



TOWARD A MORE MEANINGFUL KENTUCKY HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA



KENTUCKY EMPLOYER AND INDUSTRY SURVEY

Why a Meaningful High School Diploma Matters

Kentucky faces a critical moment in aligning K-12 education with the demands of postsecondary education and the workforce. **Despite a high graduation rate of 92.3%, significant gaps persist in academic proficiency and workforce participation.** With less than half of 10th graders meeting core subject benchmarks and workforce participation lagging behind national averages, the value of a high school diploma as a signal of preparedness has never been more important. Addressing these gaps requires a focus on building foundational skills and fostering stronger school-employer partnerships to ensure graduates are equipped for success in college, careers, and beyond.

2024 Employer Survey

To assess the readiness of recent high school graduates, the Prichard Committee **surveyed over 600 Kentucky employers across 20+ industries in 2024.** The survey examined employer confidence in graduate preparedness, success factors, and willingness to partner with schools. Key focus areas included durable skills, work-based learning, and school-business partnerships. These insights can help education leaders and policymakers strengthen the connection between K-12 education and workforce needs.



Scan to read the full **Kentucky Employer Survey Analysis and Report 2024**

Is a **Kentucky high school diploma** a reliable indicator of a graduate's readiness for college and career success?

The data tell a story...

Kentucky ranks

4th

in the nation in High School Graduation rate

yet

Kentucky ranks

46th

in postsecondary enrollment

44th

number of residents with an associates degree or higher

46th

in median household income

meanwhile

According to Prichard Committee Big Bold Future metrics

Despite obtaining diplomas, national survey data show that

Fewer than Half

of students say they are equipped to make decisions about their futures.

Kentucky businesses and employers should expect that a high school diploma signals foundational preparation for a myriad of paths post high school, and the diploma is a reliable indicator that Kentucky's future talent pipeline is well-prepared.

35%

of 10th graders are proficient and above in math skills 2023-24

45%

of 10th graders are proficient and above in reading skills 2023-24

also

Kentucky has a

57%

workforce participation rate which continues to trail most other states.

Approximately

One out of Seven

16-24 year old Kentuckians are neither in school nor working.

30.4%

of graduates directly entered the workforce in 2023

53.3%

college-going rate in 2023

35%

of graduates pursued a work-school combination in 2023

K-12 schools must equip students with the necessary academic knowledge and skills to pursue their chosen pathways immediately after high school graduation.

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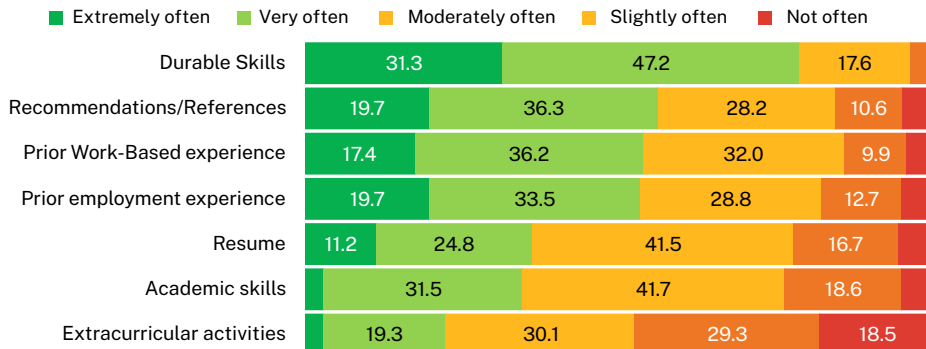


Business Leaders and Employers Prioritize Durable Skills

DURABLE SKILLS

Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, Leadership, Fortitude, Growth Mindset, Character, Mindfulness, Metacognition

What factors do you rely on the most when assessing a recent High School graduates readiness for employment?



Kentucky employers emphasize durable skills as essential for post-high school success, with 78.5% rating them highly in employment readiness.

They stress that academic success alone isn't enough, prioritizing professionalism, work ethic, interpersonal skills, and emotional intelligence. These findings highlight the need to better integrate durable skills into K-12 education.

Students Need Practical, Real-World Skills Beyond Academics

In addition to academics, what experiences, knowledge, and skills should k-12 education systems emphasize to better prepare students for life beyond high school?



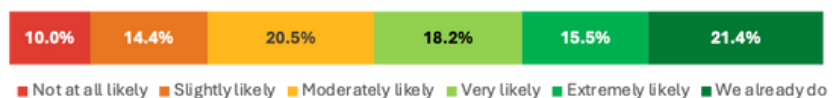
For additional skills that employers value see full report

Employers emphasize the importance of improving education to better prepare students with practical skills and knowledge that align with workplace expectations, addressing gaps that impact career readiness and success.

Work-Based Learning Programs Show Strong But Unrealized Potential

Kentucky employers value practical work experience in high school education, but only **21.4% currently offer work-based learning opportunities for students.** With **54.2% willing to provide such opportunities**, there is significant potential to expand hands-on, real-world application of learning.

How likely is your company to offer work-based learning opportunities (e.g., internships, apprenticeships) to current HS students?



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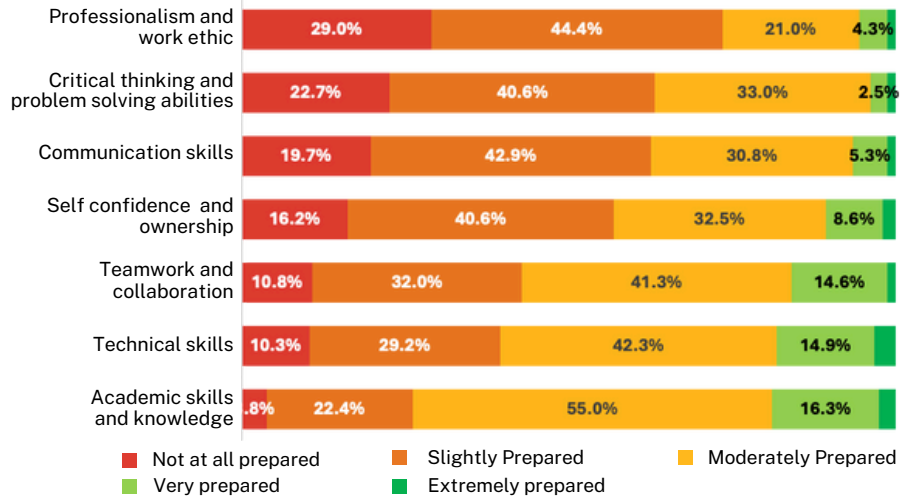
Kentucky Employers Have Mixed Confidence in the Preparedness of Recent High School Graduates

Kentucky employers have mixed confidence in the preparedness of recent high school graduates. While **56% report moderate to high confidence**, only **12% express strong confidence**, and 14% have none. **Less than 10% believe graduates are well-prepared in key areas like professionalism, critical thinking, and communication.** Although over 60% and 70% rate graduates as moderately prepared in technical and academic skills, concerns remain about their readiness in fundamental workplace competencies.

How confident are you in the preparedness of recent Kentucky High School graduates?



To what degree do you believe recent Kentucky High School graduates are well-prepared for the workforce in the following areas?



Business-School Partnerships Remain Underutilized Despite Being Highly Valued

How important is it for K-12 schools to partner with the business community to foster future talent pipelines?



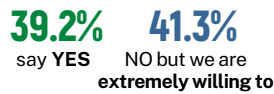
less than 5%
say not at all or slightly important

Has your company previously partnered with local K-12 schools for the purposes of preparing students for the workforce?



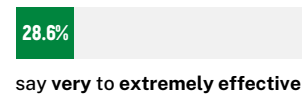
49%
of respondents say NO or unsure

Does your company participate in local community discussions focused on aligning education with workforce needs?



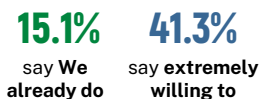
less than 5% say NO and we are not interested
15.5% say unsure

Please rate the effectiveness of existing partnerships between your company, if any, and local K-12 schools in preparing students for the workforce.



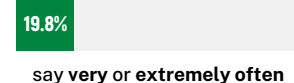
6.4% say NOT AT ALL effective
16.2% say unsure

Would your company be willing to collaborate with local educational institutions to help shape their curriculum to align with industry needs?



less than 4% say NOT AT ALL willing

How often is there communication between your business and local K-12 institutions to prepare students for entering the workforce?



15% say Never
7.6% say unsure

Kentucky employers highly value partnerships with local K-12 education, with **83.7%** viewing them as very to extremely valuable for developing a skilled workforce. While **only half have partnered with K-12 schools**, over **55% show strong interest in curriculum collaboration**, and nearly **56% are open to supporting aligning curriculum with workforce needs**. However, **only 19.8% report frequent interaction with schools**, highlighting a significant communication gap and untapped potential for deeper collaboration.



Barriers to Successful Implementation of Workforce Readiness Programs

To what extent do the following factors act as barriers to the successful implementation of workforce readiness programs for High School students?

Limited availability of qualified instructors or mentors



50% say

Significant - Very significant barrier

Difficulty in engaging students who may not immediately recognize the value of workforce readiness programs



46% say

Significant - Very significant barrier

Challenges in coordinating schedules between schools and employers



45% say

Significant - Very significant barrier

Moderate Barriers:

- **Employer awareness on engaging students** (39.5% significant)
- **Liability concerns deter participation** (39% significant)
- **Geographic and transportation limitations** (38.1% significant)
- **Limited collaboration between schools, employers, and communities** (38.1% significant)
- **Inadequate funding** (38.4% significant)

Addressing these barriers is essential for creating effective workforce readiness programs and school-business partnerships.

Comprehensive analysis of barriers listed in full report

Employers Value Specific Incentives to Increase School-Employer Partnerships

How important are the following incentives or benefits that would encourage your company's involvement in school/employer partnerships regarding students' workforce preparedness?

Access to a pool of potential future employees



87% say

Moderately - Extremely important

Tailored training or development opportunities for potential hires



82% say

Moderately - Extremely important

School sponsored programs or intermediaries that facilitate programming needs



79% say

Moderately - Extremely important

The survey findings suggest that **companies are primarily interested in incentives that can help them shape the skills of potential hires and gain access to a pipeline of future talent.** They value structured, formalized collaboration with schools and a clear understanding of the benefits their involvement will bring. While financial incentives are not irrelevant, the data indicates that **companies are more responsive to systemic support and programs that address their long-term workforce needs.**