



New Mantra for Education: **Life Readiness**

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Student success is every educator's highest priority but the interpretation of success is ambiguous. With only 44% of students still fully engaged in high school, down from 76% in Grade 1 ([Gallup](#))¹, and nearly half of out-of-school 16-25 year-olds unemployed or in precarious, low-wage, no-benefits jobs², it's clear that despite best intentions education is not fully succeeding in preparing our youth for success *beyond* school.

Life readiness is emerging as the new standard of success, the new mantra for education. Life-ready students are prepared for success in life after high school, including postsecondary education and modern jobs and career paths. Advocates of life readiness contend that the purpose of public education is to look beyond test scores or graduation rates—success *in* school—to the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes (competencies) students actually need to succeed in adult life — success *after* school. A high school diploma, in this view, should certify readiness for post-graduation jobs and learning experiences, rather than merely the completion of secondary school.³

This new success standard is triggering in a paradigm shift to personalized, project-based, real-world learning that helps students explore and test career pathways⁴ at all levels. The Harvard Graduate School of Education's 2011 paper, "*Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*"⁵ made a compelling case for encouraging students to explore *multiple* pathways. Their claim that the "college for all" mantra harms students and the economy sent shockwaves through the education world. It ignited many new pathways initiatives and focused attention on the Swiss⁶ and other national models that offer more cost-effective and direct pathways to *career readiness*.

Pathways to Prosperity co-author Dr. William Symonds presented the report's findings in over 40 states before founding the *Global Pathways Institute*⁷ (GPI) at Arizona State University. GPI has since convened thousands of education, business and government leaders in Washington, DC and Regional Pathways Conferences.⁸ With 12 national partner organizations⁹, GPI formed the *Coalition for Career Development*¹⁰ to make *career readiness* a central priority in education and workforce systems.

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/170525/school-cliff-student-engagement-drops-school-year.aspx>

² <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/03/12/24davila.h33.html>

³ <http://edglossary.org/career-ready/>

⁴ <https://cte.careertech.org/sites/default/files/CareerClustersPathways.pdf>

⁵ https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4740480/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011-1.pdf?sequence=1

⁶ <http://www.newlyswissed.com/swiss-apprenticeship-system-model-world/>

⁷ <http://globalpathwaysinstitute.org/about/>

⁸ https://youtu.be/_RCwr5pKSuk

⁹ ACT, Inc., Advance CTE: State Leaders Connecting Learning to Work Association for Career and Technical Education, America's Promise Alliance, Boston University School of Education, Council of Chief State School Officers,

The US Chamber of Commerce Foundation (USCCF) is a GPI Coalition partner. Its *Making Youth Employment Work*¹¹ series is fueling employer engagement in pathways models. USCCF has urged States to measure career readiness¹², and challenged America's 3 million employers to provide and fund industry 'account managers' in school systems. Just as account managers in the private sector are responsible for ensuring customer satisfaction, USCCF recommends that businesses, as the largest consumers of the product of the education system, provide industry liaison agents to deliver quality career development services to local educators that meet workforce needs.

With Harvard Graduate School of Education's Dr Robert Schwartz, co-author of *Pathways to Prosperity, Jobs For the Future*¹³ is growing the *Pathways to Prosperity Partnership Network*¹⁴. It now includes eight states (AZ, CA, DE, IL, IN, MA, TN, TX); three Metro regions (Columbus/Central Ohio; Twin Cities; and Metro Madison); and two urbans (New York City; Philadelphia). Their common goal is to build and enhance members' capacity to design, implement, improve and scale state and regional pathways systems enhance students' career readiness by increasing the number of youth who complete high school and attain an in-demand post-secondary credential or industry certification.

The Linked Learning Alliance¹⁵ in California believes students work harder and dream bigger if their education is relevant to them. Their approach¹⁶ integrates rigorous academics with sequenced, high-quality career-technical education, work-based learning and supports to help students stay on track. Industry themes are woven into lessons taught by teachers who collaborate across subject areas with input from working professionals, and reinforced by work-based learning with real employers. This makes learning more like the real world of work, and helps students answer the question, "Why do I need to know this?" The result: *career ready* graduates.

Advance CTE¹⁷, the national network of State Directors of career and technical education, is promoting "*Putting Learner Success First: A Shared Vision for the Future of CTE*." The vision calls for systemic transformation of the education system to ensure students are *career ready* when they finish high school. It challenges career and technical educators to provide leadership in transforming education to truly prepare *all* students for a lifetime of success. Advance CTE's vision is supported by 12¹⁸ national organizations representing education, business and industry, and policy.

Manufacturing Skill Standards Council, National Career Development Association, National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, National Governors Association, SME, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

¹⁰ <http://globalpathwaysinstitute.org/#news>

¹¹ <http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/making-youth-employment-work>

¹² <https://www.uschamberfoundation.org/press-release/us-chamber-foundation-urges-states-measure-students-career-readiness>

¹³ <http://www.jff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network>

¹⁴ <https://youtu.be/nHRNljE1XE8>

¹⁵ <http://www.linkedlearning.org/>

¹⁶ <https://youtu.be/gSdYD38dt8Y>

¹⁷ <https://www.careertech.org/vision>

¹⁸ <https://careertech.org/vision-supporters>

The Ontario Ministry of Education's *Pathways to Success*¹⁹ policy requires that all students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 develop an Individual Pathway Plan. The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training is implementing *Future in Focus*²⁰, a new *career readiness* framework for K-12 schools in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. The Council of Ministers of Education Canada is developing a Youth Transitions Framework to provide guidelines for education systems across the country to enhance students' *career readiness*.

JPMorgan Chase & Co. launched *New Skills for Youth* in 2016, a \$75 million, 5-year initiative²¹ to strengthen career-focused education. With the Council of Chief State School Officers²², Advance CTE, and the Education Strategy Group²³ they challenged states to: a) dramatically increase the number of students in career pathways from secondary school to in-demand diplomas/degrees and/or industry credentials; and b) catalyze transformational programs and policies to increase students' *career readiness*. In phase one, 24 states²⁴ and Washington, DC received \$100,000 grants. In phase two, announced in January 2017, 10 states²⁵ are receiving \$2 million over three years to expand and improve career pathways for all high school students.

The National Center for College and Career Transitions²⁶ mantra is: "*Every learner with a dream and a plan, and every community with a capable, career ready workforce.*" NC3T connects schools, post-secondary institutions, and employers to introduce students to the array of options available to them, and prepare them for pathways for which they are best suited. President and founder Hans Meeder recently authored *The Power and Promise of Pathways*,²⁷ a step-by-step guide to building a sustainable pathways system that leads students to career readiness..

WE Schools²⁸, a division of the WE movement founded by Craig and Marc Kielburger, is delivered in over 12,000 schools across North America and the UK. The program challenges young people to identify local and global issues that spark their passion then empowers them to take action. It provides educators and students with curriculum, educational resources and a full calendar of action campaign ideas. Through WE Schools,²⁹ students see school in the context of "real world" local and global issues they're passionate about. As a result, they become more engaged in school, see the relevance of school to career pathways they are considering, and become more *career ready*.

The co-ed Exploring program³⁰ of the Boy Scouts of America teaches professional and life skills through immersive career experiences and mentorship. Businesses and community organizations initiate Explorer posts by matching their employees and organizational resources to career interests of students. The result is a program of experiential activities³¹ that help students and young adults

¹⁹ <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/>

²⁰ <http://www.camet-camef.ca/images/Future%20in%20Focus%20Framework%20English-FINAL.docx>

²¹ <https://www.jpmorganchase.com/corporate/news/stories/newskillsforyouth.htm>

²² <http://www.ccsso.org/>

²³ <http://www.edstrategy.org/>

²⁴ <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2016/NSFYPhaseOneChiefStatements.pdf>

²⁵ Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Wisconsin.

²⁶ <http://nc3t.com/>

²⁷ <http://www.pathwayssherpa.com/books/the-power-and-promise-of-pathways/>

²⁸ <https://www.we.org/we-schools/>

²⁹ <https://vimeo.com/140831062>

³⁰ <http://www.exploring.org/>

³¹ <https://youtu.be/1UtPFB0BHOA>

explore and pursue their career interests, thus becoming more *career ready*. US Chamber of Commerce President³² Thomas J. Donohue Sr. recently challenged employers across the US to sponsor Explorer posts.

On March 28, 2017 RBC unveiled RBC Future Launch³³, a 10-year, \$500-million initiative to help young Canadians gain access and opportunity to the skills, job experience and career networks needed for the future world of work – to become *career-ready*. RBC will help to create opportunities, through the education system, workplaces and communities at large to help young Canadians gain relevant workforce experience and skills, access knowledge networks, and *career and future readiness*³⁴.

Cloud-based career exploration and pathway planning systems are now ubiquitous. Some allow students to connect with career coaches, employers, and work-based learning and help employers connect with potential future talent. Career Network of Vermilion County³⁵, the digital backbone of Vermilion Advantage in Illinois, is an example. It's a US Chamber of Commerce Foundation Talent Pipeline Management pilot site. Other examples are MIBrightFUTURE³⁶ in Southeast Michigan and InspireNB³⁷ in New Brunswick, Canada. These initiatives help youth become *career ready*, and help employers develop talent pipelines.

The Government of Canada convened an Expert Panel on Youth Employment³⁸ in mid-2016 to help it understand the challenges that youth face in finding and keeping jobs and to identify promising and innovative approaches to helping all youth transition successfully into the workforce. Panelists met in-person with hundreds of young people, workforce experts, employers, community organizations and service providers. The panel's recommendations to enhance young Canadians *career readiness* will soon be public.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Youth Council,³⁹ the federal Youth Employment Strategy Directorate⁴⁰, the Council of Ministers of Education Canada,⁴¹ the Forum of Labour Market Ministers,⁴² and the Canadian Council for Career Development⁴³, among others, have youth employment and *career readiness* squarely on their radar screens. A coalition of provincial, territorial, and federal governments, with First Nations, youth groups, employers, community organizations, etc. – Coalition Transitions Canada - is being discussed to foster collaboration on innovations to better prepare students across the country become *career ready* and find their personal pathway to prosperity.

³² <https://youtu.be/wsdlvkoY9X4>

³³ http://www.rbc.com/newsroom/news/2017/20170328-rbc-future_cnews.html

³⁴ http://www.rbc.com/community-sustainability/_assets-custom/pdf/FINAL-FP-report-Online.pdf

³⁵ <http://www.cnvcinspire.org/>

³⁶ <http://mibrightfuture.org/>

³⁷ <http://www.inspirenb.ca/home>

³⁸ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/youth-expert-panel/interim-report.html#section1>

³⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/prime-ministers-youth-council.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.youth.gc.ca/eng/common/yes.shtml>

⁴¹ <http://www.cmec.ca/en/>

⁴² <http://www.flmm-fmmt.ca/english/view.asp?x=1>

⁴³ <http://cccda.org/cccda/>

Personalized, real-world, project-based, and work-based career pathways initiatives is expanding exponentially in K-12 and postsecondary settings globally. Helping students find themselves, find relevance in their education, and find their own personal pathways to success, happiness, and prosperity – *life readiness* – is becoming the new mantra of education. The implications for career professionals as leaders, coaches and facilitators in this movement are exciting and profound.

AUTHOR BIO

Phil Jarvis is President of the Transitions Canada Coalition. Formerly he was Director of Global Partnerships at Career Cruising (Xello). He has led national and international initiatives to help students become life- and career-ready, including: CHOICES, The Real Game Series, the Blueprint for Life/Work Designs, and Career Cruising. His chapter in *Career Development Practice in Canada* (CERIC, 2014) links career readiness to economic prosperity. He advocates for whole community commitment and collaboration ('it takes a village') to help students become life-ready and transition from school to success.