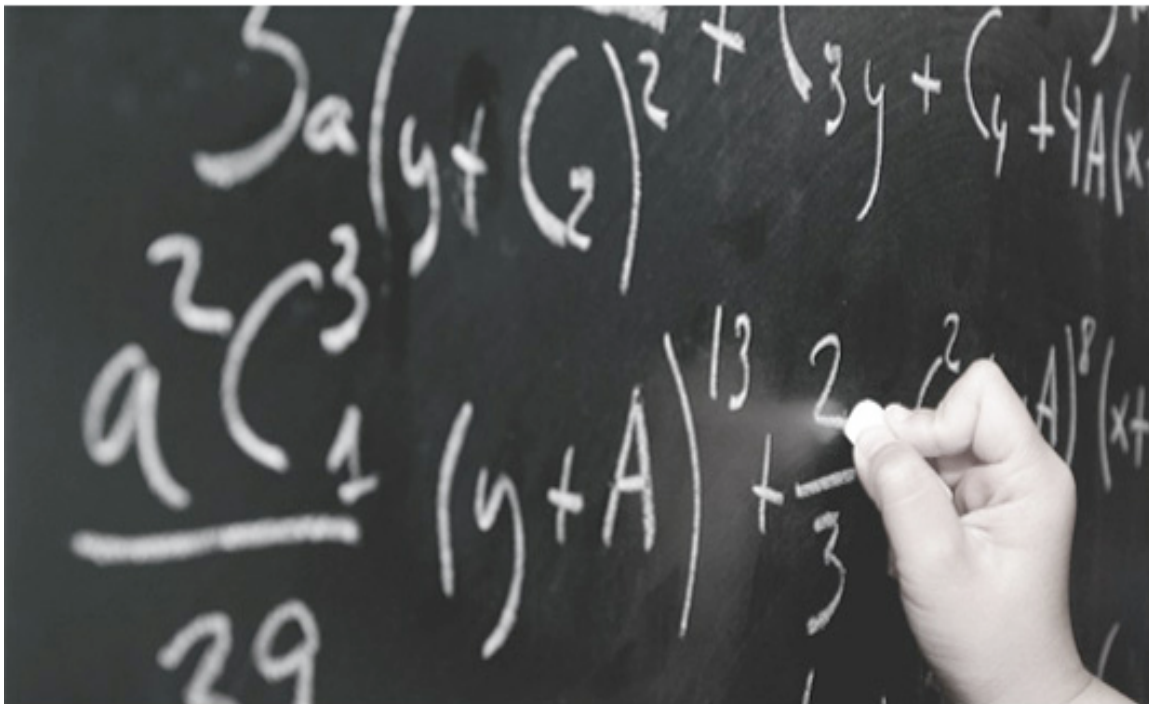


The Mounting Crisis

A Call To Action: Sustaining America's Competitive Edge
Through Quality Education



| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY |



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THE MOUNTING CRISIS
A CALL TO ACTION

*Sustaining America's Competitive Edge
Through Quality Education*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our nation's ability to compete in the rapidly changing global marketplace and the vitality of American society are threatened by our failure to prepare our students with the academic competence and 21st Century Skills essential for success. While many other countries are moving ahead to prepare their incoming workforces to meet the demands of the modern economy, much of the American education system continues to prepare for an industrial economy that no longer exists.

American productivity and competitiveness are being undercut by slowing workforce growth, stagnant educational performance and achievement, and a steady increase in the number of low-skilled employees entering the American workforce at the very time when more workers, with higher levels of education and more complex skills, are urgently needed. Many other countries are experiencing extraordinary growth in the size of their modern workforce, their skills and educational competencies, and their connections to the global economy that now allow them to compete directly with American businesses, anywhere in the world. The vitality of the American economy, and of American society, are at stake.

Alarms have been sounded for decades, confirmed by volumes of convincing research, and now the crisis is here. American businesses have a great deal at stake – as well as a great deal to offer – in developing necessary solutions.

For America to retain and assert its competitive edge, quality education for the 21st Century must begin in the earliest years of a child's life, and must be sustained throughout a life-time of learning. In order for American public education to succeed in making the changes required, business leaders need to work together with educators to identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for successful outcomes today and in the future, and to ensure that they become imbedded in every student's learning experiences. Business leaders need in turn to work together

with public officials to ensure availability of the public support and funding required to make and sustain these essential changes in our approach to the modern education system.

American business leaders bring unique and needed professional insights and resources, and they must engage with the pragmatism, creativity and sustained energy that they ask of others if this effort is to succeed.

WHAT BUSINESS LEADERS WANT AND NEED

- **Applicants ready to work:** Business executives nationwide cannot find sufficient numbers of workers with a basic competence in reading and math and the basic skills of teamwork, oral communications, initiative, and a highly developed work ethic, all of which are now fundamental to the ability of employees to succeed and the ability of businesses to compete.
- **Economic and social challenges:** The impending retirement of over 77 million experienced and skilled baby boomers, without a ready supply of qualified and prepared workers coming behind them, leaves American business at a huge disadvantage. Moreover, the new global economy is knowledge-based and innovation driven, and to compete, American business needs more employees with new competencies and skills, which are alarmingly difficult to find.
- **Both manufacturing and the service industry are dramatically changing:** Complex skills sets – including creativity, problem solving, communications, teamwork, and the ability to adapt – are now required in both. Even apart from future growth demands, tens of thousands of jobs, with excellent salaries and across all skill levels, are unfilled because of the lack of qualified applicants.

WHAT BUSINESS CAN DO

A NEW ROLE FOR BUSINESS IN EDUCATION

Quality education with a 21st Century focus holds the key to American competitiveness. Business leaders have a unique and much needed perspective about the attributes required for success in today's global economy. They should use their experience, resources, and creativity to

- **Identify specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for success in the 21st century workplace,** based on their first-hand understanding of what is needed, and of the deficiencies they all too often find in applicants;

- **Work with educators to identify and support specific and sustained local solutions that will integrate those outcomes appropriately and effectively into every child's learning experience**, including active participation in ways that will support the interests and needs of both educators and students; and
- **Build public support for adequate and sustained programs and funding** that will expand access to quality education opportunities to all children and students, from their earliest years through life-long learning, preparing them to meet the challenges of the modern workplace and to be productive members of society.

VALUING QUALITY EDUCATION AT EVERY AGE

- **For every age level and skill:** High quality education and development are essential to prepare for the modern workplace at every skill level, beginning from a child's earliest years and continuing through adulthood.
- **High quality early care and education:** Employers who offer their employee families access to these services will expand their pool of qualified applicants, increase retention, and improve employee satisfaction and productivity. Both science and experience also clearly indicate that early and sustained intervention can dramatically improve the life-course trajectories of young children, improving both their lives and establishing the foundation for development of behavior and skills essential for later success.
- **High quality education through and beyond high school:** Access to high quality education, career awareness and training, and a focus on making learning relevant to student interests and skills will promote enthusiasm about learning, reduce dropout rates, and help develop the skills and attitudes needed for success in the global economy.

CONCLUSION

The quality and focus of American education, from birth to adulthood, are at the heart of the challenge to maintain and enhance America's ability to compete in the global economy. Business leaders must take the initiative now, with specific, meaningful steps that move well beyond expressions of concern and exhortations, to become active partners and supporters of educators and public officials, and to ensure that business perspectives, experience and resources are a key part of both local and national solutions—solution that are needed now.

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What Is America's Edge™?

America's Edge™ is a national non-profit organization established in 2007 to engage business leaders in support of local, state, and national education policies and initiatives aimed at providing all Americans—from birth to adulthood—the skills, knowledge and attitudes essential for success in today's competitive global marketplace.

The ability of American businesses to compete effectively depends increasingly on the talent, knowledge, and skills of employees at every level. To develop the workforce that will keep America competitive, we need to ensure that all children and students have access to

- *Quality early care and education programs* that prepare them for success in school and that provide the foundation for the skills required by the rapidly changing demands of the global economy;
- *Meaningful standards-driven K-12 education programs* that are aligned with the skills needed for success in the workforce, along with the support to ensure that students successfully complete these programs; and
- *Opportunities to explore the full range of potential careers* and to develop students' individual talents and interests for greatest success.

America's Edge partners with business leaders to build a competitive workforce through initiatives to

- *Identify the skills, knowledge and attitudes required* for success in the workplace;
- *Work with educators* to integrate those attributes into the learning experiences, curriculum and training of every student;
- *Express support* to legislators, other public officials and opinion leaders for education policies and initiatives that will help build a qualified workforce;
- *Share best practices* in business advocacy and support for education reform, across the full learning spectrum from birth to adulthood.

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