



Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board

Workforce Readiness Committee 2023 Report

Why Workforce Readiness?

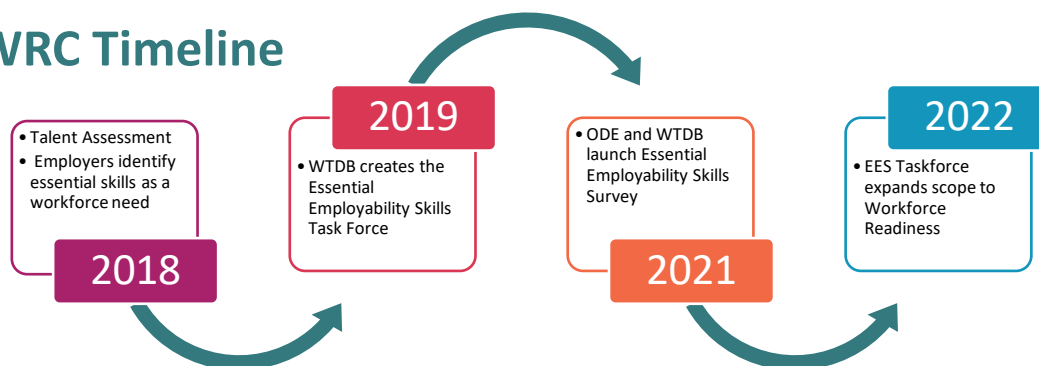
Learners are of all ages. All have a right to be able to succeed. It is our job to build the foundation upon which they can build their dreams. Workforce readiness is that tool...let's get it done!

Over the past several years, Oregon Talent Assessments have identified a need for a focused effort on improving Essential Employability Skills. This need is described here by Ken Madden, CEO of Madden Industrial Craftsmen, Inc.

"I frequently hear the same story from manufacturing business owners, 'find me a person that is willing to think and learn, accountable to show up when they are supposed to, and they will go very far in my company.' In the 35 years I've been in the staffing industry, I have seen a growing concern from employers about the lack of soft skills in new applicants. This lack of essential employability skills results in frustration and lack of productivity from both employers and employees. It's important for our state to recognize these gaps in soft skills and work toward structured policy to close them. It's a mistake to focus purely on technical skills and neglect employability skills. Technical skills might get you in the door, but employability skills turn one opened door into multitudes of growth opportunities."

Oregon employers need workers who can think critically, apply knowledge to new situations, analyze information, comprehend new ideas, communicate, collaborate, creatively solve problems, and make informed decisions. The Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board (WTDB) created the Essential Employability Skills (EES) Task Force to address this need in 2019. The Task Force was charged with researching, discussing, and understanding the challenges, opportunities, and best practices in education and training related to EES in Oregon and nationally. The goal was, and still is, to best prepare Oregonians for success in jobs and careers and meet the needs of businesses/employers. This work included grappling with the definitions of EES, developing a baseline understanding of existing efforts and perspectives around the state, and creating a plan in response to the Oregon Talent Assessment and in alignment with the WTDB Strategic Plan. Over time, the scope of this work broadened to focus on workforce readiness, and in 2022, the EES Taskforce became the Workforce Readiness Committee (WRC).

WRC Timeline



In the evolution from the Essential Employability Skills Taskforce to the Workforce Readiness Committee, the focus has broadened towards system-level change, data-driven decision-making, and system alignment that ensures readiness at the lowest cost to the student. The WRC includes leaders from Oregon business and industry, the Oregon Department of Education, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, Education Services Districts, community colleges, local workforce development boards, STEM Hubs, and other education and workforce development partners. The work of this group is focused on addressing recommendations from the Oregon Talent Assessment and EES Task Force, integrating Career Connected Learning, defining workforce readiness, and implementing an EES plan.

Workforce Readiness: for a given occupation, an individual has at least the minimum necessary:



Basic Skills



Essential Employability Skills



Occupational/Technical Skills



Credentials

Workforce readiness presumes that individuals have attained all the skills necessary to enter a particular occupation, and since no job is static and unchanging, it presumes an ability to continually update and advance skills. Ensuring workforce readiness for Oregonians through an inclusive workforce system is key to realizing the WTDB's vision of equitable prosperity for all Oregonians.

Opportunity

Oregon, the Workforce and Talent Development Board, and its Workforce Readiness Committee stand at a unique crossroads, with an opportunity to deepen the definition of career readiness. We can effectively identify and address career readiness gaps by strategically developing robust data tools to improve transparency and decision-making, as well as leveraging and aligning resources and strategies to collectively elevate workforce readiness to become our top education priority. As an action-oriented committee, we are focused on supporting and implementing work that expands the use of the Essential Employability Skills (EES) and other strategies to create workforce readiness in action. The examples below are just a few of the ways that workforce readiness is being integrated into existing work or creating new opportunities in Oregon's Workforce Readiness efforts.

Workforce Readiness in Action

Employers: Identified EES as critically important in the workplace. Employers such as PGE are piloting EES by incorporating it into their apprenticeship training program curriculum.

WorkSource Oregon:

Exploring how job seekers can learn about EES, credential their skills, and communicate their skills to employers.

Oregon Youth Works: Multiple youth workforce programs that incorporate opportunities for youth to learn 19 essential work skills in a workplace setting.



CTE & Career Connected Learning:

Aligning EES with the Oregon Skill Sets for CTE and Career Connected Learning strategies.

EES Badges: Creating Badging frameworks in high schools and community colleges that enable learners to document their EES and share with employers and others.

STEM Hubs: Working across the state to create hands-on, real-world learning experience that support essential skill development, career, and workforce readiness.

Equity

In pursuit of the WTDB's vision of equitable prosperity for all Oregonians, the significance of Essential Employability Skills cannot be overstated. Achieving this vision requires us to provide individuals with the tools to succeed. While Essential Employability Skills are but one component, they are foundational tools to success in learning and contributing within the workforce. So key are these skills they can be characterized as the solid foundation upon which all other skills can stack and continue to stand. Achieving the broader goal of workforce readiness requires us to engage and collaborate with active involvement from primary/secondary education, postsecondary education, and workforce development partners. These groups must work together to address essential skills, occupational/technical competencies, and the acquisition of necessary credentials. While the focus is on the quality of these elements, the prevalent challenges often revolve around issues of access, such as availability, especially in rural areas, cost implications, and administrative barriers. Alignment issues, such as unnecessary duplication and inadequate communication, further complicate matters. Addressing these challenges calls for dedicated resources and efforts to develop culturally responsive, culturally specific, and accessible programming.

Recommendations

The Workforce Readiness Committee is a dedicated group of individuals passionate about collaboration and innovation, creating a culture of workforce readiness throughout our state. While much has been done to implement the Essential Employability Skills, there is much to be done in achieving the broader vision. As this work continues, intentional resource allocation is needed to focus on developing the infrastructure to support the implementation of workforce readiness for the long term. The recommendations below detail what it will take to sustain this effort across education and workforce development.

- 1) Commit to making strategic and long-term investments in Essential Employability Skills development across the entire education and workforce system.
 - a. Make investments in Essential Employability Skills, including FTE at the state level to help manage, coordinate, and provide resources for efforts at regional and local levels on programs, certificates, badges, pilots, and data.
 - b. Establish policy and rule to embed EES training in K-12 curriculum, integrate top 3-5 EES into graduation requirements, and provide resources and support to educators.
 - c. Scale proven and promising models through investing in and expanding state and local infrastructure, curriculum distribution, and professional learning in K-12 and higher education.
- 2) Continue to engage community-based and culturally specific organizations and training programs in the design, delivery, and evaluation of statewide EES models, to strengthen equitable access to training and resources and establish equity-based curriculum and practices.
- 3) Make strategic, long-term workforce readiness investments in Career Connected Learning and CTE at the state and local levels.
- 4) Data-driven decision-making: establish a strategic investment in the development of a comprehensive tool such as "Clarifying Credential to Career Pathways" (C3P). By utilizing Oregon Employment Department data, the C3P tool would inform education and workforce partners about the available career paths in their respective regions. It would also compare this data to projected future job openings, enabling collaboration with the community to enhance or expand programs of study based on data and anticipated job growth. Tools like this would also support individualized career and academic planning, career coaching, and work-based learning coordination.
- 5) Develop and implement a comprehensive employer engagement strategy to help employers understand the value of tools like Essential Employability Skills and provide input to priorities and activities for achieving workforce readiness.

Conclusion

The Oregon Workforce and Talent Development Board is committed to supporting and expanding the work of the Workforce Readiness Committee. This includes the expansion of Essential Employability Skills, but beyond that, the work of system coordination and alignment. This work requires collaboration and alignment across education, workforce development, and industry to support individuals in achieving their goals, helping industry find the talent they need, and growing our economy. While the Workforce Readiness Committee is a passionate group and has made great progress, the effort must be supported at a broader level, including integration into legislative priorities, administrative rules, industry practices, education curriculum, counseling/advising, and regional accreditation. Resources will be required to bring this work to scale, including dedicated funding and administration to sustain the integrity of the collaborative effort. Workforce readiness is not owned by anyone, but it is owned by all that it touches. It is something that comes up consistently in talent assessments and in conversations with employers, educators, and workforce development partners. This data makes it clear that workforce readiness is the tangible, understandable model that's been requested for years and years, but has never been articulated and fashioned to truly benefit the learner. As we noted in the beginning, learners are of all ages, and all have a right to be able to succeed! It is our job and a priority to build the foundation upon which they can build their dreams. Workforce readiness is that tool...let's get it done!

Appendix

Workforce Readiness Resources

- Essential Employability Skills (k-12) - <https://www.oregonemployabilityskills.org/>
- Career Connected Learning Resource Hub - <https://careerconnectoregon.org/>
- Career Connected Learning - <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/learning-options/cte/careerareas/pages/default.aspx>
- Oregon Youth Works - <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/institutions-programs/workforce/Pages/youth-workforce-programs.aspx>
- College and Career Readiness Definition - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7EL9F11R9wabjlrLXIBNjVRaW8/view?resourcekey=0-e3skOtdjV5P15qjREVUjIA>
- Oregon STEM - <https://www.oregon-stem.org/>
- WorkSource Oregon - <https://worksourceoregon.org/>