focused on those things. But I don't think that there's widespread disinvestment in what higher education has historically been about."

As for the underlying premise, that supporting higher education strengthens the economy, analyses by NCHEMS and others shows that it increases per capita personal income and tax revenue and lowers the cost of social services.

Even a 1 percent increase in the number of college graduates raises the standard of living for everyone, one study found, while another concluded that investing in institutions where graduation rates are low could help boost employment, median household income and gross domestic product. That's according to a summary of research into the subject by the left-leaning think tank the Urban Institute.

Still, political leaders' preoccupation with workforce development may be bad news for universities and colleges in one important way: States are also increasingly directing money to apprenticeships and high school-level career and technical education, or CTE, which in many cases allow students to sidestep college altogether.

Although Idaho Gov. Brad Little has proposed boosting spending for public universities, for instance, he also has asked for $10 million "to more rapidly stand up CTE programs that meet local industry needs" and $50 million for apprenticeships and other forms of job training. Further west, the $200 million Future Ready Oregon program will support not only community colleges but also local workforce boards and apprenticeship programs.

More forcefully tying education to economic results is one way to restore support for it, at least, said Jones — and transcends demographic and political divides.

"If you ask students why they're going to college, 90-plus percent of them will say it's to get a job," he said. "So this all weaves together into something that speaks to students, it speaks to parents, it speaks to legislators. And it's the selling point that crosses blue and red."

This story about state higher education funding was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education. Sign up for our higher education newsletter.

Guest Column: Higher ed critical to Oklahoma's future

Allison D. Garrett, The Journal Record, May 25, 2022

Allison D. Garrett

I grew up watching The Jetsons, but I've never eaten a burger and fries cooked by a robot. That day is coming sooner, not later. In service industries that employ the most people, automation potential is often greater. Studies estimate the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated automation by five years. Robot fry cooks and autonomous forklifts and vehicles are already being used and tested around the country. Thirty percent of work activities in Oklahoma could be automated by 2025, and workers with low levels of education are the most vulnerable. Degreed jobs are far more "robot-proof" – adults with higher levels of education holding jobs that require the exercise of judgment are less vulnerable to technology advancements and automation.

Higher education is critical to Oklahoma's future and our state's economic growth. In fact, increasing college degrees within our workforce is the most important factor in meeting the demands of our growing industries and attracting new businesses to Oklahoma. The Oklahoma Office of Workforce Development provides data on the state's most critical occupations. They show that in the next six years, 66 of Oklahoma's 100 critical occupations will require an associate degree or higher.

States with more degree-holders have higher per capita incomes. Oklahomans looking to achieve their dreams and earn top salaries can take advantage of higher education to propel them to greater earnings. Oklahoma's 2019 census showed that incomes increased as educational attainment increased.

By 2028, 47 of the top 50 highest-paying critical occupations in Oklahoma will require an associate degree or higher. The impact of an educated workforce on Oklahoma's economy includes incredible benefits for individual Oklahomans. Median lifetime earnings are 25% higher for those with an associate degree and 75% higher with a bachelor's degree compared to a high school diploma.

Oklahoma's public colleges and universities are among the most affordable in the nation. They provide you and your workforce the skills needed to excel in great jobs. For example, the number of bachelor's degrees awarded in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and math) increased 47% over the last decade, and increased 29% at all degree levels. It's also important to note that our students learn here and earn here; nearly 90% of Oklahomans who earn an undergraduate degree remain here, working, one year after graduation.

How we build Oklahoma's workforce for the future is an important question, and there is a clear answer. Oklahoma's colleges and universities drive workforce growth and entrepreneurship in our state, providing you and your neighbors with the skills required to secure well-paying jobs and access to a talented workforce in a changing economy.

I'm honored to serve as chancellor of the state system of higher education, and look forward to working with you to produce more graduates ready to compete on a global stage.

Allison D. Garrett is chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education.

Guest Column: UpskillOK benefits Oklahoma businesses, workers

Allison D. Garrett, The Journal Record, August 17, 2022

I love to play golf, though I do not play well. Carrying the scuba gear and chainsaw is an extra burden when you play like I do. But if – and that's a huge "if" – I practiced more, I'd most certainly be better.

All of us constantly seek ways to improve, whether on the job or in personal pursuits. Business leaders seek to recruit, retain and develop candidates with the right skills and those who are willing to level-up. The need for a well-trained workforce is the primary reason the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education launched our new micro-credentials initiative, UpskillOK.

UpskillOK is one of the most impactful ways public higher education supports our Oklahoma businesses in real-time. The program helps your business tap into a skills-verified hiring pool and retain talent by upskilling existing employees through partnerships with local colleges and universities. Those arrangements create training programs and credentials specifically designed to build the critical skills your business needs. In turn, you can reduce hiring costs, are better positioned for organic growth, and can quickly adapt to industry changes or shifting operational needs.

For workers who engage with UpskillOK, the program provides a short-term, accredited postsecondary credential that is focused on a specific, verifiable career-critical skill or knowledge set that can be readily transferred to the workplace.

Since the program's launch earlier this year, we've seen incredible participation from more than 80 industry partners across the state. Thank you to our business partners!

Micro-credential programs through UpskillOK align with Oklahoma's most critical occupations and range from health careers to IT, cybersecurity, advanced technology, teacher education and agriculture. We have worked with businesses and our public colleges and universities to identify more than 70 programs and occupations where there is a vital need for micro-credentialing.

Support for micro-credential programs in the Oklahoma business community has been overwhelmingly positive. We have connected large and small employers to local higher education institutions that offer programs, classes, apprenticeships and internships. Feedback from participating employers indicates they appreciate the opportunity to independently verify candidates' skills and achievements and partner with an institution to create industry-recognized credentials and skills-based badges that reflect their unique workforce needs.

UpskillOK helps businesses address critical skills gaps quickly and helps Oklahomans document learning and demonstrate competency through stackable credentials. Visit UpskillOK.org to connect with an Oklahoma college or university that is poised to partner with you to meet your specific employment needs.

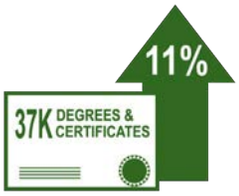
The State Regents also recently launched an online toolkit for employers that provides a one-stop access point to public higher education's many services for businesses. The digital toolkit enables your business to post jobs with campus career services offices and features a directory of business support services by institution. Tools for your workforce include information and materials for UpskillOK micro-credential programs, degree completion programs that lead to employment in Oklahoma's key fields, and options to determine how your employees' prior college credit, licenses, certifications, military service, and other learning experiences may be applied toward a college degree.

Allison Garrett is the chancellor of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education.

OKLAHOMA STATE REGENTS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE) is the coordinating board for the state system of higher education, which is comprised of 25 public colleges and universities, including two research universities, 10 regional universities, 12 community colleges and one public liberal arts university.

Only **26.2%** of Oklahoma citizens hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the national average of 33%. Of our surrounding states—including Arkansas, New Mexico, Missouri, Texas, Kansas, and Colorado—only Arkansas has fewer citizens with a bachelor's degree or higher.



Over 37,000 degrees and certificates were awarded by state system colleges and universities during the 2020-21 academic year, representing an **11% increase** at all levels over the last decade.

HIGHER EDUCATION WORKFORCE INITIATIVES

UpskillOK: Career-Focused Credentials

OSRHE is establishing a statewide framework for the development of micro-credentials, alternative learning pathways directly aligned with high-demand skills requested by employers. Micro-credentials help individuals adapt and succeed, equipping both students pursuing a degree and current degree-holders with specific career skillsets, competencies and knowledge that can be readily transferred to fill critical workforce needs. Through the UpskillOK initiative, employers and businesses can: become an internship or apprenticeship site; work with colleges and universities to build skills-based digital badges and micro-credentials that meet hiring needs; let colleges and universities know which industry-recognized credentials you value most; and endorse a developed micro-credential. In addition to customized micro-credentials, colleges and universities across the state are participating in a system contract with Coursera, one of the largest online learning platforms in the world, to provide students, faculty and staff, and employers access to Coursera's comprehensive catalog of thousands of job-relevant courses at a significantly reduced cost. For more information on micro-credentials, visit www.upskillok.org.

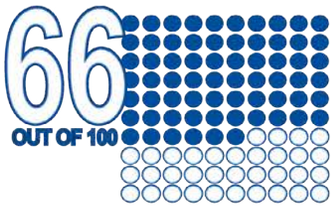
Reach Higher: Oklahoma's Adult Degree Completion Initiative

Over 402,000,000 Oklahomans currently have earned some college credit, but stopped out before earning a college degree. Reach Higher, the Oklahoma state system of higher education's adult degree completion initiative, provides specialized advising and support systems to help adult students return and complete degrees that lead to employment in Oklahoma's critical occupations. Through Reach Higher's FlexFinish and DirectComplete programs, 22 institutions offer flexible class options and enrollment to meet the needs of working adults pursuing a Reach Higher associate or bachelor's degree. More than 10,000 degrees have been awarded through Reach Higher since the initiative's inception in 2007. For more information on the Reach Higher initiative, visit www.reachhigherok.org.

OKLAHOMA'S 100 CRITICAL OCCUPATIONS

According to Oklahoma Works, by 2028, 66 of the top 100 occupations critical to wealth generation and economic growth in the state will require an associate's degree or higher, including:

- 10 of the top 10 highest-paying critical occupations
- 47 of the top 50 highest-paying critical occupations
- 7 of the top 10 fastest-growing critical occupations

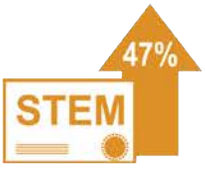


Given that only 35% of Oklahomans have an associate's degree or higher, Oklahoma's state system of higher education plays a key role in producing the graduates needed to meet Oklahoma's current and future workforce demands.

HIGHER EDUCATION'S ROLE IN WORKFORCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

90% of Oklahoma residents who earn an undergraduate degree remain and are employed in the state one year after graduation.

66% of non-residents graduating from a public institution with an undergraduate degree are employed in the state one year after graduation.



The number of STEM bachelor's degrees conferred by state system institutions **increased 47%** over the last decade, and **increased 29%** at all degree levels.

Bachelor's degrees conferred in the health professions **increased 49%** over the last decade and **increased 26%** at all degree levels.

Associate and bachelor's degrees holders earn a median income **25% and 75% higher**, respectively, than those with only a high school diploma.

For every $1 of state appropriations invested, the state system of higher education generates **$9.40** in economic return.

HIGHER EDUCATION BUSINESS SUPPORT SERVICES

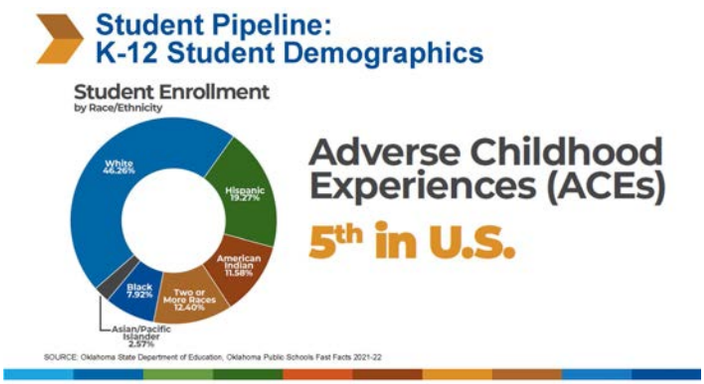
- Business plan development
- Business forums
- Small Business Development Centers
- Business counseling
- Government contract training
- Manufacturing extension agents
- Meeting facilities
- Incubators and research parks
- Customized corporate training
- Continuing education

Investing Today in Tomorrow's Workforce

Allison D. Garrett, Chancellor, Oklahoma State System of Higher Education

Our Changing State

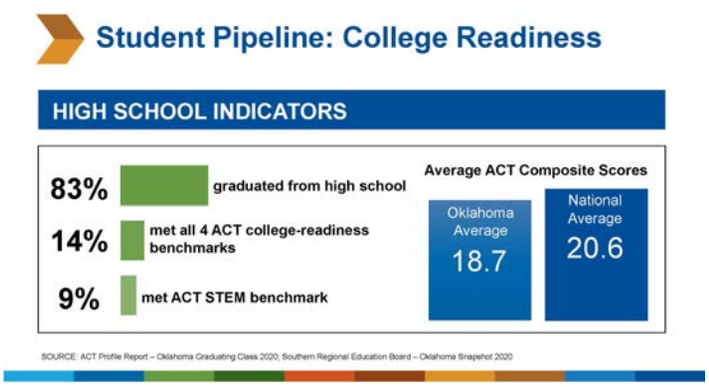
Oklahoma's demographics are changing quickly. Oklahoma is now a majority minority state in the K-12 educational system. By 2046, Oklahoma—along with the rest of the U.S.—will be majority non-white.



Further, Oklahoma's students experience a variety of challenges at higher rates than those of many other states. According to the Oklahoma State Department of Education's Oklahoma Public Schools Fast Facts 2021-22; U.S. Census Bureau, and the 2019 Public Elementary-Secondary Education Finance Data, Oklahoma children suffer more trauma than almost anywhere else in the country. Nearly half of our students (48.9%) have adverse childhood experiences, which is 10% higher than the national average. Fifty-six percent of the student population is considered economically disadvantaged. In Oklahoma, 11.5% of K-12 students have parents who are, or have been, incarcerated, compared to 7.4% nationally.

An additional factor which has a negative impact on our students is the lack of school counselors. In Oklahoma, there are 374 students per school counselor. The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250-to-1 student-to-counselor ratio.

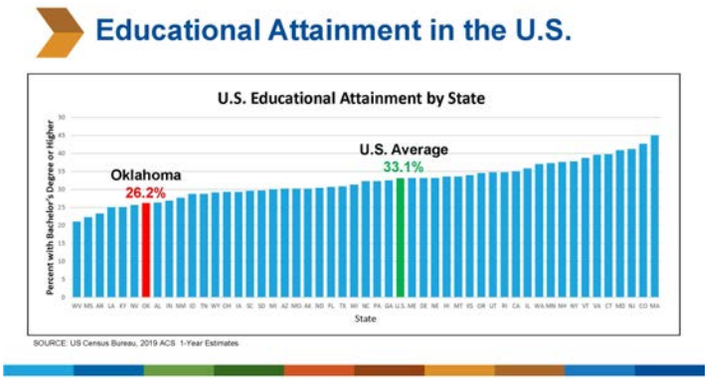
The College Readiness Pipeline



As we prepare our students for success, we look at statistics for guidance as to how we can best support the students heading into higher education institutions. College readiness can be tracked through the subscores on the ACT (which, like the SAT, is a standardized test used for college admissions in the United States). Most Oklahoma high school graduates are not prepared for college in one or more areas. Of note: the ACT data shown on the attached chart is imprecise for two reasons. First, in a few districts, the SAT is used rather than the ACT. Second, while most Oklahoma students will take the ACT, that is not the case in every state.

As higher education moves forward with the production of graduates, the economic benefits of a college degree cannot be denied. We currently have 200,000 students enrolled and over $8 billion in annual economic output. Oklahoma's public colleges and universities make a significant contribution to Oklahoma's economy. For every dollar of state appropriation invested, the state system of higher education generates $9.40 in economic output.

The demand for a highly educated workforce is growing nationwide and is essential for the state to prosper economically. Despite Oklahoma being the 7th lowest state in cost of attendance, only 26.2% of Oklahoma's residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 33.1% nationally.



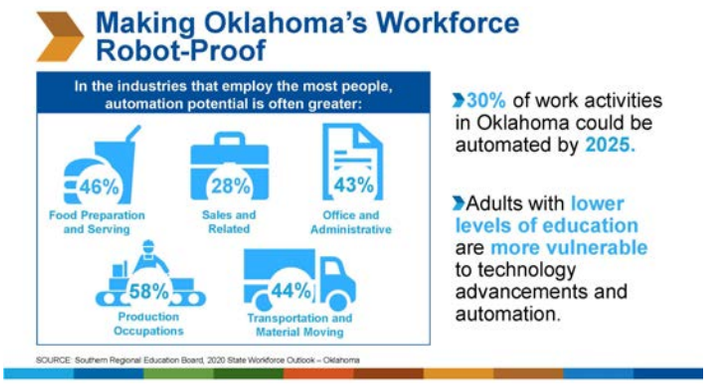
There is a clear correlation between a state's percentage of citizens with a bachelor's degree or higher and per capita income. Overwhelmingly, high-wage states are states with a well-educated workforce. Investing in higher education expands economic opportunity for the state's residents, builds a strong foundation for economic growth and attracts high-wage employers.

At every additional level of education, workers with a higher level of education tend to earn significantly more than those with less education. Beyond the money, of those with a college degree tend to live longer, lead happier lives and use fewer social services.

Looking to the Future

Oklahoma's workforce faces issues that were not fathomable a mere 15-20 years ago. Today's workforce must learn the essential skills that will keep them irreplaceable as automation continues to take hold.

Most of Oklahoma's 1.6 million workers will be affected by automation in the coming decades. Potentially 580,000 workers could be unemployable or stuck in low-wage jobs as a result of automation.



It's projected that in 2028, 66 of Oklahoma's 100 critical occupations will require an associate's degree or higher, including:

- 10 of the top 10 highest paying critical occupations
- 47 of the top 50 highest paying critical occupations
- 7 of the top 10 fastest growing critical occupations

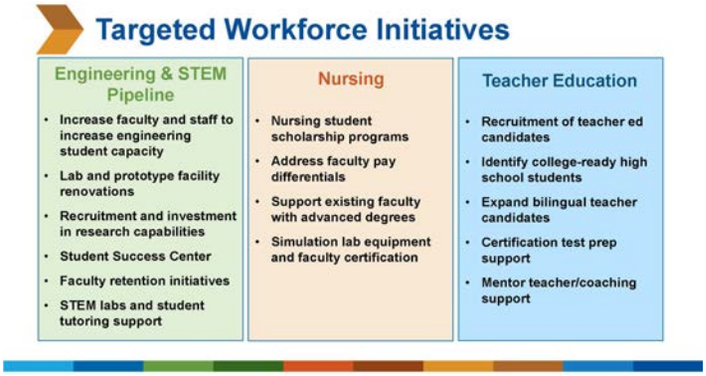
The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated automation by five years, meaning 30% of work activities could be automated by 2025. Just 5% of jobs are completely automatable, but 45% of all work activities have automation potential.

Adults with lower levels of education are more vulnerable to technology advancements and automation. What will happen to the large segment of Oklahoma's population currently working in service-sector jobs without higher education? What skills do employees need to robot-proof their careers?

The answer includes a mixture of hard skills (e.g., computer programming and data analytics) and soft skills (e.g., critical thinking, communications, creativity and problem solving).

The choice for our policy leaders is to invest now in higher education or invest later in increased social services and public assistance.

Next Steps—Advancing Oklahoma's State System of Higher Education



As we approach the future, the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education is embarking on a comprehensive strategic planning process. Issues we will address through this process include:

- Higher education's student pipeline and opportunities to increase Oklahoma's educational attainment;
- Student success, assuring that the students who enter Oklahoma's higher education institutions have the support needed to succeed;
- Workforce issues, to assure that higher education coordinates with the business community and helps direct resources into areas of need; and
- Assuring that our institutions operate efficiently.

Learn Here; Stay Here

OKLAHOMA GRADUATES EMPLOYED IN OKLAHOMA AFTER GRADUATION

	Oklahoma Residents	Non-Residents who attend Oklahoma Institutions	Total Employment Rate
1-Year after Graduation	89.7%	65.6%	83.7%
5-Years after Graduation	87.5%	61.5%	81.3%

METHODOLOGY:
Data match between OSRHE, OESC, and OTC records to determine percent of state system graduates who remain in the state and are employed in the state 1-Year and 5-Years after graduation.

SOURCE: Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, Oklahoma Employment Security Commission, Oklahoma Tax Commission 23

The higher education pipeline is an important component of building Oklahoma's future workforce.

Currently, 89.7% of Oklahoma residents stay in the state, and—most importantly—have jobs in the state one year after graduation. Higher education is an effective recruiter of workers into the state. Over 60% of out-of-state students who graduate from our institutions remain here to work. They learn what we already know—Oklahoma is a wonderful place to live.

Editorial: TCC concurrent enrollment program expansion benefits future workforce

Editorial Board, Tulsa World, April 20, 2022

The Tulsa Community College expansion of one its dual credit programs makes earning a college degree a greater possibility for many Oklahomans.

High School Plus One, which offers 31 hours of college credit, will become available to eligible high school juniors and seniors throughout Oklahoma beginning in the fall.

The pandemic showed the value of virtual offerings, particularly for students in remote areas or needing flexible school hours. This provides an opportunity for Oklahoma high school students to earn about a year of college credit, saving them thousands in tuition.

This comes at a critical time. Economic development is increasingly relying on workers with a college education.

Yet skyrocketing tuition and fees have created massive student loan debt, keeping many students from pursuing degrees. Also, high school graduates are lured directly into the workforce with recent bumps in hourly wages.

Just last week, Allison Garrett, chancellor for the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, said the state must up its current pool of residents with bachelor's degrees from 26%, which is below the national average of 33%. She specifically pointed to the low output of computer science and technology degrees.

"Between now and 2028, what we're seeing is a shift to 66 of the top 100 critical occupations in Oklahoma being jobs that will require a college degree," Garrett said.

Other challenges are unique to Oklahoma in creating barriers to college degrees, such as higher than average trauma and underfunded and understaffed K-12 public schools. TCC is doing its part.

The college has offered dual credit, also called concurrent enrollment, for more than 15 years. It enrolls more high school students than any other college in Oklahoma.

Most of the tuition for the students is paid by funding from the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. It's critical for lawmakers to continue funding that program adequately. The Legislature has slashed higher education funding for a decade, shifting costs to students.

In concurrent enrollment, students are responsible for mandatory fees. This can sometimes be a barrier, and some districts are finding donors to cover that cost for students.

The TCC program keeps classes at a maximum of 30 students, who can participate in college events tailored to their academic goals. This is a good way to introduce high school students to college life and academic expectations.

TCC fulfills an essential role in higher education and our community. It has been a crucial player in workforce development with students seeking degrees or workers changing professions.

This expansion is in addition to its EDGE program, short for Earn a Degree Graduate Early. EDGE works with students starting in eighth grade to graduate with an associate's degree. It is in several area schools including Tulsa Public Schools, Union and Sand Springs.

Oklahoma benefits from these programs and expansions, and we thank TCC for its vision in making it happen.

Upping college degree attainment in state critical for future

Tim Stanley, Tulsa World, Updated April 14, 2022

With the number of critical occupations requiring college degrees projected to increase in the state, it's more important than ever to help more Oklahomans attain them, the state's higher education chancellor said Wednesday.

"We've got a lot of ground to make up and not a lot of time to do it," Allison Garrett told the Tulsa Higher Education Consortium's Spring Convening on Wednesday at Northeastern State University-Broken Arrow.

"Between now and 2028, what we're seeing is a shift to 66 of the top 100 critical occupations in Oklahoma being jobs that will require a college degree."

At the same time, just 26% of Oklahomans currently have a bachelor's degree, she said. That's well below the national average of 33%.

The Tulsa Higher Education Consortiumconsortium, which launched last year, is a joint effort involving a number of regional colleges, universities and partner organizations to help more area students get four-year degrees and better fit changing workforce needs.

Garrett, who was appointed chancellor of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education in November, discussed the challenges facing higher education institutions, and by extension the industries that depend on their graduates.

"These are just some of the things I see as I peek into the future," she said, adding that institutions have to be ready to meet the evolving needs of the students coming into them.

Along with the positive challenges of increasing diversity, the state has a big negative in its rate of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, Garrett said.

"This is incredibly important to note. We rank fifth from the top in K-12 students having experienced significant trauma, homelessness, food insecurity, violence in the home. This is not one where you want to be top-10."

To make things worse, the ratio of students to counselors in schools is much higher than the national average, she said.

"So, as we look at the population headed our way, we have to be adaptive and make sure our (higher education) institutions are ready to fully support our students," Garrett said.

College readiness is also a critical issue.

Garrett said only 14% of all high school graduates in the state are college-ready in all four areas of the ACT, with just 9% being ready to study in STEM fields.

"You're looking at, for the 44,000 high school graduates we have, maybe 4,000 being ready to study in STEM fields," she said. "That is so far short of where we need to be."

For higher education institutions, it means offering the kinds of support services students need, she said.

Garrett, former president of Emporia State University in Kansas and a onetime Walmart executive, succeeded longtime Chancellor Glen D. Johnson.

Although she's had only five months to survey the scene, she's noticed that Oklahoma higher education also has some good things going for it.

"The beauty of a state like Oklahoma is we have consumer choices of all types," Garrett said. "We've got private institutions, we've got research institutions, we've got four-year institutions that are low-cost institutions, we've got great community colleges. Lots of opportunities.

"We're 11th lowest in the nation in average cost of attendance, 11th lowest in average debt upon graduation. So, there are some really, really great opportunities for students here in the state of Oklahoma."

Something else Garrett said she noticed early on is not as encouraging.

"Before I interviewed for the job, I took a look at degree production in the higher ed system here. Allied health, business and teaching degrees were way up there."

But not computer science degrees. "It was down, Down the list, right next to performing arts degrees," she said.

"That was a big shocker for me because, given where we're moving as a society and what our current needs are, we ought to be producing far more graduates in those kind of technology-oriented fields."

Garrett said the regents are planning to kick off a systemwide strategic planning process soon.

Institutions in the consortium include Tulsa Community College, University of Tulsa, Langston University, Northeastern State University, OSU-Tulsa, Rogers State University and OU-Tulsa. For more information, visit tulsahighered.com.

Jones wants OCCC to meet state's workforce needs

Jennifer Sharpe, The Journal Record, April 13, 2022

March 1, the day Mautra Staley Jones started as president of Oklahoma City Community College, marked personal milestones.

It was the first day of Women's History Month, even as Jones herself made history as the first Black woman to lead a higher education institution in Oklahoma. It was also the birthday of Jones' late mother, Donna Staley.

"My entire life's work and experiences have brought me to this moment," Jones said as she fought tears. "This opportunity is allowing me to accomplish things that my mother didn't necessarily get to accomplish in her life."

After about a month on the job, Jones, the 2020 Journal Record Woman of the Year, is still acclimating to her new setting, although she is a veteran when it comes to leadership roles in higher education.

"I have an opportunity to just touch so many lives – countless lives – and, at every stage of my career, I've continued to build and increase what I consider to be my footprint of service," she said.

At OCCC, that service is focused on the 17,000 or so students.

"At the beginning of every single day and at the end of it all, it's about the students and ensuring their success," Jones said.

There is a "beautiful variety" in the OCCC student body – which includes those seeking an associate degree before a four-year institution or the workforce, high school students in concurrent classes, those seeking a GED, college students enrolled elsewhere wanting inter-session or summer credits, working adults looking to finish a degree or start a new career, or a company's employees needing certificate training.

In 2021, OCCC's top degrees awarded included diversified studies, nursing, business, psychology, sociology, occupational therapy, computer science, liberal studies, pre-education and engineering. Top certificates awarded were for emergency medical technician, computer systems support, child development and digital media design.

Through many of these degrees and certifications, OCCC is having a direct effect on workforce development.

Dr. Mautra Staley Jones

In higher education right now, "there's this notion of immediacy," Jones said. "So how do we, as an institution of higher education, meet that culture?" The answer, she said, is to look closely at certifications, micro-credentials and badges. Additionally, Jones said, OCCC is happy to be a resource for employers. The school has unique partnerships currently in place, with more planned for the future.

"We have a willingness to work with industry, listen to industry and what their needs are, and then take action and ask, 'How do we do this together?'" she said.

One example of the school's workforce development efforts to meet industry need is expanding OCCC's nursing footprint with the help of American Rescue Plan Act funding, a plan that, while it was set in place before Jones began, she is a strong advocate for.

One of the attributes of OCCC that makes it special, Jones said, is the faculty. "We have talented and accomplished faculty who pour their hearts and souls into OCCC every day who have been doing it for years and years. They are the key to providing a high-quality education, a high-quality experience, such that when students leave here, they are prepared to take on anything they choose to take on from a career perspective."

Jones is the recipient of the 2021 American Mothers Inc. Oklahoma Mother of the Year and went on to win the national title of Mother of the Year. She said she is excited for the future as OCCC celebrates its 50-year anniversary this year. "Not only do I feel prepared; I feel honored and happy to be a part of this journey and to continue building on the legacy of OCCC."

'Game changer': OU plans Polytechnic Institute in Tulsa

Tres Savage, NonDoc, May 13, 2022

″As University of Oklahoma President Joe Harroz announced plans to develop a new Polytechnic Institute in Tulsa, he referenced Purdue Polytechnic Institute in Indiana and nodded toward OU Vice President for Research and Partnerships Tomás Díaz de la Rubia during today's Board of Regents meeting.

"Probably the source of the idea was from Tomás," Harroz said, referencing Díaz de la Rubia's employment at Purdue from 2015 to 2019.

Díaz de la Rubia laughed and said, "You think?"

Board members are expected to review more details and establish a timeline for the new Polytechnic Institute's development at their June meeting, but the university hopes the concept will provide significant returns on investment for the state's economy, its workforce, its business community and the education landscape in Tulsa.

"We are so thankful for the support shown for this idea by Gov. Stitt, the speaker of the House and the president pro tempore of the Senate," Harroz said, perhaps referencing what could be a significant investment of appropriations for higher education next fiscal year.

Harroz said the new institute will serve graduate students and undergraduate students, with degree programs in areas such as computer science, information technology, digital manufacturing, electric vehicles and artificial intelligence and autonomous technology.

"When you look at the jobs I listed, their average starting salary is between $62,000 and $75,000 a year," Harroz said, noting that OU's own Information Technology department has numerous open positions that it is struggling to fill.

Undergrads will need to complete their first two years at another institution such as Tulsa Community College, Rose State College or Oklahoma City Community College. (OU has recently streamlined its transfer agreements with those colleges and Tarrant County College in Texas.)

'Can you supply the workforce?'

As managing partner of the private equity firm Acorn Growth Strategies, OU regent Rick Nagel currently has investments in a company that works with Florida Polytechnic University.

"The graduates who come out of there are degreed and workforce-ready in areas of applied science that are incredibly useful to our company and all of the employers in the region who have an insatiable need for engineering talent.

University of Oklahoma Vice President for Research and Partnerships Tomás Díaz de la Rubia, left, speaks with Provost André-Denis Wright outside an OU Board of Regents meeting Friday, May 13, 2022. (Tres Savage)

They can hit the ground running," Nagel said after Friday's meeting. It's not only about getting young people right into the workforce, but think about workforce retraining as well, where college degrees are required for skills that are cutting edge and kind of tip of the spear, if you will, in terms of technology."

Nagel said OU is working to increase transfer student enrollment, and he said two more admission agreements with regional community colleges are in the works.

"They'll apply, and the idea will be that we will feather those students in and get them topped off," Nagel said after Friday's meeting. "This is really going to be a game changer for our state and could be a model for our state as we talk about economic development being corner to corner and border to border."

Nagel pointed to the state's broader efforts to recruit businesses of the future to Oklahoma.

"When you look at economic development activities of our state and how much is moving to northeast Oklahoma, whether it be Canoo or other things we've been talking about like Project Ocean, those require technologists, computer programmers, scientists and engineers at a scale our current universities cannot support," Nagel said. "We need to have another outlet that is aligned with the career requirements of those employers."

Harroz agreed.

"We check every box for being a great place to come. And

then it comes to, 'Can you supply the workforce for these technology-specific jobs?' And that's the hard stop for all of them. So this is an effort to address that," Harroz said. "We don't even have enough to meet the needs of the businesses we have right now, but the schools that have done this well become magnets for those enterprises to come to the state."

Díaz de la Rubia said that has been the result with Purdue Polytechnic Institute, which was launched about a decade ago.

"It was to fill this gap in the types of graduates that universities create in applied science and technology. Graduates who have a very experiential, project-based education that can go directly into the workforce with very high-paying jobs to implement and apply advanced technologies, which are transforming businesses today," Díaz de la Rubia said. "It's also impactful to the state of Indiana, and that is part of our vision here. They are able to recruit a lot of students, obviously from Indiana but also from around the country. Very early on in their curriculum, they work with companies on specific projects."

He said the Purdue Institute has about 5,000 students, with about 1,000 graduating annually. He said the applied sciences being taught prepare a workforce for "the fourth industrial revolution."

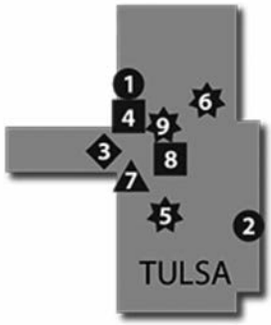
"It's both a brain gain by bringing those students into the school, and it's a retention mechanism because of the very, very close tie between businesses and the Polytechnic Institute," he said.

'An incredibly complicated higher education landscape'

In discussing OU's new effort, Harroz and Nagel both noted the unusual situation that Tulsa has long faced in terms of public institutions of higher education. Although TCC, OU, Oklahoma State University, Langston University and Northeastern State University all have a presence in the Tulsa metro area, historic complications have made it difficult for Oklahomans to find a simple and direct path to a four-year degree without having to move or go to a private university.

"Tulsa is such an incredibly complicated higher education landscape. It's complicated by law, it's complicated by policy, and it's complicated by tax policy that exists there as well," Harroz said. "So there are structural reasons that it has been difficult to figure out what to do in Tulsa, and there is a reason that Tulsa hasn't had the opportunity of a really robust four-year research public university. It's legal, it's structural, it's policy."

TULSA METRO REGION



- Research University/Branch
- Regional University/Branch
- Public Liberal Arts University
- Community College/Technical Branch
- Professional College
- Learning Center
- Independent Institution

1. Langston University, Tulsa (Regional University)
2. Northeastern State University, Broken Arrow (Regional University)
3. Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences, Tulsa (Professional College)
4. Oklahoma State University-Tulsa (Research University)
5. Oral Roberts University, Tulsa (Independent Institution)
6. Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa (Independent Institution)
7. Tulsa Community College, Tulsa (Community College)
8. University of Oklahoma-Tulsa (Research University)
9. The University of Tulsa, Tulsa (Independent Institution)

Nagel said he has learned more of that history since being appointed to the OU board last year by Gov. Kevin Stitt.

"What's been interesting to me as a regent coming on board is that, for whatever combination of reasons — territorial, political, legal, structural — the city of Tulsa does not have a public four-year degree completion center," Nagel said.

He noted that past efforts have not exactly had the desired results.

"This will finally give Tulsa and all of northeast Oklahoma what they have needed and have been desperately asking for for decades," Nagel said.

Column: OU Polytechnic to meet Oklahoma's unmet needs

Joseph Harroz, Jr., University of Oklahoma President, Tulsa World, June 1, 2022

Joseph Harroz Jr.

We're living in an era of rapid innovation and dynamic change in higher education. One of the most exciting and critical innovations in recent years has been the rise of polytechnic schools and institutes within our nation's leading research universities.

A polytechnic offers students an advanced, applied, technology-based education. Its programs prepare students to join some of the most pioneering and fastest-growing sectors of our economy. Oklahoma is well positioned for a polytechnic, especially in the Tulsa and northeastern Oklahoma region, and the University of Oklahoma intends to meet this need.

We will soon be seeking approval from the OU and state boards of regents.

Northeastern Oklahoma is building a vibrant and advanced technology-based economy. But there's a significant shortage of highly trained, highly credentialed workers in this economy. The gap will only continue to grow over the next few decades.

The new OU Polytechnic Institute will help supply this workforce and accelerate northeastern Oklahoma's growth as a hub for cutting-edge industries. We intend to offer innovative programs in high-growth areas such as telehealth, cybersecurity, data analytics, robotics and automation, cloud computing, software engineering, autonomous systems, advanced manufacturing, and more.

Students will be able to earn traditional degrees in high-demand fields, both through undergraduate completion and graduate programs. A hallmark of OU Polytechnic will be the hands-on, experiential education it offers.

Graduates of our programs will be uniquely positioned to rapidly advance in their professions and fluidly adapt to multiple careers. To that end, we plan to partner with regional and national industry leaders to create programs and curricula that include on-site, real-world training.

OU Polytechnic isn't a replacement for a traditional engineering degree. It also isn't the same as Oklahoma's existing career techs and other regional schools. Its purpose is different.

Polytechnic fuses business and engineering; it launches students into high-demand STEM careers; and it creates a burgeoning ecosystem for a technology-based economy.

I've had the opportunity to recruit major new business to Oklahoma with the governor and legislative leadership, and these are the types of skills I have repeatedly heard employers most concerned about having access to in our state.

OU has tremendous partners to make this happen for our state. Gov. Kevin Stitt, leaders in the state Legislature, current large employers and our philanthropic partners — including the George Kaiser Family Foundation and BOK Financial — all agree: This is what Oklahoma needs.

Our goal is ambitious. We seek nothing less than to help transform the future trajectory of Oklahoma's economy by making it one of the most forward-thinking, business-friendly states in the nation. We strive to see the day when the nation's leading tech start-ups and growing high-tech businesses eagerly relocate to Oklahoma.

We are committed to helping Oklahoma build a reputation for supplying innovative industries with an ample and ever-growing pipeline of highly skilled workers.

In that way, OU Polytechnic will invest in our state's most precious resource, our human capital. And the return we expect on that investment is a state whose economy is strong and diversified and whose people are more prosperous than ever before.

Many certificate programs don't pay off, but colleges want to keep offering them anyway

Lilah Burke, The Hechinger Report, April 30, 2022

Vanessa Valenciano had high hopes for the certificate she earned at public Aims Community College in Colorado. After all, colleges have been advertising these kinds of credentials as the next best thing to a degree.

But when Valenciano tried to get a job in the subject that she'd studied — automotive upholstery — she couldn't. There weren't any near where she lived, and those farther away required work experience she didn't have.

"Here in this area there's really nothing, and I guess I didn't realize that," she said. The certificate that took her months to get and today costs about $2,000 has gone unused as Valenciano now tries to start her own business in another field.

Certificates are the fastest-growing kind of credential in higher education, touted as solutions for the growing number of people who want workforce training fast and don't have time for a degree.

Some certificate programs pay off. On average, workers with certificates earn about 20 percent more than those with only a high school education, according to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

But new research from the nonprofit National Student Legal Defense Network and scholars at George Washington University shows that nearly two-thirds of undergraduate certificate programs left their students worse off than the typical high school graduate, making an average of less than $25,000 per year. The analysis used data from 2015, the latest available at the time, though more recent government statistics produce a similar conclusion.

And while most of those failing certificate programs are at for-profit colleges, which have long been criticized for leaving graduates with low earnings and sometimes extreme debt, nearly a quarter are at public colleges and universities.

The Department of Education has proposed regulations that would set a similar earnings threshold for career certificate programs in every sector, and for all degree programs at for-profits. Programs from which graduates earn less than the median salary for a working person with only a high school diploma in his or her state would lose access to federal financial aid. A certain high ratio of student loan debt to earnings would also trigger such a cutoff.

"The goal is not necessarily taking funds away and shutting down programs. It's encouraging institutions to make better programs," said Eddy Conroy, senior adviser in education policy at the left-leaning think tank New America. "If you come out of any program in higher education you should be able to make more than the average high school graduate."

But public universities, community colleges and nonprofit colleges have now joined for-profit institutions in pushing back against the proposed regulations, which the Education Department is likely to formally introduce this summer with the goal of finalizing a rule by November 1.

> ***"We're doing a disservice to students who attend these programs who expect by completing them, they'll immediately better their prospects and their financial security."***
>
> **Ernest Ezeugo, higher education policy director, Young Invincibles**

Public and nonprofit colleges often leave students with less debt than their for-profit counterparts. But regulation advocates say that debt is not the only way to measure what students give up for a degree.

"Students still do spend time and money," said Stephanie Cellini, professor of public policy and economics at George Washington University and co-author of the research analysis that found most undergraduate certificate programs don't pay off. "They incur a cost, they're out of the workforce."

Meanwhile, many institutions operate certificate programs with paltry earnings.

Take one legal-secretary certificate, for example. The university's website advertises that a legal secretary can make $29,534 to $48,910. The reality is that the program's graduates earn a median of $18,495 three years later, according to the most recent Education Department data.

That program isn't run by a for-profit college, but by the online arm of Purdue University, Indiana's state flagship.

"We are proud of our graduates and their successes," Thomas Schott, a spokesperson for the online arm of Purdue, wrote in an email. "The [data] does not reflect the individual circumstances that affect our graduates. For example, sometimes our graduates choose to work part-time to balance their personal obligations with the world of work." He noted that all students have access to career services and all certificates can stack into associate and bachelor's degrees.

Most low-payoff undergraduate certificates at public institutions are at community colleges. Graduates with a nursing assistant certificate at Triton College, a public community college in Illinois, for example, earn a median of about $18,000 per year. (Triton said the data on its students' earnings was collected in 2014.)

"There seems to be a misperception a lot of the time that higher education is just a golden ticket," said Preston Cooper, research

fellow at the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity, who studies educational return on investment. "That turns out not to always be the case. There's a lot of variation in quality and a lot of variation in the financial returns, both in the public sector and in the private for-profit sector."

According to a Hechinger Report analysis of the most recent Education Department data, which was released in March, 20 percent of public, 45 percent of nonprofit and 66 percent of for-profit undergraduate certificate programs with enough finishers to publish earnings data would fail the department's proposed test of whether graduates make more than people with only high school diplomas.

Some disciplines would fare worse than others. Of the 653 cosmetology certificate programs with published earnings data, for example, 640 would fail that test.

Emmanual Guillory, director of student and institutional aid policy at the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, who represented nonprofit institutions in negotiations with the Department of Education, said he thought the earnings threshold could be a good idea, but that other concerns prompted him to vote against the regulations. For example, he said, the department did not propose a mechanism for institutions to appeal their data.

"I understand that the department's trying to address the bad actors. I believe that they should be addressed," said Guillory. "I just want to make sure that before any official action is taken, that we know for sure that the data is the most accurate data in order to make that action."

> ***"There seems to be a misperception a lot of the time that higher education is just a golden ticket."***
>
> **Preston Cooper, research fellow at the Foundation for Research on Equal Opportunity**

The institutions also voiced concerns about the lack of time they had to consider new language for regulations. Other critics have argued that tying government funding to graduates' earnings could incentivize institutions to enroll fewer students of color and first-generation students, as workplace discrimination and other factors can dampen their eventual earnings. Certificate programs that serve more underrepresented minority students have lower earnings, according to research by scholars at Vanderbilt University.

Ernest Ezeugo, higher education policy director at Young Invincibles, a nonprofit focused on issues that affect young adults, occupied the only seat at the negotiations meant to represent students.

"There's something morally defunct about the idea that we wouldn't protect students across all backgrounds from attending programs that can't actually meet the promises that they make for the majority of their students," he said. "We're doing a disservice to students who attend these programs who expect by completing them they'll immediately better their prospects and their financial security."

At the heart of conversations about accountability are questions about the responsibility of any individual higher education institution. When the labor market has set a low wage for, say, certified nursing assistants — jobs that pay less than $15 per hour — should colleges stop educating workers to do those jobs?

"You might have a really high-quality credential — really well-designed, great content — and still have poor earnings outcomes," said Michelle Van Noy, director of the Education and Employment Research Center at Rutgers University. "I certainly agree that the poor earnings are a real problem, but I don't know if that means early child care workers shouldn't get training."

Anthony Carnevale, director of the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce, said he doesn't think the government should remove funding from low-payoff certificates. For many people, he said, having a job is the first priority. The wage is secondary.

"There's a moral question here," he said. "You shouldn't let your own ideals get in the way of someone else's opportunity."

At least one college has taken a hard look at graduates' earnings without being prompted by new regulations. Texas State Technical College opted in 2011 to begin tying its state funding to the earnings bump it imparts, calculated as the difference between students' earnings five years after graduation and the state's minimum wage.

Since then, the income of its graduates has increased 140 percent, said Michael Reeser, chancellor. But its policy has meant some difficult decisions, including closing programs. In 2019, the college shut down more than a dozen programs in fields including culinary arts, agricultural technology, chemical technology and computer maintenance.

"Like any sort of change in a product mix, when it impacts people, it is really, really hard. And it'll never be easy if a program is sunsetted because the economy isn't demanding those skills or isn't paying a reasonable salary for those skills," Reeser said. "But on the other hand, we owe it to the taxpayers who support this college to constantly be spending their taxpayer funds in a way that produces the highest benefit for the student and the employers."

Whether certificates that lead to low earnings will continue getting federal funding is still up in the air. But for some advocates, the choice is clear.

"The counterfactual to the suggestion that we shouldn't close more programs is the status quo," said Ezeugo. "Some programs, where despite even their best efforts half of students leave worse off than if they would have never attended at all — the equivalent of a high school diploma — stay open and continue to draw in vulnerable populations."

This story about certificate programs was produced by The Hechinger Report, a nonprofit, independent news organization focused on inequality and innovation in education.

Paths to avoid crippling student debt

CBS NEWS, CBS Sunday Morning, May 15, 2022

Twenty-eight-year-old Kera Cheney works for the government, lives in a basement apartment with her boyfriend in San Francisco, and stresses about her college loans. Her student debt now stands at around $280,000.

She followed the classic recipe for success, by graduating from Penn State. But now, she's facing down decades' worth of debt.

Correspondent David Pogue asked her, "Have you ever tried to figure out, 'If I put aside this much a month, this is the year I'll pay off that $280,000'?"

"That would be the goal," she replied. "I've always thought of winning the lottery!"

And Cheney's not alone: 43 million Americans now carry student debt. They owe the government more than $1.7 trillion. About two-thirds of all graduates leave college carrying debt. Many will work their entire careers without being able to pay it off.

Cheney said, "We can't go out as much as we used to for dinners, and we can't take as much trips as we want to unless it's in our budget. So, it does affect us."

No wonder college debt has become a White House priority.

- White House extends pause on student loan repayment through August 31
- With payments paused, canceling student loan debt "still on the table" for Biden administration

One of the reasons for the crisis: sky-rocketing tuition. Another reason: more people going to college in the first place.

- The 50 most expensive colleges in America, ranked
- The cost of delaying college by one year? More than $90,000 over lifetime

According to Peter Cappelli, a professor of management at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, only about 8% of Americans had a college degree in the early 1960s. "And now it's getting close to 40%. So, it's a big difference. You were pretty special in the 1960s if you had a college degree."

Cappelli is author of the book "Will College Pay Off?" So, Pogue asked, "Will college pay off?"

"It depends," Cappelli laughed. "There's no doubt that going to college is incredibly useful for people in terms of improving their lives. What everybody's interested in more is financially: Is this a good investment? Will it pay off in that you'll be better off than a high school graduate? Yeah, if they graduate, for sure. If they don't, maybe not."

Trouble is, most students don't. Only 40% of full-time college students – less than half – graduate in four years. And even if you pause your schooling, your debt keeps right on growing. Cappelli said, "If it takes you six years to graduate, you've got six years of interest accumulation."

So, the old formula (spend four years in college, get financial security) is no longer a sure thing.

But some new formulas are springing up in its place.

Natasha and Stephanie Ramos, who live in Connecticut, are avoiding massive debt. Natasha started her college career inexpensively, with two years at a community college, and finished at a state college. "Connecticut University student debt is way better than private-school student debt," she said. "So, I'll just leave it at that!"

Stephanie attends a vocational high school, where students can learn trades like carpentry, plumbing or hairdressing. But she's taking a shortcut to the corporate world, thanks to the Google Professional Certification program. For $39 a month, she can take video classes that prepare her for a career in technology. "The courses give you a certification at the end that looks very good for employers or for colleges, whatever route you wanna take," she said.

Pogue asked, "By the time you're done with high school, you'd be in the working world at, what, 18 years old?"

"Yup," Stephanie laughed. "Nothing is ever set in stone. Whether you wanna, like, go to college or go straight to the workforce, everything's changing."

Pogue asked their father, Javier, "Do you put any pressure on her one way or another for financial reasons?"

"I support going to college," he replied. "But at a certain point, the last decision is on her."

"Well, seems to be working in your family."

"Thank God!" he laughed.

The Google program has already placed 75,000 workers into well-paying tech jobs at over 150 corporations that are eager to hire them. Meanwhile, opportunities are opening up on the receiving end, too.

Ken Frazier, the executive chairman and former CEO of

Merck, and Ginni Rometty, the former CEO of IBM, have led a drive to eliminate the college requirement from as many of their companies' job descriptions as possible.

"Eighty percent of what we call family-sustaining jobs – $60,000 or more generally speaking – require a four-year degree," Frazier said. "And so, companies screen out people, no matter what their intelligence is, their curiosity, their work ethic, their adaptability. But if you don't have enough people to fill all the jobs that we need in this country, I think we have to reexamine it."

Rometty said, "When I became CEO in 2012, we looked at every single job and said, 'Do we need a college degree to start, or could we translate into a set of skills you need?' So, what started as over 90% of jobs needed a college degree, is now less than 50%."

"For example, lab techs and things of that nature, they don't necessarily need a degree in philosophy in order to do the job," said Frazier.

Pogue asked, "Obviously, you're not doing this just because it's the right thing to do; there must be something in it for the corporations?"

"Absolutely; this is not philanthropy," Frazier replied. "At the end of the day, you have people who you can retain longer because they're incredibly loyal, they're hardworking. You can access them for a lot less money."

"And our data has shown that their performance is equal to those with a four-year degree," added Rometty.

"A college degree means you know how to apportion your time; you learn to communicate with others," said Pogue.

Frazier said, "It does. But there are studies that show that people who actually have the right skills training are five times more likely to succeed in the job than people who have a college degree. It's counterintuitive."

"Are you anti-college?"

"We are absolutely not anti-college at all," Rometty said. "It is about just recognizing you may start and go a different path than someone else."

"We know college has lots of value beyond just getting a job," Frazier said. "We think education is a good thing for people. It broadens their perspectives on the world. And what we've seen in these kinds of programs is, eventually a substantial majority of these people go on and get a college degree. They just didn't get the college degree before they entered the workplace. It's a question of sequence, not a question of capability."

To scale up this idea, Rometty and Frazier have founded OneTen, a coalition of 60 major employers, and counting. "OneTen came from the proposition that it would be useful if we sought to hire one million Black Americans who lack a four-year college degree over ten years, into family-sustaining jobs," Frazier said.

The coalition works with community colleges, job-training organizations, and apprenticeships, persuading them to train young people for precisely the kinds of jobs that need filling. Rometty calls them "new-collar jobs."

New programs, new sequences, new collar workers – for some careers it's all part of a new wave of alternative paths that don't involve college … or college debt.

As for Kera Cheney, she has a long-range plan: "I really want to go to law school," she said. "If I can start making higher money, then I can afford my monthly payments."

So, Pogue asked, "Was college worth it for you?"

Cheney paused. "I mean, I had fun in college. It was a great experience. But for the lifetime of debt I'm gonna be living with … (sighs) That's so hard. That's such a difficult question."

Future of Learning: Blurring the lines between education and workforce

Javeria Salman, The Hechinger Report, June 22, 2022

After the disruption of the pandemic, people in the field of education are more open to rethinking traditional ways of doing business in order to better serve students.

One idea that's been gaining steam since last year is to break down barriers between high school, college and career to create a system that bridges all three.

The concept is called the "Big Blur."

Recently, the Big Blur was the topic of numerous conversations during a national conference hosted by Jobs for the Future (JFF) in New Orleans, where it was a subject of a panel discussion between industry leaders and two JFF officials: Joel Vargas, the organization's vice president of programs, and Kyle Hartung, associate vice president.

In a July 2021 report, the two proposed blurring the last two years of high school with the first two years of college to modernize our secondary and post-secondary education and training systems and connect them "more tightly to the world of work and careers," according to Vargas who, with Hartung, was among the report's authors.

"What would it look like to change the typical, or what we think of as the conventional high school experience and instead design something that was built for the modern economy?" said Vargas.

Vargas said that JFF is arguing for new programs or institutions that serve students in grades 11 through 14 (grades 13 and 14 being the first two years of college, under our current configuration). The institutions would be co-designed with regional employers so that all students get work-based learning experiences and graduate — without tuition costs — with a post-secondary credential that has labor market value.

Hartung said it's important to help families understand that there are multiple pathways to success, and a four-year college is only one of many. "To put all your chips in a singular one has not played out well for generations of young people and it's created durable inequities, lack of wealth generation that are perpetuating themselves," he said.

The JFF report has started conversations in K-12, higher education and the workforce about promoting change at the local level, said Brent Parton, the principal deputy assistant secretary and current acting assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (ETA).

The next step is for people to think about how this blurring can happen at scale, he said. "That's where federal leadership comes in." The ETA, he said, is working closely with the departments of education and commerce to promote the idea and encourage states and local communities to break down the barriers between these systems.

Parton said the challenges of the pandemic — including high rates of student absenteeism and disengagement — have prompted more interest in these conversations.

"It's forcing K-12 to think differently in a way out of necessity," Parton said. "In higher ed you're looking at a tight labor market, wages are going up. There's a search for how higher education can more fluidly engage with people who already in the workplace [and] help them upskill."

His staff is beginning to see states take steps to prepare young people for careers at earlier ages, he said, such as an effort in Tennessee to start a registered teacher occupation apprenticeship program.

States and communities have funds and resources to try new approaches, thanks to the American Rescue Plan, Hartung added.

Vargas pointed out that the concept of the Big Blur isn't entirely new. In states such as Texas, Louisiana, Delaware, Illinois and Colorado, there are already programs in play.

In New Orleans, for example, YouthForce NOLA is part of a city-wide effort to help bridge the gap between school and the workforce, according to Cate Swinburn, president of the nonprofit organization. YouthForce is an education, business and civic collaborative that helps prepare public school students in New Orleans for in-demand career pathways.

The organization partners with schools in the city to place students in paid internships with employers in "high-wage, high-demand" careers. Students participate in the Career Pathway Programs of Study, through which they are exposed to different careers, build skills relevant to those careers, develop their professional network and get work experience as they graduate high school.

In Texas and Delaware, the Big Blur is happening on a more structured, at-scale level.

Some of Texas's early-college high schools, which allow high schoolers to earn up to two years of college credits, are the result of a tri-agency effort between the Texas departments of education, higher ed and the workforce commission. While only a small number of schools currently offer the early-college program, Vargas said these schools are becoming a "substantial part of their high school system."

In 2015, Delaware created the "Delaware Pathways" program, linking education to workforce training to provide students with training in various job sectors. The program is a collaborative effort between the state's labor, education and higher ed departments, as well as local foundations, business and nonprofits. In 2016, the program enrolled about 50 students, but has now expanded across the state and is set to enroll 80 percent of the state's high school population within the next two years, according to Hartung.

Doing the Big Blur nationally, and at scale, isn't going to be easy. Since the separate systems — high school, college, and career training — are so entrenched, it will require leaders from all three sectors to collaborate and rethink what it should look like to get a high school diploma or a college degree and enter the workforce. The other big challenge, according to Parton is messaging.

"We have to communicate very clearly what it is and the value proposition," Parton said. "People go to what they know is guaranteed or at least what is the closest thing to be guaranteed."

Opinion: College Has Become the Default. Let's Rethink That.

John McWhorter, The New York Times, April 7, 2022

I graduated from Rutgers University in 1985 and recently had occasion to visit the campus. I was struck, just as I was decades ago, by the contrast between the look of the dormitories built early in the 20th century like Ford Hall (1915) and Hegeman Hall (1922) and that of the great many put up after World War II such as Frelinghuysen Hall (1956) and Mettler Hall (1964). University campuses tend to harbor that kind of contrast between the doughty old ones and the midcentury-modern-ish new ones. Often, the proliferation of the latter allowed the schools to accommodate a vast increase in the student body in the wake of the G.I. Bill after the war.

It was then that the idea really started settling in that the prescribed path in America is to go to college after high school. In 1940, only about one in 20 adults had completed college (today it's closer to one in three), and that wasn't thought of as a tragedy. By contrast, a White House fact sheet on President Barack Obama's education agenda once proclaimed, "Because economic progress and educational achievement go hand in hand, educating every American student to graduate prepared for college and for success in a new work force is a national imperative."

The question is why we can't just prepare students for the work force. Why do we assume that people need four whole years of further education after high school? One answer comes from Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College. He wrote an underattended manifesto about what American education should be, "Jefferson's Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture," which is 25 years old this year. Before Rutgers, I attended Bard's subsidiary Simon's Rock (now Bard College at Simon's Rock), but I would be singing this book to the skies even if I had never known Bard, Simon's Rock or Botstein.

The upshot is simple: The idea that in our society the ordinary trajectory after high school is to attend another four years of school has become arbitrary, purposeless and even absurd. Botstein noted, "America has a more elaborate educational system that spreads over more years, reaches more people and ends up with results for the entire population that are worse than those countries with educational systems that are explicitly not democratic and on the surface offer fewer opportunities for advanced education." This model, he argued, is hardly what we would choose if asked with no experience how things should go. He argued that the model of high school we currently use is from a time when teenagers were, on average, less intellectually mature than they are now. Botstein proposed instead that childhood education can stop at 10th grade and that the education kids get during that year be a richer one than kids typically get today even going up through 12 grades.

Simon's Rock takes kids from 10th or 11th grade and jumps them right onto the college track — what the school calls "early college." That means Rockers (as we call ourselves) are technically high school dropouts. I, for one, have no high school diploma and never took the SAT. (I invite my detractors to have fun with that fact.) As the school's website makes clear, when a student applies, what Simon's Rock is looking for is "not a set of numbers but an expression of your character, ambitions, imagination and intelligence." Put another way, the idea is to respect the minds of young people, rather than assume that they are for some reason unburnished until the magic age of 18.

We should also understand that just as some kids at 16 are ready for a college education, just as many kids at that age are ready to take their places in the working world. Most of us today would have a hard time articulately justifying why people must spend four years taking about 40 courses in this and that before becoming executives, administrators or fund-raisers.

Sure, you might worry that they wouldn't be educated enough for those roles after completing the 10th grade, but here's some more about Botstein's hypothesized 10-grade curriculum: The dream is that students would be steeped not in memorization but in thought. They would be indoctrinated in neither sugarcoated celebration nor radical pieties. Rather, they'd be taught the importance of having open and moral minds with a curriculum rich in text and chronicle.

As a demonstration of what young minds are capable of, consider that in the past, Americans without formal post-secondary education could be better educated in some ways than college graduates are today. The eloquently composed letters from modestly educated soldiers during the Civil War are a famous example. Another one that I have always kept in mind is that in the 1830s, in a diary entry that became public when he was tried for the murder of a courtesan, a teenager wrote: "Most youths at 17 or 18 years of age take a pride in boasting of their amours, of their dissipations and of their wild exploits; I have, however, no taste for such exposures."

I know it sounds idealistic that high school sophomores could start productive workaday lives as if they were 22-year-olds. But venturing what seems far-fetched is a part of what sparks progress, and books like "Jefferson's Children" stand as prophecy. It's true that the way things are now, a college degree means higher earnings and the unemployment rate for those with degrees is lower than for those without. One is not allowed into most of the highest-paying careers without a bachelor's degree. But that's just it: In this hypothetical America of the future, where public education is about presenting young adults to the world after 10th grade, the idea is that the stewards of these

lucrative positions — the people doing the hiring — would be more open to applicants without degrees. Much of what makes this sound so strange today is a mission creep in what high school and college are supposed to be for.

College should be something some kids choose out of personal predilection. When I was at Rutgers, I lived in Demarest Hall, which for decades has been a quirky outlier dorm, with each hallway dedicated to investigating and celebrating special-interest subjects such as German and the performing arts. It has an especially progressive social atmosphere. Junot Díaz set much of his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," in Demarest at a time not long after I was there and captures the place perfectly. It was a whole building where almost everybody actively wanted to be doing this college thing.

But it was hard not to see that this wasn't true of many other college kids at that time. Even as a young student, it was hard for me not to notice how many of my contemporaries were just marking time until they "got that piece of paper," as some would put it. Yes, they were smart and capable. But they were largely jumping through hoops: It seemed that they might have been better off just getting out there and doing what they wanted to do, without four years of expensive preparation only diagonally related to what they were going to spend their lives doing. Half the students seemed to be majoring in economics and not because they had a special interest in the Laffer Curve but because they saw it as a major that would help them "get a good job," as many would say. Did society need to put all those students through that exercise?

I don't mean to imply that kids like that lacked curiosity or weren't "college material." The question was what the college mission, as constituted by then, was even for. Nowadays especially, if you want to know about nearly any subject, you don't have to have a college professor teach it to you. At least not live, in person and as part of a rigid credentialing requirement: College-level education is more readily available today than it has ever been because of online sources. Companies like the Great Courses (which hosts some of my lectures) are ubiquitous. There are countless podcasts about countless subjects available at the push of a button, whereas 40 years ago, when I was an undergraduate, books, periodicals and maybe PBS or NPR probably constituted most of your options. It's a new world out there.

True, in-class instruction, with its required attendance and the availability of professors for questions, has its advantages, as does the experience of spending four years interacting with a wide range of people. But the question is whether those advantages are so very important as to justify continuing to think of college, including the expense and debt involved, as a default American experience. There is no sacrosanct reason for keeping students in high school through 12th grade, much less for enshrining eight further semesters of formal education as something we quietly pity people for having done without.

We think of four years of high school and four years of college as normal because it's what we know. But we could be a society of solidly educated people if we improved and bolstered public education while reclassifying a college education as a choice among many. Call this a pipe dream — I realize it wouldn't happen overnight. But I suspect quite a few would see Botstein's idea as valuable if we rolled back the tape and started over. That kind of hypothetical is invaluable to assessing where we are and where we might like to go.

John McWhorter (@JohnHMcWhorter) is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University. He hosts the podcast "Lexicon Valley" and is the author, most recently, of "Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America."

Should More Students Skip College?

Opinion Letters, The New York Times, April 16, 2022

Readers discuss John McWhorter's suggestion that ending high school after 10th grade and skipping college are better options for some students.

To the Editor:

Re "College Has Become the Default. Let's Rethink That," by John McWhorter (Opinion, April 7):

I was puzzled and disappointed by Dr. McWhorter's essay. Puzzled by his assumption that so many students are biding their time until they get that "piece of paper" so they can get a job. Disappointed by his cheerleading for a less educated America.

Of course college isn't for everyone, and not everyone needs to go to college to be educated. He shared about his college experience. I'd like to share mine.

I went to Brooklyn College. I majored in media, having found the mini-series "Roots" to be a life-changing experience. I took a psychology class and fell in love with the subject, so I majored in that too. I wondered about health science and took a course in that, and I learned why eating healthily matters. I learned in biology how to understand how my body works, making me an educated patient. And perhaps as important as all those things, I took history and political science and learned what it means to be an informed citizen.

I do not understand Dr. McWhorter's attitude toward higher education. Learning to think critically about health and politics and having empathy for other cultures are important for everyone. College may not be the best way to do it for everyone. But his downgrading of the value of a four-year degree misses the whole point of college. It is to become an educated adult and citizen.

Elaine Edelman
East Brunswick, N.J.

To the Editor:

As the executive director of a foundation that supports programs designed to strengthen early childhood education, I have viewed with dismay kindergarten classrooms festooned with pennants from Ivy League colleges. I agree with John McWhorter's premise: A college education isn't required to prepare someone for a successful career!

Years ago what was called "vocational education" was valued and available to high school students, but it seems to have fallen out of fashion in favor of four more years of what may be unfocused study. Technical education should be available to students who become plumbers, electricians, computer technicians and other tradespeople who are essential contributors to our everyday lives, but who may not need to read the Great Books to have successful careers.

Deborah Breznay
New York

To the Editor:

The headline of John McWhorter's column buries the lead. The main takeaway should emphasize a proposal by Leon Botstein, the president of Bard College, that kids spend their last two years in high school on a track termed "early college." Assuming that this means a richer and more intellectually demanding curriculum than usual, I'm all for it. Early college would give these students a better sense of what a college education is, and, maybe, should be. The decision to continue would be better informed.

Dissing college has been fashionable for some time now, particularly among those who choose to measure its value through a cost-benefit analysis. A college education can lead to a job, but it is not the same as a trade school certificate. Those who choose a college education should do so for the education, mostly to explore subjects previously not available in high school. If more of these subjects can be offered in the 11th and 12th grades, that's wonderful.

Concentrate on revamping the high school curriculum for today's students, and the issue of college as the default will take care of itself.

Robert S. Cole Jr.
Washington

To the Editor:

John McWhorter is correct. Many students arriving on campus do not know what college has to offer them or even why they are there except that it's "the next step." And too many never take advantage of the opportunities available on campus. But that doesn't mean students shouldn't bother attending college and instead rely on distance (or other alternative forms of) learning.

Rather, pre-college education should prepare students for

the opportunities afforded by further quality education; college brochures and tours should foreground the means and the rewards of learning to think deeply about many topics; and, most important, faculty and staff on campus should work to ensure that every enrolled student can explore new areas and graduate better equipped to deal with work, civic and personal responsibilities.

Howard Gardner
Cambridge, Mass.
The writer is a professor of cognition and education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and co-author of "The Real World of College."

To the Editor:

Colleges and universities have contributed significantly to the decline of the American system of education. Most institutions of higher education have become expensive and extremely political. Professors seem too often to be preoccupied with doctrine rather than teaching skills meant to prepare students for professions. As a result, students and their families too often incur high debt and pay outrageous amounts of money for credits and certificates that could be achieved with less money and time involvement.

When I attended college and graduate school, what John McWhorter refers to as "the ordinary trajectory" after high school served for me more as a trajectory of escape from poverty. I came from a family that had little education, and college and graduate degrees freed me from poverty and afforded a very rewarding life. The path I took seems less rewarding today.

Franklin T. Burroughs
Walnut Creek, Calif.

To the Editor:

John McWhorter is absolutely right: Not everyone needs to go to college, but everyone does have to become educated and prepared to be a responsible citizen. Can that be done without going to college?

Dr. McWhorter suggests, together with Leon Botstein, that an appropriate basic education could be achieved by the end of 10th grade. Possibly. But — been there, done that. Robert Maynard Hutchins, then president of the University of Chicago, was of that opinion back in the 1940s, and indeed the University of Chicago Laboratory School discharged me with my high school diploma at the end of 10th grade in 1947.

Well, probably I was ready for college intellectually, possibly emotionally, but certainly not physically. I took two more years at preparatory school before I went to college, during which time I grew about four inches and without which I would never have succeeded in becoming a three-time all-American in soccer.

OK, so that is not a measure of success in life. But to implement a shorter curriculum as a useful part of a comprehensive restructuring of our educational system there would have to be more universal acceptance of the idea and a common appreciation of the goals of education. Mr. Hutchins's idea was ahead of its time and did not last; the University of Chicago's High School is now back to a traditional 12-grade curriculum.

Robert H. Palmer
New York

To the Editor:

John McWhorter, arguing against higher education, says that many young people might be "better off just getting out there and doing what they wanted to do, without four years of expensive preparation only diagonally related to what they were going to spend their lives doing."

Well, let's see. In college what I wanted to do was to be an actress. I ended up, diagonally, spending my life writing and teaching writing. Meanwhile, I had all kinds of college experiences "only diagonally" connected to preparing me for this life. I learned to speak pretty good French and minimal Spanish. I discovered Gawain and heroic couplets. I learned that I loved botany and anthropology. My mind exploded with existentialism and dramatic irony.

Meanwhile, I had my first beer and my first heartbreak, experienced a deep friendship and a resistance to certain concepts of my childhood, and interrogated my relationship to God.

Gee whiz, if only I'd had the benefit of Dr. McWhorter's wisdom I wouldn't have wasted my time on a "liberal education."

Janet Burroway
Chicago

Learning & Development as a tool for business survival

Kim Leveridge, Ph.D., Learning and Professional Development, Oklahoma Center for Nonprofits

A consulting client, Lana, once lamented the disappointing return on investment from their organization's recruitment and hiring processes. No matter how thorough, relevant, or seemingly robust the screening, they could not keep people around for more than a year or so. Lana decided that the employee selection practices were not working and needed revamping. This is a common assumption on the part of hiring managers.

No doubt, hiring practices and poor job fit can be a source of staff turnover. Employee engagement and retention is a business imperative that begins at onboarding and in some ways may be more challenging for the nonprofit sector. Historically, the nonprofit sector strains to match salary levels and benefit packages offered by government and for-profit sectors. The good news is that there always have been and will continue to be skilled, high-enthusiasm employees that are passionate about the mission of our work and who are willing to work to fulfill that mission. Unfortunately, as is the case everywhere, the nonprofit sector's ability to rely solely on that passion to feed engagement will become more difficult post-COVID as competition for employees is extremely high. Additionally, because of the current employee shortage and the changes seen in the workplace, employees have more leverage when choosing when and where they want to work. Flexibility around things like remote work, established hours, and children "in the workplace" are necessary in order to attract employees in 2022. These employer adaptations are necessary now and may be with us for the long term.

So, while inadequate employee selection processes can lead to shorter staff tenure, the more likely culprit is deficits in employee engagement and organizational culture. Employee engagement "is an employee's satisfaction with their work and pride in their employer, the extent to which people enjoy and believe in what they do for work and have the perception that their employer values what they bring to the table." (SHRM). The concept seems straightforward enough; and yet we are in the midst of a significant shakeup in our ability to retain staff. The critical point being that an engaged staff leads to retention, productivity, and loyalty. Further, engagement then facilitates client satisfaction and agency reputation. (SHRM)

What do staff members typically link to satisfaction and eventually engagement? When considering employment, people tend to focus on wages, benefits, potential for growth and flexibility. Clearly, learning and development is a critical piece to the talent management and retention picture. To keep our high performers and build a staff that is engaged, committed, and driven to complete the mission, we must provide opportunities for professional development.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion reflection and commitments make our organizations and sector more effective and sustainable, and equally importantly provide us the opportunity to be fair and transparent. DE&I should play a foundational role in all learning and development initiatives. So what does that look like in this context?

Learning program design should align the goals of the organization with the goals and needs of the learner. This is the essence of equity—promoting fairness and making adjustments so that expectations are fair and just. When injustice is perceived, whether it be to whom we provide development opportunities, who we promote, how we engage in development, or how we include or exclude individuals, employee engagement and retention will suffer.

Research completed by The Building Movement Project Race to Lead research found that women of color were asked to step into leadership roles most frequently in times of crisis, with little offered in the way of support from leadership in their organizations. Thus, the chance to advance, to grow into a role, to make a significant impact during a difficult time, can immediately be undermined without equitable opportunities to grow and develop in ways that make sense for the individual as much as for the organization.

A key role of the Learning and Development wing of your organization is to recognize the complexity of work in our sector. In doing so, we must consider accessibility, region, military and immigration status and more. Thus, to truly be the employer of the future, we must challenge ourselves to constantly improve and evolve to identify and move past bias and deliver content that our sector wants and needs in ways that meet them where they are.

Organizations that invest in effective learning and development strategies tend to achieve long and short term benefits. However, one of the biggest challenges remains convincing managers to prioritize it by making sure staff are free to pursue development opportunities. About a third of organizational decision makers claim that insufficient budgets are a hindrance to adapting effective learning programs. In 2019, spending on learning and development reached $370 billion with an average of $1,286 spent per learner. And yet, 1 in 2 US companies does not provide formal training for their staff, which literally adds to risks around sustainability and survival. All the while, quit rates are higher than normal and 57% of workers are actively open to new opportunity.

A robust learning and professional development program provides stability, preparation, professional skill enhancement and personal reward and will lead to a more engaged and capable workforce. As you plan for the year ahead, include strategies for building engagement, prioritize staff professional development, and challenge your organization and leadership to think differently about how to expand internal potential for growth and success. Invest in your team to "grow your own" highly skilled and engaged staff, explore professional facilitation opportunities, physical and virtual spaces for community, content that is focused on and designed for individual learners, and provide ongoing accessible up-to-date support for the specific and evolving needs of the people who make things happen in your organization.

Growing local talent helps Oklahoma businesses

Chris Lozano, Guest Columnist, The Journal Record, June 29, 2022

As a small business owner in Oklahoma City, we enjoy some advantages when it comes to recruiting talent. We have a low cost of living and a great quality of life with pivotal improvements over the past 10 years to entertainment venues, arts, trails and parks, food scene and other factors that pleasantly surprise visitors from other states. Our city ranks the second most affordable housing market in the country, making this an attractive place to live.

Chris Lozano

But the downside of recruitment is that Oklahoma doesn't produce enough college graduates in key industries. We consistently rank in the bottom 10 states for college attainment percentage among the population 25 years and older who have an associate degree or higher. Our lack of investment per student starts early. When looking at per pupil public elementary and secondary school expenditure, again, Oklahoma ranks in the bottom 10.

Certainly individuals feel the impact of lower educational attainment on lifetime earnings and other upward mobility measures. But local businesses also feel the effects. Oklahoma's talent pool is tight, with one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country, and that affects our company's ability to hire. As a defense contractor, Long Wave depends on our staff of STEM degreed professionals when pursuing and fulfilling large defense technology contracts. There aren't enough Oklahoma educated candidates to fill all the job openings, so our recruiting team must search for candidates in other states.

We've added tools to help with national searches, incentivized our existing employees to help identify candidates, improved benefits and increased pay bands to successfully compete nationally. But we continue to face shortages of systems engineers, software engineers and electrical engineers. The bottom line is that more degreed professionals in Oklahoma would allow our company to grow at a faster rate.

Other business executives I meet share the same story, regardless of their industry. The shortage has become an economic development consideration; more talent now and in the future would allow most businesses to expand more quickly and be more competitive nationally.

We ask our elected officials to prioritize education and workforce training in the state's budget. It's critical to our ability to attract companies looking to grow in our state as well as support companies that already headquarter in Oklahoma.

Chris Lozano is the chief marketing officer at Long Wave Inc., a defense contractor located in Oklahoma City.

Employers Say Students Aren't Learning Soft Skills in College

Dana Wilkie, SHRM, October 21, 2019

Jim Link's college-age son came home this summer with a problem: Assigned to clean up a database at his internship, he first had to confirm that the data were accurate and up-to-date.

But the people who could help him didn't reply to his e-mails, responded too slowly, failed to show up for meetings or weren't up to speed on the data.

For a week, Link coached his son through this challenge.

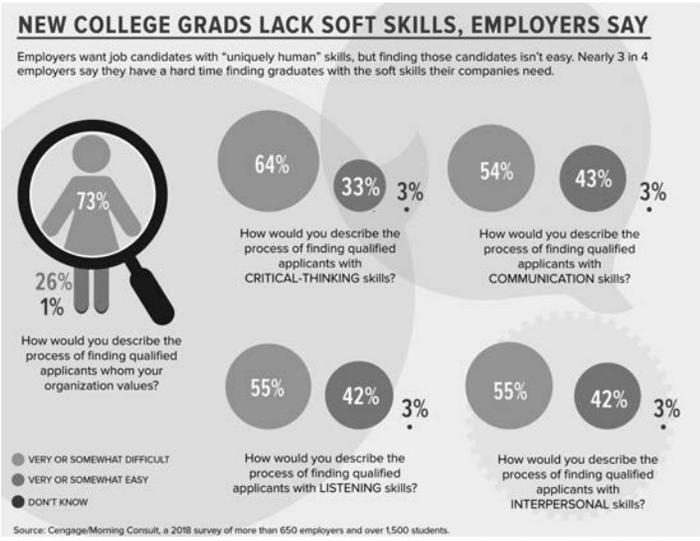
"I taught him about being inspirationally irritating," said Link, CHRO of Randstad North America, a leading staffing company, in Atlanta. "It means saying what you need persuasively, up to the point of driving people nuts. What I was really teaching him was how to work with other people—about influence, negotiation and persuasion."

His son's experience, Link says, illustrates the lack of creative problem-solving that he sees in today's college students.

How Important Are Soft Skills?

What Link describes are what today's business world calls "soft skills." And the classic four-year college education, with its emphasis on critical thinking, debating, viewing issues from several angles and communicating clearly, was designed to teach these skills.

Yet nearly 3 in 4 employers say they have a hard time finding graduates with the soft skills their companies need.



In a 2019 report, the Society for Human Resource Management found that 51 percent of its members who responded to a survey said that education systems have done little or nothing to help address the skills shortage. The top missing soft skills, according to these members: problem solving, critical thinking, innovation and creativity; the ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity; and communication.

Are college curricula just different than in years past? Are college students different? Has a reliance on technology robbed young adults of soft skills? Or have today's companies—many of them startups and dependent on ever-changing technology—grown impatient and unwilling to wait out what was once a predictable, on-the-job learning curve?

All of those questions may hold the answers, say the executives, educators, students and workplace experts interviewed for this series.

In the immediate future, the most valuable work skills will be those that machines can't yet perform, like soft skills, according to a survey by the Pew Research Center of about 1,400 technology and education professionals. The survey suggested that young adults need to "learn how to learn" if they hope to adapt to a fast-changing work world.

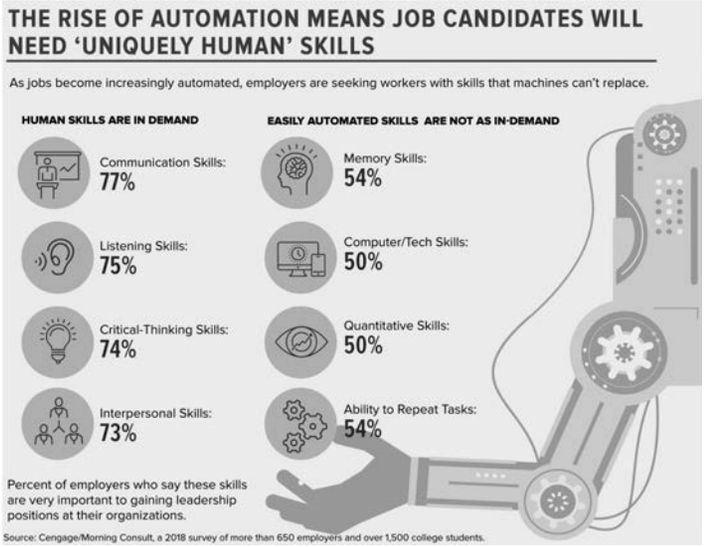
Link likes to think further ahead—to 2025, when many familiar jobs will be performed by machines. Machines will be doing basic tasks that require abilities such as operational skills (functioning as forklift operators, assembly line workers), administrative skills (secretaries, bank tellers) and computational skills (accountants).

Soft skills are precisely the skills that a traditional four-year college degree, especially in the liberal arts, is designed to teach, said Lynn Pasquerella, president of the Association of American Colleges & Universities in Washington, D.C.

"I was a philosophy major," Pasquerella said. "We composed arguments about issues, responded to objections, developed a capacity to imagine what it's like to be in the shoes of someone different, to listen critically and to consider points of view that might call into question your fundamental beliefs."

Year after year, her organization's annual survey on the skills that company executives consider most valuable in college graduates and that prepare students for the workforce finds that soft skills "are the best preparation for long-term career goals."

Yet "these are areas where colleges are clearly struggling to prepare students," said Denise Leaser, SHRM-SCP, who is president of GreatBizTools, an HR management products and consulting services company in St. Paul, Minn., and whose daughter just graduated from California's Biola University. "And the future appears to be worse."



Chris Kirksey is president of McLean, Va.-based Direction.com, a digital marketing and Web design company. He said he's interviewed "many brilliant people with college degrees," some of them with multiple degrees. But he often finds them wanting.

"It seems college is graduating many 'book-smart' people with no real people skills or no real-world use of their knowledge skills," Kirksey said. "What's so great about a degree in something if you only know about it, and not how to teach it, use it, or understand why people want or need it?"

What's Happening at College?

Pressured by businesses to produce graduates with up-to-date technical skills, colleges could be relaxing their standards for requiring liberal arts classes—precisely the types of classes that research has shown develop the soft skills businesses also want.

"A lot of colleges still have curricula grounded in the liberal arts," said Martin Van Der Werf, associate director for editorial and postsecondary policy at Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. "But most could also be accused of chasing after what they think most businesses want ... what the next hot major is. And designing curricula to bring students up to snuff on the technical skills they need for a degree sometimes comes at the expense of grounding them in the liberal arts."

For example, he said, a college business degree can now be splintered into several subdisciplines (such as a specialty in supply-chain management), each requiring its own specific expertise. "So the emphasis becomes trying to [introduce] new classes, so they'll shave off one or two of the core liberal arts requirements."

In addition, he said, colleges are more consumer-oriented today. Because the public can track from year to year what new college graduates earn, schools feel pressure to demonstrate that college tuition is worth the investment, especially at a time when tuition costs are through the roof.

"For colleges, it used to be 'Hey, we're a place where students can come and find themselves, learn about their passion and follow it,' " Van Der Werf said. "As the tuition sticker price rose, the leverage has switched to consumers who say, 'I invest thousands in my education. What guarantee can you give me that I'll get a job when I'm out, and how much will I make?' More and more, colleges are listening and saying, 'OK, maybe it's not the wisest thing to require political science for a business major.' "

Zachary Schallenberger is a rising senior at Montana State University in Bozeman, majoring in computer science. Like most of the computer-science students interviewed for this series, he confessed that college hasn't really taught him some basic interpersonal skills, which is important for science-inclined students who can be introverted and socially awkward.

It wasn't at the university but at an internship at BMW where he first learned these skills.

"One of the things I quickly had to learn was to communicate in a professional environment," he said. "That was never taught to me. What's the formal way to write an e-mail? Is e-mail the most appropriate way to contact someone? How do I have conversations with my manager?"

Is Digitization to Blame?

Eric Frazer has another explanation for the dearth of college graduates with soft skills—and it has nothing to do with college curricula.

College students are more disengaged than students of decades past from campus sports, Greek life, volunteerism and other extracurricular activities that grow soft skills.

"Students are not getting as involved in the opportunities that could develop these skills," said Frazer, who teaches part time at Yale School of Medicine. "Before, one would join a fraternity or sorority, a recreational club, a sport, theater, music—where there's a hierarchy, leaders, where you learn interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills.

"Now [students'] social connections are online. Instead of joining a club, people join an app or an online group. Instead of sitting down with someone and sharing, they share photos and news snippets on phones and tablets."

Link agrees.

"I see this even in my own household," he said. "I am raising four Generation Z students. "While they completely recognize that they need to be persuasive or to manage conflict, they're often perplexed as to how to make those things happen. I think it's because they've been 'digitalized' at a very early age and taught to believe that the best way to solve a problem is go to a machine and find your solution, instead of to another person."

Outdated Mindsets and Degree Stigmas

Cengage Group, July 20, 2022

Cengage Group's 2022 Employability Report Reveals What's Really Causing the Talent Crunch

• Nearly two-thirds (65 percent) of employers are struggling to find talent

• 62 percent of employers require a degree for entry-level jobs, even though nearly half (43 percent) of employers admit that skills training credentials are more important than a degree when considering a candidate

While U.S. employers say they're facing a talent crisis that's threating their business sustainability and growth, the reality is that employers are contributing to the talent crisis with the majority (62 percent) requiring degrees for entry level jobs, and more than a quarter (26 percent) admitting they do so to "filter the candidate pool" or because "that's the way it's always been done."

Exposing this outdated mindset, Cengage Group's 2022 Employability Report (Part 2) of 1,000 U.S. hiring decision makers reveals that one of the biggest drivers causing the talent crisis is the skills mismatch between the current workforce and employers' needs. By requiring a degree and not focusing on a candidate's skills or experience, employers are substantially shrinking their potential talent pool; only 38 percent of U.S. adults have a four-year degree.1 These degree requirements and employers' mixed messages about what's actually needed for job eligibility caused half of all recent graduates not to apply for entry-level jobs because they didn't feel qualified.2

While employers continue to implement outdated degree requirements, they seemingly contradict themselves by ranking skills training credentials (43 percent) and real-world experience (28 percent) more important than a two- or four-year degree (26 percent) when considering an entry-level candidate.

"Employers seem to be stuck in a contradictory cycle, where they recognize that a degree is not an indicator of job readiness, but nonetheless require them as part of their candidate screening process. This outdated mindset and degree stigma is not only widening the labor gap, it's costing businesses time and money and turning away potential talent," said Michael Hansen, CEO of Cengage Group.

And change is slow with just one in 10 employers (nine percent) saying they don't require a degree to apply for entry-level jobs. Nearly half (48 percent) of employers who don't require a degree say it's because they believe candidates can attain the proper skills through life experience, internships, skills training credentials, stackable credentials and hands-on experience outside of an institution.

"For a number of fields, including several in-demand industries like healthcare, technology and skilled trades, the future of work – thanks to the accelerating pace of technological change – will not depend only on a degree. It will instead focus on a candidates' skills, experiences and potential to upskill or train in new fields. Employers need to make changes to hiring practices. However, removing degree requirements is not a simple 'top-down' policy change, it requires a full-blown change effort to make sure hiring managers are actually comfortable overturning a decades-old practice," said Hansen.

Other findings include:

Closing labor gaps while closing gaps in equity. Of those struggling to find talent, two in three (66 percent) believe that removing degree requirements for open roles would help them find qualified talent to narrow staffing gaps. And while the end goal is finding talent to support business growth, one in four employers (22 percent) say they don't require a degree because it's essential to creating fairer employment opportunities.

Employers struggle to evaluate and define the value of credentials. Before a mind shift can happen, employers need a better understanding of credentials and certifications, and the value they offer. Employers are split, nearly half (47 percent) believe it's difficult to measure the meaningfulness of certifications or credentials in their line of work because they're not familiar with them (16 percent) and aren't sure which certifications or credentials have credibility (36 percent).

The hottest hiring industries have cold hiring methods. When reviewing entry-level recruitment across three of the "hottest job markets" – healthcare, technology and skilled trades – technology is one of the biggest degree stalwarts with 81 percent of tech employers admitting they require a two- or four-year degree compared to healthcare (50 percent) and skilled trades (57 percent). Considering that there are 3.85 million unfilled IT jobs in the U.S., the tech industry faces the biggest urgency to modify hiring requirements.
Employers as educators – education benefits become a powerful recruitment tool. Today's talent expects employers to invest in their continued learning and career development, and most employers (77 percent) say free employer-sponsored education offerings are a differentiator for recruitment and retention in this tight labor market. Three in four employers (75 percent) offer employer-paid/employer-sponsored education opportunities, with 61 percent offering online education opportunities. Outside of providing education, 78 percent of employers say they offer the flexibility needed to pursue education opportunities.

Oklahoma CareerTech students shine in national competitions

Staff Report, The Journal Record, July 5, 2022

Oklahoma CareerTech students brought national attention to the state during recent competitions for students in career-building programs held in Atlanta, Georgia, and Nashville, Tennessee.

Oklahoma SkillsUSA students earned 74 medals, including 38 gold, 22 silver and 14 bronze, to place second in the country in the recent 58th National Leadership and Skills competition and conference held in Georgia.

Oklahoma students also fared exceptionally well at the 2022 International Leadership Conference for future health care professionals held in Tennessee.

According to Emily Goff, state adviser in the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, 177 Skills USA competitors from Oklahoma captured top-10 status in Georgia.

"The state of Oklahoma should be proud of the students and advisers who participated in the SkillsUSA National Conference. The students did a fantastic job demonstrating their skills and abilities learned in their chosen career and technology education fields," Goff said. "Our amazing instructors and advisers provided professional guidance and support to the students setting the pathway to success."

More than 400 competitors, advisers and others from Oklahoma attended the conference.

In addition to student successes, Gordon Cooper Technology Center in Shawnee was among only 24 schools in the country to earn "Models of Excellence" distinction – the highest honor a SkillsUSA chapter can earn.

In the Tennessee competition, students in career tech programs for aspiring health care professionals earned more than 60 medals, along with other honors.

Some 224 students, advisers and guests represented 47 chapters in the state. The students earned 22 gold medals, 20 silvers and 19 bronze medals. In addition, 23 students scored Top 10 status in their competitions.

Oklahoma CareerTech students earned top-10 status along with numerous awards during recent competitions for students in career-building programs held in Atlanta, Georgia, and Nashville, Tennessee. (Photo illustration by Emmanuel Ikwuegbu on Unsplash)

During the conference, Oklahoma advisers were responsible for running four competitive events focused on clinical nursing, pharmacy science, emergency medical skills and academic testing.

"I am very honored to work alongside Oklahoma students and advisers," said Debbie Bennett, program state adviser at the Department of Career and Technology Education. "The students showed respect and professionalism yet enthusiasm and excitement throughout the entire conference. Our advisers continue to lead our students in becoming future health professionals."

The Oklahoma program for future health care professionals was recognized for an 8% increase in membership. The CareerTech student organization's membership for 2021-22 was 8,107.

Getting students college AND career ready

Lee Denney, D.V.M., The Journal Record, July 18, 2022

While career and technology education is designed to provide students with skills demanded by the labor market, it also prepares them for postsecondary degrees in a wide range of technical fields. This is the premise behind Oklahoma CareerTech's mantra to get students college AND career ready.

CareerTech activities include career-oriented courses, internships, apprenticeships and in-school programs that promote work readiness.

CareerTech programs in aerospace, health care, construction, business, agriculture and film production provide hands-on training that translates directly to careers upon graduation from high school.

By integrating academic skills into a real-world context, career and technology education can inspire students to be more engaged, thus improving core academic skills. What's more, it teaches core academic skills essential to lifelong learning and often does so better than traditional schooling, particularly for disadvantaged youth.

But the combination of academic education and career training is important to assure students have the best chance at lifelong, gainful employment in a world of advancing automation and global integration.

A strong system of career and technology training built on a base of academic education gives students the option to go right to work from high school or into a university to gain a broad and deep education that enables them to adapt to changes in technology and workforce needs.

Oklahoma CareerTech successfully trains nearly half a million students each year through a network of 394 school districts, 29 technology centers, 15 skills centers and 31 adult basic education providers. What's more, most CareerTech programs offer connections between secondary and postsecondary courses.

Oklahoma is regularly recognized by other states for having one of the best CareerTech systems in the nation. That's because we've built a reputation for being inclusive and breaking through silos that traditionally separate the academic subjects from the skills and knowledge provided by career and technology education.

In fiscal year 2020, Oklahoma CareerTech programs had a 93% positive placement rate, which means nearly all CareerTech graduates found employment, entered the military or continued their education.

Also, Oklahoma CareerTech served more than 5,600 companies in 2021 through business and industry training programs, increasing profitability through some form of CareerTech service or training. These programs are customized to fit the needs of Oklahoma businesses.

As we move ahead in this era of college and career readiness, CareerTech's mission to provide Oklahomans skills to enter the workforce and make informed career choices has never been more relevant.

Oklahoma CareerTech has built a reputation for pursuing innovative ideas that break from tradition and the accepted paradigm. By thinking outside the box, Oklahoma CareerTech has been able to reach more students with customized training developed in tandem with Oklahoma businesses.

CareerTech is investing in emerging technologies and new learning methods to provide an education for our times. These efforts require an approach that emphasizes broad academic learning coupled with a strong system for CareerTech training.

If you would like to learn more about Oklahoma CareerTech, visit our website at okcareertech.org.

Lee Denney is the interim state director of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education. Denney served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 2004 to 2016. During her last two years in office, she served as speaker pro tempore.

CareerTech developing Oklahoma's economy and its workforce

Russell Ray, Chief Communications Officer, Oklahoma CareerTech

When Milo's Tea Co. opened a new plant in Tulsa, it turned to Oklahoma CareerTech for employee training. Milo's conducted interviews at Tulsa Technology Center, which also provided safety, leadership and quality training for the new employees through Oklahoma CareerTech's Training for Industry Program.

TIP is just one of the workforce development programs that the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education offers through the state's network of 29 technology centers with 59 campuses across the state. Since 1968, the program has provided start-up training for almost every sector of industry: manufacturing; warehouse and distribution centers; aerospace; business services; biotechnology; food processing; and more. In fiscal year 2021, Oklahoma CareerTech provided training for 1,330 new jobs through TIP.

Other programs in CareerTech's Workforce and Economic Development Division are adult and career development, customized training, small business services, small business incubators, Training for Industry Growth and firefighter training. In fiscal year 2021, CareerTech served more than 6,500 businesses through these programs and had more than 260,000 enrollments.

"The Workforce and Economic Development divisions of our 29 technology centers do a great job of maximizing and leveraging economic development initiative funding to provide state-of-the-art training to help improve the knowledge, skills and lives of their communities' residents and employers," said Max McKnight, Oklahoma CareerTech Workforce and Economic Development Division manager. CareerTech's 13 certified business incubators -- located at technology centers around the state -- provide space to entrepreneurs and small business owners -- like Ana Nunez, owner of Vida Bars, and Billy Turner, inventor of the TetherTech System.

Nunez started her business in her Oklahoma City home, first creating the solid bars of shampoo and conditioner in her kitchen and then moving the operation to her garage. Demand for Vida Bars outstripped what Nunez could do at home, however. When her family moved to Stillwater, she learned about the business incubator at Meridian Technology Center's Center for Business Development.

After meeting with Meridian's Business and Entrepreneurial Services staff members, she moved into the Center for Business Development's light manufacturing space, where she found room to grow her business.

Turner, a trucking company owner, invented the TetherTech System in an effort to prevent fatalities caused by trucks losing wheels. He and his partners connected with Caddo Kiowa Technology Center in Fort Cobb and moved their new business into CKTC's Business Development Center incubator.

There, they developed their system to keep all the wheels on trucks. The system runs a steel cable through an axle tube tethered to a pair of wheel end caps. If a bearing fails, the wheels don't fly off the truck.

In 2020, TetherTech Safety landed a contract with the state of Oklahoma to put the product on all state tractor trailers. In addition to space, technology center incubators also offer managerial, administrative and financial services. The Oklahoma Department of Commerce has conducted a thorough review of each incubator before certification. Oklahoma CareerTech Workforce and Economic Development programs aren't just for start-ups. They also provide customized training through the technology centers, which respond to the needs in their own communities. In fiscal year 2021, the CareerTech System provided customized industry training to 3,297 businesses and provided safety training to 1,596 businesses.

If multiple employers in an area need similar training, technology centers can use the Training for Industry Growth program to provide customized training that will meet the needs identified by those employers.

When Cosmetic Specialty Labs needed to invest in equipment maintenance, the company turned to Great Plains Technology Center for assistance. Representatives of the locally grown company visited Great Plains during a Manufacturing Month open house and saw training the tech center was doing for other companies like Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. and the Lawton Indian Hospital.

Great Plains business and industry personnel toured Cosmetic Specialty Labs and worked with the company to determine its needs before developing a training program. The program included a blended learning system for maintenance staff in which they attended class online and worked with a tech center instructor once a week at the company. Then, Cosmetic Specialty Labs' head of maintenance entered a one-year program that had actually been created for another local business.

"It is a great opportunity for the company to get employees the training they need to be successful in their roles and grow the entire company," said Morgan Gould, Great Plains business and industry services director.

Small businesses and potential entrepreneurs can also find assistance to help them evaluate business ideas and help

them grow their businesses through consulting services at CareerTech's technology centers.

Section 37 Surveying and Mapping owners Marcus Heilman and Tyler Matthesen discovered how much a technology center's business and industry services staff could help when they started their business. They had the surveying skills necessary for their business, but no experience in running a company.

Red River Technology Center helped the two create a business plan and strategy and offered training to help them grow their business. Heilman and Matthesen attended workshops at the tech center that covered topics like social media, taxes and branding and participated in Red River Tech's small business roundtable discussions.

RRTC's assistance helped Section 37 increase revenues: total invoices more than doubled in one year.

Oklahoma CareerTech's workforce and economic development divisions at technology centers don't just work with businesses. Staff members also work with individuals and with public safety entities.

Technology centers offer adult and career development classes that can help individuals upgrade existing skills and learn new skills to advance in their careers or obtain new jobs. The tech centers offer career development, continuing education and personal enrichment courses along with certifications in a variety of workplace skills. In fiscal year 2021, CareerTech's adult and career development classes had 58,194 enrollments.

Technology centers across the state also work continually to help keep rural fire departments staffed with properly trained individuals. In some areas of the state, volunteer fire departments are the first responders. Oklahoma CareerTech delivers the training those firefighters need through tech centers' workforce and economic development divisions. Firefighter training can vary from just a few hours to courses that span weeks, months or even a year. Many technology centers have added special facilities -- like Tri County Tech's rescue training tower, Northeast Tech's rescue training center and Gordon Cooper Tech's public safety training center -- in which they can train firefighters and other emergency responders.

In fiscal year 2021, Oklahoma CareerTech served 287 businesses with firefighter training and had more than 3,000 firefighter training enrollments. In addition, 1,596 businesses received safety training -- including courses in OSHA topics, CPR, fire safety, hazardous materials and even ladder safety. The safety training had more than 115,000 enrollments.

Oklahoma CareerTech's vision is to develop a world-class workforces for Oklahoma industries and employers, and its mission is to prepare Oklahomans to succeed in the workplace, in education and life. It's Workforce and Economic Development Division is a part of that vision and mission as it seeks to improve the state's economy by providing individuals with the training and skills necessary to be successful in the workplace and by providing companies with the required workforce to compete globally.

Guest Column: Tech center compact benefits Oklahoma aerospace

Abbey Charlow, The Journal Record, August 3, 2022

Onward OKC, a partnership among five career and technology education centers in the metro area, is leveraging its strong relationships and world-class training to make a significant economic impact in the aerospace sector.

Abbey Charlow

There is a plethora of skilled trade careers emerging in this multibillion-dollar industry, ranging from certified machinists and mechanics to cybersecurity professionals and engineers. Many of these positions are included in the state's 100 most critical occupations list. In the Oklahoma City area alone, the aerospace industry produces over $11 billion in goods and services locally. Onward OKC is poised to meet aerospace training needs through a variety of postsecondary certification options across its multiple campus locations.

Each technology center within Onward OKC provides hands-on training to a diverse population of high school students and adults and connects employers directly to thousands of students and alumni. Canadian Valley, Moore Norman, and Metro Technology Centers are home to Airframe and Powerplant Mechanics programs, while Francis Tuttle and Mid-Del Technology Centers house Aircraft Structures, Aircraft Composites, and Sheet Metal programs. Collectively, Onward OKC boasts an impressive 29 aerospace-related programs with an average employment placement rate above 80%. Members of the professional community from organizations such as Tinker Air Force Base, AAR, the FAA Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center, Boeing and Northrup Grumman maintain deep connections with the technology centers to ensure training is current with the latest industry trends and demands.

"As a graduate of Mid-Del Tech's Aircraft Structures, I had hands-on experience going into my career that made me successful. I knew how to meet industry expectations and was able to continue to grow in my profession. Today, I still love the work that I do, and I'm grateful that Onward OKC continues to invest in the future of aerospace in our state," said Colby Nelson, Tinker Air Force Base employee.

Onward OKC is preparing to publish an aerospace Assets Map on its website, which will guide employers in identifying the best solution to their workforce needs, including details on the 2,700 students trained during the last school year. The Onward compact ensures a skilled workforce is readily available, and programs remain flexible enough to respond to today's rapidly changing labor needs.

Eddie Compton, aerospace defense industry liaison at the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, stated, "The Onward OKC compact of technology centers is vital to providing the workforce our aerospace industry needs. The present and future workforce will be filled with talented aerospace professionals trained by the CareerTech System. Oklahoma City's aerospace industry is booming, in large part due to their efforts."

Visit www.onwardokc.com to learn more about this important coalition and how it can help your organization thrive in today's environment.

Abbey Charlow is director of Business Development & Training at Mid-Del Technology Center.

Guest Column: CareerTech bringing VR to Oklahoma classrooms

Lee Denney, D.V.M., The Journal Record, June 10, 2022

Lee Denney

Bringing innovation to Oklahoma classrooms is core to CareerTech's mission to help students explore their interests. That is why Oklahoma CareerTech is investing in virtual reality technology, an increasingly popular innovation that brings lessons to life.

Reading a book about the planets of the solar system has its limits. Seeing the planets of the solar system in a 360-degree digital environment that feels real can send a student's interest to a whole new level. Imagining the possibilities is no longer necessary, thanks to new educational technology companies wanting to create vivid virtual journeys for teachers and students.

Through VR headsets and training modules, Oklahoma CareerTech is working to help teachers provide students virtual career experiences in agriculture, health care, aerospace and film and television production. Demand for VR in education is expected grow in coming years, and CareerTech wants to help Oklahoma educators meet this inevitable demand.

Experts believe education is one of the industries that is ready to adopt VR technology. Some students are auditory learners and some are visual learners. VR combines both learning styles.

Teachers should be learning about the benefits of VR in the classroom. VR offers students memorable and immersive experiences that would otherwise not be possible. What's more, the magic of VR is that it can take students to places throughout the world without leaving the classroom.

In this world of limited attention spans, VR offers immediate engagement. It increases a student's ability to learn. It increases overall comprehension of complex subjects and theories. It improves their ability to retain information. And it makes learning an active experience.
There is no doubt that VR has a positive educational value. VR should be included in lesson plans because it can bring academic subjects to life.

But the challenge with bringing VR into the classroom is striking the right balance.

VR is best used as a supplemental learning tool. It should not be used to replace traditional means of classroom learning. VR technology should be used to frame the classroom curriculum in a way that sparks curiosity and interest among students. If the right balance can be achieved, this hybrid approach could potentially transform the world of education.

Serving more than 426,000 students through a network of 394 school districts, 29 technology centers, 14 skills centers and 31 adult basic education providers, Oklahoma CareerTech could be the state's best channel to disseminate VR technology to classrooms across the state.

Many educators have already embraced VR and are using it in the classroom, while others remain reluctant, arguing the technology is too costly, glitchy and more suited for entertainment. In addition, some critics say the content lacks quality and is often unavailable.

But we think the benefits of VR technology far outweigh the drawbacks. VR technology has a distinct and unique part to play for learners of the future. It's a reality that's easy for us to see.

Lee Denney is the interim state director of the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education. Denney served in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 2004 to 2016. During her last two years in office, she served as speaker pro tempore.

Guest Column: Tech centers join forces in job training

Cody Mosley, The Journal Record, June 8, 2022

Cody Mosley

From a strategy to address workforce needs from a regional perspective, five metro area technology centers began collaborating in "Onward OKC."

This joint effort helps streamline access to training for business owners, HR managers, and job seekers, while assuring that Oklahoma's workforce obtains quality skills. The centers provide business development solutions, professional development opportunities, entrepreneurial services, and workplace health and safety training. The Candidate Fast Track Program serves businesses, employees, and job seekers with specialized training.

At its launch, the program targeted people who went through layoffs during the pandemic as well as those seeking new direction in careers. It has served as a stabilizing force for people who faced unexpected and difficult changes in careers.

When central Oklahoma's five major technology institutes joined forces to create Onward OKC, it was clear that our combined expertise and resources could create the Candidate Fast Track Program as a product that would ready people for new careers rapidly and effectively. Today the collaboration has seen incredible success, launching hundreds of Oklahomans down new paths and into new careers during a particularly difficult time for workers and employers alike.

Through the Candidate Fast Track Program students complete 30 hours of training remotely with a live instructor over four to five weeks. Courses are a deep dive into foundational skills including customer service, problem-solving, multiple levels of applied excel, project management, workplace communication and cyber safety. Feedback from graduates and employers is glowing – the skills learned in the Fast Track Program can be applied in the workplace immediately.

For working adults or those with families, job training programs like this are only accessible with real flexibility, which is why the Candidate Fast Track Program is structured to accommodate busy schedules. The opportunity to participate remotely allows students to learn wherever is convenient for them.

The program serves three cohorts a day in either morning classes, afternoon classes or night classes with up to 15 students per cohort. The accelerated program can be completed in a little over a month, so instructors are able to move through the program eight times per year.

A pride of the program, beyond the breadth of applied subjects, is the affordability – $99 is all students are charged for 30 hours of training, and still, scholarships are available to relieve any economic strain.

The program itself is a way Onward OKC is helping validate prospective employees to local businesses. Following their graduation from the course, students who receive certification can attend an invitation-only job fair to meet diverse employers from industries like tourism, utilities, tribal services, construction, and nonprofits. Graduates are guaranteed an interview, and hiring managers know each attendee has the baseline set of skills. Onward OKC is proud to make an impact on our state's economic development and looks forward to cultivating and sharing more initiatives for students in the future.

Cody Mosley is director of workforce and economic development at Francis Tuttle Technology Center.

Growth Potential—Empowering Interns as Future Workforce

Lee Copeland, Director of Talent & Business Growth, Greater Oklahoma City Chamber

Does this sentiment sound familiar?

> "We're struggling to forecast what the future of our headcount looks like, because we were forced to made adaptations we never planned for. We actually were really successful, but now we're busy trying to figure out what the 'normal' will look like going forward, and we're pretty sure that we'll never be quite the same again."

As our economic development team engages with Oklahoma City regional employers, we continue to hear companies that are continuing to wrestle with the rippling impact of accelerated changes in how people work, and even what "work" looks like. These rapid shifts in paradigms are not happening in a workforce vacuum. Every day we connect with employers that are trying to navigate seismic shifts in culture, with near historic-low regional unemployment rates. Many of them are beginning to see the development of young talent as a crucial component of refreshing their workforce. After the lockdowns of the pandemic, there is resurgence of employers looking to expose young talent to potential career opportunities through summer internship programs.

To assist in these efforts, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber provided a supplemental training experience for interns called InternOKC. This program is an intentional professional development event, which spanned three in-person sessions across three afternoons during the summer of 2022. The content of the program was intentionally curated to align with essential core competencies for young talent entering the workforce. These competencies were developed in conjunction with talent and human resource leaders from across Oklahoma City and were designed to lay a foundation for the success of young talent as it enters a rapidly changing workforce.

These core competencies are based on essential soft skills that will enable young talent to move across multiple industries or career pathways more deftly. The competencies are:

1. Interns must learn to establish positive habits and practices that help them set priorities, manage their team, navigate in a professional environment and set them up for success in their professional journey

2. Interns must learn the key role that relationships will play in their professional journey. This includes receiving feedback, learning under a mentor, developing professional networks and establishing positive workplace connections

3. Interns must establish a growth mindset that allows them to overcome anxiety, learn from mistakes, become more resilient and become adept at seeing the bigger picture and problem solving

In order to help interns, demonstrate the value of this training experience, the Chamber arranged for a parallel partnership with the University of Central Oklahoma. All participants in InternOKC were given the opportunity to engage with online surveys and discussion questions regarding each session's content. Those interns that successfully completed the feedback were able to earn a micro badge in Professional Development from UCO. The purpose of this micro credential is to allow future employers to see the additional soft skill training as a net-value differentiator as they look to add talent to their organizations.

InternOKC 2022 was a great success, with over 260 participants from over 35 leading regional employers.

Accelerators can have a significant impact on new ventures

Scott Meacham, The Oklahoman, April 24, 2022

When the team from Zen Health Technologies formally introduces their company, they describe a business that uses immersive technologies for personal development training. In a more relaxed setting, CEO Sibyl Badugu and Chief Growth Officer Jacob Mahaffey talk of solutions that use games, artificial intelligence and virtual reality to build connections and skills inside companies.

Scott Meacham

Their solutions are fun, leading edge, and keep employees engaged — something that absolutely critical in these times of talent wars. Instead of PowerPoint presentations or "talking heads" on Zoom, Zen Health has an entirely new approach. The company uses virtual reality. Employees put on their employer-provided goggles and learn these skills by playing games.

"We are a game-based, skill-building personal development company," said Badugu.

"Zen Health is developing personal development programs for organizations and all employees in soft skills," Badugu said, "skills like effective communications, interpersonal relationships, purpose and motivation."

Zen Room

For those less familiar with the virtual reality and the concept of metaverse, here's a crash course. A metaverse is a 3D virtual world, a conceptual space where people socialize and play–remember the movie Avatar. The idea has been around for a while. Zen Health's "metaverse" for skills development will be viewed through virtual reality goggles.

"After the last two years," Mahaffey said, "employee engagement is low. Employees are leaving jobs. Our training keeps them engaged and interacting with other people in a healthful and challenging way. Companies have wellness rooms and coffee bars. Why not a Zen room? There is a lot of personal development and wellness out there that people don't come back and continue using. We make it memorable and fun."

Zen Health Technologies completed i2E's e3's mini accelerator earlier this year. Both Mahaffey, who is a serial entrepreneur, and Badugu, who is a product designer and researcher, participated in the program.

"There are so many directions we can go," Mahaffey said. "Finding product market fit and figuring out the biggest unmet need–the hair-on-fire problem and where do we resonate with the customer was invaluable. The e3 program helped us define that by having us talk to our customers during the program."

The e3 Impact

At e3, entrepreneurs have to dig in. There are weekly assignments tailored to a particular company's situation. "We interviewed customers. A lot of entrepreneurs want to build something and then go out and find customers — that's exactly the backward way to do things," said Badugu.

"e3 was completely customized," Badugu said. "I learned what I needed to learn, not general things. We learned what we needed to build our business. e3 helped us change our positioning from being just another voice in the crowd, to be very specific. In that process, we understood our customers' pain points and what they are willing to pay. We are able to build what they need because we have already talked to them. After talking with customers, we pivoted."

The state of Oklahoma is at an important inflection point. For a state that a decade ago had no accelerators or incubators, it now seems like they are everywhere. Accelerators, like e3, that focus on individual companies where they are with what they need at their stage of growth can have a significant impact. That's what e3 graduates like Zen Health Technologies tell us — and we think they are right.

Scott Meacham CEO of i2E Inc., a nonprofit corporation that mentors many of the state's technology-based startup companies. i2E receives state support from the Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology and is an integral part of Oklahoma's Innovation Model.

Business incubator for immigrant entrepreneurs eyed in Tulsa

Rhett Morgan, Tulsa World, June 14, 2022

To diversify Tulsa's small business, start-up platforms, local officials plan to establish a $5 million incubator dedicated to immigrant entrepreneurs.

A center called the 21st Street Market would be located in the East 21st Street and South Garnett Road commercial corridor, also known as the Tulsa Global District.

"In essence, the mission of the 21st Street Market would aim to develop an ecosystem of supports for immigrant entrepreneurs all over the Tulsa metro and promote intercity tourism," Rodrigo Rojas, deputy chief of staff for the Mayor's Office, said by phone. "Our hope is that it would really serve as a model for inclusive economic growth."

The concept was presented to the city council April 20, and the city recently OK'd $1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds for the project. The Tulsa Authority for Economic Opportunity plans to acquire property at an undisclosed site in the 21st and Garnett area, renovate 14,000 square feet for the incubator and rehabilitate a parking lot.

Business education, access to capital and a support network would be part of the center, as well as a multi-use outdoor space to host food trucks, farmers markets and the like. Also available would be an international-themed retail space for pop-up shops.

A total of $2.8 million is budgeted for the asset acquisition, with the balance earmarked for renovations ($2.26 million) and the multi-use outdoor space ($100,000). Backers of the initiative — they want to start a launching strategy after completing the property purchase by the end of the year — will seek additional funding from other government sources and philanthropic groups, Rojas said.

The business center could be a catalyst to "elevate the vibrancy and authenticity that has existed in that area for decades," he said.

More than 70,762 immigrants reside in the Tulsa metropolitan area, representing 7.1% of the population and $1.5 billion in spending, according to New American Economy, a New York-based research and advocacy organization for immigrant policies.

The Tulsa Global District is home to large Hispanic, Vietnamese and Hmong populations, and the city as a whole has 6,293 immigrant entrepreneurs, according to the New American Economy (NAE).

"When COVID hit, it disproportionately impacted this community," Rojas said. "While small businesses all over the country were struggling, immigrant entrepreneurs were especially vulnerable because they make up this really large percentage of sectors that were especially hard hit.

"We truly believe this initiative will jumpstart that ecosystem that's already been there and that we need to continue to see."

Tulsa is tied with Indianapolis as the American city with the greatest increase in diversity since 2010, according to NAE.

From 2010 to 2020,the Hispanic and Asian populations grew by 43% and 58%, respectively, as the white population decreased by about 12%.

"We want all of our stakeholders to invest in a project like this to support our immigrant community," Rojas said. "We believe now is the time to do it. There is a lot of great momentum happening at 21st and Garnett and generally in east Tulsa."

What You Need to Know About Google Career Certificates

Jeffrey L. Katz, U.S. News & World Report, May 3, 2021

If you're interested in a new job in some of the fastest-growing technology sectors, Google Career Certificates can provide some of the skills you'll need. Google's online learning programs now cover user-experience design, project management and data analytics – and include an Android development certification course. These are in addition to the IT support program that Google has offered since 2018. They are relatively inexpensive and do not require a degree or experience to enroll. Obtaining any of the certificates gives you access to interview tips and connections to more than 140 companies working with Google.

The company chose fields that can be taught well online, are in high demand, are well-paying and can be assessed for mastery, says Lisa Gevelber, vice president of Grow with Google. Courses are designed and taught by Google employees, in consultation with companies seeking to fill technology jobs. Google says there are more than 1 million open positions in these fields, with an average starting salary of $69,000.

Why Obtain a Google Career Certificate and Who Is It For?

The certificate programs are an option for someone interested in finding a technology job or improving their skills for a current role. Google designed these programs to target a wide audience; it says 59% of those who've enrolled in the IT support program don't have a four-year degree. Compare that with 27% of the general population on Coursera, where the IT support program is offered.

But there are also benefits for those with a four-year degree. "What we're offering is really complementary," Gevelber says, "even for folks who have a college degree."

Some analysts believe education and learning skills are part of lifelong career enhancement. As businesses and workplaces evolve, relying on an old degree isn't always enough. "I don't think one-and-done is the world of work anymore," says Julia Panke Makela, associate director for assessment and research at the career center at the University of Illinois.

Overview of the Google Career Certificate Courses

The Google Career Certificate courses generally take three to six months to complete. Users set their own pace, so the time it takes to finish varies. The certificates for IT support, IT automation, UX design, data analytics and project management are offered on Coursera for $39 a month each. So a six-month course is $234. Scholarships are available. There is no charge for the Associate Android Developer Certification training. However, the certification exam costs $149 per attempt. The courses are taught by Google employees.

Google's approach uses "gamified learning" by providing an interactive approach to covering the material, says Julia Pollak, a labor economist with ZipRecruiter. "It is a much better online learning experience than a classroom lecture via Zoom," she says.

Google Project Management Professional Certificate

The Google Project Management Professional Certificate is for those who want to plan, organize and run projects. This includes such jobs as project manager, program manager, scrum master and project analyst. Skills include estimating time and budgets, managing stakeholders, and identifying and managing risks.

While professional certification is not required for project managers, it can demonstrate your knowledge in the field. Those who complete the certificate qualify to receive credit toward credentials like the Project Management Institute's Certified Associate in Project Management certification, at a lower price.

Google Data Analytics Professional Certificate

Google's Data Analytics certificate provides training for those who want to process and analyze data to help make business decisions. It focuses on skills for entry-level roles, such as associate data analyst, junior data scientist, data technician and marketing analyst.

Course content includes using data to solve problems and data storytelling with visualizations. Participants use spreadsheets, SQL and Tableau.

Google UX Design Professional Certificate

The Google UX Design Professional Certificate provides preparation to be a user experience designer, user interface designer and visual designer. Skills include developing personas, user stories and user journey maps; conducting usability studies; creating prototypes; and testing and iterating on designs. The program includes hands-on projects, peer reviews and discussion forums.

Google IT Support Professional Certificate

The Google IT Support Professional Certificate is designed for those interested in problem-solving to help computers and networks run smoothly. It can prepare you for jobs as database administrator, systems analyst and help desk technician. This introductory-level IT certificate is designed for those with no relevant experience.

Topics include troubleshooting, system administration and security. The program is also available in Spanish and Portuguese. Learn more about the Google IT Support Professional Certificate.

Google IT Automation With Python Professional Certificate
The Google IT Automation With Python Professional Certificate is essentially an advanced level to its IT support certificate. It's designed for those already familiar with basic IT concepts. The course deals with such topics as Python programming, IT automation and setting up your developer environment.

The program is also available in Spanish and Portuguese. It's recommended that you have Python installed on your machine. For some courses, you'll need a computer where you can install Git.

Associate Android Developer Certification
The Associate Android Developer Certification is separate from the Google Career Certificates and is not offered on Coursera. It consists of two parts: the course materials and the certification exam. Taking the course is free. The Associate Android Developer Certification exam, designed to test the skills of an entry-level Android developer, costs $149 per exam attempt, though pricing may vary based on your country.

The Android Basics in Kotlin training covers the essentials of developing, testing and debugging Android apps in the Kotlin programming language. It is designed for people with no programming experience and goes over Kotlin basics, layouts, navigation and connecting to the internet.

Google Career Certificate FAQs

How Do You Prepare for a Certificate Course?
Google says no degree or experience is required to enroll in these certificate courses. One of the purposes, Gevelber says, is to "remove college degrees from being a barrier to entry."

How Long Does It Take to Get the Certificate?
Google says its career certificate courses generally take between three and six months to complete. It estimates that learners will devote about 10 weeks to each course. Users set their own pace, so the time it takes to finish varies.

Is a Google Career Certificate Worth It?
One of the benefits of a Google certificate is the access to potential employers. Google plays up its connection with a consortium of more than 140 companies, including Bayer, Verizon, Accenture, Deloitte, Anthem, SAP, Zennify and SiriusXM. Pollak says the collaboration encourages rapid feedback between course participants and employers. "They have such a clear employment focus right from the start," she says.

As for its worth, the cost of the courses and availability of scholarships provide a low barrier to entry. That, coupled with no requirement for knowledge or experience, opens these fields to a wide group of consumers. It should encourage more people to see their education as part of a continuum, Makela says. "Lifelong learning and continuing to adapt and pick up new skills – like learning a new programming language – is the way of the future," she says.

Are These Skills in Demand and What's the Career Outlook?
The jobs you can get with these skills are generally in very high demand and should be for the foreseeable future.

Pollak says those who complete a course earn a digital badge that is integrated with Credly and can be pulled directly into the job seeker's online job search profiles. "Completing an online certificate shows an employer that you are self-motivated, resourceful, have a genuine interest in the topic and have some level of proficiency," she says.

Still, Google offers no guarantee of employment. And completing a course does not make you an expert, Pollak cautions. "You can't just go from having no skills to taking a six-month course in data analytics and then present yourself on your resume as a data analyst."

- **Computer/IT Support**

Computer support specialists will remain an in-demand job as organizations upgrade outdated hardware, software and network equipment and require more experienced, knowledgeable professionals to help users. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects 8% employment growth for computer support specialists between 2019 and 2029, much faster than the average for all occupations. An estimated 67,300 jobs should open up during that time in this field.

- **Data Analyst**

Data analysts fall into several job categories that the BLS tracks. Among them are operations research analyst, market research analyst and data scientist, which are all expected to grow much faster than average in the next 10 years.

- **Web Developer and UX Designer**

Demand for web developers and UX designers will be driven by the continued popularity of mobile devices, according to the BLS. Developers and designers will have to create sites and interfaces that work on a variety of device screen sizes. The growth of e-commerce will also lead to more jobs, it says. As a result, the BLS projects employment in the job category that includes web developers and UX designers will grow 8% from 2019 to 2029, much faster than the average for all occupations. That would add 14,000 more jobs to this field during that time.

- **Software Developer**

Software developers are employed in a range of industries, including computer systems design, manufacturing and finance. The BLS projects 22% employment growth in the field between 2019 and 2029, which is much higher than the average for all occupations. About 316,000 additional jobs are expected to be added in that time. The BLS attributes that in part to new applications on smartphones and tablets, as well as increased software needs by health and medical insurance and reinsurance carriers.

- **Project Manager**

Every industry that has projects has project managers, who keep an eye on scope to limit distractions, make decisions and lead everyone involved in the project. A report commissioned

for the Project Management Institute by the Anderson Economic Group studied 11 countries and estimated a 33% increase in the field from 2017 to 2027. In the U.S. alone, it estimated an increase of 213,974 jobs in that time. The report says that health care would be responsible for the largest percentage increase in project-oriented jobs among sectors analyzed in the U.S.

Will a Certificate Help Me Get a Job?

Only the online IT support course has been around long enough to establish a track record. Gevelber says of the roughly 50,000 people who've completed the program since it began in 2018, 82% reported a positive career outcome, whether it be a new job, a promotion or a raise.

Still, recruiters caution consumers that these courses are not a quick fix. "If you have been having a hard time getting interviews because you lack experience or a degree, these certificates will not guarantee an interview," says Jim Johnson, a senior vice president for the technology division of staffing agency Robert Half. "But we have found that hiring managers appreciate the initiative candidates have taken to turn a 'no,' or 'not yet' into an opportunity for improvement."

Google says certificate holders gain access to interview tips and mock interview sessions, in addition to connecting to its consortium of partner businesses. Gevelber says those with a UX design certificate, for instance, get help in preparing for a job interview, including building rapport with the interviewer.

Several analysts say the most important aspect of completing one of these courses is how to talk about it afterward. "The certificate can be very helpful," Makela says. "But the reason it's helpful is you can put together this story (about) why you're a great candidate for the job."

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Creating more successful pathways for students

Marissa Lightsey, MSHR, Executive Director of College and Career Readiness, OSDE

Oklahoma's workforce is in the midst of exciting change. Our student population has become more diverse, with students of color representing nearly 54% of public school enrollment in the 2021-22 school year. These shifts bring rich culture, new ideas and innovation to the state's workforce. Oklahomans are also re-envisioning postsecondary preparation and readiness practices and creating more successful pathways for students.

Oklahoma jobs are changing as well. In the most recent Oklahoma Works report, more than 70% of new occupations projected a need for education and training beyond high school by 2019. Understanding and addressing barriers to postsecondary opportunities for all students is critical to the state's future.

In 2017, Oklahoma received a three-year New Skills for Youth grant from the Council of Chief State School Officers and JPMorgan Chase & Co. The Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) and its grant partners, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education and Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, used the $2 million grant award to support projects critical to postsecondary success for K-12 students, including increasing concurrent and dual enrollment and better connecting schools with business and industry to give students access to and information about career pathways and choices. The grant's cornerstone was the development of a new graduation requirement, Individual Career Academic Planning (ICAP), to provide equitable college and career preparation for all students. The OSDE's 8-year strategic plan, Oklahoma Edge, includes ICAP as one of six critical goals, ensuring that "every student in grades 6 through 12 develops a useful and meaningful Individual Career Academic Plan."

The OSDE piloted ICAP with more than 70 school districts to learn best practices for implementation in rural, urban and suburban districts. After completing the grant, the OSDE formed the state's first-ever Office of College and Career Readiness to oversee ICAP implementation, expand career pathways and support work-based learning programs for students. The OSDE and Office of College and Career Readiness have an ambitious goal – ensuring students graduate ready for high-skill jobs and innovative careers and are poised to become successful problem solvers, thinkers and leaders.

As outlined in Oklahoma Edge, the OSDE is committed to giving Oklahoma students a competitive edge as they pursue college and career opportunities. One critical component of that goal was strengthening Oklahoma's academic standards to be nationally comparable and to ensure that proficiency on federally required assessments reflects college and career readiness. Implemented in 2016, the standards have been deemed among the strongest in the country. Additionally, the Oklahoma School Report Card includes a Postsecondary Opportunities indicator. This metric shows the percentage of high school juniors and seniors completing one or more options to prepare for success after high school, including college preparatory work, industry certification, work-based internships and dual or concurrent enrollment.

Barriers to Postsecondary Success

Although the state has made progress toward a future-ready workforce, students continue to face barriers to postsecondary success, from poverty to lack of access to school counselors. One of the major hurdles to postsecondary success is high school graduation. According to the 2018 Oklahoma School Report Card, the most recent for which data is available, the state's overall graduation rate was 80.9%. Students from economically disadvantaged households had a four-year graduation rate of 74%, compared to the 89.3% rate for students from non-economically disadvantaged households. Additionally, over 60% of students from the rapidly growing Hispanic and American Indian populations are economically disadvantaged, signaling the need for more targeted interventions.

	Economically Disadvantaged		Not Economically Disadvantaged	
	2018 4Y Graduation Rate	Number of Students	2018 4Y Graduation Rate	Number of Students
American Indian	78.6%	4,373	88.9%	2,969
Asian	84.7%	459	90.5%	576
Black	75.5%	3,019	87.9%	1,394
Hispanic/Latino	78.7%	4,956	82.1%	2,243
Pacific Islander	81.1%	95	70.9%	55
Two or More Races	79.9%	1,764	90.1%	1,716
White	75.3%	10,166	90.5%	14,891
Grand Total	77.1%	24,832	89.3%	23,844

Economically disadvantaged is defined as students who qualify for free-and reduced-price lunch based on their family size and income.

Access to School Counselors

Oklahoma is experiencing a severe teacher shortage that includes school counseling professionals. Oklahoma schools

exceed the American School Counselor Association-recommended student-to-school-counselor ratio of 250 to 1, two years ago reporting a 433 to 1 ratio. School counselors play a pivotal role in supporting students by providing information on college and career readiness and helping students develop the necessary employability, academic and technical skills to be successful in their postsecondary pursuits. Additionally, research has shown that the 250 to 1 ratio in high-poverty schools leads to better academic outcomes for students, including higher graduation rates, improved attendance and fewer disciplinary incidents.

Attempted	2018 AP / IB	2019 AP / IB	2018 CTE	2019 CTE	2018 Dual / CC	2019 Dual / CC	2018 Intern	2019 Intern	2018 Total	2019 Total
American Indian	1821	1734	702	832	2246	2662	89	175	4858	5403
Asian	1974	1929	702	134	416	593	3	32	2505	2688
Black	1223	1152	291	336	298	363	25	47	1837	1898
Econ. Dis.	11484	11038	6493	7123	6246	8466	302	952	24525	27579
EL	126	268	81	171	14	34	2	9	223	482
Hispanic	1884	2258	537	633	862	1240	16	93	3229	4224
Multi-race	1743	1870	428	524	1316	1513	30	117	3517	4024
White	16425	15332	3760	4192	12018	14339	264	838	32467	34701
Total	37167	36287	14101	16868	23564	29870	747	2467	75579	85492

Using federal pandemic relief funding, in June 2021 the OSDE launched a School Counselor Corps initiative to match schools' funding for school counseling supports. Under the initiative, Oklahoma schools have hired or contracted with 285 school counselors, mental health professionals and recreational therapists, reducing the student-to-counselor ratio to 374 to 1. This is a meaningful improvement; however, the ongoing teacher shortage and temporary federal relief funding present challenges. Oklahoma must focus on long-term investments and ongoing efforts to increase the pool of eligible school counselors to ensure continued momentum.

Maintaining Focus and Strengthening Momentum

Due to a shortage in counselors, many are undertaking duties outside the scope of their training and expertise, eliminating time needed to support students. In the first year of ICAP implementation, many districts committed to expanding quality academic advising for students through school counselor meetings and rigorous academic planning. This strategy, coupled with Oklahoma's commitment to expanding rigorous course access, resulted in an increase of 10,000 more courses completed by students in a single year. According to the 2018 Oklahoma School Report Card (the most recent for which data is available), at least 90% of students who enrolled in a postsecondary opportunity course (AP, IB, concurrent enrollment, Career Tech certification or internship) successfully earned high school credit. Strategies like ICAP ensure that every student, beginning with the Class of 2023, graduates with a career development plan, at least one workforce experience and access to at least one career technology, concurrent enrollment or Advanced Placement (AP) course. This work is impossible without quality school counselors.

Closing the Achievement Gap, Eliminating the Opportunity Gap

An achievement gap is the disparity in academic performance between groups of students; it is considered closed if traditionally underserved populations succeed at least as often as their peers. In other words, students' socioeconomic status, zip code or ethnicity is not a factor in academic success. These gaps are also known as opportunity gaps. They do not necessarily demonstrate a student's ability to perform but can indicate limits in access to resources needed to do so successfully. When implemented equitably and with fidelity, the ICAP process is collaborative, with input from the student, their family, educators, school counselors and other caring adults who interact with the student. ICAP requires all school districts to provide activities such as work-based learning, career counseling, career interest surveys and intentional course sequencing that are integrated into a seamless ICAP delivery process over which all stakeholders feel ownership. Completing a meaningful ICAP process helps students connect the relevance of education with their career and life goals and pursue postsecondary pathways and academic course sequences that support their goals. The ICAP process is essential for opening doors to postsecondary and career success for each learner and closing the opportunity gap.

As Oklahomans work together to tackle the significant work skills gap in our state, we must focus a portion of our discussion on the career preparation of our students and youth. Despite challenges, the ICAP process and related OSDE programs to support students statewide are working to reduce the workforce skills gap and provide more opportunities for Oklahoma students and families to be successful.

OKLAHOMA **INDIVIDUAL CAREER ACADEMIC PLANNING** SNAPSHOT

In the most recent Oklahoma Works report, **more than 70%** of new occupations projected a need for education and training beyond high school by 2019.

(2019 Oklahoma Works)

IMPLEMENTING & SCALING INDIVIDUAL CAREER & ACADEMIC PLANNING (ICAP)

In the most recent Oklahoma Works report, **more than 70% of new occupations projected a need for education and training beyond high school** by 2019. Understanding and addressing barriers to postsecondary opportunities for all students is critical to the state's future. The need for students to plan for college or a career while still in school is clear.

This is why beginning in the 2019-20 school year, all incoming 9th grade Oklahoma public school students began a four-year Individual Career Academic Planning process. Individual Career Academic Planning (ICAP) refers to a process that helps students prepare for life after high school. During the ICAP process, students complete a variety of academic and career development activities. Insight gained from these activities will result in a personalized roadmap they can use when navigating college, career, or military plans after high school.

School districts across the state began implementing ICAP as early as 2017 with ICAP formally becoming law for all incoming ninth-grade students during the 2019-2020 academic year. Since inception, schools have experienced early success in academic preparation, career exploration, and building hope and resiliency.

"Students are more likely to come into college with a clear direction in exploring their major and career options."

— Jessi Masterson
Exploration Coach
Center for Major & Career Exploration
University of Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA EDGE

Want to learn more about ways to get involved in ICAP visit:
WWW.OKEDGE.COM

OKLAHOMA Education

CONNECTING TO WORKFORCE

To ensure students have the tools to create their individual career paths, students are required to update electronic career portfolios complete with annual career assessments, goal setting tools, and other future planning resources. Students are also required to complete a work-based learning or service learning experience, creating seamless connections to workforce.

"ICAP has provided so many more opportunities for workforce to connect with schools, in the past few years we have noticed students participating in more internships and job shadow opportunities, and leaving more confident about their plans after high school. We are really excited to see what this first class of ICAP completers have to offer!"

— Karen Davidson, Deputy Director of Southern Workforce Board

"I am so excited for the growth and longevity of ICAP in the state of Oklahoma. In our office, we have been able to utilize the Career Clusters and Pathways to connect with OU Majors. As students explore their careers, we can then help them match those with majors in a way that's familiar to them.

Little by little, **I am seeing new students who are more self-aware and excited to learn**, and I would say this has been impacted by ICAP. Students are more likely to come into college with a clear direction in exploring their major and career options. As I've been enrolling new students this summer, more students have been exposed to more options and experiences that have either solidified their major decision or have given them clarity of what they don't want earlier on. This gives them time to explore their options.

Students cannot easily decide on 170+ OU majors when they've only been exposed to 10-20. ICAP is creating a space for them to understand their interests, **connected them to careers and have affirming experiences with these careers**, and makes them ready to make more confident decisions in college.

— **Jessi Masterson**
Exploration Coach
Center for Major & Career Exploration
University of Oklahoma

OKLAHOMA ICAP IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

726K

Number of 6th - 12th grade students affected by ICAP since implementation

100%

Percentage of K-12 districts implementing ICAP

20,606

Number of 11th and 12th grade students that participated in full-time career technology programs in 2021

Creating a *pathway of hope* is key to ensuring students are able to thrive in classrooms.

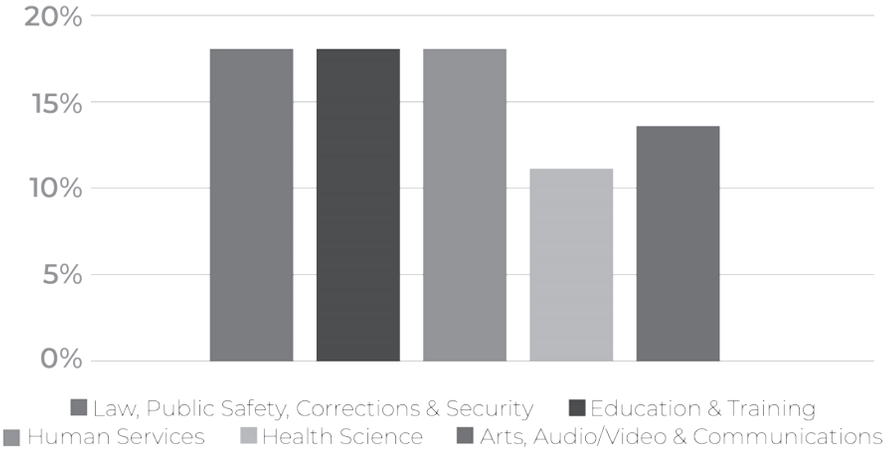
COLLEGE & CAREER READINESS

ICAP is not just another graduation checklist – it is student-driven and student-owned. Since ICAP has launched during the 2019-2020 school year, **students have enrolled in over 10,000 courses related to Advanced Placement, career technology education, concurrent enrollment, and internship / pre-apprenticeships**, a 12% increase from previous years. Concurrent enrollment increases alone are 8% from previous years.

EXPANDING CAREER EXPLORATION

To ensure students have the tools to create their individual career paths, students are required to update electronic career portfolios complete with annual career assessments, goal setting tools, and other future planning resources.

TOP 5 STUDENT CAREER INTERESTS



BUILDING HOPE AND RESILIENCY

LEARN MORE

In the Fall of 2020, the Oklahoma State Department of Education and the Hope Research Center of the University of Oklahoma engaged in a partnership to investigate the effect to which ICAP participation is associated with student hope. **Creating a pathway of hope is key to ensuring students are able to thrive in classrooms.** Once viable pathways are formed, students are able to identify potential barriers and develop problem solving strategies to overcome the barriers or to select an alternative pathway. In a 2020-2021 ICAP survey, 83% of high school educators shared that they believed ICAP was increasing their students hope for the future. **To learn more about ICAP's connection to hope and resiliency, view our evaluation using the QR code.**

OSDE offering early-career teachers free support, training, stipends

Rob Crissinger, Oklahoma State Department of Education, August 23, 2022

Amid a catastrophic teacher shortage, the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) is committed to ensuring early-career teachers have opportunities to create sustainable careers in Oklahoma classrooms. The First Class Teacher Induction Program is accepting applications for teachers and instructional coaches through Sept. 16.

"I remember my first year teaching some 34 years ago. Thankfully, I had a master teacher and role model who I still draw from today. All new teachers deserve a mentor to walk with them through those first critical years," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Joy Hofmeister. "The First Class program provides the sustained support and training early-career teachers need to effectively impact their students' learning needs but also to help keep teachers in the profession for many years to come."

The First Class program provides comprehensive support to guide early-career teachers in classroom management and instructional practices that engage students and improve their academic performance. The program can accommodate up to 300 first-year teachers, 200 second- or third-year teachers and 60 virtual instructional coaches who have taught for at least three years.

The program offers two pathways. One pairs first-year teachers with a site-based mentor teacher assigned by the school district, and in the other, second- and third-year teachers work with a virtual instructional coach. Kickoff activities begin in late September 2022, with mentoring and coaching continuing through the end of the school year. First-year teachers will collaborate with their mentor teachers on an ongoing basis and in virtual professional learning sessions after the conclusion of the school day. Instructional coaches will work to help small groups of up to three second- and third-year teachers deepen their instructional practices via a virtual coaching platform.

First-, second- and third-year teachers and site mentors assigned by the school district earn $500 stipends for each completed semester of First Class, while instructional coaches receive stipends of $1,125 per teacher coached and can work with up to three second- and third-year teachers during the 2022-23 school year.

The OSDE is investing $2.4 million in pandemic relief funding in the First Class Teacher Induction Program through summer 2024. The First Class program is a component of Ready Together Oklahoma: An Action Plan for Supporting Students Through the Pandemic and Beyond. More information is available at https://readytogether.sde.ok.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/First%20Class%20Teacher%20Induction%20Program%20Initiative.pdf.

Column: Creative solutions used to fix Oklahoma's teacher challenges

Jon Pedersen and Shelbie Witte, Tulsa World, August 4, 2022

At Oklahoma State University, we want to promote an open dialogue about concerns regarding the teacher pipeline and our efforts to recruit, retain and engage teachers across the state.

In doing so, we want to underscore our efforts at OSU to produce highly skilled graduates to fill teaching positions in Oklahoma. It's a challenging time for Oklahoma educators, administrators and districts, but we remain focused on strengthening our state by educating the next generation of teachers.

Much has been discussed in the media the past year about teacher education programs in Oklahoma, specifically, concern about the preparedness of individuals entering the teaching profession. As reported, a few institutions in our state have struggled to maintain previous enrollment numbers at a time when the number of teachers entering the profession has decreased nationally over the past decade.

Oklahoma, like other states, has attempted to remedy this by providing fast-track solutions to overcome these challenges.

The protracted situation has led to an exponential increase in the issuance of emergency certifications — 3,800 in this academic year, a new record. In comparison, there were just 32 emergency certifications statewide in 2011-2012.

While university programs continue to adhere to high standards and state mandates, requirements for alternative routes have become more relaxed.

As a result, a counterproductive competition has developed, pitting alternative and emergency pathways against rigorous university programs. This is a major concern for teacher educators.

We are as concerned for the teaching profession as we are concerned for students in Oklahoma's classrooms. This is not a critique of the individuals entering the profession via alternate pathways, but of the pathways themselves.

A pathway intended for exceptional circumstances on a short-term basis is quickly becoming the most common way a new teacher begins a career in our schools. Holding all teacher preparation programs (university-based or alternative) to the same standards and requirements would provide opportunities rather than set up diversions and competitions.

In passing House Bill 3564 to create the Oklahoma Future Teacher Scholarship and Employment Incentive Program, the Legislature took a meaningful step to recruit, support and retain well-prepared teachers. We thank the bill's authors — Rep. Mark McBride and Sen. Dewayne Pemberton — and all legislators who supported this important investment in Oklahoma education.

At OSU, we have made concerted efforts to address teacher pipeline issues by:

- Creating unprecedented scholarship access for OSU students through Educating Forward, which has surpassed a fundraising target of $5 million for teacher scholarships;
- Focusing on responsive and innovative course delivery through our online, hybrid and HyFlex course options;
- Providing opportunities for immersive and diverse classroom experiences, such as our ExCEL Elementary program, which offers a year-long student teaching experience, and our upcoming Urban Elementary Education cohorts at OSU-Tulsa;
- Supporting alternative and emergency-certified teachers through the Graduate Certificates for Effective Teaching across all grade levels and subjects;
- Retaining innovative educators through OK-Thrive, a three-year postgraduate mentoring and coaching program;
- Supporting teachers in schools through in-service and graduate programs and centers such as the Center for Research on STEM Teaching and Learning, the OSU Writing Project, and the Randall and Carol White Reading and Mathematics Center;
- Requiring undergraduate coursework in English Language Learners in K-12 settings and coursework targeting data-driven approaches to meeting learners' needs.

These approaches have contributed to enrollment growth at OSU in some of our professional education majors. And yet, innovative approaches are only one step.

We acknowledge more needs to be done to recruit and retain teachers, and we need your help.

We must listen and respond to the needs of teachers, school districts and communities. They are on the front lines, and they know best what is needed for student success.

A good first step is recognizing and respecting the professional expertise and passionate dedication of our teachers. This first step, along with partnering with policymakers and legislators, will ensure a strong teacher pipeline remains the backbone of our state's education system.

Working together, respecting our teachers and valuing our children, we believe we can build a better future for our students and our state. OSU is prepared to do our part and lead this important effort.

Jon Pedersen is the dean of the College of Education and Human Sciences, and Shelbie Witte is the head of the School of Teaching, Learning and Educational Sciences at Oklahoma State University

Teacher scholarship programs goes into effect Friday

Sidney Lee, Quorum Call News, June 27, 2022

Education did not see an increase in this year's budget, but funding was put in place for a new program directed at the teacher pipeline.

The bill creating the program, HB3564 is active, will go into effect Friday.

HB3564 is active, by Rep. Mark McBride, R-Moore and Sen. Dewayne Pemberton, R-Muskogee, requires the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education to establish and maintain an incentive scholarship program and teacher employment incentive program, as funding is available, to encourage the preparation of public, prekindergarten through twelfth grade schoolteachers, including minority teachers, for at least five years, to be known as the Oklahoma Future Teacher Scholarship and Employment Incentive Program. The bill considers prospective teachers for the incentive program if they have graduated from an Oklahoma high school, meet the higher education admission standards and declare a major in an approved Oklahoma teacher preparation degree program leading to a standard teaching certificate. It awards scholarships renewable for up to three additional years for qualified students to cover costs of tuition, general enrollment fees, other fees, books, materials, and services provided by the institution, including room and board. The bill tasks the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education with creating a committee composed of educators, teacher educators from the participating institutions, and representatives of the public schools and the State Department of Education to provide recommendations to the State Regents. It sets the maximum amount of employment incentive payments for any qualified participant at $4,000 per year for up to five years, not to exceed a total of $20,000 per participant.

McBride said when he introduced the bill in the House it was likely the only kind of salary increase teachers would see that session, which proved to be correct.

This is one of three programs focused on key areas of need in Oklahoma described by Rep. Jon Echols, R-Oklahoma City, last summer. The other two are nursing and engineering. The Legislature has used American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to increase training programs for nurses, and a few different programs are being considered from STEM and engineering programs.

When McBride first introduced HB3564Bill is active, there was some discussion in the first committee meeting about ARPA funds going to this program as well, but McBride said that would likely not work with the proposed program, nor would the federal constraints on ARPA match the timeline of the program.

It will now be up to the State Regents to implement administrative rules for implementing the program across Oklahoma's teacher preparation programs.

Bilingual and Diversity Teacher Pipeline Programs

Mary Mélon-Tully, President/CEO, Oklahoma City Schools Foundation

Teachers are leaving our state and teachers are leaving the profession across the country. That isn't a new fact, it has just been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and all the difficulties schools have faced the past few years. According to the Learning Policy Institute, a Washington-based education policy think tank, national teacher demand exceeded supply by more than 100,000 in 2019 for the first time ever. The teaching profession is in crisis. This is a workforce problem in and of itself, but the long term consequences this will have on our overall workforce is immense.

In most of the school districts across Oklahoma, there is not only a need for teachers, but a desperate need for teachers who are as multi-cultural as the students being served. That is certainly the case in Oklahoma City Public Schools (OKCPS), where the student population is 86% nonwhite and where only 18% of the teacher workforce is racially and ethnically diverse. Nearly 40% of our student population is made up of English Language Learners, meaning English isn't their first language. About a third of these students are not fluent in English. The primary language being spoken by English Language Learners is Spanish at 39%.

There is compelling evidence that student outcomes are better when students have exposure to teachers who look like them. In the book, Teacher Diversity and Student Success, written by Seth Gershenson, Michael Hansen and Constance A. Lindsay, data is presented showing student outcome improvements with teacher diversification in not just test scores, but also attendance, discipline issues, graduation rates and many other metrics.

Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation began strategic conversations with OKCPS leadership in early 2015 initially to find solutions to serving the growing ELL student population. The shortage of bilingual teachers came to the forefront, as did the value of the bilingual paraprofessionals (teaching assistants) employed by the district. These paraprofessionals work closely with students and families, are deeply embedded in the culture of the school and are also some of the lowest paid members of the support staff. From these discussions, the Bilingual Teacher Pipeline Program was developed and launched in 2016. The program follows a Grow Your Own model, working with bilingual paraprofessionals already employed in the school district who wish to become certified teachers. The Diversity Teacher Pipeline Program was added for BIPOC paraprofessionals in 2019, as the OKCPS Foundation clarified its focus areas to include recruiting and retaining urban ready teachers.

How the Programs Work:

Though Grow Your Own programs have been gaining traction across the country for a number of years, they are still relatively uncommon in Oklahoma. The Bilingual and Diversity Teacher Pipeline Programs provide 100 percent funding for tuition, books and fees for participants, after any applicable financial aid is applied. Participants have certain eligibility requirements, such as being employed by OKCPS for at least one year and maintaining a minimum 2.75 GPA throughout college. Participants also commit to staying with OKCPS for at least three years after becoming certified teachers.

The programs work because of partnerships. OKCPS Foundation provides funding entirely from private sources as well as leadership, administrative and case worker support. OKCPS provides the participants the flexibility to remain employed full-time with benefits while attending college part-time. While every effort is made to avoid it, the district even allows participants to take professional development leave for classes that are only offered during the work day. The Foundation worked a few years ago with OSSBA to provide legislation giving school districts the option to pay paraprofessionals during student teaching, which was another important partnership. Colleges and university partnerships also play a key role. Participants earn the general studies credits at community colleges OSU/OKC, OCCC and Rose State College before matriculating to UCO to complete their degree. Each higher education partner is committed to providing support and student advising to these nontraditional students to ensure their success.

Results So Far:

There are currently 60 participants combined in the Bilingual and Diversity Teacher Pipeline Programs, including three who are recent OKCPS graduates (part of the new focus on recruiting from our high schools, called the High School to Teacher Pipeline Program). Twelve have graduated from the program and only one has left the district, only because her husband got a job transfer. This 91% retention rate is better than the 85% national average for GYO programs over five years.

We also know that the lives of these individuals have changed and their socioeconomic status has grown. They've become first time home owners and have more financial security than they've ever had before. They've finished college with no debt and are contributing to our economy.

In addition, we are beginning to benchmark the impact these new teachers are having in their classrooms. We know they are committed, loyal employees. We know they have a passion for teaching and for the kids they serve. We know they are making a difference in the short term and in the long term.

Section 4

Rural & Urban Nature of Oklahoma

Boosting America's Rural Workforce

Iris Hentze and Chelsea Canada, National Conference of State Legislatures, June 2019

Did You Know?

- Nearly 40% of the 60 million Americans living in rural communities don't have access to the low-bar minimum broadband standard set by the Federal Communications Commission.
- Between 2000 and 2017, the percentage of young adults ages 25 to 34 with bachelor's degrees in urban areas grew from 29% to 38%, compared to rural areas, where it increased from 15% to 20%.
- Since 2013, employment growth in rural America has been 4%, even though 14% of the population lives and works in these areas.

During the last half century, rural counties across the United States have suffered from a shrinking population and workforce. Since the 1990s, rural population growth continues to remain stubbornly low compared to urban and suburban areas. Rural counties experienced a 3% population growth rate since 2000, which can be attributed to gains in rural communities on the edges of metropolitan areas, while more remote counties continued to lose population. During this same period, by contrast, suburban and urban counties grew by 16% and 13%, respectively.

Individuals, especially young people, move out of rural areas in favor of more densely populated suburbs and urban city centers to seek economic and education opportunities. Economists point to this so-called "brain drain" as a major cause of decreased human capital and other resources in rural areas. To keep rural communities and economies thriving, state policymakers are experimenting with a variety of different policy solutions to attract new residents and retain current ones.

State Action

State lawmakers' efforts include offering incentives to communities, businesses and individuals to help make working and living in rural areas more attractive and attainable.

Community-targeted incentives. States use targeted incentives for investments in rural communities, including broadband infrastructure. The Oregon legislature is considering SB 505, which would create a statewide broadband plan and provide funding for broadband infrastructure projects in rural areas that lack adequate access. Georgia lawmakers considered legislation creating a new tax on digital goods and services to fund infrastructure for rural broadband this year.

States are also discussing initiatives that offer incentives to businesses to move to rural areas. In 2018, the Utah Legislature passed HB 390 to administer rural employment expansion grants to businesses that create jobs locally, remotely, online or in a "satellite hub" in counties with a population of less than 31,000. The Washington Legislature debated a bill during its 2018 session that would strengthen rural communities by providing tax credits for employers that allow employees to telework.

States are also tackling workforce development with apprenticeship programs. This strategy benefits rural areas where attaining an advanced education and opportunities for new entrants to the job market may be less accessible. Each budget year, state legislatures appropriate funds to community and technical colleges to administer apprenticeship programs. Some states, such as Iowa and Maryland, go beyond this. In the last few years they implemented targeted programs intended to develop strong apprenticeship infrastructure. These programs create pipelines for apprentices by establishing postsecondary courses for high school students aligned with high-demand careers, internships, youth apprenticeship programs, registered apprenticeship programs, grant funding for state businesses and scholarship funds for students.

States are also finding ways to offer incentives to private companies or individuals to invest in communities through development, business creation and capital investments in rural growth funds. To guide investment into rural areas, states create rural economic development zones or target in-

vestments to areas federally identified as opportunity zones. Last year, the Utah Legislature created The Rural Economic Development Incentive Program to reward businesses that create jobs in rural counties with grant money for each new, full-time employee position they fund. New York, Massachusetts and Kentucky lawmakers are considering legislation this year to create rural growth funds, a new avenue for state governments to award tax breaks to businesses for investing in rural communities.

Individual-targeted incentives. Offering incentives targeted at individuals to attract new workers and better train current workers is another approach states are considering. One such incentive involves a state paying a portion of a workers' student loan debt if he or she pursues a specific profession in an underserved area. New York's SB 1200 creates the New York Rural Doctors and Nurses Loan Forgiveness Program intended to attract nurses and doctors to the state's rural areas. Montana and Idaho have put similar programs in place. In 2011, the Kansas Legislature created the Kansas Opportunity Zone Program, which offers college graduates as much as $15,000 over five years to help repay student loans if they relocate to designated rural counties.

States are considering various other policy solutions to bolster the rural workforce. Vermont is experimenting with a telecommuting program, offering people who move to the state and work remotely for an out-of-state employer $10,000 over two years. The money can be used to cover expenses related to relocation and other items like internet fees. In 2018, the Utah Legislature passed HB 327, the Rural Online Initiative. It is designed to provide Utah's rural workforce and businesses with the training, education and online connectivity they need for remote employment, freelance work and e-commerce. Finally, the Montana Legislature is considering HB 405, which would offer grants to help offset the expenses of workers moving into rural areas.

Federal Action

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) launched the Connect America Fund last year with an investment of $500 million in funding for rural broadband. Within the last 10 years, Congress passed the Telework Enhancement Act requiring federal agencies to set up policies for teleworking and communicate to all eligible employees that teleworking is an option.

The Federal Workforce Investment Act and The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act provide funding to employers and registered apprenticeships through state and local governments. Although not specifically targeted at rural communities, these funds can be used to assist with training and tuition costs, support training expenses, and provide additional recruiting, placement and support services. To attract investments to areas that often get overlooked by investors, the Opportunity Zones Act, passed in 2017, uses tax incentives to draw long-term investment to parts of the United States that continue to struggle with high poverty and low job and business growth.

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Boosting America's Oklahoma Tribal Finance Consortium Announces Tribes' Impact on Oklahoma's Economy Rural Workforce

Heather Griffin, Oklahoma Native Impact Report, March 23, 2022

Native American tribes in Oklahoma had a $15.6 billion impact on the state in 2019, according to a new study released Wednesday.

The study found that the tribes directly employ more than 54,000 people and support a total of 113,442 jobs to tribal citizens and non-citizens, accounting for more than $5.4 billion in wages and benefits to Oklahoma workers in 2019.

"This study shows just how important tribes are to Oklahoma's economy," said Neal McCaleb, Chickasaw Nation Ambassador to the United States. "We are helping create sustainable economies through our many valuable jobs as well as making other substantial and impactful investments into our broader communities," said McCaleb "This is our home and we look forward to continued growth – growth that benefits all Oklahomans."

This study, sponsored through the Oklahoma Tribal Finance Consortium, was released during a press conference at the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City on Wednesday. In 2019, the Consortium sponsored a similar study. The new report shows a significant increase of more than $2.6 billion in economic activity from FY 2017 to FY 2019.

"Tribes are an economic driver as well as a constant and reliable partner," said Victor Flores, President, Oklahoma Tribal Finance Consortium and Director of Tribal Services, REDW, LLC. "Unlike corporations that move based on economic conditions, our tribes are here to stay," said Flores. "Oklahoma is home, and we will continue to reinvest in our communities through job creation, critical service delivery and infrastructure development. Oklahoma is stronger when we all work together."

One of the most impactful contributions by the 38 federally recognized tribes has been in health care, particularly in rural and underserved Oklahoma communities. Tribal health care operates more than 45 facilities, providing care in most locations to both Native American and non-Native Oklahomans.

When health care is provided to Native Americans at tribal health facilities, the entire cost of care is paid by the federal government, resulting in savings to the state. In 2019, tribes paid $232 million in Medicaid expenditures, saving the state $86 million by requiring no state matching funds.

"Tribally owned and federal health centers across the state provide life-saving treatment and improved quality of life to Native and non-Native citizens," said Nicolas Barton, Executive Director, Southern Plains Tribal Health Board.

"In 2019 alone, there were 3.5 million patient visits at tribal health facilities in Oklahoma," said Barton. "By maintaining the health care safety net in rural areas, tribes are strengthening Oklahoma's entire health care infrastructure and ensuring many healthy generations to come."

Through gaming compacts between Oklahoma-based tribes and the state, tribal nations submit a percentage of their Class III gaming revenues for the exclusive right to operate casinos in the state. Oklahoma sends the first $250,000 of these fees to the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. Of the remaining funds, 88 percent is earmarked for public education supporting all Oklahomans.

The tribes have invested heavily to support local communities and efforts. Oklahoma tribes have paid more than $1.8 billion in exclusivity fees since 2006. More than $1.5 billion has been earmarked for public education. In 2019, an additional $84 million was paid to support Oklahoma schools, municipalities and other community initiatives.

"It is impossible to overstate the positive impact Oklahoma's tribal nations have had, and continue to have, on our state," said Matthew L. Morgan, Chairman, Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association. "Through our gaming industry, we employ more than 75,000 people, mostly in rural communities. We build roads and hospitals, invest in our public schools and universities and create programs to serve those who need assistance," said Morgan. "We are proud of our past, excited about things happening right now, and determined to leave the next generation an industry, and an Oklahoma, that they can take pride in."

Kyle Dean, associate professor of economics and the director for the Center for Native American and Urban Studies at Oklahoma City University, analyzed data from 16 tribal nations based in Oklahoma and prepared the study.

The Oklahoma Tribal Finance Consortium's mission is to advance tribal economics and strengthen tribal finance within the state of Oklahoma.

More information can be found at oknativeimpact.com.

OKLAHOMA NATIVE IMPACT

OKNATIVEIMPACT.COM

OKLAHOMA IMPACT

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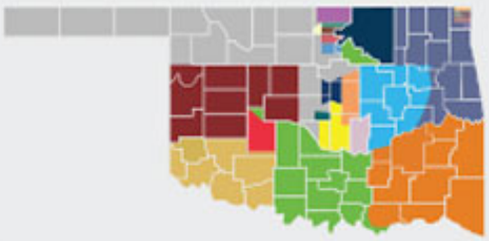


14% of population is Native American

38 federally recognized tribes permanently located in Oklahoma

JOBS

113,442 Jobs supported (Native & non-Native employees)

$5.4 billion in wages & benefits to Oklahomans

HEALTH CARE

Nearly **3.5 million** Native & non-Native patient visits to tribal health facilities

More than **$66 million** paid to local healthcare providers for contract health services

$232 million paid in Medicaid expenditures at tribal health care facilities

Saved the state **$86 million** by requiring no state matching funds

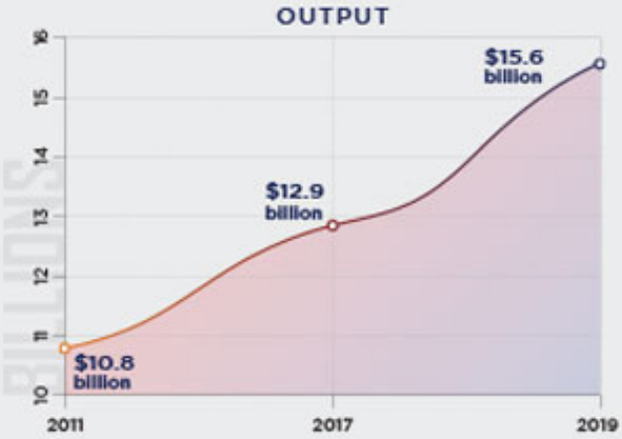
COMMUNITY SUPPORT

$1.8 billion paid in exclusivity fees for education since 2006

$84 million in additional support to schools, municipalities and other community initiatives

IMPACT GROWTH

(2011 - 2019)



Why investing in rural prosperity matters: A retrospective

Dell Gines, Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, April 27, 2022

The Federal Reserve System recently released a book titled "External LinkInvesting in Rural Prosperity." In this book, 79 authors share innovative strategies for rural community development. I am excited about this book because I am passionate about rural development. I would like to share how I got engaged in rural development and why I think rural communities are so important.

Dell Gines is a lead community development advisor at the Kansas City Fed's Omaha Branch. Gines specializes in small business, particularly entrepreneurship-led development. This approach says that entrepreneurship is an effective way to establish sustainable wealth from employment and ownership, which results in thriving markets and a healthy society.

I joined the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City in 2011, the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Before joining the Bank, I had spent most of my life living and working in North Omaha, Nebraska. Until recent demographic shifts, North Omaha had been the only majority-minority community in the state. Nearly 50% of the state's African American population lived in North Omaha. The city had the distinction of having the highest poverty rate in the entire nation for African American children, according to a 2008 Pew Research Center report.

My first assignment at the Kansas City Fed was to develop our small business work for the community development team. I knew entrepreneurship was essential to developing distressed communities because of my experience with banking and community advocacy in North Omaha. So, without recognizing it, I jumped into what is now called entrepreneurship ecosystem building.

He still has that belt buckle and cowboy hat

Shortly after that, we released "External LinkGrow Your Own," our first guide to entrepreneurship-led economic development. This short guide shared ways communities could build their small business ecosystem for economic development purposes. Almost immediately, I began to receive speaking requests. Nearly every request was from a rural community or for rural conferences. I put together a PowerPoint presentation and hit the road.

For the first five years of my career at the Kansas City Fed, up to 75% of my speeches and presentations were about rural development. The appetite for new strategies for development in these communities was high. This appetite was often driven by significant population loss and economic growth challenges.

I remember a presentation at the South Central Economic Development District in Nebraska. I shared data showing that the further away from the interstate a county was in their region, the greater its population loss. For example, the county farthest from the interstate lost more than 10% of its population over a decade. Losses like these make communities nearly unsustainable over time. This was and is a challenge for many of our rural places.

When you give the keynote for the Texas Rural Challenge in Waco, Texas, they show their appreciation.

I drove for hours to speak in rural communities, many times ones with fewer than 1,000 individuals. Some years I did more than 30 presentations, which allowed me to visit great places and meet wonderful people. In Hebron, Nebraska, for example, they projected my presentation on their theater's new digital movie screen, which made me feel like Denzel Washington, and then they showed me the largest porch swing in America. I still have the big belt buckle and cowboy hat I received for my keynote speech at the Texas Rural Challenge in Waco, Texas. I did another cool event in South Dakota, where they broadcast my presentation across the Extension video network.

I enjoyed every minute of it.

Culture shock gives way to appreciation of rural areas

In many of these rural communities, I was the only African American at the event and sometimes nearly the only one in the entire county. Early on, this was a culture shock. I was an urban individual from a predominantly low-income African American community in Omaha, traveling throughout the rural Midwest. I was used to the dynamics of urban politics and being close to significant philanthropic and

corporate resources, to population diversity and the benefits and challenges it brings. The culture shock quickly wore off, however, and I developed a passion for rural community development and an appreciation for the people and places we define as "rural." This was especially true of small rural towns. There is nothing cooler than a well-organized main street.

In the early days of working in rural areas, I realized a few things. The first was that I, like many urbanites, was biased against things "rural." Because there weren't as many amenities in rural towns, many of us from larger cities felt these communities were somehow lesser. I quickly found, though, that the increased sense of community, place and commitment often seemed to offset the perceived loss of 16 restaurants within a mile radius, like I have in Omaha. I discovered that if we approach rural towns from a perspective of strengths and assets, the value of rural towns can easily be seen.

The second thing I realized was that many of the challenges rural communities face are the same as in urban core communities, like mine. I vividly remember sitting with a group at a Rural Futures meeting in Lincoln, Nebraska, when a younger participant said that many parents from declining rural towns tell their kids to leave and not come back. During my travels, many others shared this same sentiment with me. Not only did this sadden me, but it echoed what I heard in my own community. Many from my neighborhood were also told to leave, not just North Omaha, but the entire state of Nebraska. This, coupled with the shared urban/rural challenges such as high-quality economic development and education, made me realize that rural communities need advocates also.

This brings me to my third realization. People matter, and therefore, the places where people live, work and play matter. This includes rural communities. I have heard some economists say certain rural towns should close up shop. They say these towns have no long-run prospects, and the cost to states of helping sustain them outweighs the benefits. I reject this. These communities are not just economic entities that should only exist because they generate net economic benefit to the state. They are places of potential and opportunity that require better economic development and support. This is why I have been such a strong advocate for entrepreneurship-led economic development as an economic development strategy in many rural communities. It helps unleash rural talent. It is aspirational. And it provides an opportunity for long-run sustainable economic growth.

This year I am returning to my roots at the Kansas City Fed, focusing on rural economic and community development. Not only will I help promote "External LinkInvesting in Rural Prosperity," but I will be holding webinars and, most importantly, getting back out in the seven states of our Tenth District doing rural listening and sharing sessions. At the Kansas City Fed, we believe rural places matter. I can't wait to hit the road again!

Lawmakers put funds toward economic development sites statewide

Janelle Stecklein, CNHI Oklahoma, May 22, 2022

In a bid to diversify rural Oklahoma's economy beyond the borders of Mayes County, state lawmakers plan to divvy up $250 million to help make other economic development sites more competitive.

But critics of House Bill 4456 said there are no guardrails or rules for how the dollars will be allocated, and the Progressing Rural Economic Prosperity Fund amounts to little more than a quarter-billion-dollar legislative "slush fund."

Despite some bipartisan opposition, the measure passed both the state House and Senate by large margins and headed Friday to the governor's desk as part of the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat, R-Oklahoma City, said he didn't have much input on the name, but there's "an absolute agreement" that the money isn't just for rural areas of the state. With 65% of Oklahomans living in the Tulsa or Oklahoma City areas, metro areas will not be excluded.

He said when lawmakers spoke with Commerce Secretary Scott Mueller, there was "a lot of frustration" that Pryor was the only place the Commerce Department was putting projects. Treat said Pryor's MidAmerica Industrial Park is a tremendous asset for the state, but members are starting to get frustrated and they're being asked to put about $700 million cash on the table to develop an area that may not directly impact their district.

Earlier in the session, lawmakers set aside $698 million for an incentive package designed to reel in an electric vehicle battery manufacturing plant to Pryor. The measure pays $613 million to a "mega project" and allocates $85 million to another project related to the same industry. It provides a 3.4% rebate of the investment over five years up to the balance of the fund once capital expenditures and jobs are created. The company being targeted by the LEAD Act could create as many as 4,000 to 6,000 new jobs.

"At some point, we've got to start developing assets around the state so we have more than one option to show businesses that want to locate (here), and Pryor is a crown jewel, but we need crown jewels all across the state," Treat said.

He said the $250 million investment is in concert with the $700 million Pryor project, which is believed to be a Panasonic facility.

"We are going to invest in our future," Treat said. "We have an opportunity here to make Oklahoma a much more attractive place to develop, not just in Northeast Oklahoma, but around the entire state."

State Rep. Monroe Nichols, D-Tulsa, said lawmakers have allocated $250 million more for an unspecified purpose, and combined now plan to sink just shy of $1 billion into rural economic development in a year's time.

"This is not about the issue of not wanting economic development in rural parts of the state, but more so about why would we take a quarter billion dollars and not have a purpose for it with no guardrails," he said. "It's just a $250 million slush fund."

Nichols said that with no parameters, the funds might not get to where they're most needed, and he said there's an "opportunity cost" to just putting money into a fund with no plan. For instance, Nichols said the funds could have been used to reduce or eliminate the state's grocery sales tax or give taxpayers refunds greater than $75.

"We have resources that could be working for Oklahomans, (but) they're going to let it sit for an unspecified purpose," he said.

Oklahoma Department of Commerce officials said Friday they had no comment in response to a question about whether the funding would be a useful tool in their ongoing efforts to recruit new businesses.

State Rep. Kyle Hilbert, R-Bristow, who backs the measure, said how PREP will work is still being negotiated. He said that will be determined during a special session in the coming weeks.

He said he's been traveling around the state and talking to colleagues from other parts of Oklahoma. A few months ago, for instance, he visited Lawton, which has an industrial park that's ready to go — except it's missing a critical gas line that will cost $15 million.

"The challenge is a gas company won't put the line in until a company is there, and the company won't come until there's a gas line," Hilbert said. "And so it's a chicken-or-the-egg situation where if we could come in with matching dollars to help the community get that industrial park up and ready and where it needs to be, then you have growth and economic development."

He said Department of Commerce officials have told lawmakers that Pryor's MidAmerica Industrial Park isn't the only place that businesses want to come to in Oklahoma. It just simply is the place that's ready.

There are other places that could be ready for moderate large-scale development, but the problem is that to get them ready will take a few months because they might not have

all of the "big five" — water, sewer, broadband, gas and electric, Hilbert said.

Hilbert said PREP should prioritize helping finance improvements at commercial industrial parks, airports, airparks, railparks and ports by requiring local officials to provide matching funds.

State Rep. Carl Newton, R-Cherokee, said Avard, in Woods County, has one of the few places where two major rail lines intersect.

"It could be crucial as far as transportation and development in our areas because you have products coming in from two different directions," Newton said. "So we can bring products into Oklahoma from all directions and utilize it there."

But he said the site needs a paved road and water infrastructure.

There also are industrial authorities in Woodward, Fairview and Cherokee that could potentially become "shovel ready" for new business if they received some direct state funding, Newton said.

"Yeah, they got a big boost out there around Pryor, Oklahoma, and that industrial park, but that doesn't mean the rest of the state (did)," Newton said. "We felt that we needed to reach out and help the other part of the state, and I think this could be a good economic boost."

Notes

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Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

Outlook 2022: Investing in quality of life

Mike Neal, president and CEO of the Tulsa Regional Chamber, April 7, 2022

As I reflect on the past couple of years, words like adversity, resilience and perseverance spring to mind. As I think ahead through 2022 and beyond, another word is just as applicable to our region. That word is investment.

The Tulsa region continues to make significant investments in itself. In the past year, we have seen significant, game-changing projects more forward. Projects like Zink Dam, the new Arkansas River Pedestrian Bridge, and the reimagined Gilcrease Museum all made progress.

These projects are being funded in whole or in part through Vision Tulsa. The Tulsa Regional Chamber led the public campaign in support of passage of the Vision funding package back in 2016. All of the Vision projects are proof positive that ours is a community that invests in itself.

TAKING FLIGHT

Just over a month ago, another Vision project opened its doors to the public. All of us here at the Chamber—and especially the members of our regional tourism team—were thrilled to be part of the ribbon-cutting celebration for the amazing new USA BMX headquarters, Hall of Fame and the Hardesty National BMX Stadium in the historic Greenwood District. This is such an impressive complex, and the long-term investment USA BMX is making in Tulsa is a direct reflection of the investments our region has made in itself this past decade.

Of course, our regional investment extends well beyond the Vision projects. Last year, the opening of the Greenwood Rising history center helped our city commemorate the centennial of the Tulsa Race Massacre and invest in a better tomorrow.

That tomorrow begins with the education of today, and in 2021 Tulsa voters invested in future generations by overwhelmingly approving a $414 million Tulsa Public Schools bond package.

A number of air carriers – including American Airlines and Breeze Airways – upped their investments in our region by adding new direct flights from Tulsa.

Individuals and companies from across the country and around the world are seeing the advantages our region offers. They see our low costs of living and doing business, our high quality of life, our short commute times, our centralized location, our educational and training opportunities, and our talented workforce. As a result, they are investing in us, and the Chamber is here to help.

BOOMING ECONOMY

Tulsa's Future, the Chamber-led regional economic development partnership, supported the creation of 4,125 jobs and $421 million of capital investment in northeast Oklahoma during 2021.

Tulsa's Future is a collaborative economic development partnership that works with the City of Tulsa, Tulsa County, more than 200 private investors, and numerous regional and tribal partners to further economic prosperity in the Tulsa region. Since its inception 16 years ago, Tulsa's Future has supported the creation of more than 72,000 jobs and more than $4.2 billion in capital investment.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020 Tulsa County awarded the Chamber CARES Act funds to help tell the Tulsa recovery story to a national audience through a dedicated marketing campaign. In 2021 the Chamber pivoted to Tulsa's Future: Road to Recovery, a one-year strategic work plan that addressed urgent needs for recovery and attracted new employers and transformative projects to the region.

And it worked. During 2021, the Chamber's economic development team saw its largest uptick in project requests and site visits in years. This year, we are launching an aggressive new economic development plan called Tulsa's Future: Acceleration. This three-year plan will support existing industries and pave the way for new industry growth.

Much of Oklahoma's economic identity has long been tied to the aviation and energy industries. That's still true, but major investments in tourism and quality of life opportunities during the past decade have catapulted tourism into our state's third largest industry. Tulsa is a big part of that.

AMENITIES ABOUND

The cycle of economic success from the Tulsa region's tourism industry is strong and growing stronger. Thanks to the hard work of tourism staff, volunteers and investors, Tulsa is known as a vibrant, welcoming city for diverse events and visitors.

From more than $1.5 billion in public and private investment in downtown, to quality of life improvements like the

$465 million Gathering Place river development, to marquee venues such as the BOK Center and ONEOK Field, our community is "on the map" in a major way.

That's also thanks to outdoor spaces like Guthrie Green, River Parks and Turkey Mountain, and events such as the Tulsa Run, Saint Francis Tulsa Tough and the IRONMAN triathlon. Tulsa makes it easy to walk, bike, and run, or to simply relax and soak up the sun.

Tulsa is also family-friendly. Our region's attractions – including our zoo, botanic garden, parks and lakes – appeal to young and old alike, offering fun for the entire family. Tulsa is a great place to visit a fair, take in an outdoor concert, and splash in the water.

For those who love music and the arts, we have Philbrook, and ahha Tulsa, and the Woody Guthrie Center, the soon-to-open Bob Dylan Center, and the Oklahoma Museum of Popular Culture (OKPOP) being built across from the world-famous Cain's Ballroom.

Our region has also invested in sharing its history. From our treasure trove of Art Deco architecture to iconic Route 66, Tulsa offers sights and sounds that chronicle the history of our nation. Tulsa offers world-class museums that bring the arts and history of our region, and other regions, to vivid life.

When I'm asked about our city, I always say this: Tulsa is as multi-faceted as its citizens, and our best days are still ahead. After all, a community that invests so heavily in itself is sure to attract the continued investment of others. That's exactly what happened in 2021, and there's no reason 2022 will be any different.

With more projects in the pipeline than ever before, and new events being announced almost daily, our region is poised for an extremely bright future. Yes, adversity was one word for 2021. But so was its opposite: prosperity.

All of us at the Tulsa Regional Chamber look back proudly at all our region has collaboratively accomplished. And we look forward to the promise of a prosperous 2022 and beyond.

Pathways to High-Quality Child Care: The Workforce Investment Credit

Anne Mitchell and Louise Stoney, The Committee for Economic Development

Introduction

The investments we make now in our future workforce—today's youngest generation—lay the groundwork for a prosperous economy tomorrow. The science related to brain development shows that a child's experiences in the first years of life set the foundation for learning, including school readiness. As with other construction projects, the quality of materials used to build this foundation—early learning settings such as child care and Pre-K—has significant implications for children's lifelong knowledge, skills, and capabilities.

A well-trained and qualified early care and education (ECE) workforce is essential to produce desired results: children eager to learn, happy, healthy, and well-prepared to succeed in school and life. Attracting and retaining such a workforce is a long-standing challenge in the United States because pay is based on what parents can afford. This limitation impacts the ability of early childhood educators to advance their education and training and acquire research-based skills and competencies that best promote early learning in young children. This brief discusses (1) the state of the ECE workforce, including low compensation, and (2) how one state's approach using a refundable tax credit links professional development with a modest wage increase.

In Brief

The quality of child care has long-lasting repercussions for our future workforce. We can promote better child care by investing in the professional development and adequate compensation of child care providers. An early childhood workforce investment credit, modeled after the Louisiana school readiness tax credit, rewards professional development for child care providers and can foster the quality ECE workforce necessary to promote children's learning and school readiness.

Child Care Affects Our Future Economic Prosperity

Quality child care matters for children's healthy development, early learning, and safety. The factors that contribute to quality care include a secure and stimulating environment in which to learn, a workforce trained to encourage brain development through responsive interactions with children, and professional development that prepares early learning educators to identify potential problems early on, so appropriate interventions can be made available. Currently, these factors are not sufficiently addressed.

- The quality of child care is directly related to the quality of the workforce.
- Low compensation for the child care workforce makes it hard to attract and retain high quality staff.
- Low compensation makes it difficult for the current workforce to access the training and higher education necessary to acquire the knowledge and competencies for delivering high quality care.

An ECE workforce investment tax credit helps provide an incentive for professional development, and rewards educational attainment with a refundable wage credit to increase pay

High-Quality Child Care Can Influence Children's Brain Development Over the Course of Their Lives

Child care is an important place for children's early skill development and a support for working parents. Currently, more than 15 million children under age six have working parents.[1] Many of these children are in some type of child care setting every week. Numerous studies have shown that all children, and particularly low income children, benefit from high quality care.[2] This care can help launch a lifetime of better health, education, and career outcomes.

Neuroscience research confirms that a child's earliest years are critical for brain development. From birth to age five, the architecture of the brain is built rapidly, laying the foundation for future social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Because both genes and experiences play a role in brain development, children's interactions with the adults and environments around them influence the brain's architecture.[3] Research shows that the quality of care can either positively or negatively affect a child's development.[4]

Improving the ECE Workforce Has Multiple Benefits

A high-quality ECE workforce is necessary for high-quality child care and early learning. The right scaffolding can support the capacity of the ECE workforce to help children build strong brains in the earliest years of life. According to the National Survey of Early Care and Education, more than one million paid staff work in about 130,000 child care centers throughout the United States. Another one million caregivers are paid home-based providers caring for children in their residence.[5] Two-thirds of the staff working in centers do not have a college degree.[6] For home-based providers, the level of education is lower than center-based staff, with many having no more than a high school degree.[7] In other words, many child care providers have not had the education and professional training that can support them in their role as vital agents of children's early learning and skill development.

The workforce is underdeveloped as a result of the dominant business model in the child care industry. Parent fees are the only source of revenue to cover operating expenses for most programs (such as rent, utilities, materials, insurance, and wages for staff). Parents struggle with the high cost of care, which often leads to decisions to hire staff at the lowest wages possible so that programs can keep parent fees as low as possible. As a result, the median hourly wage for an individual working in child care is $11.65 per hour (about $24,230 per year).[8] In fact, over half (53 percent) of child care workers reside in families enrolled in one or more public support programs annually, compared to 21 percent of the U.S. workforce as a whole.[9]

Low pay restricts the ability to hire and retain quality staff and leads to turnover, which research has shown is about 25 percent among centers with turnover.[10] Low pay can also contribute to provider stress, which research demonstrates can lead to lower

quality classrooms. Teachers who are more depressed and stressed have been observed to be less sensitive, more intrusive, and harsher in classroom interactions with children.[11] This results in less supportive, less responsive interactions between children and their caregivers and disrupts children's development and well-being. Consistent staffing in care settings is a challenge but essential for children's healthy development given the importance of stable relationships with supportive adults.

Boosting the wages of child care providers based on achieved competencies, certificates, or educational levels is a voluntary, reward-based strategy that helps fill in the gap between what parents can pay and the operating costs of highquality care. With the market constrained by parent fees, it is a way to both promote family choice among quality settings and help support a quality workforce.

The Louisiana Approach Works

Practical, viable solutions to the challenge of developing a high-quality ECE workforce already exist. Louisiana pioneered its School Readiness Tax Credits in 2007.[12] One component of that package provides ECE directors and staff with a refundable credit linked to their educational attainment at four levels and work experience in a quality program. The credit amount increases as the credentials rise.

Educational attainment is verified through the state's early childhood career development registry (called Pathways), and employment is verified by the center where they work. It is not an entitlement—only those individuals who voluntarily join the registry, achieve professional development, and have been working for at least six months in a licensed program that participates in the state quality rating system qualify for the credit.[13]

The credit is adjusted for inflation annually. In tax year 2016, the value of the credit by qualification level ranged from $1,658 to $3,315 and a total of 4,044 individuals claimed it. The average credit was $2,154, a modest investment that links professional development with a wage increase.[14]

Between 2008 and 2015, the number of staff achieving a Teacher Level 1 credential (a Child Development Associate credential) grew from 963 to 3,598, an increase of 374 percent, and the number of staff that attained higher-level credentials (Levels 2, 3, and 4) increased almost eight-fold, from 284 to 2,156.[15] Use of the credit shows that strong incentives can help spur stronger qualifications and expertise while also rewarding credential achievement.

ECE Workforce Investment Credit is a Sensible Solution

Raising a healthy population of future workers, citizens, and parents starts with high-quality child care settings. Quality care depends on attracting, retaining, and growing a well-trained workforce that is fairly compensated for its skills and expertise. In every state, child care workers earn low wages.[16] As long as parent fees remain the revenue source driving the operating budgets of child care programs, compensation is unlikely to change, limiting the ability to provide highquality care.

The keys to designing a workforce investment credit are:

- Making the credit refundable so the lowest paid providers can benefit from a wage increase;
- Indexing the credit to inflation;
- Structuring the credit large enough to matter (e.g., at least a 10 percent increase); and
- Linking the credit to qualifications.

The framework for this policy is already in place. Quality rating systems are operating in nearly every state and the District of Columbia.[17] Voluntary state registries are operating in 44 states.[18] Because it is voluntary, individuals working in child care select whether to participate and only receive the credit for educational levels actually achieved.

Business Leaders Understand Workforce Quality

Business leaders know a quality workforce matters. Investing in quality early learning settings can lead to more children starting school ready to learn. When children start school ready to learn, they are more likely to experience positive academic and health outcomes, which in turn will lead to a stronger future workforce and more engaged citizens. Businesses understand the concept of return on investment—a higher rate of return in productivity and income is derived from improving the quality of our human capital development.

The bottom line: investing in a quality ECE workforce allows parents to work, supports children's healthy development, promotes a skilled workforce pathway and more sustainable regional economies in communities across the country—now and in the long-term.

Endnotes

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18. *National Workforce Registry Alliance, Membership Map*

A High Quality Workforce is Necessary for Early Childhood Development

OKLAHOMA

Research shows that DURING THE FIRST YEARS OF A CHILD'S LIFE:

More than 1 million new neural connections form every second

Genetics plus experiences shape the developing brain

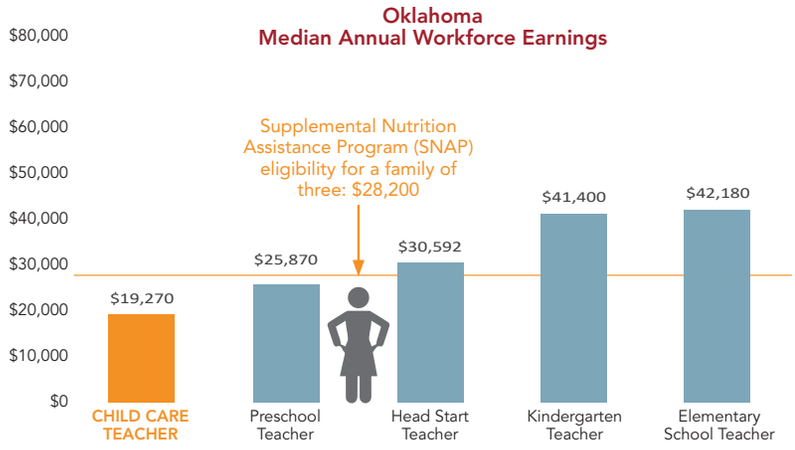
The foundation forms for future cognitive abilities

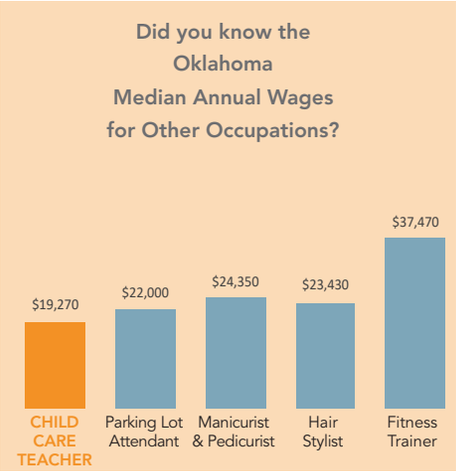
Vocabulary at age 3 can predict 3rd grade reading achievement

Oklahoma DEMOGRAPHICS

146,874	Children Under Age 3
303,867	Children Under Age 6
55,489	Children Under Age 5 Living in Poverty
181,492	Children Under Age 6 Living in Households with All Parents Working
46.1%	Families Led by a Single Mother with Children Under Age 5 Living in Poverty
22.1%	Children Under Age 5 Living in Poverty

High Quality Early Education Programs Depend on a Quality Workforce
LOW WAGES UNDERMINE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION





State of the EARLY EDUCATION WORKFORCE

High Turnover

25%

Average child care staff turnover

Low Wages

POVERTY LEVEL $21,720

$19,270

Average annual wage for child care staff, below the federal poverty level for a family of 3

Building blocks for HIGH-QUALITY EARLY EDUCATION

Competitive wages to attract and retain high-quality staff

Well-trained and educated workforce

A stimulating and supportive **learning environment**

Promoting **brain development** in a child's earliest years

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 1 Year data (2019); U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Employment Statistics (2019); Head Start Program Information Report (2019); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility for a family of three (FY2021); U.S. Federal Poverty Thresholds for a family of three (2020); Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child; Campaign for Grade Level Reading; Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, University of California, Berkeley (2016).

CED

Edmond permits illustrate workforce housing crisis

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, April 6, 2022

Building permits issued last year in Edmond show the average cost of a new single-family home is $421,325.

"That is the beginning of what we would call a workforce housing crisis," Josh Moore said Wednesday during a presentation at the Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce.

"The cost of homes increased 33% since 2011, while the average household income went up only 11%," David Chapman said.

Moore and Chapman – both developers and Edmond City Council members –prepared the presentation to help educate people about the issue.

"As a council, we have a responsibility to provide housing for everyone," Moore said.

The U.S. Census shows Edmond is the fastest-growing city in Oklahoma. It grew by 16% in the past decade and today has a population of about 96,000, he said.

That growth has increased the number of Edmond residents in the labor force to about 50,000. More than half of them work in service industries like health care, education, hospitality, automotive services, cosmetics and landscaping, while another 11% work in retail – jobs that don't pay enough to afford a $400,000 home.

"We need workforce housing, and the percentage of workforce housing needs to grow as well," Moore said.

The presentation points to a lack of starter homes, duplexes, patio homes and, especially, apartments. It shows more than 6,000 single-family homes have been built in Edmond since the last apartment complex was completed in 2012.

Two new multifamily projects were blocked by citizen referendum petition in 2021. The Spring Creek Mansion Block Homes project was withdrawn after voters decided to buy the land. The other – a proposed apartment complex near Interstate 35 and Memorial Road – will be decided by a vote of people likely in November, Chapman said.

Affordable housing stock is the longest ongoing issue facing Edmond and it's getting worse, Chapman said. Residents who object to multifamily development cite the "same tired pathetic narrative" every time, he said.

Concerns about overcrowded schools, crime rate going up

Edmond City Councilman and developer Josh Moore talks about the lack of workforce housing in the city during a presentation Wednesday at the Edmond Area Chamber of Commerce. The average cost of new houses built in Edmond last year was $421,325, Moore said. (Photo by Kathryn McNutt)

and property values going down are not borne out by data, he said.

Increased traffic is a legitimate concern because traffic will grow with the population. Chapman said that can be controlled by mixed-use development that puts retail centers in neighborhoods, so residents don't have to drive across town to shop.

One example of a mix-use project is The Campbell, being developed by Rader Building Co. west of the University of Central Oklahoma campus with completion expected in summer 2023. It consists of two multistory buildings containing retail, restaurant, office and 61 living spaces.

However, those apartments won't be affordable to many workers, Chapman said.

"The best hope we have now for affordable housing is overlay districts," he said.

Edmond city staff has identified three areas around downtown that could be designated overlay districts and give property owners the right to develop more affordable housing types currently not allowed by the building code, Chapman said. Final approval of those districts isn't certain and could be a long time coming, he said.

Law to expand high-speed internet needs funding

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, May 25, 2022

A new law intended to expand high-speed internet access to 95% of Oklahomans by 2027 comes two years after the pandemic closed schools and workplaces, and the shift to remote learning and working highlighted the connectivity disparity in the state.

Gov. Kevin Stitt signed House Bill 3363 – the Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Act – into law this month. Legislation to fund it is awaiting his signature.

Only 69% of Oklahoma households have an internet connection, the fourth worst in the nation, according to a report from Review.org. Data from the latest U.S. Census survey was used to pinpoint how the country and individual states are faring when it comes to the digital divide.

The report shows 27.6 million (22.5%) of U.S. households don't have home internet and must use public Wi-Fi or other means to get online. Of those with home service, 265,331 households still use dial-up internet.

Mississippi, Arkansas and Alabama residents are the least-connected, while Utah, Colorado and California have the highest percentage of households with an internet connection.

One in four Oklahoma students doesn't have high-speed internet access at home, which limits access to advanced placement courses and concurrent enrollment at universities, according to the state Department of Education.

The Review.org report shows one-third of Oklahoma's population is considered rural, and the rural poverty rate is 17.6%.

The nine states with the lowest percentage of home internet all have a higher rural poverty rate than the national average of 15.3%. The poverty rate can influence which telecom providers build in certain areas, if any at all, the report noted.

The Oklahoma Broadband Expansion Act – co-authored by House Speaker Charles McCall, R-Atoka, and Senate President Pro Tem Greg Treat, R-Oklahoma City – passed with sweeping bipartisan support.

It creates the Oklahoma Broadband Office to exist until June 30, 2028, and a governing board, which will oversee the office and hire an executive director. Together the office and board are charged with developing the Statewide Broadband Plan, the State Broadband Grant Program, and other grant programs and projects to address unserved and underserved areas.

The Legislature's Joint Committee on Pandemic Relief Funding voted unanimously to spend more than $2 million of the state's federal relief funds to complete the broadband mapping needed to create the Statewide Broadband Plan.

The fiscal analysis for HB 3363 notes the broadband office will be funded from federal programs and funds available from the State Broadband Grant Program Revolving fund. Since it is unknown what the actual cost will be for the new office, a possibility remains that appropriated dollars will be necessary in the future, it states.

Relief funds to help build employment pipelines

Associated Press, The Journal Record, August 8, 2022

With the highest unemployment rate in the nation, New Mexico is banking on a tiny infusion of federal relief money through the American Rescue Plan to boost the job market in a poverty-stricken corner of the state and in some cases provide a second chance to would-be workers with a criminal record or those recovering from drug or alcohol addiction.

Top federal officials announced the job funding Wednesday, saying a total of $500 million was being doled out for programs in more than 30 states and in Puerto Rico. The U.S. Economic Development Administration received more than 500 applications requesting more than $6.5 billion, or about 13 times more than the available funding.

New Mexico will share in just a fraction of that to develop a partnership among community colleges, hospitals, construction firms and unions with the goal of building an employment pipeline in the northern part of the state.

Led by the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District, part of the effort will include deploying a mobile classroom to provide training and apprenticeships in the construction industry for hard-to-reach populations.

As for health care, Santa Fe Community College will work with hospitals and recovery centers in Santa Fe, Espanola and Taos to create a program similar to one in Arizona that has for the past decade streamlined student pathways into clinical on-the-job training.

The funding comes amid raging inflation and rising interest rates in a state where joblessness continues to outpace the national average as employers struggle to find willing workers.

Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Wednesday also noted the shortfall of health care professionals in the state – a long struggle that was exacerbated in early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

She suggested the jobs funding would be "transformative."

"This is a state that has really struggled based on the rural nature of our populations and the fact that we are a sparsely populated state," she said. "Really growing and diversifying our economy so that it meets the needs of those families and workers where they are has been a challenge for decades."

Nationwide, employers posted fewer job openings in June and companies have complained that it is hard to fill open positions.

In New Mexico, the unemployment rate dropped to 4.9% in June. While that's down from 7.3% a year ago, it's still higher than the national average and the highest among other states, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Deputy Secretary of Commerce Don Graves told reporters Wednesday that the grants are aimed at critical industries that range from health care to energy production, manufacturing and wildfire prevention.

Some $500 million in federal funding has been dedicated to helping states develop employment pipelines through partnerships with community colleges, local hospitals, construction firms and unions, officials say. Photo by Jeriden Villegas on Unsplash

In California, for example, the Foundation for California Community Colleges has been awarded more than $21 million to develop statewide infrastructure for training in forest health and fire safety. Federal officials said the emerging sector has the potential to grow into a $39 billion industry, but there are shortages of fire and forestry crew leaders, scientists and others.

The grant program will last for three years and officials in New Mexico expect about 1,100 workers to be placed in jobs. However, how the programs will be bankrolled after that is uncertain.

Monica Abeita with the North Central New Mexico Economic Development District said she's hopeful that success will lead to private investments that can keep the programs running.

Abeita outlined some of the challenges facing northern New Mexico, including poverty and generational substance abuse. She also said the economy is based largely on tourism, which means low paying, seasonal jobs that don't provide a career ladder beyond the service sector.

Another target for prospective participants is the 3,000 people who graduate from recovery centers annually in northern New Mexico. By getting them lined up for a job before graduation, state officials said that will give them a goal to work for and hopefully reduce recidivism.

Abeita said officials also are working with local employers to get over the hurdle of hiring those who have been incarcerated or have had substance abuse problems.

"We feel like everyone in the region is committed to this," she said. "We know that if we don't change this dynamic and make a fundamental change to some of these structural problems, our region can't move forward."

Bond question could include workforce development at OKC high schools

Kathryn McNutt, The Journal Record, August 10, 2022

A resolution calling for a bond election for Oklahoma City Public Schools includes the construction of a workforce development facility at every high school campus.

"That's a really important piece of this bond election, something that we're very excited about," Superintendent Sean McDaniel said Wednesday at the 2022 State of Schools hosted by the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber.

McDaniel said the Oklahoma City School Board will decide at its meeting Monday whether to call for a school bond election and what will be in the bond package, which could total as much as $900 million. Nov. 8 is the target election date.

"We know that pipelines into industry, pipelines into the workforce need to begin in the pre-K through 12 level," he said.

The bond proposal calls for a 20,000- to 25,000-square-foot flexible space at each high school campus to offer programs that build students' skills. McDaniel said. It could be college and career opportunities, construction trades, aviation, mechanics, film production, esports or visual and performing arts.

"We have very, very strong relationship with Metro Tech, our CareerTech system, and they will be partners in this," he said, along with the business community and higher education. "We need to partner with everybody so that we can provide these types of opportunities for our kids so that we can fill our own pipelines into industry."

The bond proposal includes other capital improvements, as well as operational costs and deferred maintenance on district buildings. McDaniel noted the average age of the districts' schools is 72 years and nine are more than 100 years old.

Mayor David Holt called on voters to rally behind the bond proposal last month during his State of the City address.

"The Oklahoma Constitution doesn't do school districts in this state any favors. If they so much as want to replace a broken air conditioner, they have to ask the voters. And they need 60% approval," Holt said.

Superintendent Sean McDaniel gives an update on the Oklahoma City Public Schools on Wednesday – one day before classes begin – during the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber's annual State of Schools event. (Photo by Kathryn McNutt)

Supporting the bond issue is "the single most important thing each of us in this community can do for public education this year," he said.

Chancellor Allison Garrett, CEO of the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education, also addressed the state's workforce pipeline.

Critical occupations data tracked by the state Commerce Department shows about two-thirds of new jobs created today require a college degree.

While 87% of Oklahoma residents who earn an undergraduate degree remain employed in the state after five years, as well as 61% of graduates who came from out of state, only 26.2% of Oklahoma adults have a bachelor's degree or higher.

Garrett said the higher education system has targeted initiatives for three critical occupations areas – engineering, nursing and teaching – to address future workforce needs.

Changes as a result of automation means many service sector jobs will be replaced by technology by 2025, she said.

"That means many of the jobs where individuals with low levels of education have been earning a living wage and gotten benefits might go away."

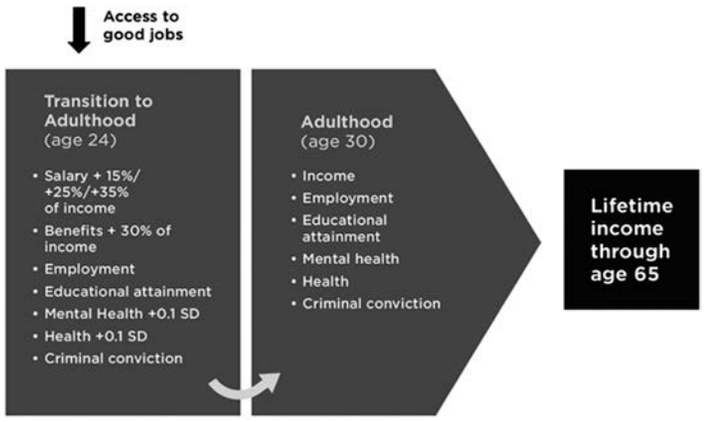
Good jobs for young adults can boost their lifetime earnings and well-being

Gabriel Piña, Kristin Anderson Moore, Vanessa Sacks, and Alison McClay, Child Trends, May 12, 2022

Getting a good job early in one's work life can help set young adults on an upward path of economic mobility. A good job is one that pays well, provides good benefits, and (where feasible) allows for a flexible schedule. A good job can also provide opportunities to develop skills, advance in one's career, and improve one's physical and mental health through access to benefits and better pay. To understand the life course implications of holding a good job early in life, we simulated the long-term effects of having a higher-paying job at age 24 that provides benefits such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off. We found that having a better job early in life improves lifetime earnings substantially for all racial groups; however, these improvements aren't sufficient to close the earnings gap between White people and Hispanic or Black people (estimated to be as high as $350,000 in average discounted lifetime earnings).[1]

We simulated a good job by changing three measures of job quality: First, for those who do not have a bachelor's degree and who earn no more than $30,000 a year, we increased annual earnings at age 24 by 35 percent for those making $1 to $12,000; by 25 percent for those making $12,001 to $24,000; and by 15 percent for those making $24,001 to $30,000. (The rationale for this stairstep approach is that low-education and very low-wage workers need large earnings increases to approximate a substantial improvement in their jobs.) Second, we also increased earnings by an additional 30 percent to approximate the effects of the average employer-provided fringe benefits, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off. Third, we also added a conservative 0.1 standard-deviation change in both the mental and physical health scales in the transition to adulthood, given that work benefits have positive effects on workers' physical and mental health.

Figure 1: Progressive Effects of the Good Jobs Simulation Throughout the Adult Life Course

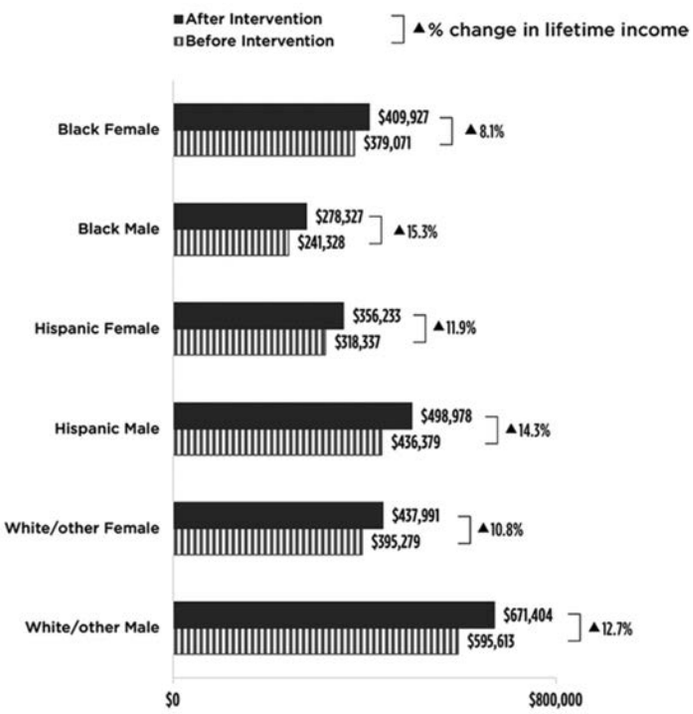


After applying our simulations, we found that having a better job at age 24 translates to better pay at age 30: On average, there was an increase of about $4,800 in annual earnings at age 30 (2018 dollars) for young adults who access these jobs. The simulation also showed an average increase in discounted lifetime earnings of about $52,000; this is equivalent to about $100,000 in undiscounted earnings throughout the young adults' lives across all racial groups. As a result of structural/racial discrimination in the workforce, these improvements are more likely to affect Black and Hispanic people, who are more likely to work in occupations with lower wages.

However, the changes modeled in our simulation weren't sufficient to close the earnings or well-being gaps between White people and Black and Hispanic people. The largest earnings increases in absolute terms were for Hispanic and White men; while Black women and men saw 8 percent and 15 percent earnings increases, respectively, both groups remained among the lowest-earning groups examined after the simulation (Figure 2). And while young adults' mental and physical health at age 30 improved slightly after the simulation (0.03 to 0.06 standard deviation increases), the largest increase was found for White women.

Figure 2: All Simulated Demographic Groups Saw Increases in Lifetime Earnings, but Racial and Ethnic Gaps Remained

Change in lifetime earnings in our job quality simulation among young adults who earn no more than $30,000 and do not have a bachelor's degree, by race or ethnicity and sex



While our simulations show long-term benefits for young adults who enjoy good jobs, many jobs in the United States do not currently provide good pay and/or good benefits. This makes it harder for low-income workers to achieve economic mobility and a better quality of life, a situation that seems to have gotten worse in recent years. Fortunately, several policies and programs can promote improvements in access to or availability of good jobs for young people. Work-based learning, job shadowing, and apprenticeships can link young adults to employers and contacts whom they might not otherwise meet, thereby giving them a pathway to accessing better jobs. Other alternatives include requiring employers to provide benefits via legislation, private sector initiatives that expand access to nonmonetary benefits, efforts to strengthen workplace practices and worker protections through regulation, and encouraging employees to participate in workplace decisions on job practices via expanded worker engagement. If employers do not act now, they may risk workers looking to leave their current jobs for another position with higher wages and better benefits.

Notes

This is a resource document for you to use.
Take notes, highlight, use as a text book.

The Oklahoma Academy
Town Hall

Building Awareness, Developing Policies, Inspiring Oklahomans to Move Ideas Into Action!

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TOWN HALL CONFERENCES

Topics covered at the Town Hall Conference from 2001 - 2022

2001 – Competing in an Innovative World
Town Hall Chair: Cliff Hudson, SONIC, America's Drive-In

2002 – Oklahoma's Health
Town Hall Chair: Cliff Hudson, SONIC, America's Drive-In

2003 – Oklahoma Resources: Energy and Water
Town Hall Co-Chairs: John Feaver, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma; Howard Barnett, TSF Capital LLC; and Larry Nichols, Devon Energy Corp.

2004 – Oklahoma's Environment: Pursuing A Responsible Balance
Town Hall Chair: William R. McKamey, AEP Public Service Company of Oklahoma

2005 – Drugs: Legal, Illegal... Otherwise
Town Hall Chair: Howard Barnett, TSF Capital LLC

2006 – Strategies for Oklahoma's Future
Town Hall Co-Chairs: John Feaver, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma; and Larry Rice, Tulsa University

2007 – Building Alliances: Tribal Governments, State & Local Governments And Private Sectors
Town Hall Chair: Douglas Branch, Phillips McFall

2008 – Oklahoma's Criminal Justice System: Can We Be Just As Tough But Twice As Smart?
Town Hall Chair: Steve Turnbo, Schnake Turnbo Frank PR

2009 – Getting Ready For Work: Education Systems And Future Workforce
Town Hall Chair: Howard Barnett, OSU- Tulsa

2010 May – Oklahoma Water- A Special Town Hall on Oklahoma's 50 Year Water Plan
Town Hall Chair: John Feaver, University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

2010 November – MUNI.OK.GOV- Addressing Municipal Governance
Town Hall Chair: Tom McKeon, Tulsa Community College

2011 – Developing the Oklahoma Economy
Town Hall Chair: Susan Winchester, The Winchester Group

2012 – It's 2032- Where in the World is Oklahoma?
Town Hall Chair: Steve Kreidler, University of Central Oklahoma

2013 – Moving Oklahoma: Improving Our Transportation Infrastructure
Town Hall Chair: Darryl Schmidt, BancFirst

2014 – We Can Do Better: Improving the Health of the Oklahoma People
Town Hall Co-Chairs: Kay Goebel, PhD, Psychologist; Gerry Clancy, MD, OU-Tulsa; and Steve Prescott, MD, Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation

2015 – Oklahoma Priorities: The Government & Taxes We Want
Town Hall Co-Chairs: Howard Barnett, OSU- Tulsa; and Dan Boren, Chickasaw Nation Department of Commerce

2017 – Oklahoma Votes: Improving the Election Process, Voter Access & Informed Voter Engagement
Town Hall Co-Chairs: Dan Boren, Chickasaw Nation Department of Commerce; and John Harper, AEP Public Service Company of Oklahoma

2018 – Aligning Oklahoma's Tax Code to Our 21st Century Economy
Town Hall Co-Chairs: Darryl Schmidt, BancFirst; and Dan Boren, Chickasaw Nation Department of Commerce

2019 – OKLAHOMA ENERGY: Optimizing Our Resources for the Future
Town Hall Co-Chairs: C. Michael Ming, retired VP Baker Hughes, a GE company, and Stuart Solomon, retired President & COO of Public Service Company of Oklahoma

2021 – Addressing Mental Health ~ Improving Mental Wellness
Town Hall Chair: Howard G. Barnett Jr., The Barnett Family Law Firm

2022 – OKLAHOMA'S HUMAN POTENTIAL: Enhancing Our Workforce for an Innovative Economy
Town Hall Chair: Lee Denney, D.V.M., Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education

A complete Library of Town Hall Resource Documents, Findings & Recommendation Reports can be found at www.okacademy.org

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