



Mercer County Talent Alignment Survey: Preliminary Report

Bridging The Talent Gap — an initiative sponsored by The Graduate! Network

Submitted November 2016

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MERCER COUNTY TALENT ALIGNMENT SURVEY

The Mercer County Talent Alignment Survey was administered to HR Professionals and other business leaders over a two-week period in October, 2016. There were 74 completed surveys and 162 partially completed surveys with missing information. Usable data were derived from a total of 123 respondents.

Specifically, respondents were represented in the following ways:

- **86%** represent small businesses (1 – 200 employees)
- **8%** represent medium-sized businesses (201 – 1,000 employees)
- **6%** represent businesses with more than 1,000 employees

Industries Represented

Sector	Number (%)
Accommodation & Food Services	6 (5%)
Administration & Support	6 (5%)
Agriculture	1 (1%)
Arts & Entertainment	8 (7%)
Construction	5 (4%)
Educational Services	16 (13%)
Finance & Insurance	12 (10%)
Healthcare	14 (12%)
Government Agencies	7 (6%)
Information	6 (5%)
Manufacturing	6 (5%)
Personal & Laundry Services	0 (0%)
Professional Scientific & Technical Services	26 (21%)
Real Estate	6 (5%)
Religious	7 (6%)
Repair & Maintenance	0 (0%)
Retail Trade	4 (3%)
Transportation	5 (4%)
Utilities	1 (1%)
Wholesale Trade	2 (2%)
Other	24 (20%)

(Please note, percentages do not add up to 100% because survey respondents could choose more than one industry cluster.)

Executive Summary of the Findings

Community Landscape

- A total of **57%** of survey respondents described the economic conditions in their community as positive. Of the industries most represented in the survey, professional, scientific and technical services held the most optimistic view (**62%** positive, n = 26). Conversely, the least optimistic industry among those most represented was educational services, with **47%** holding a positive view of the community's economic conditions (n = 15). Considering all industries with 5 or more respondents, the most optimistic was accommodation and food services (**100%**).
- **80%** report that their respective companies are preparing for moderate to high growth in the next 3-5 years. Among industries most represented, **92%** of professional, scientific and technical services anticipate moderate to fast growth. Educational services are the least likely (**67%**) to anticipate growth among those most represented in the survey.

Hiring Landscape

- **Among those currently hiring, 71%** indicated that recruiting qualified workers is difficult.
- **For respondents hiring for new full-time regular positions requiring new and different skills, 72%** report it somewhat or very difficult to find qualified individuals for new regular jobs requiring new and different skill sets.
- **49%** of the business community is currently hiring for full-time, regular staff. **Among those currently hiring for full time positions, 66%** are hiring non-management salaried employees while **8%** are hiring executive level management.
- **Among those currently hiring, 40%** of all new hires require new or updated skills.
- **It has been somewhat or very difficult for 94%** of employers hiring high-skilled medical staff (nurses, doctors and specialists) to do so. Similar difficulty has been experienced for those hiring engineers (**100%**), and skilled trades (**91%**).
- Somewhat or very easy positions to fill include HR professionals (**62%**), customer service representatives (**54%**) and administrative support staff (**49%**).
- The main reasons respondents experience difficulty in hiring includes candidates who do not have the right skills for the job (**63%**), low number of applicants (**57%**), and competition from other employers (**51%**). **Only 11% of respondents identified the**

idea that local education/training system does produce enough work ready/qualified candidates as a main reason for such difficulty.

Skill Needs Landscape

- Across all **academic** skills, respondents reported that **49%** of high school diploma holders in their labor pool possessed the skills needed for their jobs. This figure was **52%** for technical/community college graduates and **62%** for four-year college graduates. The academic skill experiencing the greatest increase in respondents' opinions was science with an increase in the percent of "yes" responses from **16%** for high school diploma holders to **56%** for those with a four-year college degree.
- Among academic skills considered, spoken English was rated with the greatest proportion of yes responses across all education levels (high school diploma holders: **84%**, technical/community college degree holders: **82%**, four-year college degree holders: **85%**). Reading comprehension in English was rated equally high for four-year degree holders.
- Across all **applied** skills, respondents reported that **47%** of high school diploma holders in their labor pool possessed the skills needed for their jobs. This figure was **53%** for technical/community college graduates and **63%** for four-year college graduates. The applied skill experiencing the greatest increase in respondents' opinions was engineering/technical skills with an increase in the percent of "yes" responses from **37%** for high school diploma holders to **69%** for those with a four-year college degree. Among the multiple soft-skill sets to gain from education attainment, leadership experienced the greatest increase in yes responses, with **33%** for high school diploma holders to **63%** for four-year degree holders.
- Among applied skills considered, diversity (the ability to work well with a diverse workforce and customer base) was rated with the greatest proportion of yes responses across all education levels (High school diploma holders: **74%**, technical/community college degree holders: **73%**, four-year college degree holders: **83%**). Reading comprehension in English was rated equally high for four-year degree holders.

Learning Landscape

- **43%** of organizations reported the need for employees with a minimum of a bachelor's degree will increase.

- **28%** say this same need applies for employees with an advanced degree. The skills we need and our economic prospects are indeed changing and fall under the heading of “a good problem to have.”
- Support for learning was mixed across respondents. **36%** provide financial support to pursue college level courses, **44%** offer financial support for learning/training that is not college coursework, **72%** provide on-the-job learning or training, **41%** provide support in non-financial ways.
- Respondents offer a variety of methods supporting education. Among those most often identified include flexible work schedules (**77%**), advice on which degrees will benefit employees’ careers (**42%**), and public recognition of education achievement (**42%**).
- On average **55%** of financial benefits offered to employees is utilized annually. The main reason given for learning benefits not being utilized more fully involve workers being too busy or committed otherwise to pursue education (**39%**).
- A majority (**68%**) of respondents indicated that they **did not** currently work with a local education provider to assess skill gaps that can be addressed through educational institutions’ program offerings and curricula.
- **65%** of respondents who do not currently partner with education institutions either definitely or possibly might consider doing so. An additional **15%** say they might consider such a partnership in the future.
- Education was considered influential in helping respondents achieve their organizational goals. On a scale of 1 – 100 the average rating was **72** across all organizational goals, with a low of **63** and a high of **79**. A rating of 1 would indicate no influence and a rating of 100 would indicate that education is very influential.

Items specific to Mercer County Talent Alignment Survey

Does your organization provide on-site training for new employees?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	67.6%	50
No	12.2%	9
Don’t know	2.7%	2
Not applicable	17.6%	13

**How do you measure the time investment in on-site training for new employees?
(Check as many as apply.)**

Value	Count	Average Time
Hours per employee	17	26 hours
Days per employee	12	14 days
Weeks per employee	7	5 weeks
Months per employee	3	3 or more months
Don't know	6	
We do not measure time investment in on-site training	19	

If your on-site training could be completed before you hire a new employee, would you be willing to work with an educational institution or other learning provider to deliver such training?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes, definitely	9.5%	7
Possibly, but would need more information to decide	28.4%	21
No, but might be interested in doing so in the future	10.8%	8
No, and do not anticipate doing so in the future	31.1%	23
Don't know	4.1%	3
Not applicable	16.2%	12

NOTE: These data are preliminary, representing a snapshot of communities after initial piloting of the Mercer County Talent Alignment Survey administration and should be interpreted with that in mind.

If you would like more information about Bridging The Talent Gap, please contact Bridgett Strickler, Director of Network Engagement, The Graduate! Network and Co- Principle Investigator/ Business Engagement Lead, Bridging The Talent Gap, Bridgett.Strickler@Graduate-Network.org

Appendix

Approximately how many people are employed by your organization, full-time and part-time, at your work location? (Please exclude outside contractors from your count.)

	Frequency	Percentage
Self-employed	13	10.2%
1 - 10 employees	33	26.0%
11 - 50 employees	33	26.0%
51 - 200 employees	30	23.6%
201 - 500 employees	8	6.3%
501 - 1,000 employees	2	1.6%
1,001- 5,000 employees	7	5.5%
5,001 - 10,000 employees	1	0.8%
More than 10,000 employees	0	0.0%

This survey classifies industries according to a modified version of the NAICS coding system defined by the US Census Bureau. Please select up to five industries for the organization for which you are providing input.

	Frequency
Accommodation and Food Services	6
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	6
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	8
Construction	5
Educational Services	16
Finance and Insurance	11
Health Care and Social Assistance	14
Government Agencies	7
Information	6
Manufacturing	6
Mining	0
Personal and Laundry Services	0

Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	26
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	6
Religious, Grantmaking, Civic, Professional, and Similar Organizations	7
Repair and Maintenance	0
Retail Trade	4
Transportation and Warehousing	5
Utilities	1
Wholesale Trade	2
Other - Write In	24

Community Economic Conditions

Overall, how would you describe the economic conditions in your community or area?

	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely negative	1	0.9%
Negative	6	5.2%
Somewhat negative	14	12.2%

Neither negative nor positive	29	25.2%
Somewhat positive	27	23.5%
Positive	37	32.2%
Extremely positive	1	0.9%

N = 115

Over the next 3 to 5 years, what is your organization's projected growth?

	Frequency	Percentage
Fast decline - loss of jobs and/or possibly of business	1	0.9%
Moderate decline	1	0.9%
No Growth	16	13.9%
Moderate growth	76	66.1%
Fast growth	16	13.9%
Don't know	5	4.3%

N = 115

Hiring

Is your organization currently hiring for any of the following?

	Yes	No
Full-time regular staff	51 (44.7%)	63(55.3%)
Part-time regular staff	43 (37.7%)	71 (62.3%)
Temporary staff	24 (21.1%)	90 (78.9%)
Temporary-to-regular staff	21 (18.4%)	93 (81.6%)

Hiring Focus

At what level(s) is your organization currently hiring full-time regular staff? (Check all that apply.)

	Frequency
Executive/upper management (e.g., CEO, CFO)	4
Other management (e.g., directors, managers)	24
Non-management salaried employees	33
Non-management hourly employees	31

How would you describe the types of the full-time regular positions your organization is currently hiring? (Check all that apply)

	Frequency
Direct replacements of existing positions—requiring no new skills	36
New duties added to existing positions—requiring some additional new skills	16
Completely new positions—but not requiring new skill sets.	18
Completely new positions—requiring new skill sets	10

Has your organization hired any workers from outside the U.S. in an attempt to fill key full-time regular positions that have been difficult to fill with U.S. workers?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	14.3%
No, but we are considering	4	8.2%
No, but we have plans to do so in the next 12 months	1	2.0%
No	32	65.3%
Don't know	5	10.2%
Did Not Respond	184	

N = 49

Has your organization hired any U.S. Veterans in an attempt to fill key full-time regular positions that have been difficult to fill?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	13	26.5%
No, but we are considering	8	16.3%
No, but we have plans to do so in the next 12 months	4	8.2%
No	19	38.8%
Don't know	5	10.2%
Did Not Respond	184	

N = 49

Hiring Challenges

In the current labor market, are you having a difficult time recruiting for certain types of positions that are open in your organization?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	72.9%
No	10	20.8%
Don't Know	3	6.3%

N = 48

For the new, full-time regular positions being created by your organization that require new and different skill sets, how easy or difficult is it to find qualified individuals for those positions?

	Frequency	Percentage
Very easy	0	0.0%
Somewhat easy	8	28.6%
Somewhat difficult	12	42.9%
Very difficult	8	28.6%

N = 28

How easy or difficult has it been to fill the following job categories for full-time regular positions?

	Very easy	Somewhat easy	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	N/A
Accounting and Finance Professionals	0	8	15	2	23
Administrative Support Staff	5	12	15	4	12
Customer Service Representatives	3	9	8	3	25
Drivers	0	5	3	4	36
Engineers	0	0	6	2	40

High-Skill Medical	0	1	6	9	32
Hourly Laborers	1	7	5	5	30
HR Professionals	0	12	5	3	28
Managers and Executives	0	10	14	7	17
Production Operators	0	2	1	4	41
Sales Reps	2	5	8	10	23
Scientists	1	1	2	0	44
Skilled Trades	0	1	8	2	37

What are the main reasons your organization experiences difficulty in hiring qualified candidates for full-time regular positions? (Check all that apply.)

	Frequency
Candidates do not have high enough levels of education/training	8
Candidates do not have the needed credentials/certifications	11
Candidates do not have the right skills for the job	22
Candidates do not have the right work experience	16
Candidates are overqualified	1

Qualified candidates are not interested in moving to our local area	7
Qualified candidates are not within our salary range or hourly rate range	12
Our local education/training system does not produce enough work ready/qualified job candidates	4
Low number of applicants	20
Lack of interest in type of job	7
Competition from other employers	18
Don't know	0
Other - Write In	9

Hiring Influences

Please estimate the percentage of open full-time regular positions at your organization over the last 12 months for each of the following categories. All the numbers you enter need to add up to 100.

	No minimum education required	HS Diploma or Equivalent	Tech or Comm College	Bachelor's Degree	Advanced Degree
0%	38	18	22	17	28
10%	4	5	7	3	6

20%	3	3	4	1	3
30%	1	5	3	2	1
40%	1	4		7	1
50%	1	9	8	8	3
60%		1	2		1
70%	1	1		2	
80%		3	1	4	1
90%		1		2	
100%	5	7	2	11	5

What factors are most likely to encourage your organization to increase hiring? (Check all that apply.)

	Frequency
Improved market conditions/increased demand for products and services	67
More stable global economic conditions	17
Better qualified job candidate pool	33
Tax incentives or other government incentives	15
Better access to credit lines	5

Lower labor costs/benefits costs	18
Changes to employment legislation	18
Don't know	6
Other - Write In	16

Skills Needs

For each basic skill below, select whether or not the education level of the recruitment and current worker labor pool generally possesses that skill.

	HS Grads		Tech/Comm College Grads		Four-year College Grads	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Basic Skills						
Engineering/Technical	15	17	27	8	31	6
English language (spoken)	62	5	58	5	63	5
Reading comprehension (in English)	55	11	53	8	63	5
Written English	50	17	48	16	56	12
Foreign Languages	6	26	6	23	15	21

Government/Economics	5	25	9	19	23	15
History/Geography	8	21	11	15	20	11
Humanities/Arts	12	21	18	15	30	10
Mathematics	45	12	42	11	49	9
Science	6	24	13	16	22	8

Applied Skills						
Diversity	54	4	53	5	62	6
Information Technology	37	14	50	8	56	8
Leadership	24	28	28	21	47	13
Problem Solving	39	23	43	16	56	12
Teamwork/Collaboration	52	7	52	9	57	7
Written Communication	42	21	46	15	53	16

How does your organization measure employees' skill and/or professional development deficiencies? (Check all that apply.)

	Frequency
Employees evaluate their own skills and development and identify areas for improvement	29
Individual skills assessments (i.e., tests)	26
Job performance evaluations (i.e., using performance metrics)	57
On-the-job interviews	37
Supervisor/manager observation	71
Team skills gap analysis	11
Not applicable, my organization does not measure employees' skills and/or professional development needs	4
Other - Write In	2
Don't know	2

Education Needs

Over the next 5 years, do you anticipate that your organization's need for employees at the following education levels will increase, stay the same or decrease?

	Increase	Stay the Same	Decrease	N/A
A minimum of a HS diploma or equivalent	16	42	3	13
A minimum of an industry or professional association credential	27	34	2	11
A minimum of a post-secondary certificate	20	34	2	18
A minimum of a technical college diploma or certificate	18	40	1	15
A minimum of an Associate's degree	18	39	2	14
A minimum of a Bachelor's degree	32	33	1	8
A minimum of an advanced degree	21	28	0	25

Which of the following is true for your organization? (Select all that apply.)

	Frequency
We provide financial support for our employees to pursue college level courses.	26
We provide financial support for our employees to pursue education, learning or training provided by outside agencies that is not college coursework.	32

We provide on-the-job internal education, learning or training for our employees.	53
We provide support for our employees to pursue education, learning or training in other ways besides financial support.	30
Other - Write In	2
None of the above	12

For which of the following does your organization provide financial benefits for education, learning or training? (Select as many as apply)

	Frequency
All employees	28
Employees with identified skills and/or professional development deficiencies	9
Employees who request skills training and/or professional development	16
My organization does not provide or pay for skills training and/or professional development for its employees	0
Other - Please specify	0
Don't know	1

*What local education/training groups does your organization work with to train employees?
(Check all that apply.)*

	Frequency
Technical/vocational college	12
Community college or university	24
Workforce board	7
Community groups	11
Cooperative group of similar organizations	10
Other - Write In	4
Don't know	4

Does your organization provide any of the following methods of supporting your employees' educational goals? (Please select all that apply.)

	Frequency
Make office computers/technology available to employees for studying and school work after scheduled work hours.	9
Allow employees to have breaks for study while at work.	9
Allow flexible work schedules to accommodate employees' classes.	23
Invite higher education or other learning providers to your organization's location to talk about educational opportunities.	6

Advise employees on which degrees will benefit their career.	12
Publicly recognize employees who have graduated or achieved significant educational milestones.	13
Other - Write In	1
Don't know	1

Has your organization considered any of the following methods of supporting your employees' educational goals? (Please select all that apply.)

	Frequency
Make office computers/technology available to employees for studying and school work after scheduled work hours.	0
Allow employees to have breaks for study while at work.	0
Allow flexible work schedules to accommodate employees' classes.	3
Invite higher education or other learning providers to your organization's location to talk about educational opportunities.	0
Advise employees on which degrees will benefit their career.	0
Publicly recognize employees who have graduated or achieved significant educational milestones.	1
Other - Write In	2
Don't know	6

Does your organization work with local education and training providers to help them assess local skills gaps that can be addressed through their program offerings and curricula?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	22	29.7%
No	50	67.6%
Don't know	2	2.7%

What local education/training groups does your organization work with to assess local skills gaps? (Check all that apply.)

	Frequency
Technical/vocational college	10
Community college or university	13
Workforce board	7
Community groups	4
Cooperative group of similar organizations	9
Other - Write In	3
Don't know	0

Education and Organizational Goals

How important is each goal listed below to your organization's success? For each goal listed below, move the slider control to the level that best reflects this importance. If you think the importance for a given goal is already displayed, then click on the slider control.

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Development of employee leadership skills	77.65	83.0	100	23.54
Development of employees' professional skills	81.42	82.0	100	17.95
Employee advancement within your organization	68.73	71.5	100	24.63
Increasing customer/client satisfaction	88.03	98.0	100	17.87
Increasing employee engagement/organizational loyalty	80.49	88	100	22.54
Increasing profits/savings	81.61	90.0	100	21.84
Increasing worker productivity	79.74	80.0	100	16.91
Recruitment of new employees	68.59	70	100	25.45
Worker retention	81.26	90.0	100	22.46

N = 74

Consider the impact that successful education, learning and training have on achieving your organization's goals. For each goal listed below, move the slider control to the level that best reflects the influence of your organization's education learning and training programs in achieving that goal. If you think the influence for a given goal is already displayed, then click on the slider control.

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Development of employee leadership skills	69.97	70.0	50.0	23.97
Development of employees' professional skills	76.88	79.0	100	20.19
Employee advancement within your organization	68.24	70.50	100	23.18
Increasing customer/client satisfaction	79.20	81.5	100	21.61
Increasing employee engagement/organizational loyalty	74.15	77.50	100	21.43
Increasing profits/savings	69.42	74.50	50	25.71
Increasing worker productivity	72.38	72.50	50	21.53
Recruitment of new employees	63.18	64.0	50	23.78
Worker retention	73.19	71	100	22.26

N = 74

Organizational Learning Benefits

Approximately what percent of your learning benefits is utilized annually?

Mean = 54.79; Median = 52.0; Mode = 100; SD = 31.19; N = 29

Does your organization keep track of any of the following outcomes of learning, education, or training? (Please check as many as are applicable.)

	Frequency
Industry/professional organization certifications	36
Post-secondary certifications	19
College credentials	29
Number of hours of learning completed	27
Other - Write In	3

Why do you think your learning benefits program is not being utilized more fully? (Choose as many as apply.)

	Frequency
Lack of interest in our programs	8
Lack of knowledge about our programs	4
Lack of promotion by management	8

Workers do not need additional benefits in this area	5
Workers are too busy or committed otherwise to pursue learning	29
Too difficult for workers to access our benefits	2
Few or no options for learning in our area	5
No incentives or benefits in our organization for pursuing learning	6
Other - Write In	2
Not applicable	31

What level of employee most often takes advantage of your learning benefits?

	Frequency	Percentage
Entry level employees	12	16.2%
Mid-level employees	22	29.7%
Executive level employees	3	4.1%
No differences across level of employee	20	27.0%
Not applicable	17	23.0%

N = 74

Would your organization consider partnering with a local post-secondary institution or other learning provider to support education, learning or training for your employees?

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, definitely	8	10.8%
Possibly, but I need to learn more about partnering to make a good decision	32	43.2%
Not at this time, but I might be interested in the future	11	14.9%
Not at this time and do not anticipate any partnering in the foreseeable future	11	14.9%
Our organization already partners with local colleges or other learning providers	9	12.2%
Other - Write In	3	4.1%

N = 74