

West Michigan Workforce Readiness Survey

Summary and Report

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Prepared with support from:

Adult Learning Professionals
of West Michigan

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Ottawa County Michigan Works!



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West Michigan Workforce Readiness Report

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I. Introduction

Why conduct a survey on employers' expectations of new hires? What would be the purpose of such an exercise, and what would be the benefit? When the few of us involved with this project asked these questions several months ago, we believed that the benefits were quite apparent: good data on this subject would help to improve the process of matching skills of jobseekers with employer needs, would enable administrators and educators to better plan and deliver programs, and would provide support for individual employers making decisions about whom to hire.

Believing that the effort would prove valuable, we set out to assess and report on employers' perceptions about the "job readiness" of the regional workforce, launching the first West Michigan Workforce Readiness Survey of HR professionals, which was conducted in November and December, 2010. This survey was designed to replicate at a local level a report entitled "Are They Ready to Work?" which was the result of a nationwide survey performed in 2006. The national survey was sponsored by a partnership which included the Conference Board, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

Employers for the local project were solicited from West Michigan chapters of SHRM: the Association for Human Resources Management (AHRM) and the Lakeshore Human Resources Management Association (LHRMA). The West Michigan results we obtained will be briefly compared to the national survey results below.

Of the 365 regional employers solicited to participate in the 2010 survey, 75 representatives from a variety of industries responded. These employers were asked to rank twenty knowledge areas and skills sets (listed below) as very important, important or not important for positions requiring a high school diploma or GED, two year or technical degree, and a four year (bachelor's) degree. Respondents were also asked to rank new hires as deficient, adequate or excellent in the knowledge areas and skills sets for each new hire level.

II. Knowledge and Skills Sets Assessed

The survey asked employers to identify which of the basic knowledge / skills and applied skills were very important, important, or not important for positions requiring a high school diploma or GED, a two year or technical degree, and a four year (Bachelor's) degree. The survey also asked the employers to rate whether new hires at each education level were deficient, adequate, or excellent in each skill area.

The following table divides the skills assessed into basic knowledge/ skills and applied skills.

Basic Knowledge/Skills	Applied Skills
English Language (Spoken)	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving
Reading Comprehension (English)	Oral Communications
Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	Written Communications
Mathematics	Teamwork / Collaboration
Science	Diversity
Government / Economics	Information Technology / Application
Humanities / Arts	Leadership
Foreign Languages	Creativity / Innovation
History / Geography	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction
	Professionalism / Work Ethic
	Ethics / Social Responsibility

III. Top Five Skills Most Frequently Ranked “Very Important” and Preparedness Ratings

The tables below identify the five skills identified as very important most frequently by employers for each education level assessed. The table also shows the percentage of respondents who rated skills deficient, adequate, or excellent.

Positions requiring a **high school diploma or GED**:

Top Five Rated “Very Important” Skill /Knowledge Areas	Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Deficient in this Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Adequate in this Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Excellent in this Skill / Knowledge Area
	Professionalism / Work Ethic	60%	37%	2%
	English Language (Spoken)	25%	64%	11%
	Reading Comprehension (English)	43%	57%	0%
	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	66%	34%	0%
	Teamwork / Collaboration	42%	53%	5%

Positions requiring a **two year or technical college degree / diploma**:

Top Five Rated “Very Important” Skill /Knowledge Areas	Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Deficient in this Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Adequate in this Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Excellent in this Skill / Knowledge Area
	Professionalism / Work Ethic	18%	80%	2%
	Oral Communications	20%	73%	7%
	English Language (Spoken)	7%	81%	12%
	Written Communications	36%	61%	2%
	Reading Comprehension (English)	14%	75%	11%

Positions requiring a **four year college degree (bachelors)**:

Top Five Rated “Very Important” Skill /Knowledge Areas	Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Deficient in this Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Adequate in this Skill / Knowledge Area	Percent of Employers Finding Employees Excellent in this Skill / Knowledge Area
	Professionalism / Work Ethic	12%	60%	28%
	Oral Communication	9%	40%	51%
	English Language (Spoken)	2%	43%	55%
	Reading Comprehension (English)	7%	45%	48%
	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling)	19%	43%	38%

IV. Ranking Importance of Skills / Knowledge Areas

The following table ranks the results of the 20 Skill / Knowledge Areas surveyed in regard to importance:

Rank	Occupations Requiring a High School Diploma or GED	Occupations Requiring a Two Year or Technical College Degree / Diploma	Occupations Requiring a Four Year College Degree (Bachelor's)
1	Professionalism / Work Ethic	Professionalism / Work Ethic	Professionalism / Work Ethic
2	English Language (Spoken)	Oral Communications	Oral Communications
3	Reading Comprehension (English)	English Language (Spoken)	English Language (Spoken)
4	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	Written Communications	Reading Comprehension (English)
5	Teamwork / Collaboration	Reading Comprehension (English)	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, Etc)
6	Ethics / Social Responsibility	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, Etc)	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving
7	Oral Communications	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	Teamwork / Collaboration
8	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, Etc)	Teamwork / Collaboration	Written Communications
9	Written Communications	Ethics / Social Responsibility	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction
10	Mathematics	Mathematics	Information Technology Application
11	Information Technology Application	Information Technology Application	Ethics / Social Responsibility
12	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	Creativity / Innovation	Leadership
13	Creativity / Innovation	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	Mathematics
14	Diversity	Diversity	Creativity / Innovation
15	Science	Leadership	Diversity
16	Leadership	Science	Government / Economics
17	Government / Economics	Government / Economics	Science
18	History / Geography	History / Geography	History / Geography
19	Humanities / Arts	Humanities / Arts	Humanities / Arts
20	Foreign Languages	Foreign Languages	Foreign Languages

V. Top Five Skill / Knowledge Areas Rated "Most Important" for Occupations at each Education Level

For positions requiring only a high school diploma or GED West Michigan Employers rated the following skills / knowledge areas as the top five in the "very important" category:

- Professionalism / Work Ethic (84%)¹
- English Language (Spoken) (80%)
- Reading Comprehension (English) (76%)
- Critical Thinking / Problem Solving (76%)
- Teamwork / Collaboration (76%)

¹ Percent indicates the percent of responders who ranked this skill / knowledge as very important.

For positions requiring a diploma or degree from a two year or technical college West Michigan Employers rated the following skills / knowledge areas as the top five in the “very important” category:

- Professionalism / Work Ethic (96%)
- Oral Communications (91%)
- English Language (Spoken) (91%)
- Written Communications (87%)
- Reading Comprehension (87%)

For positions requiring a diploma or degree from a four year college (Bachelors) West Michigan Employers rated the following skills / knowledge areas as the top five in the “very important” category:

- Professionalism / Work Ethic (98%)
- Oral Communication (96%)
- English Language (Spoken) (96%)
- Reading Comprehension (96%)
- Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, Etc) (96%)

VI. Preparedness in Terms of Basic Skills and Applied Skills

Employers’ ratings of new hire preparedness are provided for each education level below:

Overall, employers ranked as excellent very few new hires for positions requiring a high school diploma or GED. These employees were most frequently ranked as deficient in both basic and applied skills.

Ratings for Positions Requiring a High School Diploma or GED								
Deficient			Adequate			Excellent		
Rank	Skill	%	Rank	Skill	%	Rank	Skill	%
Basic Knowledge / Skills								
1.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	70%	1.	English Language (Spoken)	64%	1.	English Language (Spoken)	11%
2.	Foreign Language	70	2.	Mathematics	57	2.	Foreign Language	0
3.	Science	53	3.	Reading Comprehension (English)	57	3.	Government / Economics	0
4.	Government / Economics	51	4.	History / Geography	56	4.	History / Geography	0
5.	Humanities / Arts	47	5.	Humanities / Arts	53	5.	Humanities / Arts	0
6.	History / Geography	44	6.	Government / Economics	49	6.	Mathematics	0
7.	Mathematics	43	7.	Science	47	7.	Science	0
8.	Reading Comprehension (English)	43	8.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	30	8.	Reading Comprehension (English)	0
9.	English Language (Spoken)	25	9.	Foreign Languages	30	9.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	0

Applied Skills								
1.	Leadership	79%	1.	Oral Communication	65%	1.	Information Technology Application	11%
2.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	70	2.	Diversity	56	2.	Diversity	7
3.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	66	3.	Teamwork / Collaboration	53	3.	Teamwork / Collaboration	5
4.	Written Communications	64	4.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	52	4.	Creativity / Innovation	2
5.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	60	5.	Creativity / Innovation	50	5.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	2
6.	Creativity / Innovation	48	6.	Information Technology Application	50	6.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	2
7.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	48	7.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	37	7.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	0
8.	Teamwork /Collaboration	42	8.	Written Communication	36	8.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	0
9.	Information Technology Application	39	9.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	34	9.	Leadership	0
10.	Diversity	37	10.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	28	10.	Oral Communications	0
11.	Oral Communications	35	11.	Leadership	21	11.	Written Communications	0

Employer ratings of new hires with a two year or technical degree showed a significant increase in adequate scores with the majority of employers rating new hires as adequate for the surveyed skill sets. The percentage of employers rating new hires as excellent still remained very low.

Ratings for Positions Requiring a Two Year or Technical Degree								
<i>Deficient</i>			<i>Adequate</i>			<i>Excellent</i>		
Rank	Skill	%	Rank	Skill	%	Rank	Skill	%
Basic Knowledge / Skills								
1.	Foreign Language	51%	1.	English Language (Spoken)	81%	1.	English Language (Spoken)	12%
2.	Government / Economics	33	2.	Reading Comprehension (English)	75	2.	Reading Comprehension (English)	11
3.	History / Geography	28	3.	Humanities / Arts	74	3.	Mathematics	7
4.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	27	4.	Science	74	4.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	7
5.	Humanities / Arts	26	5.	Mathematics	73	5.	Foreign Languages	0

6.	Science	26	6.	History / Geography	72	6.	Government / Economics	0
7.	Mathematics	20	7.	Government / Economics	67	7.	History / Geography	0
8.	Reading Comprehension (English)	14	8.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	66	8.	Humanities / Arts	0
9.	English Language (Spoken)	7	9.	Foreign Languages	49	9.	Science	0
Applied Skills								
1.	Leadership	41%	1.	Creativity / Innovation	81%	1.	Information Technology Application	18%
2.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	37	2.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	81	2.	Diversity	9
3.	Written Communications	36	3.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	80	3.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	9
4.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	27	4.	Information Technology Application	73	4.	Oral Communications	7
5.	Teamwork / Collaboration	25	5.	Oral Communications	73	5.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	5
6.	Diversity	23	6.	Teamwork / Collaboration	70	6.	Teamwork / Collaboration	5
7.	Oral Communications	20	7.	Diversity	68	7.	Creativity / Innovation	2
8.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	19	8.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	64	8.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	2
9.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	18	9.	Written Communications	61	9.	Written Communications	2
10.	Creativity / Innovation	16	10.	Leadership	59	10.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	0
11.	Information Technology Application	9	11.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	58	11.	Leadership	0

Employer rating of the skill quality of new hires with a four year degree increased with respect to two-year degree holders. In almost all cases, new hires with a four year degree were ranked deficient less than 10% of the time. Also, four year degree holders were ranked excellent much more frequently than high school diploma or two year degree holders.

Ratings for Positions Requiring a Four Year (Bachelor's) Degree								
<i>Deficient</i>			<i>Adequate</i>			<i>Excellent</i>		
Rank	Skill	%	Rank	Skill	%	Rank	Skill	%
Basic Knowledge / Skills								
1.	Foreign Language	33%	1.	Science	84%	1.	English Language (Spoken)	55%
2.	Writing in English (Grammar,	19	2.	Government / Economics	77	2.	Reading Comprehension	48

	Spelling, etc)						(English)	
3.	History / Geography	14	3.	History / Geography	77	3.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	38
4.	Government / Economics	12	4.	Humanities / Arts	77	4.	Mathematics	30
5.	Humanities / Arts	12	5.	Foreign Language	67	5.	Government / Economics	12
6.	Science	9	6.	Mathematics	64	6.	Humanities / Arts	12
7.	Mathematics	7	7.	Reading Comprehension (English)	45	7.	History / Geography	9
8.	Reading Comprehension (English)	7	8.	English Language (Spoken)	43	8.	Science	7
9.	English Language (Spoken)	2	9.	Writing in English (Grammar, Spelling, etc)	43	9.	Foreign Languages	0
Applied Skills								
1.	Leadership	14%	1.	Diversity	80%	1.	Oral Communications	51%
2.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	14	2.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	75	2.	Information Technology Application	48
3.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	12	3.	Leadership	68	3.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	39
4.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	12	4.	Creativity / Innovation	66	4.	Written Communications	39
5.	Creativity / Innovation	10	5.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	60	5.	Teamwork / Collaboration	36
6.	Diversity	9	6.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	60	6.	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	28
7.	Oral Communications	9	7.	Teamwork / Collaboration	59	7.	Professionalism / Work Ethic	28
8.	Written Communications	9	8.	Written Communications	52	8.	Creativity / Innovation	24
9.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	7	9.	Information Technology Application	48	9.	Ethics / Social Responsibility	18
10.	Information Technology Application	5	10.	Lifelong Learning / Self Direction	48	10.	Leadership	18
11.	Teamwork / Collaboration	5	11.	Oral Communications	40	11.	Diversity	11

VII. Respondent Industry Representation

Industry	Percentage of Respondents
Accommodation and Food Services	0
Agriculture, Fishing and Hunting	0
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation	0
Construction	7%
Education Services	16%
Finance and Insurance	2%
Government	0
Health Care and Social Assistance	11%
Information	0
Management of Companies and Enterprises	2%
Manufacturing	31%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	0
Other Services (Except Public Admin)	11%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	4%
Real Estate, Rental and Leasing	2%
Retail Trade	0
Transportation and Warehousing	2%
Utilities	4%
Wholesale Trade	7%

VIII. Education Requirements for Hiring (The questions soliciting information in this area were unique to the West Michigan Survey)

The following table reflects the education requirements for positions within the companies who responded to this survey for all positions that require at minimum high school diploma or GED:

Education Level	Percent of Workforce	Percent of Companies
High School Diploma or GED	0-25%	24%
	25-50%	32%
	50-75%	21%
	75-100%	24%
Two Year College or Technical School Degree / Diploma	0-25%	65%
	25-50%	30%
	50-75%	3%
	75-100%	2%
Four Year College (Bachelor's Degree)	0-25%	56%
	25-50%	35%
	50-75%	6%
	75-100%	3%

IX. Entry Level Positions (The questions soliciting information in this area were unique to the West Michigan Survey)

- 89% of the employers who responded require a minimum of a high school diploma or GED for entry level positions.
- For those employers that have a minimum hiring requirement, 0% would prefer to hire an individual with a GED over an individual with a high school diploma.
- 86% of the responding employers provide some support (tuition reimbursement, shift or schedule flexibility, etc) for the achievement of additional academic credentials after hire.

X. Assessments (The questions soliciting information in this area were unique to the West Michigan Survey)

- 45% of responding employers are currently utilizing some skill based tests or assessments in their selection process.
- 42% of respondents currently use personality or work style assessments in their selection process.
- 14% of responding employers utilize assessments of general intellectual ability in their selection process.

XI. Analysis

In general, an analysis of the data does not reveal any very surprising findings to those who are familiar with this territory. While there was a gap recorded between skills expected and preparation, the new hire preparedness statistics collected show a clear correlation between education level and level of preparedness. Thus, the higher the level of education, the smaller the gap between skills desired and preparedness. Respondents rating employees as “Deficient” moved from 52% ranking GED/high school diploma new hires deficient, to 11% ranking hires as deficient when new hires had a four year degree.

As a whole, employers did not find employees to be excellently prepared with great frequency, but this number did increase from only 2% for employees with a high school diploma or GED, to 28% for employees with a four year degree.

Two year and technical college degrees / diplomas also showed a strong increase in the preparedness of employees, with employers rating these employees as adequately prepared 70% of the time. Two year and technical college degrees did little to increase the number of employers scoring employees as excellently prepared, with this percentage remaining low at 5%.

It can also be noted that although several of the skills / knowledge areas rated as very important by employers improved in the preparedness ratings with education (such as communicating, reading and writing) several applied skills (such as leadership) continued to receive fairly low preparedness scores.

XII. Areas for Improvement

While a combination of basic and applied skills is necessary, based on employers rating, based on the ratings provided by respondents to the local survey, improvements need to be made in the following areas ranked as most important:

- Professionalism / Work Ethic
 - More than half of the employers ranked graduates of a two year or technical program and four year college degree as only adequate in this area. While only nearly 40% of those with high school diplomas were ranked as adequate.
- English Language (Spoken)

- More than three-quarters of employers ranked employees in all graduating categories as adequate or excellent with regards to spoken English language skills. Yet writing skills still need improvement with more employers ranking them as deficient.
- Reading Comprehension (English)
 - Graduates with a high school diploma and a two year technical college degree/diploma are most often ranked as adequate, while four year graduates are almost split equally between adequate and excellent.
- Oral Communications
 - Nearly three-quarters of high school diploma or GED and two year or technical college degree holders are ranked as adequately prepared with regards to oral communications. Only 51% of four year college graduates are ranked as excellently prepared.

Overall, with regards to preparedness of important skill areas, most employees are ranked as only adequate.

XIII. Comparing Regional Results to the 2006 National Survey

Overall, results from the West Michigan Workforce Readiness survey are very similar to those obtained in the 2006 national workforce readiness survey completed through a partnership which included the Conference Board, Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Corporate Voices for Working Families, and the Society for Human Resource Management.

A couple of differences are worth commenting on:

While the local survey rated Professionalism / Work Ethic the number one “Very Important” skill set for all three education levels, in the national survey, Professionalism / Work Ethic was top rated for only High School/GED and Two-Year College degree levels. Oral Communication was #1 for Four Year College level hires in the national survey, and Professionalism/Work Ethic was #3. In the local survey, Professionalism / Work Ethic took the #1 spot and Oral Communications was #2.

The Critical Thinking / Problem Solving skill was featured in the top 5 only for the High School/GED level in the local survey results; in the national survey it made the top 5 for both Two-Year and Four-Year degree levels, and was ranked #7 for High School / GED level new hires.

Similar patterns in skills rankings were noted when comparing levels across the two surveys:

In the local survey, the Ethics / Social Responsibility skill was ranked #6, 9 and 11 respectively for the HS/GED, Two-Year and Four-Year levels. In the national survey, the same skill set ranked #4, 8 and 9.

As referenced above concerning the local survey results, a significant percentage of employers rated lower education levels as “Deficient” in terms of skill preparation, while higher levels were generally rated higher (“Adequate” or “Excellent”) in terms of preparedness. In the national survey the percentage of employers rating HS/GED level employees as “Deficient” was significantly greater: for all skill sets, 42% of employers rated HS/GED level hires “Deficient” on average across all skills, compared with only 10.8 and 8.7 percent of Two- and Four-Year college grads.

In addition to being larger in terms of the total number of survey respondents, the national survey project included followup interviews with HR professionals to solicit individual responses at a more detailed level. These interviews also focused on obtaining reactions to the survey results, and were used to develop hypotheses around the causes of trends in results. The interview approach undoubtedly improved the scope of the survey and the quality of the inferences that can be drawn from the national data.

A difference exists between the two surveys' respondent demographics that may contribute to the differences in results. While the national survey listed 22.8 percent of respondents in Manufacturing and 20.5 percent in Government and Nonprofit sectors, the West Michigan survey counted 31 percent of its respondents in Manufacturing, and only 11 percent in the Government and Nonprofit sector. Interestingly, the national survey also reported that Manufacturing employers were much more likely to rate new hires as "Deficient" in Math, Science and Reading Comprehension than other industry sectors.

Overall, the trends and patterns in the local data align with the national sample from the 2006 survey. While there are undoubtedly differences between the national and local data in certain areas, it would take another, broader sample along with more analysis to make conclusive judgments about how (much less why) West Michigan and national data differ. Because employers in similar industry sectors are more likely to use similar standards and practices in hiring and selection, it is more likely that the results reported by respondents from the same sectors (e.g., Manufacturing) at national and local levels would resemble each other more than employers from dissimilar sectors in either the national or regional surveys.

XIV. Observations and Recommendations

While the results from the survey cannot be relied on as a statistically significant sample of West Michigan employment practices and employer attitudes, there are some interesting observations that emerge when reviewing the reported survey results. Among these observations are the following:

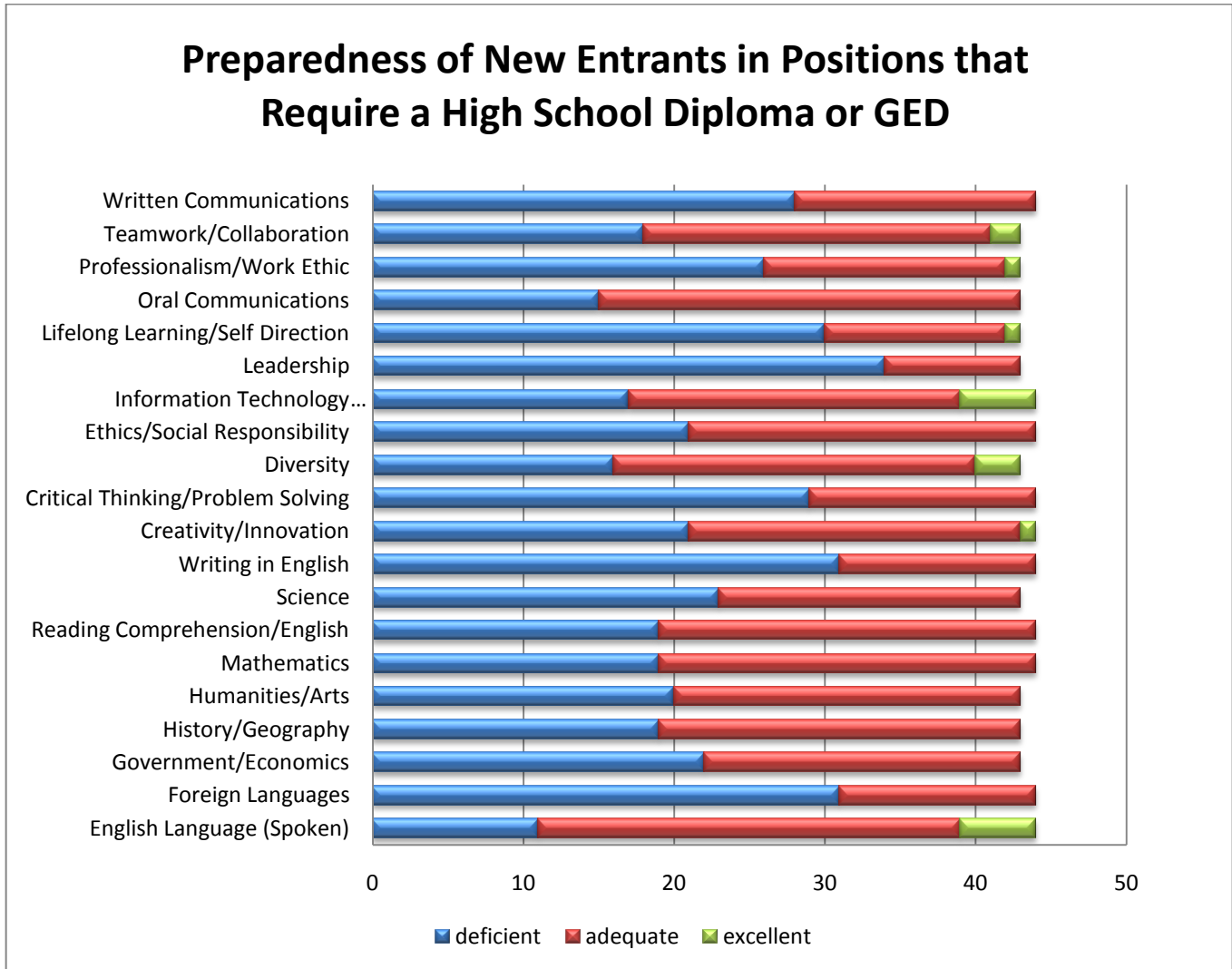
1. Many employers report that the skills sets that they believe are most critical for new hires' success are also, in many cases, "deficient" in terms of preparedness. This is particularly true for HS/GED level new hires, who were also unlikely to be rated "excellent" in terms of preparation.
2. Applied skills (vs. basic skills, see ***Knowledge and Skills Sets Assessed***, p.3) were generally most likely to be rated "very important" by our respondents, which was also true of the national survey. A footnote in the national survey observes that employers are generally more likely to rate applied skills which they can observe as more important than basic skills which are more cognitive in nature.
3. Some applied skills are learned in non-academic settings, or are developed not as a result of academic experience but through life experience, particularly those we can term "soft skills", such as Ethics / Personal Responsibility and Work Ethic / Professionalism.
4. While applied skills are typically more likely to be rated "very important" in the survey, there are critical basic skills (e.g., Mathematics, Science, Reading Comprehension) that are known to be critical for the development of a highly skilled workforce, particularly in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) disciplines.
5. Many employers responding to the survey indicated that they used skills (45%) or personality/work style (42%) assessments in the screening and selection process. While there is no comparable data for prior time periods, and the national study did not include this question as a survey element, it is possible to infer that employers are using these tools to get a better measure of job-related skills in response to the current perception that the average applicant's skills are often deficient.

While many recommendations could be offered based on the data reported and the analysis provided above, there are a few which emerge as most relevant:

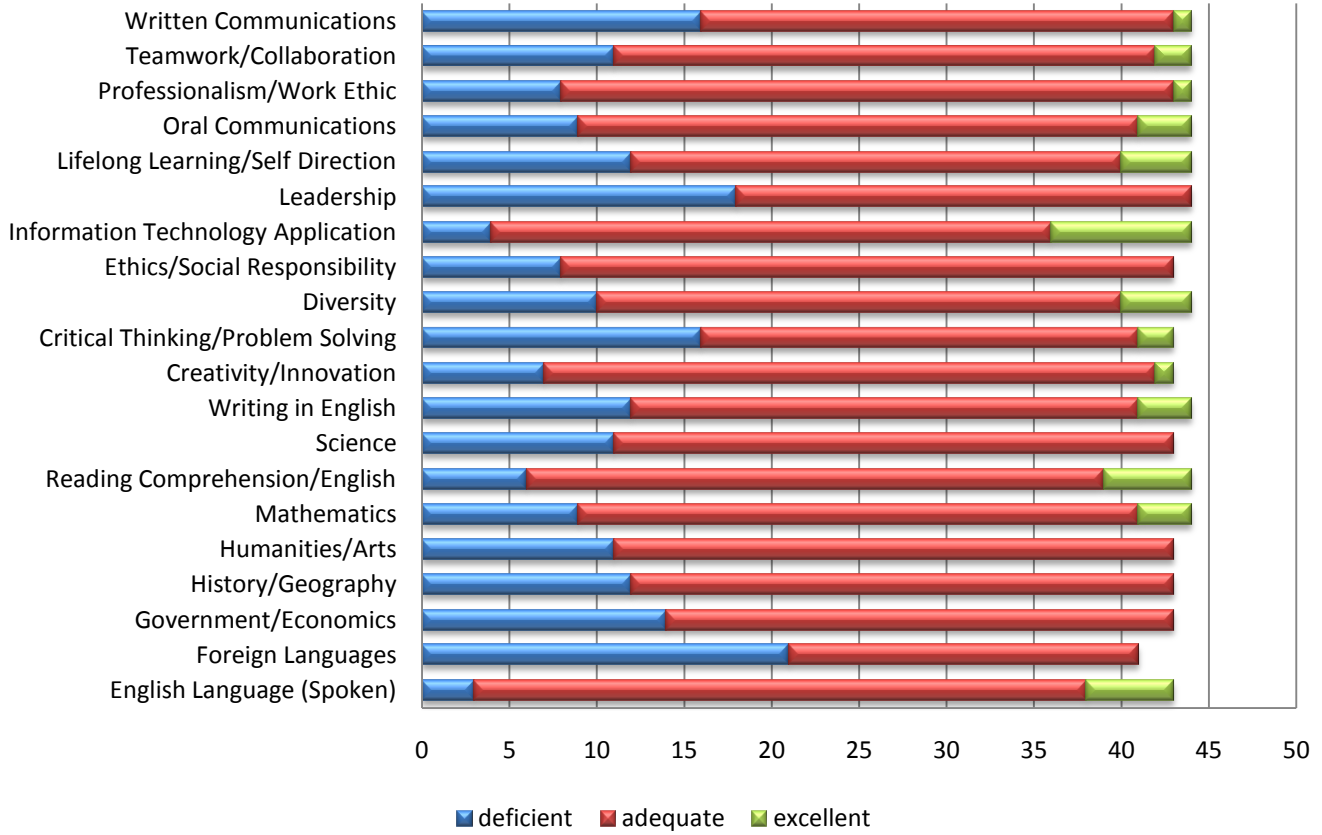
1. Based on respondents' survey question answers, there is a perceived gap between skills provided by the current entrants to the workforce and the skills required in entry-level jobs. While the gap identified locally is similar in type and scope to that cited in the national survey report, it is clear that this is a current and important concern for regional employers from a variety of industries. Consequently, additional data collection, analysis and action planning should be undertaken in our region in connection with the skills gap identified. In particular, regional employers and HR professionals should be engaged in interviews, focus groups and best practice sharing. Fortunately, there are many willing employer participants as well as capable agencies and institutions that can facilitate this in our region.
2. The large percentage of employers who are using some form of skills or personality/work style assessment as a screening and selection tool is encouraging, although careful and appropriate use of these tools is necessary if they are to yield improved results. The ACT National Career Readiness Certificate and WorkKeys assessments were adopted early and have been used by many employers in our region. In addition, all High School graduates in the state have the opportunity to earn and present this job-ready credential. If valid instruments like the NCRC are used appropriately by employers, and applicants are provided with necessary preparation and remediation, then credential development and assessment will be helpful in decreasing the skills gap over time. It is recommended that additional valid credentials and assessment tools be adopted and judiciously applied within our region.
3. Many regional organizations and entities are currently engaged in the effort to identify, quantify and develop the skills required in our current and future workforce. Various survey forms, assessments, competency models, databases, selection tools and remediation programs are in development or in use in the three county region. While it is important to continue to provide opportunity for each organization to seek its own solutions, there is an overriding need to share information, provide support and technical assistance, and set up websites, data warehouses or other means of disseminating information, with the end goal of putting into practice the best tools available, region-wide.
4. The legislative and administrative arms of government can do much to foster the development of region-wide systems to address the systemic problem of the "skills gap". Agency administrators and public educators must continue to partner with businesses and nonprofits in order to support the critical effort to close the skills gap. In particular, Adult Ed and Vocational/Tech Ed delivery systems and providers should be encouraged to use the data in this report to contextualize learning and target outcomes that align with employer needs. In addition, legislators are needed who will support smart, lean initiatives and targeted, regional collaboration in this area.
5. Finally, the employer data provided in this report as well as the national data from the 2006 report must be compared to data from the other side of the skills gap: the employee, student or applicant side. While the employer perceptions recorded in this report suggest that prospective employees have a ways to go to fulfill the expectations of employers, the opposite may be said as well. Last August, SHRM published a survey of HR professionals in which 80 percent of respondents reported that employees' stress had increased and morale had decreased. Stress and poor morale lead to a lack of employee engagement, that highly sought-after quality of giving the "extra effort" which employers in every sector depend on. In fact, recent surveys cited by SHRM suggest that only 29 percent of employees "work with passion and feel a profound connection to the organization." In addition, the changes in values that are impacting the workplace as a new generation enters employment will become more evident in the next several years. What should we expect from this new generation? While conventionally we have learned to expect that each generation enters the work world better educated than the one previous, at a national level the reverse will actually be true with the incoming generation. Thus, while employers currently express concern about the preparation of new hires, a greater effort to close the skills gap is likely going to be required in order to sharpen the skills and shape the expectations of our future workforce.

APPENDIX A: Workforce Readiness Report Card- Charts

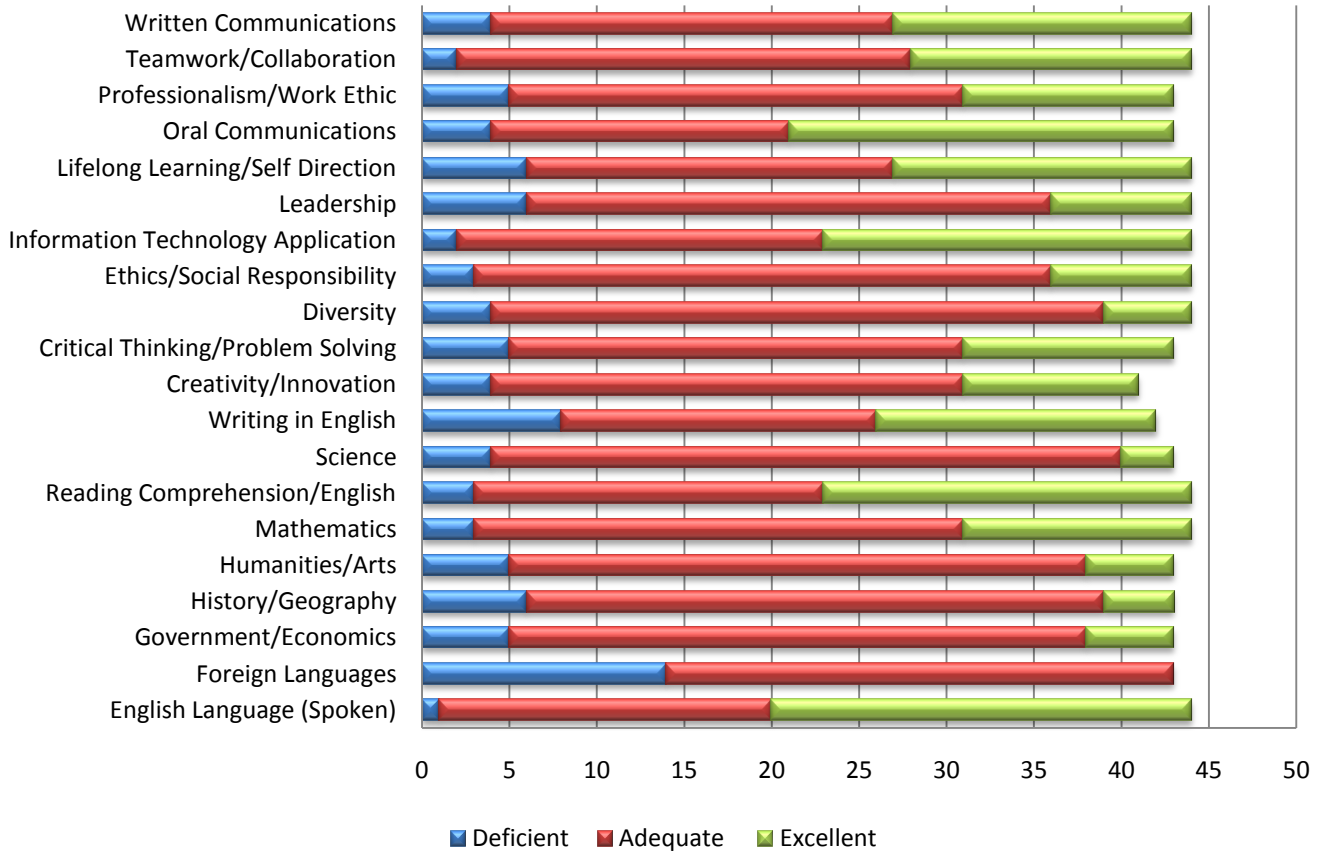
The following charts show employer ranking of preparedness.



Preparedness of New Entrants in Positions that Require an Associates Degree



Preparedness of New Entrants in Positions that Require a Bachelors Degree



APPENDIX B: Survey Questions

This document is a summary of the questions asked in the ALPWM online survey.

Section 1. Readiness to Work: Skills

In this section we ask you to consider how **important** "basic knowledge/skills" (e.g. Oral and Written Communication (English), Reading Comprehension (English), History/Geography, Humanities/Arts, Science) and "applied skills" (e.g. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, Ethics, Leadership , Information Technology) are for entry-level employees.

Please rank the **importance** of following skills/knowledge for positions requiring a **high school diploma or GED, two year college or technical school degree or diploma/four year degree (Bachelors)**.

1	2	3
not important	important	very important

English Language (Spoken), Foreign Languages, Government/Economics, History/Geography, Humanities/Arts, Mathematics, Reading Comprehension (English), Science, Writing in English (grammar, spelling, etc.), Creativity/Innovation, Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, Diversity, Ethics/Social Responsibility, Information Technology Application, Leadership, Lifelong Learning/Self Direction, Oral Communications, Professionalism/Work Ethic, Teamwork/Collaboration, Written Communications

Section 2. Readiness to Work: Preparation

In this section we ask you to consider how **prepared** entry-level employees are in the areas of "basic knowledge/skills" (e.g. Oral and Written Communication (English), Reading Comprehension (English), History/Geography, Humanities/Arts, Science) and "applied skills" (e.g. Critical Thinking/Problem Solving, Ethics, Leadership , Information Technology) at the **high school diploma or GED, two year college or technical school degree or diploma/four year degree (Bachelors)**.

1	2	3
deficient	adequate	excellent

Section 3. Entry Level Positions

Please complete the following questions regarding requirements and support offered for entry-level positions.

Q: Do you require a minimum of a High School Diploma or GED for entry-level positions? Yes/No

Q: If you have a minimum requirement, which do you prefer to hire for an entry-level position?
If you do not have a minimum requirement, please proceed to the next question.

Responses: A person with a GED/ A person with a high school diploma/ No preference

Q: For entry-level positions, do you offer support (e.g. tuition reimbursement, shift or schedule flexibility, etc.) for achievement of additional academic credentials after hire? Yes/No

Section 4. Assessments

Please answer the following questions regarding assessments used in the selection process.

Q. For any positions, are you currently using skills-based tests or assessments (e.g., WorKeys/National Skills Readiness Certificate, Mechanical Aptitude tests, etc) in the selection process? If so, please indicate the assessments in the box below. Yes/No, Name or describe _____

Q. For any positions, are you currently using personality or work style assessments (e.g., Myers-Briggs, JobFit, DISC, Kolbe, etc) in selection? If so, please indicate the assessments in the box below.
Yes/No, Name or describe _____

Q. For any positions, are you currently using assessments of general intellectual ability (Wonderlic, etc) in selection? If so, please indicate the assessments in the box below.
Yes/No, Name or describe _____

Section 5. Company and Workforce Profile

Please tell us about your company and workforce.

Please select industry/sector as classified by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Company Location (zip code)

Estimated sales (\$)

Please estimate the number of positions you have that require the following levels of educational attainment. High School Diploma/GED____; two year college or technical school degree____; four year degree (Bachelor's)____.

Other questions or comments: Do you have any additions to your responses above (reference the item topic) or suggestions or comments on this survey?

Section 6. Company Contact Info

If you would like to receive a copy of the final survey report, please provide the following information:
Contact Name, Company Name, Company Address, Email Address

Questions? Contact Lisa Miller at GVSU, 616-394-4848, or lisa.miller@gvsu.edu