

# West Michigan Workforce Readiness Survey Report

## Executive Summary

With the sponsorship of the Adult Learning Professionals of West Michigan, and with staff support provided by Grand Valley State University and Ottawa County Michigan Works!, the West Michigan Workforce Readiness Survey was conducted in November and December of 2010. The purpose of the survey was to collect local employers' opinions on the relative importance of certain skills, as well as the extent to which these skills are present among new hires at the High School/GED, Two year- and Four year-college degree levels in the Kent-Ottawa-Allegan region.

The core of the survey instrument used a list of 20 basic and applied skills which respondents were asked to rate as "very important", "important" or "not important" at each level of education. Respondents were then asked to identify the extent to which new hires exhibited these qualities, rating them "deficient", "adequate" or "excellent" in terms of preparation for work.

The survey instrument was borrowed from a 2006 national survey of employers. This approach provided a proven instrument and allowed a comparison between West Michigan and national survey results. A total of 365 HR professionals who were members of two local Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) chapters were invited to participate. Of these, a total of 75 responded. While the response rate of 20.5% is good for this type of survey, we cannot claim that this data would be statistically representative of the whole region, due to the small size of the sample compared to the total number of regional employers.

While the findings may lack statistical significance, they do offer some valuable insights into the preferred and required qualifications of new hires at the 75 respondent companies. Here are some selected items from the online report:

- Work Ethic/Professionalism was identified as the #1 desired skill set for hires at all three levels (HS/GED; Two year College; Four year College);
- Two other skill sets were in the top five for all three levels of new hires: Spoken English Language and Reading Comprehension in English;
- Of the three education levels, the HS diploma/GED level received "deficient" ratings most frequently ("deficient" was the most frequent rating for 16 of 20 HS/GED skill sets). For the Work Ethic/Professionalism skill set, 80% of respondents rated HS/GED level new hires deficient;
- In general, the preparedness of new hires was rated more favorably ("adequate" or "excellent") as level of education increased;
- A total of 89% of regional employers respondents required a HS diploma or GED for entry-level hire;
- Many of the employers polled use assessments in selection: 45% use some form of skill-based test; 42% use personality or work style assessments; 14% use assessments of general intellectual ability;

- Many of the ratings and rankings from the regional employers closely followed the responses provided in the 2006 national survey report. However, in the regional sample, Teamwork/Collaboration was ranked in the top five of only the HS/GED level of new hires, whereas in the national survey it ranked equally high across all three levels.

You may view a report containing tables of results and an analysis of findings at the Ottawa County Michigan Works! site, [http://www.miottawa.org/HealthComm/MichiganWorks/education\\_group.htm](http://www.miottawa.org/HealthComm/MichiganWorks/education_group.htm). In addition, if you would like to explore the report from the national survey performed in 2006 you may go to the SHRM website and search for the report titled "Are They Really Ready to Work?: Employer's Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce".

There is great interest in the area of "job readiness" among HR managers, educators and workforce development professionals currently, and there are many other activities that are under way in our region which focus on this area. It is our hope that this report stimulates action on the part of every partner in our regional employment and workforce development system to help promote and support the development, alignment and utilization of critical "job readiness" skills in employment.

If you have questions or would like to be added to a list of respondents for potential future surveys, please email Rachel Cleveland at [rcleveland@ocmwa.org](mailto:rcleveland@ocmwa.org).

Finally, we would like to thank the respondents who provided the data on their preferences and requirements for new hires in our region. Without their involvement there would be no results to share.

Respectfully submitted, on behalf of the survey sponsor, by:

Lisa Miller, Director, Meijer Campus/Holland

Rachel Cleveland, Workforce Intelligence Analyst

Melissa Peraino, Director, Educational Outreach

Joel Westmaas, Program Supervisor

