

ALIGNING PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT REGIONAL INDUSTRIALIZATION

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As global industrial firms such as Ford (Blue Oval Project) continue to anchor in Tennessee, supplier companies designed and built to accommodate large manufacturing are locating across the state. What was once productive croplands and pastures is now becoming solar farms, industrial plants and office complexes. This shift from being an agricultural dominated to an industrial economy will require a change in education philosophy for K-12 through post-secondary education. Highly-skilled workers are necessary for states to compete in a global economy (Zinth, 2014). The National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) indicates that the labor market will increasingly demand workers with high levels of knowledge and technical skills. It is essential for K-12 educational leaders and systems in Tennessee to incorporate approaches and concepts that foster the development of students with a broad learning base.

Bates (2000) suggested as workforce preparedness become an increasingly important element of individual well-being and of social and economic progress, it is essential that we put in place policies and systems interwoven into a seamless pattern of services that support the development of our human resources. According to the NCEE (2024) Career and Technical Education (CTE) systems are dynamic and constantly evolving, and the qualifications offered regularly change to anticipate future workforce demands. According to Hargis (2011), having career and technical education programs aligned with local workforce results in an adequate workforce available for employment as well as the ability of the trained workforce to find employment.

Workforce development concepts offered by Goodman and Moon (2019) can be realized when comparing current ideas to new approaches in community workforce development:

CURRENT MANNER

- Responsive to rules and systems
- Programmatic silos with special populations
- Education and workforce are different systems
- Geography matters
- Technology tracks people and results

NEW WAY

- Responsive to employer needs
- Flexible, simplified, and customized
- Efforts are seamless and learning simple
- Industry needs matter
- Technology customizes, analyzes, and empowers

In places where alignment is not present, business and industry struggle to find competent employees, possibly resulting in the loss of local jobs (Hargis, 2011). Another negative impact of improper alignment occurs when trained workers are unable to find positions in their local communities, forcing them to seek employment elsewhere and often resulting in relocation and a tax base loss for the home community (Hargis, 2011). Developing a school system focused to produce a high-performance workforce will help fulfill this increasingly important role of insuring the social and economic progress of communities (Bates, 2000).

Steady advancements in the global integration of labor markets have put the workers of all nations in direct competition with each other, and advances in the automation of work have resulted in increasing competition between machines and people for available jobs (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2024). Advancements in global communication has placed Tennessee workers in competition with foreign job seekers. Global communications also have allowed Tennessee companies to access foreign markets for exporting products and importing raw materials for industrial production. However, this same principle of enhanced global communication affords Tennessee graduates an opportunity to work abroad or be employed by foreign-based companies.



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