

TURNING THE CLIFF INTO A CATALYST

Employers and educators face a “demographic cliff,” a sustained decline in the numbers of high school graduates. Its cause is a plunge in U.S. birth rates. Its result is a drop in potential enrollments for post-secondary education institutions as well as new hires for industry. However, both educators and employers can transform the cliff into a catalyst for opportunity by pivoting toward serving a “new majority.”

Strategic Shifts for EDUCATORS

- **Seek New Audiences:** Assess and strengthen outreach efforts among nontraditional sources of potential learners.
- **Reach Out Sooner:**
 - Identify strategies to communicate with potential learners earlier in their career exploration and decision-making journey.
 - Participate in “Parent Night” and other relevant activities at local schools.
 - Collaborate with school counselors to inform students, parents, and other stakeholders about the value of education and training programs and pathways.
 - Invite school counselors to industry advisory committee meetings.
 - Organize program tours for early grades students.
 - Ensure that partner school students and parents have access to enough information to make informed decisions about career pathway options.
- **Appeal to Adult Learners:**
 - Become a Career Coach: Assist adults and other prospective learners in cataloging their existing skills to help them spot potential career opportunities.
 - Make Careers Data Visible: Embed careers data on program and pathways web pages and in outreach campaigns to facilitate prospective learners’ exploration and decision-making, including related job titles, salaries, potential employers, and other insights.
 - Spotlight Graduates’ Success: Solicit information from program graduates about their career outcomes and promote those success stories with prospective learners.
- **Offer Flexibility in Routes and Results:**
 - Design hybrid, asynchronous, and mobile-first courses tailored to working adults.
 - Create stackable micro-credentials and digital badges that build credits and degrees over time.
- **Align with Regional Workforce Needs:**
 - Deepen Employer Relationships: Work closely with local employers to align curriculums more directly with regional job opportunities.
 - Track Market Demand: Use real-time labor market data to track skills and occupations in high demand or experiencing rapid growth in the region.
 - Assess and Strengthen Alignment: Align market demand insights to programs and pathways, courses, and credentials.
 - Design Innovative Outcomes: Use labor market data and employer partnerships to craft credentials of value for the future of work.



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Strategic Shifts for EMPLOYERS

• Invest in Employee Development:

- Develop and promote career ladders showing employees how they can advance in their careers.
- Upskill and reskill to develop current employees and reduce reliance on external recruitment.
- Implement mentorship efforts so experienced workers can share institutional knowledge with newer employees.
- Offer phased retirement options, part-time schedules, or remote work flexibility to retain employees longer.

• Strengthen Employee Engagement:

- Communicate regularly why the work is important and what is possible with a fully engaged workforce.
- Align work practices and talent to drive engagement and results.
- Support strategies for assessing and improving engagement.
- Emphasize employee engagement as a continuous improvement effort.
- Model engagement in words and actions.
- Apply emotional intelligence.

• Support In-School Youth: Partner with public schools to support career exploration, career advisement, and work-based learning.

• Invest in Workflow Enhancements: Supplement lean teams with workflow automation and use artificial intelligence tools to handle appropriate tasks.

• Enhance Recruitment:

- Reconsider degree requirements in favor of demonstrated competencies (skills-based hiring).
- Consider a renewed focus on potentially overlooked audiences, such as military service members transitioning to civilian careers, workers displaced due to downturns in the economy, or justice-involved individuals who completed education and training programs.
- Sponsor apprenticeships and tuition-assistance pipelines with local education and training providers.
- Work directly with education partners to co-create certificate programs that feed specific talent pipelines.



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