



Who Will Be the New Business Leaders in Maine?

Strengthening career-technical education and high-quality postsecondary learning will build the skilled workforce that Maine needs

By 2025, Maine will need an additional 158,000 workers with the skills and credentials needed to fill our state's job openings.¹ Furthermore, to reach Maine's educational attainment goal, 60 percent of all adults must hold a postsecondary credential of value by that time.² While Maine has improved its overall rate of educational attainment to 46 percent, it lags slightly behind the national average.³ It is clear that our state has considerable work to do to ensure it can field the well-qualified workforce we need.

Maine's Working-Age Population is Rapidly Shrinking

In 2018, the largest contributor to real GDP growth in Maine was professional and business services, adding thousands of jobs to the economy.⁴ At the same time, Maine is experiencing a decline in the working-age population, putting a strain on our state's



We hear from employers every day about their workforce needs. It is critical that we partner with schools and students of all ages to develop our next generation of business leaders right here in Maine.



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economic development and per capita income. According to census data, Maine's median age is 44.3, which is 6.5 years older than the national average.⁵ By 2025, the school and young working adult population is projected to decline as the retiree population drastically increases.⁶ The ratio of senior citizens to working adults in Maine will increase 93 percent by 2030, far surpassing the U.S. average increase of 67 percent.⁷ As the population ages, more job opportunities are being created than workers to fill them.

Maine Employers Need Skilled Workers

In the most recent “*Making Maine Work*” report, more than 1,000 Maine employers say that the top two factors supporting business retention are quality of life and quality of workforce.⁸ Yet amongst their top 10 concerns, No. 2 is the availability of professional workers, No. 4 is the availability of skilled technical workers, and No. 5 is the availability of entry-level workers. It is apparent that the labor force we are building in Maine today will fall far short of the demand of our businesses.

Expanding Postsecondary Opportunities Will Grow the Future Workforce

Educational attainment can have profound impacts on a student's career trajectory. In fact, unemployment falls and wages rise up to 50 percent as a person's education level increases from a high school diploma to a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, though, Maine students experience a “funnel effect”; out of 100 students entering high school, 87 earn a high school diploma, 55 enroll in a two-year or four-year college, and 30 graduate college.⁹ Preparing students for

 We must commit to the urgent goal of preparing Maine people to build a talent pool to match employer and employee needs, and thus build a strong economy for years to come.



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postsecondary education and successful career paths is essential, especially considering Maine's aging workforce.¹⁰

Affordable, High-quality Secondary and Postsecondary Options Build the Competencies Maine Needs

Today's students must acquire both the hard and soft skills needed to thrive in the workforce, including effective communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, working collaboratively, learning how to learn, and creating an academic mindset.¹¹ In fact, employers say these skills are among the most lacking in today's employees. In Maine, we are fortunate to have a breadth of secondary and postsecondary options to provide our students with these skills and more.



Bridge Academy Maine

Using Rigor and Relevance to Help Close the Skills Gap for Maine Youth

Bridge Academy is a cutting-edge career and technical education (CTE) program that provides high school students with an early college experience and the skills needed to graduate workforce-ready. Bridge Academy is a great example of bringing together the best in our education system in Maine. It is a true collaboration between our high schools, our CTE centers, and our university and community college systems. Students may take CTE courses for up to 24 college credits and earn real-world credentials, reducing the time and debt that they will accrue by enrolling in postsecondary education. Bridge Academy also equips students with the technical skills they need to participate meaningfully in Maine's economy, offering programs in subjects that include business, healthcare, construction trades, and pre-engineering. During their participation in Bridge Academy, relevant, real-world experiences provide students with lessons and skills that they bring with them into their lives as future workers in our state.¹²

Conclusion

Business leaders from all corners of Maine are working in partnership with education stakeholders and policymakers to help build a stronger workforce. Businesses want to help ensure students receive earlier career exposure, academic and training relevance, program innovation, and employer/secondary school partnerships that help students both see and achieve their postsecondary aspirations. Maine's career and technical

centers are one innovative example of better matching students' interests and needs with those of Maine workplaces. These programs attract and motivate many students who would otherwise not see their potential for success in a wide variety of careers, including those that are in highest demand. Investments in high-quality secondary and postsecondary options help ensure that our students are building the skills they need today to lead our businesses tomorrow.

Endnotes

1 MaineSpark (n.d.) <https://mainespark.me/>

2 Lumina Foundation. (2019). A Stronger Nation, Maine's Progress Towards the Goal. <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2019/#state/ME>

3 Ibid.

4 Bureau of Economic Analysis. (2018). Maine. U.S. Department of Commerce. <https://www.bea.gov/regional/bearfacts/pdf.cfm?fips=23000&areatype=STATE&geotype=3>; Maine Development Foundation. (2017). Measures of Growth: Performance Measures and Benchmarks to Achieve a Vibrant and Sustainable Economy for Maine. <http://www.mdf.org/publications/Measures-of-Growth-2017/922/>

5 United States Census Bureau. 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml?src=bkmk; Bell, T. (2013). The demographics of Maine. Portland Press Herald. <http://specialprojects.pressherald.com/aging/the-demographics-of-maine/>

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7 Maine Development Foundation. (2017). Measures of Growth: Performance Measures and Benchmarks to Achieve a Vibrant and Sustainable Economy for Maine.

8 Making Maine Work: Critical Investments for the Maine Economy. (2018). http://www.mainechamber.org/documents/makingmainework/MMW07-Priorities2018_Final2Web.pdf

9 Educate Maine. (2018). Education Indicators for Maine. http://www.educatemaine.org/docs/EducateMaine_2018_IndicatorReportWEB01.pdf

10 Maine Development Foundation. (n.d.) Maine's Investment Imperative II: Unleashing the Potential. <http://mdf.org/publications/Maines-Investment-Imperative-II-Unleashing-the-Potential/283/>

11 The Alliance for Excellent Education. (2019). Why Do All Students Need to be Ready for College, Career, and Life? <https://deeperlearning4all.org/>

12 Bridge Academy Maine (2019). Bridge Academy Maine Overview. <https://www.bridgeacademymaine.org/>

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