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IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR COMMUNICATIONS, RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

Implications and recommendations for future research

- **Explore differences in stakeholders' views on college readiness and career readiness.** Our review of the survey research suggests opinions differ on what college readiness and career readiness mean. Most managers, for example, do not feel college graduates are career-ready, and in focus groups we heard that employers have difficulties finding employees with the necessary skills. Meanwhile, many college and high school students feel college-ready, yet many college students need developmental education. These stakeholders may not be seeing eye to eye on what college readiness and career readiness mean. Research should, therefore, explore the perspectives of multiple stakeholders—high school students, teachers and counselors; college students, administrators and advisers; policymakers and employers—on what it means to be ready for college and work, who is responsible for college readiness and career readiness and how well those entities are fulfilling their responsibilities. Understanding these stakeholders' narratives about college readiness and career readiness can pinpoint differences of opinion, identify opportunities for engagement and highlight consensus to help more people succeed in higher education and the workforce.

- **Give voice to a diverse range of perspectives of high school students and recent graduates—including low-income students and students of color—on the quality of schools and their experiences in K–12 education.** Few publicly communicated surveys give voice to the perspectives of high school students. Therefore, it would be beneficial to hear directly from current students in order to share their perspectives on the quality of and their experiences in K–12 education. Since achievement gaps persist for low-income students and students of color, giving voice to those students' experiences can ensure their views are included in conversations about where K–12 education falls short and how it can improve. Lines of inquiry could include what they believe the purpose of K–12 education is or should be; what they are learning or think they should learn in school; what college readiness and career readiness mean to them; what they see as the strengths and weaknesses of their educational experience; or how they think K–12 education can improve. To our knowledge, no surveys have compared the perspectives of current high school students with those of recent graduates—including graduates who have enrolled directly in college and those who have newly entered the workforce—to identify differences in their opinions. While surveying students is logistically challenging, putting the voices of current students and recent graduates at the center of the conversation about K–12 education could reorient narratives about school improvement, success and the students themselves.

- **Learn from teachers and administrators how to integrate communication skills into curriculum.** Although technical skills, STEM and soft skills are important to employers, the necessity of communication should not be underestimated. Employers in focus groups spoke of struggling to find employees with basic communication skills. Other research has found that nearly half of managers believe college graduates lack writing proficiency and public speaking skills. Recent years have brought an emphasis on the technical skills and STEM in K–12 education. STEM education and technical skills need not come at the expense of other priorities. Future research can explore teachers' and administrators' views on the importance of communication skills, and how they believe these skills can be embedded within the curriculum.

- **Investigate how employers see their roles in education and find ways to support those who want to get more involved.** Researchers have used surveys and other methods to understand the skills employers seek in employees, the challenges they experience in finding those skills and employers' perspectives on the workforce. But public opinion research has not yet explored employers' perspectives on their roles in K–12 education. Employers in our focus groups briefly described a variety of ways in which they have gotten involved in the K–12 system or want to be more involved. But additional surveys or focus group research can dive deeper and provide a more robust picture of how employers are already involved in K–12 education, the challenges they face in getting more involved and the impacts they are having. At the programmatic level, connecting employers with one another and with schools can be a step toward more effective partnerships among employers, as well as between employers and schools.

- **Gain a better understanding of different stakeholders' perspectives on the purposes of education, career readiness and vocational pathways in high school.** In focus groups, employers often said college is not for everyone and some students should be prepared to enter the workforce directly. Some employers favored schools' offering distinct pathways for students looking to go to college and those looking to enter the workforce. It would be worthwhile to investigate how widespread this view is among employers and whether it is shared by other stakeholders, such as high school students, teachers and counselors; college students, administrators and advisers; and policymakers. Lines of inquiry could include the following: Do perspectives vary across demographics, regions and industries on the purposes of K–12? Have stakeholders considered the implications of a two-tiered system for equity and socioeconomic mobility? If there are two distinct pathways in high school—college-bound and vocational—how would those pathways' curricula and pedagogy differ? How would it be determined which students should enter each pathway? How would employers view graduates from vocational programs in comparison with those who hold college degrees? Do people believe less jobs should require college degrees?

Implications and recommendations for employers, teachers and other stakeholders

- **Explore different ways to promote the development of interpersonal skills in K–12 education.** Public opinion surveys and our focus groups show that many stakeholders prioritize the development of interpersonal skills as a goal of K–12 education. While the Common Core is designed to help students develop some interpersonal skills, such as critical thinking, it is worth investigating what else can be done. Many focus group participants indicated interpersonal skills should be developed at a young age, and that parents, extracurricular activities and academic coursework can all help students develop these skills. Exploring a range of ways to develop interpersonal skills— including leveraging local employers, community members and parents—can benefit all students.

- **Weigh a variety of approaches to helping high school students learn about careers and career paths.** Surveys of students have found they often graduate without knowing their career paths. In focus groups, employers stated it would be helpful for students to be exposed to many careers so they understand their options. Schools, employers and other institutions in communities could explore a variety of ways to provide students with meaningful opportunities to explore careers and experience workplaces firsthand. These could include allowing students to shadow or intern at local businesses or bringing employers into schools to speak about their professions. Schools and employers that want to do more to help students learn about careers could be connected with each other to share best practices and resources.

- **Identify effective approaches to integrating technical skills or career-readiness training into K–12 education.** Surveys of a variety of stakeholders and our focus groups with employers indicate strong support for providing more technical skills and career-readiness training as part of K–12 education. However, this type of training can take many different forms, including dedicated courses or integration of technical skills or career-readiness training into academic courses or assignments. It would, therefore, be beneficial to hear directly from students, teachers, administrators and employers to identify effective formats and content for integrating such skills and training into K–12 education. Employers in our focus groups placed a premium on qualities such as common sense, accountability and teachability. These may not fall under the traditional rubric of career readiness, so it would be particularly beneficial to know what employers think career-readiness training should encompass.

- **Consider holding community events or convene gatherings that bring together teachers, administrators, parents and local employers.** Americans believe many entities within the community are responsible for helping improve public K–12 education. Consider ways to bring together parents, local employers and community organizations with teachers, school administrators and students so they can all work together to address schools' and students' needs. These events can provide space for educators to identify ways in which they believe stakeholders from outside the K–12 system can be most helpful, while those stakeholders can take stock of current opportunities to engage with local schools and consider what they bring to the table and how they want to get more involved.

Implications and recommendations for communication

- **Do not overlook employers' views that parents are too lenient and students are lazy.** The negative views about parents and students that were heard from employers in our focus groups may be easy to dismiss as uninformed and irrelevant. Yet these narratives may be barriers to getting employers more involved in mentoring students, hiring young workers and supporting their local schools. Identifying ways to counter these narratives and to bridge gaps between employers and young people can help both students and employers succeed.

- **Help educators, administrators, policymakers and other leaders understand that education is more than academic success and college preparation.** Most federal and state policies focus on academic success and college preparation. Many Americans feel, however, that public education should be about more than academics. Many believe the public schools should offer career training, help develop interpersonal skills and prepare students to be good citizens. Amplifying Americans' voices regarding the purpose and future of public education can help ensure policymaking and implementation are aligned with public concerns, beliefs and values.