

HIGHER EDUCATION TASK FORCE FINAL REPORT

Work Group 4: Aligning Outcomes with Workforce Needs

Work Group 4 used the recommendations of the Governor's Workforce Task Force as a starting point for our discussion. The Group observed that in order for the higher education system to be able to respond to workforce needs, the system needs to exhibit the following characteristics:

- Agility
- Ability to align with workforce needs
- Anticipation of those needs
- Utilization of measurable or identifiable outcomes
- Ability to bridge the disconnects between workforce demand, K-12, and higher education

In order for higher education to meet work force needs and more fully develop the above characteristics, Work Group 4 identified three recommendations by which strategies and desired outcomes could be formed.

Recommendation – Education and Industry are active partners in an education system to build a kindergarten to career pipeline that meets workforce needs.

Principle

An active partnership will allow industry and education to adjust public education in Idaho to generate a well-educated citizenry while meeting the underlying demand that drives the State's 60% goal. This can be achieved by Education and Industry identifying education levels along with a baseline set of skills or competencies that allows individuals in the workforce to be qualified for immediate employment while also having the skill set/competencies to adapt to change in the workplace.

Actions (Short and Long-Term still being determined)

- The state has made significant efforts beginning in 8th grade to guide students through high school and into postsecondary education with a focus on careers. However, there is an opportunity to enhance this effort with career exploration as early as the elementary school years. Part of the focus should be on "replacement jobs" meaning making students aware of current jobs and what skills, competencies and education levels are necessary
- Student-centered career advising should be required in public higher education institutions to guide assist students in identifying a degree path and make the transition from the "college experience" to job placement and meeting workplace expectations.
- Partnerships should be formed between Education and Industry based on regional location and/or statewide based on industry sector. Those partnerships can be organic or convened by an entity. Future work should be done to determine if one method of formation is more advantageous than another. It is critical that both the partnerships and their outcomes are flexible.

- Credit-bearing internships, apprenticeships and co-op programs should be developed to connect higher education to career. Graduate education could be included within these programs.

Owner

The public education system and industry

Government & Industry Roles (if applicable)

Industry should be an active partner.

Outcomes

Recommendation – The public higher education system should shift to a competency-based system.

Principle

A competency-based education will allow students to earn certificates for degrees based on a demonstrated mastery of a competency, rather than learning outcomes based system that requires students to earn credits based predominately on class-time. A competency-based system may reduce time-to-degree given that students may be able to demonstrate mastery of a competency in less than a semester's time.

Actions (Short and Long-Term still being determined)

- Competency-based higher education programs and institutions should be reviewed for setting a process shifting the Idaho public higher education system from being based on learning outcomes to being based on demonstration of competencies. One example to review is Western Governors University, which is accredited by the same accrediting agency as Idaho's colleges and universities (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities).
- A uniform assessment system must be developed to determine student mastery of competencies. Such a system will provide confidence in the certificate or degree that has been earned, as well as allow for transfer of credit between public higher education institutions.
- Some universities have required internships and/or cooperative education programs in "appropriate" fields as part of the degree completion. These types of programs have a proven success rate of job/career placement. The business partner may not be Idaho based. Time to approval must be reasonable. The internships and cooperative education programs should be reviewed every five years to ensure that the student experience allows for introduction and mastery of industry-relevant competencies. There should be a documented level of assessment for each student receiving credit. Funding for such programs could include a mix of sources such as state, local, federal and private industry. Tuition should be adjusted to an affordable level given the other sources of funds available.

Owner

The State Board of Education should own this recommendation based on its role of approving degree programs.

Government & Industry Roles (if applicable)

Outcomes

Recommendation – Workforce training completed by an individual should count towards degree or certificate completion.

Principle

Experience and skill certifications should count as credit towards a degree, whether earned at the workplace or through the Idaho Department of Labor Workforce Training Centers. Industry considers professional certifications earned and experience when making employment considerations. Higher education should count those same factors as credit towards a degree. Counting experience and industry certifications as degree credit will entice both individuals with no college to enroll for additional education, as well as those with some college to complete a degree. The enticement is the reduction in time to complete and reduced cost.

Actions (Short and Long-Term still being determined)

- CEI uses Workforce Training Centers for Customized Workforce Training for Business and Industry, as well as needs assessment for Business and Industry. This is the concept of “just-in-time” industry requested training not containing college credit. CEI also uses Workforce Training Centers for scheduled continuation education (open to the public) for individuals wanted classes such as computer networking, software, A+ certification, and Microsoft Office instruction. Completion of these courses and application in the workplace could result in a credential that can count towards a degree. The public higher education institutions should work with the Workforce Training Centers to ensure all training programs result in academic or CTE higher education credits.
- Apprenticeships: Postsecondary education should consider apprenticeships for credit. Apprenticeship programs must have a committed business partner and a clearly defined educational curriculum that is approved by industry and higher education. These apprenticeships can be at any level of education and transferable.
- Workplace training programs, such as IT training programs should be reviewed for competencies taught to evaluate credit worthiness.
- Public higher education institutions should collaborate with the Division of Career-Technical Education to expand Badging and Skillstack. CTE’s badging program provides a way to store demonstrated competencies for employers and student resumes.

Owner

The State Board of Education

Government & Industry Roles (if applicable)

The State Board of Education and the Department of Labor must work together to assess the workplace training programs.

Outcomes