



Building Pathways: Connecting Classroom to Industry

Issue Brief | 2025

Prologue: From Conversation to Action

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At Discovery Education and CECP, we know that meaningful change happens when business and education communities come together to listen, learn, and act. The *Building Pathways: Connecting Classroom to Industry* series was designed to make those conversations possible, creating a space where local education leaders and industry partners could share ideas, challenges, and solutions for preparing students for the future of work.

Across the country, these convenings brought together real voices from both sectors. What emerged were authentic insights into what's working, what's not, and what's needed next to better connect classrooms to careers. The findings captured in this issue brief reflect those honest discussions and the shared commitment to ensuring every student can access meaningful career opportunities.

We hope you use these findings to inform your strategic planning, strengthen partnerships, and expand your impact in ways that help students, communities, and industries thrive together.

Executive Summary

This issue brief dives into the evolving landscape of education and workforce development, spotlighting insights from Building Pathways events hosted by Discovery Education and Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose (CECP) in 2024–2025. It surfaces three urgent themes and actionable opportunities to help students thrive in tomorrow's economy.

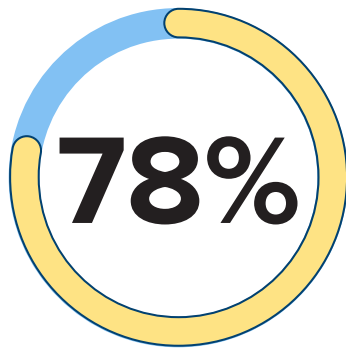
	Key Theme	Opportunity
1	Regional alignment is key. National momentum around workforce readiness is growing, but local partnerships between schools and employers are what truly unlock success.	Partner locally. Build strong ties with districts, educators, and community organizations to meet talent needs and create meaningful career pathways.
2	Future-ready means more than technical skills. Students need critical thinking, communication, and adaptability to succeed—not just credentials.	Connect the dots. Help educators understand and teach the soft skills and mindsets that matter most in the workplace.
3	Hands-on learning builds real-world readiness. CTE, internships, and apprenticeships aren't just nice-to-haves—they're launchpads to good jobs.	Activate learn-and-earn. Co-create programs that give students paid, practical experience and a clear path to employment.

Current State and Trends

What is a good job, and what does it take to get one? The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce (CEW) defines a “good job” as one that pays, nationally, a minimum of \$43,000 to workers ages 25–44 and a minimum of \$55,000 to workers ages 45–64, with a median of \$82,000 for all good jobs.

CEW defines a “promising occupation” as one that meets two criteria:

1. more than half of jobs in the occupational group are projected to be good for workers on a given educational pathway in 2031, and
2. the occupational group will employ a higher share of workers on a specific educational pathway than will the overall economy in 2031 (more than 52 percent for workers on the bachelor’s degree pathway, 22 percent on the middle-skills pathway, and 26 percent on the high school pathway).ⁱ



Of respondents indicated that their companies have one or more programs or initiatives designed to foster a workforce pipeline.

Workforce pipeline development is a priority for companies, and an opportunity to engage with education partners.

In an October 2024 CECP Pulse Survey of corporate leaders, 78% of respondents indicated that their companies have one or more programs or initiatives designed to foster a workforce pipeline. Eighty-one percent noted a focus on young adults.ⁱⁱ Educators also feel strongly that corporations are in a unique position to help prepare students for future job opportunities. **Most superintendents (90%) and teachers (87%) agree that corporations can help bridge gaps between the classroom and students’ careers.**ⁱⁱⁱ

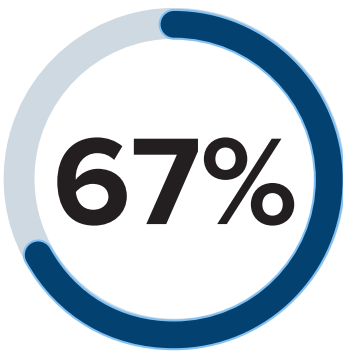
Addressing education and workforce needs is especially important amid national economic and policy changes. In an April 2025 CECP Pulse Survey, 15% of respondents indicated that they would address the potential impact of tariffs by reshoring work and/or investing in workforce pipelines.^{iv} In another April 2025 CECP Pulse Survey, 16% of respondents indicated that their companies would respond to potential gaps in funding due to changes to the U.S. Department of Education by increasing community investments in education programs, while 50% of respondents did not plan to increase support. **Seventy percent of respondents indicated that education is a priority focus area for community investment and engagement.**^v

Key Themes and Opportunities

1

Regional alignment is key. National momentum around workforce readiness is growing, but local partnerships between schools and employers are what truly unlock success.

Across the country, schools want to equip students for jobs of the future, and companies want a prepared and committed workforce. Students share these interests, with 70% considering career exploration resources important for their long-term success and day-to-day learning. Still, 67% of students worry that education is not evolving to meet future workforce needs.^{vi}



Of students worry that education is not evolving to meet future workforce needs.

Collaborative cross-sector partnerships foster mutual understanding, align classroom learning with workforce needs, and open doors for real-world experiences like internships and job shadowing. Companies' considerations around workforce development are rooted in micro and macro factors: each company must meet its specific workforce needs to achieve industry-specific competitive advantages, while the nation needs a highly skilled representative workforce if U.S. institutions are to maintain global leadership in innovation and technology in the modern knowledge economy.^{vii}



Leader Perspective: Saint Paul, MN

There should always be a way to figure out how to support education because it touches so many fields.

Jackie Turner

Executive Chief of Administration and Operations
Saint Paul Public Schools

While access to industry varies by geography, students in rural areas need the same opportunities as those in more urban settings, and scalable solutions like digital learning platforms can help close that gap. Learning can happen anywhere if students have the connectivity, digital know-how, and professional and educational support to succeed.



Leader Perspective: Saint Paul, MN

In a capitalist economy, when there are market failures, we all need to step up. We think and work cross-sector.

Michael Stroik

Vice President of Community Impact
3M

Opportunity

Partner locally. Build strong ties with districts, educators, and community organizations to meet talent needs and create meaningful career pathways. Align on long-term goals that address students' learning needs and employers' workforce needs. Pilot programs and pivot as needed to drive scalability through investment in pathways that will lead to good jobs for students. To build meaningful relationships with education partners, seek multiple opportunities for engagement including grantmaking, in-kind donations, and employee volunteerism. Build student awareness by having employees volunteer in classrooms and career fairs; invite students to tour company facilities, understand potential roles, and explore a day in the life. Virtual opportunities connect employee volunteers to more students, regardless of geography.



Leader Perspective: Phoenix, AZ

Early deposits can lead to a much larger applicant pool. Exposure leads to interest.

Arun Bhaskara-Baba

Chief Information Officer
Honeywell Aerospace Technologies



Leader Perspective: Phoenix, AZ

A big part of this is career development, so just engaging at the lowest level possible to help students understand what career opportunities exist. Even juniors don't know what opportunities exist.

Chad Eichenlaub

Director of Career and Technical Education

Peoria Unified School District

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In Action

3M Advanced Training Center.

The Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) 3M Advanced Training Center is a dedicated space for SPPS students to explore career pathways and complete relevant college coursework to jumpstart their future success. The career pathways, including business, criminal justice, construction management, manufacturing, health science, and cybersecurity, reflect the anticipated workforce needs and opportunities in each area. 3M's support for the Advanced Training Center is part of a longstanding partnership with SPPS and aligns with 3M's robust science encouragement programs.^{viii ix}

2

Future-ready means more than technical skills. Students need critical thinking, communication, and adaptability to succeed—not just credentials.

In a rapidly changing job market, today's students must be prepared to be lifelong learners. This mindset—combined with adaptable, skills-based training—will help students thrive amid future economic shifts. This presents an understandable point of friction: Teachers lack guidance from industry on how to develop or assess students' future-readiness, and student success is often evaluated based on standardized test scores.

Teachers and students report a quality gap in interpersonal and life skill curriculum. Both students and teachers feel schools are not meeting their expectations within these areas (communication, critical thinking, life skills, and growth mindset). Only 60-71% of both teachers and students indicate that the curriculum and instruction for these skills is high quality. **This indicates there is a 20% gap between the quality of instruction for these skills and their perceived value to successfully navigate the future.^x**

 *Leader Perspective: Atlanta, GA*

Strategic judgment is going to be the skill set that really helps people stand out.

Woodson Savage

Vice President, Enterprise Data Product Management and Analytics
Cox Automotive

Opportunity

Connect the dots. Help educators understand and teach the critical skills and mindsets that matter most in the workplace. Corporate recruiting often assesses technical and critical skills, and employees' professional and leadership development deepens those skills. Share with education partners the criteria you use to evaluate candidates as well as the competencies you prioritize. Providing the corporate perspective and process to educators makes clear to them what students need to be ready for future careers. Collaborate with educators to develop common language and competencies for teaching and assessing future-ready skills.

 *Leader Perspective: Atlanta, GA*

These kids come in and they're so smart. But they don't know how to persevere. They don't know what a productive struggle is. They don't have a process for moving through a problem.

Sally Holloway

Director of Artificial Intelligence and Computer Science
Gwinnett County Public Schools

3

Hands-on learning builds real-world readiness. CTE, internships, and apprenticeships aren't just nice-to-haves—they're launchpads to good jobs.

Career and technical education (CTE), internships, and apprenticeships give students hands-on experience and help industry address critical workforce needs. Partnership and communication between school districts and employers ensures that the needs of both are met. These needs and considerations vary across the country. A small business may have one internship opportunity, while a Fortune 500 company may have an established internship program with many opportunities. A small business partner may not have the skills and experience needed to manage an intern. **Capacity building and training business leaders of enterprises of all sizes to shepherd students' work-based learning journeys maximizes the benefit to both the student and the business.**

Engaging students of all ages in career exploration, from elementary through high school, builds awareness of potential pathways and motivates skill development.

That engagement need not be limited to the classroom and extends to out of school time. When stakeholders across the learning ecosystem (e.g., teachers, families, coaches, out-of-school [OOS] professionals) actively support students' career pathways, future challenges may not seem so daunting. At the core of the ecosystem are teachers, whose success and confidence directly impacts students'. Holistic approaches to support teachers include prioritizing recruitment and retention to combat teacher shortages, training on career opportunities and readiness, and addressing cost of living concerns so teachers can afford to continue in their roles.



Leader Perspective: Denver, CO

Being 'future-ready' means combining technical expertise with curiosity, adaptability, and strong communication and problem-solving skills. Through initiatives like our Community Workforce Initiative, we emphasize job-specific training and the soft skills that drive long-term success. Creating real-world, collaborative learning experiences can help students build confidence and resilience for the future.

Suzanne Fallender

VP, Global Impact & Sustainability
Prologis



Leader Perspective: New York City, NY

Our internship program continues to be an integral part of our culture as interns at Meta contribute to real projects, gaining hands-on experience and making meaningful contributions to their teams. Each intern works on a curated project plan designed to challenge their skills, promote growth, and deliver impact across Meta's family of apps and services.

Maryanne Ravenel

Engagement Business Partner
Meta

Opportunity

Activate learn-and-earn. Co-create programs that give students paid, practical experience and a clear path to employment. Identify barriers and pilot new ideas to build the workforce pipelines regions and the nation need. Seek and develop scalable solutions that engage and serve communities, industries, educators, and students as true partners in the process.



In Action

Honeywell Aerospace in Phoenix, AZ, offers internships to high school seniors who are enrolled in or have completed CTE courses relevant to manufacturing. **With the support of a 1:1 mentor, high school interns build skills including mechanical component assembly, troubleshooting, and following safety protocols.** Interns can then join the company as full-time employees upon graduation from high school.^{xi}

Conclusion

To prepare students for success in tomorrow's economy, **education and industry must work hand-in-hand to create scalable future-ready pathways**. The insights from Building Pathways events underscore the urgency of aligning regional efforts, expanding soft skill development, and investing in hands-on learning experiences. As stakeholders look ahead, three actionable next steps emerge:

1. Engage with regional workforce coalitions

Convene local employers, educators, and community leaders to co-design programs that reflect regional labor market needs and student aspirations.

2. Develop a shared skills framework

Collaborate across sectors to define and integrate essential soft skills—like communication, adaptability, and teamwork—into curriculum and assessment practices.

3. Scale learn-and-earn models

Pilot and expand paid internship, apprenticeship, and CTE programs that offer students real-world experience and a direct path to good jobs.

About Building Pathways

Leveraging the power of district relationships and corporate partnerships, Discovery Education hosted a series of working events in partnership with CECP to facilitate conversations and foster collaboration amongst today's industry and education leaders in the U.S. that ultimately supports workforce readiness at the local and national level.



Building Pathways Events Served Three Key Objectives



Build better connections between industry leaders and education leaders on a local level.

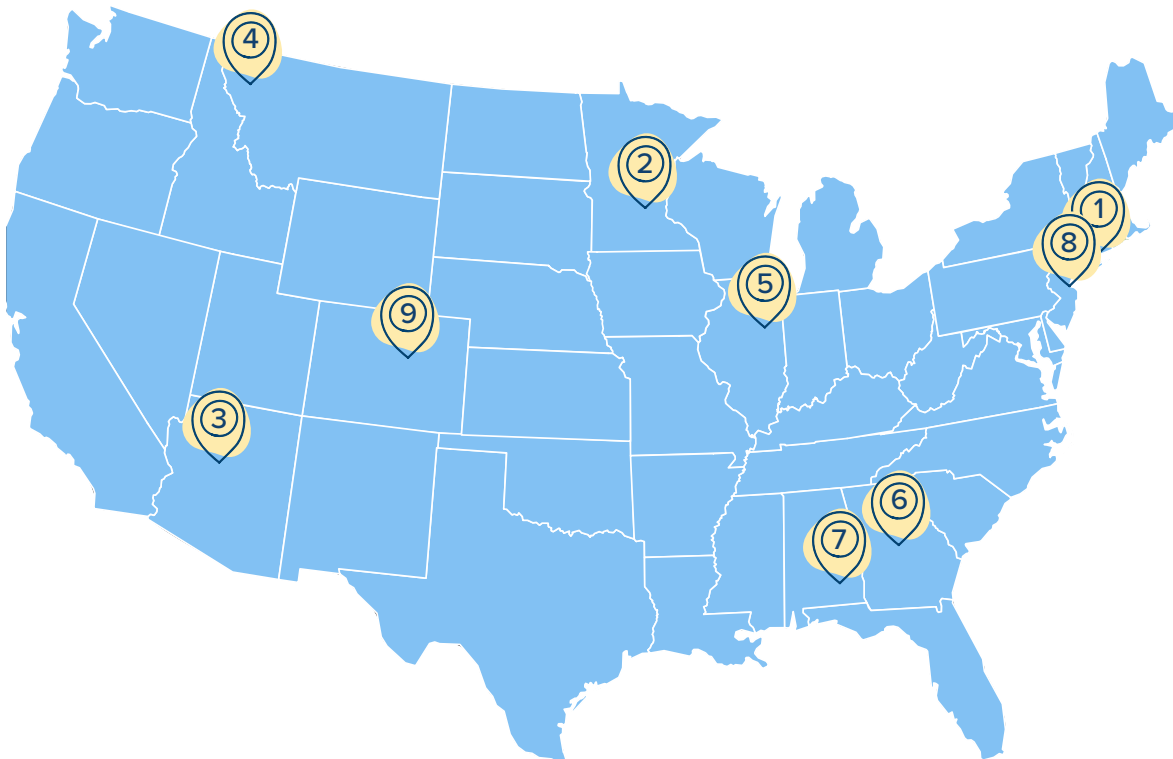


Facilitate honest dialogue about what is working for today's students and where there is room for improvement.



Develop creative solutions for bridging conversations between classroom practices and working world needs.

Building Pathways Events Were Held in 9 Locations



1. Boston, MA at Sanofi
2. Saint Paul, MN at 3M
3. Phoenix, AZ at Honeywell Aerospace
4. Missoula, MT at Cognizant
5. Chicago, IL at Loyola University
6. Atlanta, GA at Cox Enterprises
7. Birmingham, AL at Innovation Depot
8. New York, NY at Meta
9. Denver, CO at Prologis

About Discovery Education

Discovery Education is the worldwide edtech leader supporting PreK–12 learning with award-winning digital content, instructional resources, and innovative classroom tools that make teaching more engaging and effective. Serving 4.5 million educators and 45 million students across 100+ countries, Discovery Education partners with districts, states, and trusted organizations to inspire curiosity, build confidence, and accelerate learning with the goal of increasing career awareness and preparing students for post-secondary success, the Discovery Education Corporate Partnerships business bridges industries and classrooms to bring real-world education into classroom instruction.

About CECP

Chief Executives for Corporate Purpose® (CECP) is the only nonpartisan business counsel and network dedicated to driving measurable returns on corporate purpose. We promote responsible, purpose-driven business as it increases customer loyalty, builds employee engagement, improves brand trust, attracts top talent, connects with strategic investors, and contributes to the bottom line.

More than 200 of the world's leading companies seek to improve their return on purpose through access to CECP's solutions in insights and benchmarking. With our companies, we harness the power of corporate purpose for the benefit of business, stakeholders, and society.

Explore how Discovery Education prioritizes scalable, future-ready pathways for students—visit [DiscoveryEducation.com](https://www.discoveryeducation.com).

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