

# BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION:

# Key Partners for Improving Student Success

PREPARED FOR COLLEGE SUMMIT  
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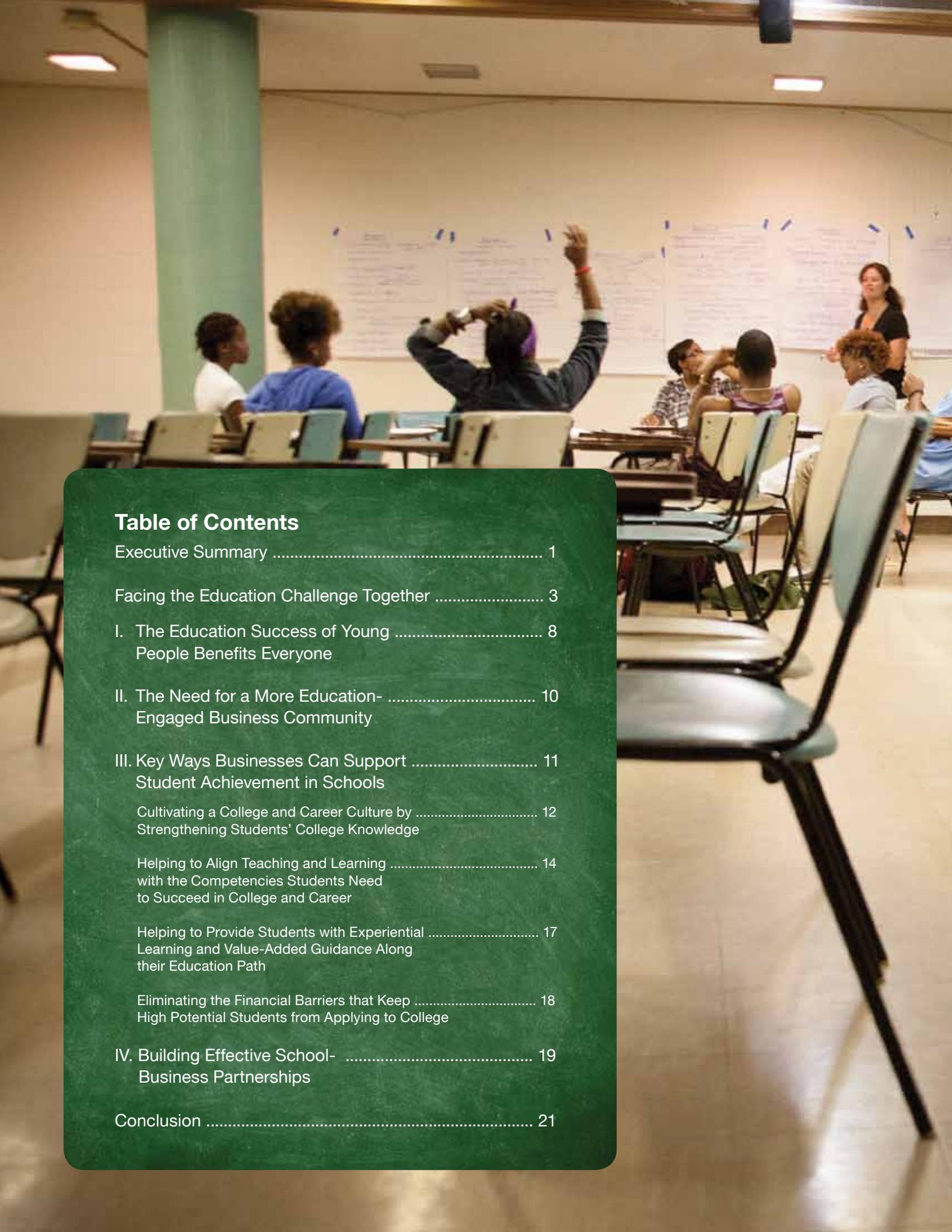
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# Executive Summary

This report stresses the importance of education-business partnerships as a way to improve the student achievement and college and career readiness of low-income and first-generation high school students.

First, it outlines the reasons we need to reverse the ongoing loss of talent when young people don't complete high school or fail to obtain the rigorous and relevant education they need for success as adults. Second, it discusses the costs if these critical challenges are not successfully addressed. Third, the report provides guidance on ways in which the business and education sectors can and do work together to leverage the power of collective action to improve these outcomes. The engagement of effective business-education partnerships is crucial if we, as a nation, are to work together to achieve positive outcomes for young people, communities, and the economy going forward in the 21st century.

The imperative facing the nation today is to find ways to improve education and learning for all young people and to ensure that no one lacks genuine opportunities to develop the skills and competencies they will need to succeed in higher education and the workplace. Postsecondary education is fast becoming a prerequisite for successful entry into occupations that provide a living wage and the opportunity for upward mobility. Achieving success in broadening young peoples' access to college and a meaningful career will result in sustainable and vibrant communities and a more prosperous nation ready to take on the vexing challenges that will most certainly emerge in the years ahead.

The achievement gaps in the nation's education system are real and challenging. Real progress in improving the pool of talented and motivated young workers with the skills to prosper will largely come from improving the academic success of those that fall lowest on the socio-economic ladder. Research has shown that those at risk are less likely to succeed in high school, fail to bridge the gap from high school to higher education, and, if they make it to college, struggle to move forward to degree completion and into a stable job. This group has traditionally lagged their better-prepared peers, and continues to fall behind even as the value of education rises.

Meeting these challenges head-on and with success requires commitment, innovation, and a willingness on the part of the many who have a stake in the future of the nation's young people to work together for change. The resulting partnerships and collective impact can be transformative. Working together, businesses, schools, nonprofit organizations, and others can change the culture and character of the high school experience and enrich the lives of students. They can strengthen the capacity of schools and educators, and enhance their ability to offer students relevant curricula, tools, and techniques that deepen their engagement with real-world learning. Further, they can bring together diverse community members in ways that foster civic involvement and the application of authentic leadership in support of young peoples' educational achievement.



Partnerships between education and business have consistently shown their value in communities across the nation. They can, for example:

- Provide work-based learning experiences and strengthen career awareness.
- Help schools build success-oriented college and career cultures that empower students.
- Help educators align curriculum and readiness standards with business needs.
- Provide funding and equipment to modernize classrooms, workspaces, and labs.
- Help youth build meaningful relationships with strong role models and mentors.
- Provide financial guidance and advice that lessens affordability as a barrier to college.

The value-potential of a true partnership lies not only in the solutions and activities it can deliver but also the level of commitment and engagement of the stakeholders. Businesses need to see importance and return on their investment, be it the development of a pipeline of well-trained employees, a more stable community for their factory and office, or an opportunity for employees to develop new skills and contacts in the community. It is essential that schools have a clearly defined role for themselves in any alliance and be willing to join together as partners in education to optimize their impact. A common strategic vision is essential to help all parties work to the advantage of students.

As this report clearly highlights, the bottom line for business and education is that partnership and collective action is a powerful formula for improving the chances that more students stay engaged with learning, find meaning in school, and follow a pathway into college and a career. An education-business partnership has the potential to change the life experience of a young person in ways that may not always be measurable, but certainly provide an impact—especially as a means to build and to realize a vision of what is possible in their life through learning.



They also must work in concert and with greater resolve to help those who need the most assistance to successfully navigate the demands of our challenging socio-economic landscape. This means high schools, school districts, businesses, parents, nonprofit groups, civic leaders, and public agencies need to roll-up their sleeves, work side-by-side, and build true partnerships that will open new avenues to learning and personal development for students and improve their chances for success across their school to career pathway.

All who have a stake in the success of our young people have an obvious and convincing incentive to be actively and collectively engaged in their learning-lives. The heavy lifting required to raise education achievement and create transformative learning experiences calls for shared commitment and collaboration. A willingness to encourage innovation and engage new approaches to teaching and learning that will bridge the divide between school and the real-world demands young people face as they move toward adulthood is a necessity.

### **Business-Education Partnerships**

The case for business-education alliances is so relevant because of the value it can bring to improving student success and opportunity. “Ensuring that all students graduate academically prepared for college, citizenship, and the 21st century workplace,” contends the Business Coalition for Student Achievement, “there is perhaps no greater job the U.S. business community can undertake.”<sup>13</sup> Such a collaborative working relationship built on a platform of shared values and goals, can have tremendous impact on the effectiveness of educators and on the individual outcomes of students. It can enrich lives and open doors to opportunities and greatly improve the capacity of schools to help young people climb the education ladder toward a meaningful career.<sup>14</sup>

There is hope, as the U.S. business community has a long legacy of making strategic investments that improve the education and training of America’s young people.<sup>15</sup> As the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s Institute for a Competitive Workforce states, “The business community is the number one consumer of the public education system and therefore must be an involved and engaged stakeholder in the education of America’s children.” And, in our current times of scarce resources and increasingly strained school capacity, their active engagement in the education process is increasingly critical. Business leaders and professionals are uniquely positioned to work with schools to educate, inspire, and engage students while helping to develop the talent pipelines for the workforce of tomorrow. The return on their collaboration with educators has consistently shown to be significant for all parties involved: students benefit, as does the school and the business, as well as the community.

## **AMGEN-BRUCE WALLACE BIOTECHNOLOGY LAB PROGRAM**

The Amgen-Bruce Wallace Biotechnology Lab Program, funded by the Amgen Foundation, the philanthropic organization of Amgen, partners with schools and industry to provide young people the opportunity to experience real-world, inquiry-based science in the classroom setting.

Guided by their teachers and enriched by state-of-the-art resources and materials, students have the opportunity to explore the steps involved in creating biotechnology medicines, discover the challenges and rewards of a genuine laboratory experiences, strengthen their scientific literacy skills, and learn about college and career opportunities in the science fields. The program provides educators with a comprehensive system of classroom and education delivery support. Instructors are provided with a comprehensive experiential-based curriculum, support materials such as student guides and pre-lab notes, resources necessary to implement the curriculum in the classroom setting, and research-grade lab equipment.

The laboratory experiments conducted by students incorporate core technologies used by the biotechnology industry and thus create a highly relevant experience of application, discovery, and learning. Professional development training is available for teachers where they learn from professionals working in the biotechnology field the theory embedded in the program’s curriculum, classroom implementation methods, and current as well as emerging laboratory techniques.