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Recasting College & Career Readiness



 College For
Every Student™



GE Foundation



Trinity College Dublin

Recasting College & Career Readiness

Introduction

Last fall, 20.5 million students attended college – nearly an all-time high, and an increase of almost 33 percent since 2000, according to the U.S. Department of Education. By 2024, just seven years from now, more than 23 million students are expected to enroll in college in the United States.

One might expect, with this influx of educated job-seekers joining the workforce, that businesses would have no problem filling the millions of new jobs requiring skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). And one might expect that educators would have no trouble guiding the millions of new students entering their classrooms to a place where they'd gain these valuable skills.

But that's not the case, as a distinguished group of educators, elected officials, policymakers and industry leaders made clear at a two-day summit held in May 2017

by College For Every Student (CFES), a non-profit group that helps low-income students from urban and rural communities in the U.S. and abroad become college and career ready.

Participants in the summit, “Recasting College and Career Readiness,” learned that despite the record number of students graduating college, millions of jobs in this new economy go unfilled – 81 percent of employers, in fact, say they have difficulty filling high-skill jobs. At the same time, K-12 and college educators alike lamented their struggle to match students with coursework and out-of-class experiences that develop the types of skills that employers want.

Despite that labor shortage, a deep well of potential talent from low-income communities has gone untapped. Fewer than 50 percent of high school graduates from those areas enroll in two- and four-year institutions, while nearly 80 percent of graduates from high-income households go on to college.



In recent years, educators, employers and others have touted the concept of college and career readiness as a salve for these mismatches in labor supply and demand. Despite localized successes, data indicate the effort has yet to take hold at scale. One recent study shows that 80 percent of college instructors and 60 percent of employers say schools do not do an adequate job of preparing students for college.

Part of the challenge is there is no agreement on what, exactly, college and career readiness entails. “We need to develop a definition for college and career ready that works for our constituents, our educators, our families, and, most of all, our students,” said Rick Dalton, CFES President and CEO, in introducing the event, held at the group’s headquarters in Essex, New York.

With that task in mind, summit attendees – including GE Foundation Executive Director for Education and Skills Kelli Wells; Information Technology Industry Council President and CEO Dean Garfield; and former Republican presidential candidate and New York State Governor George Pataki and former Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank – embarked on an intensive

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— Rick Dalton,
CFES president and CEO

series of presentations and roundtable discussions to work through the issues plaguing efforts to achieve true readiness.

The group’s consensus: The best chance at ensuring students graduate from college with the skills necessary to succeed in careers that are in demand is to forge better communication, and deeper partnerships, not just

between industry and educators, but also among parents, students and government. It’s about “moving from silos to systems,” said Doug Bauer, Executive Director of the Clark Foundation, in aligning the needs of each of these groups. College and career readiness isn’t merely a checklist that can be ticked off with readiness as a result, but an intensive process that yields outcomes tailored for each individual.

That process, they found, needs to start before high school. And to work best, college and career readiness means the following:

- Giving students the means to imagine themselves in college – because if students can’t envision a future that involves college, college readiness itself will remain forever out of reach.
- Working with students to develop grit, perseverance,



Kelli Wells, GE Foundation Executive Director for Education and Skills



Dean Garfield, Information Technology Industry Council president and CEO

leadership, teamwork and other Essential Skills that they will need to draw from in order to successfully complete college and embark on 21st century careers.

- Working with families to support their children's educational journeys, as many of them have little experience with higher education.
- Establishing partnerships, such as College MAP (Mentoring for Access & Persistence), a program developed by CFES and Ernst & Young that has reached more than 1,500 low-income youth in 30 urban sites across the United States. The College MAP program matches EY employee mentors with high school juniors who continue the mentoring relationship through college.

This white paper looks at many of those important steps, and recommends strategies to put them in place. "It's no longer about the silos that we're in, but it's about collaboration," said Wells of the GE Foundation. "It's how we create products, how we invest, how we expand our philanthropic efforts, and it's how we impact our kids. And we cannot do this alone. We have to build our relationships with each other. We need to have all the stakeholders at the table so that we really can drive change."

CFES Scholar and Readiness Exemplar

Ryan McLennon, a rising senior at New York's Plattsburgh State College, knows how far he's come to be a college student. "Six years ago, if you asked me if I would be in this position, I would have laughed at you," he said while addressing summit participants.

McLennon was born in rural Jamaica. When he turned 13, his mother moved to the U.S., leaving him behind. The woman who subsequently raised McLennon died just a year later, and McLennon was uprooted to a poor, violent neighborhood in Kingston, rampant with drugs and gangs. At 16, his mother reached out and brought him to the Bronx.

McLennon was grateful to escape. He set his sights on finishing high school, and perhaps joining the military. But then a counselor in his high school approached him and suggested that he join CFES. "She told me, 'You're smart. You're intelligent.' It was the first time anybody in my life had believed in me," McLennon said.

College, he said, was something he never seriously considered. "I always wanted to be something in life, but I didn't know what I wanted to be," said McLennon. Regardless, he took up his counselor's invitation and visited



From left: former Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank, CFES program director Leroy Nesbitt, and former Republican presidential candidate and New York State Governor George Pataki.



Ryan McLennon, former CFES Scholar and current student at SUNY Plattsburgh

Skidmore College, 180 miles and a world away from the Bronx, where he remembers exactly what he was doing when his life changed.

“I made the decision to go to college when I was laying on a dorm bed at Skidmore while everybody was asleep,” McLennon said. “It was a surreal moment for me. To realize I could go to college. I could make something of myself.”

McLennon’s tale may be more dramatic than most. But at the core of that story is a truth faced by many young people from underserved communities: these students have few college and career readiness role models. “Readiness needs to be palpable,” Rick Dalton said. “We need to literally walk students down the readiness pathway. Our kids need to visit colleges, meet college students and get our help figuring out how to pay for college.”

“For students to be college and career ready, they have to want it and they need to visualize what the future can

Sophomore Summit

Indeed, getting students on college campuses so that they can see themselves in college is a critical part of the readiness process espoused by CFES. One long-standing CFES partnership, with The Clark Foundation, brings 400 10th graders from central New York State, to a different college campus in March each year. While there, those students meet with dozens of college and business leaders who counsel them in the steps they need to take to be college and career ready.

hold for them,” said Sarah Grimson, an administrator at the Trinity Access Programme (TAP) that helps low-income students get into and through Trinity College Dublin.

Exposing students to campus life is especially important to a cohort that often has no previous experience with higher education. Families are included early in the process, as CFES offers workshops to introduce the college application and financial aid process. When combined with other CFES core practices such as mentoring and leadership through service, CFES Scholars gradually come to view college not only as possible, but probable.

That probability can only be achieved through implementing an end-to-end system. “CFES is in place in every one of our schools,” Doug Bauer said. “Teachers and counselors, superintendents and principals are engaged in this effort. They organize resources and create a culture where college is not a choice, but is, in fact, an expectation.”

But even if the goal of getting students to college is universal, the process itself is not one-size-fits-all, said Linda McIntyre, Headmaster of Jeremiah E. Burke High



Linda McIntyre, headmaster of Jeremiah E. Burke High School in Boston

School in Boston. Rather than focusing on test results, she and others urged educators to size up the students themselves and recognize their life experience as much as their classroom experience. Although GPA and SAT scores have long been considered both benchmarks of achievement and harbingers of future performance, those data “have no relevance to a black or brown child who has been left out for most of his or her educational experience,” McIntyre said.

Often, educators find K-12 curricula too rigid to promote individual development; rather than steering students to find topics they’re interested in, students are shunted onto prescribed tracks that don’t really captivate their interests.

The GE Foundation’s Wells and others urged schools to get away from the practice of mandating curricular tracks for large groups of students, saying they’re ultimately a detriment to helping students identify areas of interest to pursue. “I think it’s a bit disingenuous to expect a student at 17 or 18 is going to know what their career path is,” said Kristine Duffy, President of SUNY Adirondack, a community college in Queensbury, NY.

Rick Dalton spoke about what he called *de facto tracking*. “We’ve all heard people say: ‘Kids don’t need college, what they need is vocational training.’ That’s vocational tracking,” Dalton said. “The problem here is the kids they’re referring to are the low-income, the underserved. If we target these children to vocational readiness—rather than career readiness, which is the higher-paying track, we’re moving them out of and away from the college pipeline. We’re closing doors and limiting opportunity.”

“We need to change the culture, change the roles, change the responsibilities, of the people that serve public schools to be relevant, to be innovative, to be responsive to what’s happening now,” McIntyre said. “A guidance counselor that serves 500 kids cannot possibly differentiate pathways

“For students to be college and career ready, they have to want it and they need to visualize what the future can hold for them.”

– Sarah Grimson,
Trinity Access Programmes

for every single one of them. But if we had partnerships with folks like CFES and others, we could personalize the opportunities for children to have access to career and college readiness in ways that suit them and not ways that suit the system.”

Working with students as individuals keeps them engaged and moves them

toward the desired outcome: To enter college and find meaningful career paths. “School systems have failed too many children – the pedagogy is not working any more,” said CFES board member Lawson Allen. “We need to engage kids at the level of their interests. To excite them about what interests them – that’s what’s going to keep them from dropping out of school, that’s going to keep them out of the prison system, that’s going to keep them off of public welfare.”

A Brilliant Strategy

It’s impossible to prepare students for careers if they don’t know what their interests are. Considering that job descriptions for as many as two-thirds of existing jobs will change in the not-so-distant future (if the jobs have even been invented yet), helping students understand the road ahead is critical. To address this knowledge gap, the GE Foundation has partnered with CFES to develop *Brilliant Career Lab*, a website that introduces high school students to careers that might interest them, what skills they will need to compete in those career pathways, and the requisite classes they need to take.

Here’s how it works: After logging in to the website, at brilliantcareerlab.org, students complete a 60-question assessment asking them to rate their interest in performing certain jobs. Would they enjoy working in daycare? Managing a department within a large company? Finding a sugar substitute in the laboratory? Students rank each possibility from *strongly dislike* to *strongly like*.

After completing the assessment, student interests are identified as they relate to thousands of career choices. Each career description includes current salary information, the number of openings in the field, a list of skills needed to do the job, and courses students should consider taking to prepare for this career, all the way from 7th grade into college. The website also provides modules for students to develop the Essential Skills.



Rick Dalton, CFES president and CEO

Building New Career Pathways

Summit attendees consistently cited pathways development as one of the most important objectives for improved college and career readiness. That's especially true at a time when once well-travelled roads to middle-class success close down, said Dean Garfield, President and CEO of the Information Technology Industry Council.

Garfield, whose group represents tech industry titans such as Facebook, Google, IBM and Microsoft, offers his own mother's path out of poverty as an example. She held a life-long job at a razor factory, where she inspected blades for defects. Automation, though, has obviated the job Garfield's mother once had. Machines can perform those tasks much more quickly and accurately.

As familiar pillars erode, job seekers can't rely on the careers their parents had. They need to educate and prepare themselves for what's available. "What we really need today is clarity around career pathways and a much deeper connection between communities, schools and employers," Garfield said. Members of his group need to do a better job sharing clear expectations with educators and students, so they can prepare to enter the tech field. "Telling someone 'I want you to go to college and study engineering,' doesn't really do it. We're moving beyond a top-line job description



Ron Chesborough, president of Cazenovia College in New York

to speaking about the actual competencies. What particular skills do you need to be a web programmer versus a computer programmer?"



To reach as many students as possible, GE has recently expanded its internship program to include high schools as well as colleges, said Wells. In a panel discussion, SUNY Adirondack's Kristine Duffy and Ron Chesborough, President of Cazenovia College in New York, talked about programs that give high school students experience in the college classroom, and college students experience in industry.

As students embark on the path to landing jobs in a new economy, those partnerships reinforce the need for a college degree – but not necessarily a four-year degree.

"Every student should have the opportunity to go to college," Garfield said.

While community college can be a great stepping stone – or, depending on the career a student chooses, a destination – associate degrees still carry a stigma with many. But even Chesborough, who leads a four-year institution, encouraged more to consider that route. "In my view, community college for many students is a great start, because they learn what they love to do, and they also learn to be college students."

Where the Pathway Leads: Gauging Student success

CFES delivers results. That much is evident by hearing the stories of CFES Scholars such as Ryan McLennon, or looking at schools across the country where 99 percent of seniors are graduating and 95 percent are attending college.

To build stronger data and insights about how CFES schools find success, though, the organization is developing a survey that will assess the attributes that lead to college and career readiness.

This 10-question survey, to be administered to all CFES Scholars in grades 6-12 beginning in the fall, will assess how much knowledge students have about the steps they must take to pursue a college degree, and measure their progress in attaining the Essential Skills that support college and career readiness.

To measure that progress, the survey asks students to assess statements like *I am a hard worker* or *I see myself as a leader*. “These attributes are very closely connected to going on to college and being career ready,” said David Holmes, former head of high schools in Idaho and Connecticut who is leading the development of the survey. “Essential Skills are more powerfully related to success in college, in work, in life, than conventional measures like SAT scores and GPA.”

Just 26 years ago, when CFES began its work, its goal was one more step. To urge high school dropouts to take one more step and earn a diploma, and those with a diploma to take one more step to college. It wasn't long before the goal shifted to access, to ensure every student make the leap to college. Then the goal was persistence: ensuring that CFES Scholars attain college degrees.

Today, thousands of students later, the national emphasis has shifted to college and career readiness – because simply graduating from college isn't enough. Too many students complete their degrees without any career direction. Cliona Hannon, Director of the Trinity Access Programmes, summed up the progression at the end of the summit in this way: “The norm has moved from completing high school to the necessity for post-secondary education that tees up students for the labor market.”



James Carter, superintendent of schools, Greene County, Alabama

Two Perspectives, One Goal: A Conversation with George Pataki and Barney Frank

Former New York Gov. George Pataki and retired Massachusetts Congressman Barney Frank may be on the opposite side of the political fence, but when they shared the stage during the Summit, they each made it abundantly clear: A college degree is critically important, and CFES is a leader in the work to help students find mentors, develop pathways to college and career and learn traits such as grit, leadership, teamwork and perseverance.

In discussing the necessary steps to prepare students for college and career, though, both Pataki and Frank said society needs to go farther.

Frank said long before children can contemplate higher education, policymakers and educators need to address the challenges underserved students face at home, and make a concerted effort to reduce economic inequality. “I don't know how you teach people who don't have enough to eat,” Frank said.

Pataki agreed with Frank about the depth of the economic divide in America. An even more pernicious wedge, he suggested, is an educational divide: One in which part of the country values and pursues a college education, and another that doesn't.

He urged a two-pronged approach to ease that divide: Ensure students get the information and role models necessary to encourage them to pursue college – in essence, he said, what CFES already does.

Pataki said that while education provides a bridge to achieving the American Dream, individuals need to re-calibrate what that dream is. More than a name-brand diploma and hefty paycheck, he said, the American Dream is about economic and personal success. “To me, it's having confidence in the future,” Pataki said. “And living your own life in a way where you do your best to help others and make the world a little better when you're done.”

Next Steps in Making Students College and Career Ready

Through evidence and experience, CFES has learned that college and career readiness requires both pathway knowledge and the Essential Skills.

- 1. Employ a clear definition for college and career readiness understandable to not only educators but students themselves.** We recognize the vital importance of academic preparation for success in college and the need for alignment in high school and college coursework for career readiness. For our purposes, however, the definition of college and career readiness centers on developing the Essential Skills and building pathway knowledge. Pursuing and completing a college degree and beginning and succeeding in a 21st century career entails high aspirations, grit, teamwork and other Essential Skills. It also requires pathway knowledge: knowing what to do and when to do it, such as how to select and pay for college and how to choose and then pursue a career. Mentoring, Leadership Through Service and Pathways are the CFES core practices designed to ensure that young people, especially those from low-income households, achieve these objectives and become college and career ready. The Brilliant Career Lab was built collaboratively by the GE Foundation and CFES to help middle and high school students identify career interests and then understand how to access specific careers.
- 2. Ensure that students are 21st-century career literate.** Low-income youth often lack information about 21st century careers. The students who most need this information and knowledge, those from low-income households, have the least understanding of 21st century career and job opportunities. Teachers, students and

parents need to understand what kind of jobs will exist so we can adequately prepare students for tomorrow's jobs. The Brilliant Career Lab is an ideal resource for building career literacy.

- 3. Increase the number of comprehensive partnerships with colleges and universities and corporations and businesses.** Faculty and cadets from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point have provided robotics workshops and residential STEM camps at West Point for hundreds of CFES Scholars over the last five years. Through these and other supports and interventions, CFES is seeing significant gains in the number of high-school aged students who are becoming college and career ready. Likewise, EY's College MAP program illustrates the power of corporate partnerships in ensuring that students become career ready not only by providing out-of-classroom experiences such as internships, apprenticeships and job shadowing, but also through mentoring and guidance down the college pathway.
- 4. Build STEM awareness and readiness.** If you want a high paying, sustainable job, pursue and experience STEM study and acquire STEM skills. We may not know the jobs of the future, but we do know that most of the high-paying jobs will be in STEM.

Not every student needs an advanced degree from a research university. Community colleges play a critical role in readying students for high-demand technical roles. To ensure that low-income students pursue STEM study and careers, we need to increase interest, knowledge and skills in STEM. College students in STEM fields and professionals with STEM jobs make ideal mentors and can serve as role models for our students.

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