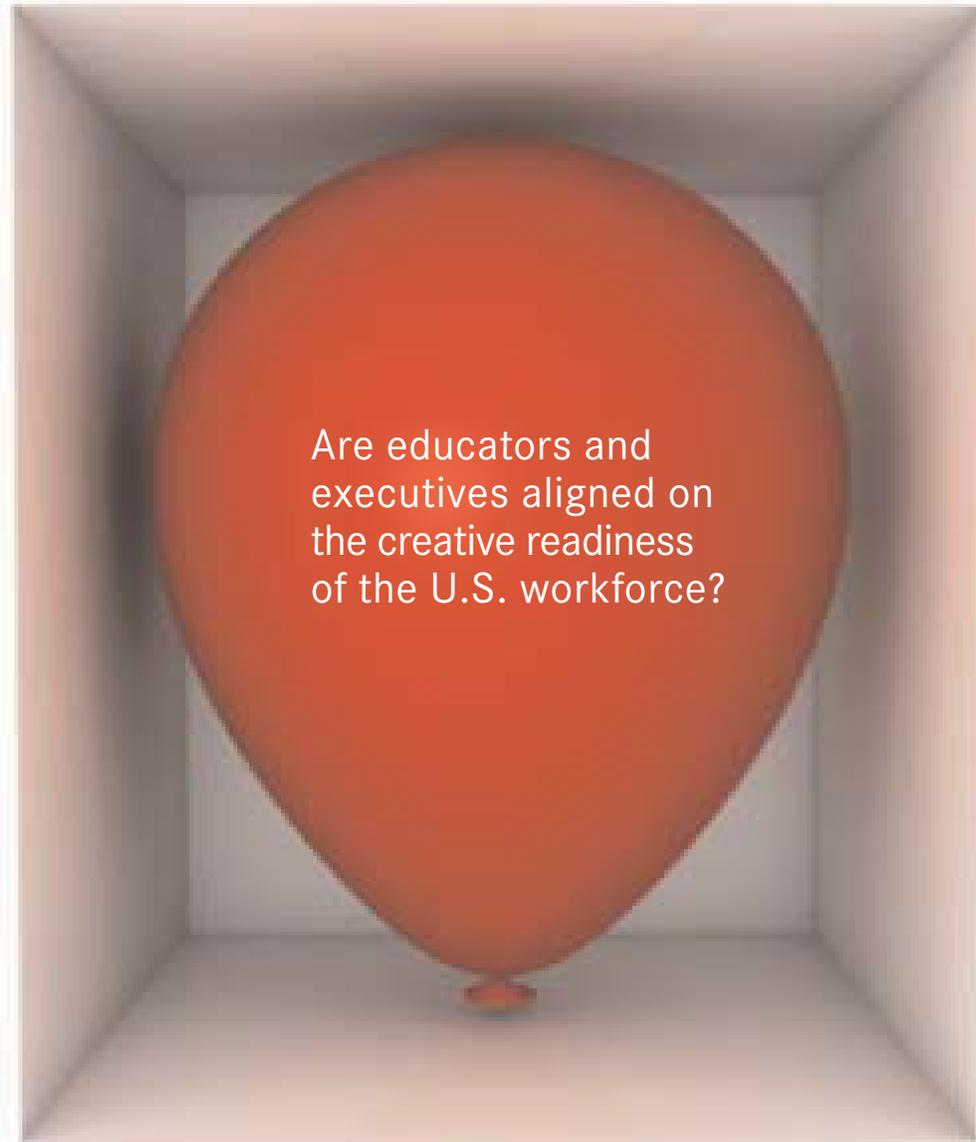




# Ready to Innovate

## Key Findings



# Ready to Innovate

## Are Educators and Executives Aligned on the Creative Readiness of the U.S. Workforce?

Innovation is crucial to competition, and creativity is integral to innovation. U.S. employers rate *creativity/innovation* among the top five skills that will increase in importance over the next five years,<sup>1</sup> and *stimulating innovation/creativity and enabling entrepreneurship* is among the top 10 challenges of U.S. CEOs.<sup>2</sup> But how to foster creativity in new entrants to the U.S. workforce? In November 2007, The Conference Board and Americans for the Arts, in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators, surveyed public school superintendents and American business executives (employers) to identify and compare their views surrounding creativity.

Overwhelmingly, both the superintendents who educate future workers and the employers who hire them agree that creativity is increasingly important in U.S. workplaces (99 percent and 97 percent, respectively), and that arts-training—and, to a lesser degree, communications studies—are crucial to developing creativity. Yet, there is a gap between understanding this truth and putting it into meaningful practice. Our findings indicate that most high schools and employers provide such training and studies only on an elective or “as needed” basis.

Other results of this survey:

- Eighty-five percent of employers concerned with hiring creative people say they can’t find the applicants they seek.
- Employers concerned with hiring creative people rarely use profile tests to assess the creative skills of potential employees (less than 20 percent). Instead, they rely on face-to-face interviews. More than 1 in 4 say they assess creativity based on interviewees’ appearance.

- Superintendents and employers cite many of the same skills as indicators of creativity. Yet when asked to rate mastery of these skills, superintendents are more likely than employers to rate graduates/new entrants as meeting or exceeding expectations.

- While 97 percent of employers say creativity is of increasing importance, only 72 percent say that hiring creative people is a primary concern.

### Defining Creativity

We gave 155 school superintendents and 89 employers a list of 11 “skills or observable behaviors” and asked them to rank which ones best demonstrate creativity. Both groups agree that *ability to identify new patterns of behavior or new combination of actions and integration of knowledge across different disciplines* are foremost in

demonstrating creativity. Other responses reveal a decided lack of alignment.

- Employers say *problem-identification or articulation* best demonstrates creativity, while school superintendents rank it ninth. Superintendents rank *problem-solving* first; employers rank it eighth. These discrepancies bolster the view that while schools teach students how to solve problems put before them, the business sector requires workers who can identify the problems in the first place.

- Most employers report that new workforce entrants meet or exceed expectations on seven of 11 creativity-related skills or behaviors. Most school superintendents report that high-school graduates meet or exceed expectations on all 11.

It is not clear what accounts for these differences. Perhaps it’s the varied perspectives of the respondents rather than a disagreement on the importance of creativity. The results suggest there needs to be more discussion between the

#### Which best demonstrates creativity?\*

(#1 = most popular choice)

	Business/ Employers	School Superintendents
Problem-identification or articulation	1	9
Ability to identify new patterns of behavior or new combination of actions	2	3
Integration of knowledge across different disciplines	3	2
Ability to originate new ideas	4	6
Comfort with the notion of “no right answer”	5	11
Fundamental curiosity	6	10
Originality and inventiveness in work	7	4
Problem-solving	8	1
Ability to take risks	9 (t)	8
Tolerance of ambiguity	9 (t)	7
Ability to communicate new ideas to others	11	5

\* Rank determined by percentage of respondents selecting skill. Respondents allowed to select only three skills.

<sup>1</sup> The Conference Board, Corporate Voices for Working Families, Partnership for 21st Skills, Society for Human Resource Management, *Are They Really Ready to Work? Employers’ Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*, Research Report BED-06, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> The Conference Board, *CEO Challenge 2007: Top 10 Challenges*, Research Report 1406, 2007.

two groups—educators and employers—to be sure they understand each other’s points of view.

## Diverging Views

Seventy percent of school superintendents presume employers seek out “creative thinkers” over “technically skilled” individuals. Employers, as a group, are evenly split (49/51). When employers are separated into two groups—those who say creativity is a primary hiring criterion and those who say it is not—differences emerge:

- Of employers seeking creativity, 63 percent prefer the creative employee over the technically skilled one.
- Of employers who do not see creativity as primary, only 16 percent prefer creativity over technical skill.

## Playing a Guessing Game

Employers who are concerned with hiring creative people use job interviews as their primary tool for assessing creativity. In those interviews, employers evaluate the following:

- *Ability to look spontaneously beyond the specifics of a question* (78 percent)
- *Responses to hypothetical scenarios* (70 percent)
- *Elaboration on extracurricular activities or volunteer work* (40 percent)
- *Appearance (style of dress, accessory, hair, etc.)* (27 percent)

Asked to name the educational backgrounds and experiences deemed indicators of creativity, school superintendents and employers rank *arts study* among the top two.

- School superintendents rank *arts study* as the highest indicator of creativity, followed by *experience in performing arts/entertainment*.

- Employers rank *arts study* second, topped only by *self-employed work*, as an indicator of creativity.

## Walking the Walk

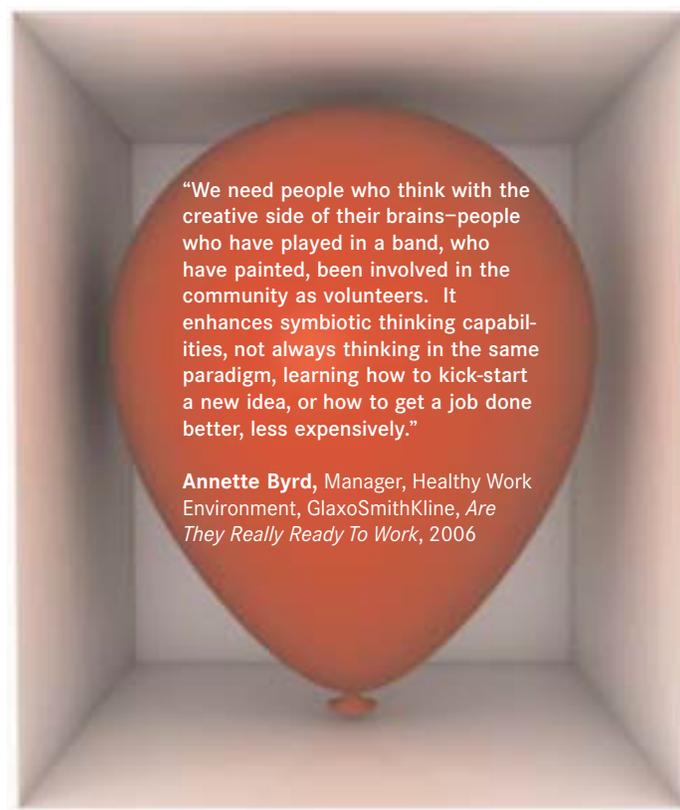
Educators and employers both feel they have a responsibility for instilling creativity in the U.S. workforce (83 and 61 percent, respectively). However, their current creativity-building offerings don’t match this desire.

When superintendents were presented with a list of 12 creativity-promoting educational activities/experiences, more than three-quarters reported that each one (excluding study-abroad programs) is supported within their high schools. However, in more than half of these schools, only three of these activities/experiences are part of the required curriculum.

When employers were presented with a comparable list of eight employee activities/training options, at least half the employers identified seven of the eight as creativity-developing endeavors. Of this group, however, fewer than one in 10 say they provide those seven to all their employees. And only four of the eight options are offered even on an “as needed” basis by more than half the employers.

The picture isn’t much better among those employers who cite creativity as a primary hiring criterion. In this group, 80 percent provide the three activities/training options that they say best develop creativity—*working in departments other than their own*, *managerial coaching*, and *mentoring*—only on an “as needed” basis.

Given these findings, it is time for employers to evaluate how well their corporate support of education and their own employee training programs stack up against the strategic value they themselves place on innovation and its creative underpinning. It is also time for greater dialogue within and across all sectors to better understand and align efforts to foster creativity in current and future U.S. employees.



## About This Report

This Key Findings report is based on the upcoming *Ready to Innovate: Are Educators and Executives Aligned on the Creative Readiness of the U.S. Workforce?*, which has been developed as part of The Conference Board Workforce Readiness Initiative. Focusing on the skills and knowledge of current, new, and future employees, The Conference Board Workforce Readiness Initiative is committed to helping ensure that employers have the workforces they need to compete in the global marketplace. Our evolving work is validated by frequent interaction with our 2,000 member companies as we respond to their emerging business issues.

\* James Lichtenberg and Christopher Woock with Mary Wright, *Ready to Innovate: Are Educators and Executives Aligned on the Creative Readiness of the U.S. Workforce?*, The Conference Board, Research Report 1424, 2008.



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