

From Education to Employment: HR at the Helm Connecting Education, Skills, and Opportunity

The U.S. workforce is at a critical inflection point. Employers struggle to find talent with the skills they need, while students and job seekers often feel unprepared for the opportunities ahead. **This is not a shortage of talent — it is a misalignment between education and workforce needs.**

The challenges in the pipeline are clear:

- **K-12 Education is Broken:** Students are graduating without essential literacy, math, digital, or “power” skills such as problem-solving, communication, and adaptability. Vocational and hands-on programs have declined, leaving many without practical, job-ready experience.
- **Higher Education is Leaky:** Degrees alone no longer guarantee employability. Internships, apprenticeships, and experiential learning are underutilized, while alternative credential pathways remain fragmented and inconsistent.
- **Untapped Talent is Overlooked:** Millions of capable workers — including veterans, military spouses, older workers, people with disabilities, and opportunity youth — remain underemployed due to outdated policies, bias, and lack of structured pathways.

HR MUST LEAD THE SOLUTION

HR professionals are uniquely positioned to bridge education and opportunity. By leading with strategy, partnerships, and data, HR can:



In K-12 Education:

Embed foundational, technical, and human-centered skills into curricula; expand career pathways, apprenticeships; and connect students with real-world work experiences.



In Higher Education:

Align academic programs with labor market demand, embed work-based learning, and ensure students understand how degrees and credentials translate to employability.



In Untapped Talent:

Remove barriers, implement inclusive hiring practices, and create structured pathways for veterans, caregivers, older workers, and other underutilized populations.

SHRM RESEARCH SHOWS

3 in 4

organizations reported that it is somewhat or very difficult to find people with the needed skills.

30%

of organizations said candidates lack the right power skills.



Source: 2025 Talent Trends, SHRM, 2025.

“Repairing the pipeline requires educators, policymakers, and HR leaders to work in lockstep so learners can transition seamlessly into meaningful careers.”

Emily M. Dickens, J.D.
Chief Administrative Officer, SHRM

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