

## WORKFORCE READINESS



Today, the private sector spends more than \$164 billion every year on employee education and training to close workforce skill gaps<sup>i</sup> and currently more than 1 in 3 workers agree that they do not have the education and training they need to get ahead.<sup>ii</sup> These issues beg the question about one of the major challenges facing the country: how do we sufficiently prepare youth to enter the future labor market as adults? Afterschool and summer learning programs are integral partners in this effort, providing students a ladder of supports that offer a step up for future success and help them reach their career aspirations.

### **The Problem: The skills and experiences most expected to build a strong and vibrant workforce are largely missing**

1. **Employees are missing crucial foundational skills that employers desire.** The ability to work in teams, problem solve, and communicate effectively are among the principal skills that employers consistently report desiring in their future hires.<sup>1</sup> Despite the high priority placed on these skills, employers have long reported that it is difficult to find these skills in potential and current employees. A Business Roundtable survey of its member companies found that although critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills were highly relevant to positions within their company, these skills were challenging to find in qualified job candidates.<sup>iii</sup>
2. **Employers find it difficult to hire a workforce with the technical skills needed for open positions.** In addition to the foundational skills integral to success in the workplace, there are technical skills that are increasingly necessary in today's rapidly evolving economy. In a 2017 survey of 500 leadership and human resource staff, 3 in 5 agreed that it was "common for job applicants to lack the technology skills important for success in their career."<sup>iv</sup> Additionally, despite more than half of the current U.S. labor market being comprised of middle-skills jobs,<sup>2</sup> only 43 percent of workers are trained for these jobs.<sup>v</sup>
3. **Employers struggle to find candidates with job experience when looking to hire.** Approximately 1 in 5 employers reported that a candidate's lack of experience was one of the top reasons it was hard to fill positions, and among unemployed adults looking for work, lack of job experience was the number one obstacle to finding a job.<sup>vii</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These skills have been included under various terminologies, such as "social and emotional learning," "employability skills," and "foundations for young adult success."

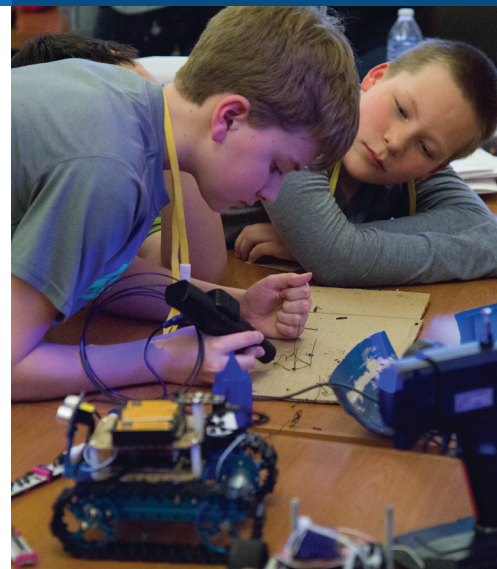
<sup>2</sup> Middle-skills jobs are those that require more than a high school degree, but not a four-year degree, such as health technicians, construction workers, and sales managers.

## Afterschool Can Help: Afterschool programs provide a ladder of supports that help students reach their career aspirations

Afterschool and summer learning programs provide students—from elementary school to high school—with a ladder of supports to prepare them for their futures:

1. **Afterschool programs build students' foundational skills and competencies that will help them in the workforce and in life.** Minneapolis Beacons provides scaffolded leadership development opportunities to build their K-12th grade students' foundational skills. Kindergarten through 5th graders build teamwork and communication skills, working in groups and practicing reaching consensus, while middle and high schoolers work on goal setting and take on leadership roles within the program, such as becoming program assistants and youth advisory board members. Beacons' participants were 2.2 times more likely to graduate in four years relative to their peers.
2. **Programs introduce students to new interests, opening their eyes to potential career pathways.** At The City, a program serving middle schoolers in rural Salina, Kan., and MEDTwo, a program working with high schoolers in Columbia, S.C., students are connected to a wide variety of career trajectories. The City students have the opportunity to explore potential, local career pathways, such as digital production, through the Education Practice & Immersion for Credit project, headed by the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce. MEDTwo students gain a closer look at the health science field through a lecture series that brings in guest speakers representing an array of health science professions. Students in both programs are able to earn digital badges that capture their new knowledge and skills.
3. **Students gain real world work experiences in afterschool that help build their familiarity with and capabilities in the workforce.** Sunrise of Philadelphia and EVOLUTIONS After School Program in New Haven, Conn., help their students develop job-seeking skills and provide them with work experiences. Sunrise of Philadelphia sets students up to land their first job through mock interviews, resume support, tips on dressing professionally, and paid internships. High schoolers in EVOLUTIONS have the opportunity for paid work in the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History or internships in Yale science faculty's laboratories. Students earn school credits for successful participation in the program. More than 5 in 6 EVOLUTIONS' students reported an increased understanding of the connection between high school academics, college academics, and careers and an increased knowledge of science-related careers.

For more information on how afterschool and summer learning programs are helping students build the necessary skills for the future workforce, check out the full issue brief and program spotlights at: <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/research.cfm>.



Research has found that younger students participating in quality afterschool and summer learning programs get along better with their peers and see gains in their pro-social behavior, as well as reductions in aggressive behaviors. Among afterschool programs for older youth that focus on workforce readiness and building students' workforce skills, participation in programs has a positive impact on students' school day attendance and graduation rates.



## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Business Roundtable. (2017). Work in Progress: How CEOs Are Helping Close America's Skills Gap.

<sup>ii</sup> Pew Research Center. (2016). Key findings about the American workforce and the changing job market.

<sup>iii</sup> The Business Roundtable. (2017). 2016 BRT Education and Workforce Survey: Results and Analysis.

<sup>iv</sup> Career Advisory Board. (2017). Exploring America's Tech Skills Gap and the Parallel Deficits of Applied Tech Skills and Hard Tech Skills.

<sup>v</sup> National Skills Coalition. (2017). United States' Forgotten Middle.

<sup>vi</sup> ManpowerGroup. (2017). 2016/2017 Talent Shortage Survey.

<sup>vii</sup> Harris Poll. (2015). American Staffing Association Workforce Monitor.

Photos courtesy of the 50 Statewide Afterschool Network