

**ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN WORKERS AND EMPLOYERS PERCEPTIONS
OF IMPORTANT JOB SKILLS**

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
With a Major in

Guidance Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

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ABSTRACT

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Analysis of the Relationship between Workers and Employers
Perception of Important Job Skills

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<u>May, 2000</u>	
<u>34</u>	
(Month/Year)	(No. of Pages)

American Psychological Association A.P.A. Publication Manual
(Style Manual)

The purpose of this study was to analyze the job skill needs of the Colby School District's School-to-Work Program and the community employers. This study was based on the need to examine important job skills in the work-based curriculum and the business community work expectations. Data was collected from the Colby School District, School-to-Work Program and from the business from surrounding communities of Dorchester, Abbotsford, Colby, Unity, and Marshfield.

The ultimate goal of the School-to-Work Program survey was to enhance students' job skills; to give them maximum employment

potential. The research project seems to indicate the students in this study had not absorbed the message that a good attitude is of great importance. The research project goals were as follows: to provide useful feedback about employment skill needs for the foreseeable future; to make changes in the STW curriculum as indicated by employers from the returned surveys; and to change the educational competencies to meet the ever-growing and evolving job market employment demands.

Twenty-four Colby, Abbotsford, and surrounding area STW employers returned the Job Skills Survey, which ranked valued job skills from 1 to 9, with one as the most important and 9 as the least important skill. Twenty-three STW students also completed the same survey of valued job skills ranked 1 to 9. The results revealed close correlations between *works safely* and *cooperates, works well with others* as ranked by both groups. Students ranked *good attitude toward work* as the most important and employers ranked it second on their priority list for job skills. Employers leaned towards cost reducing measures with human resources, i.e. a good work safety record lower the insurance portion of the operating costs. Cooperating well with others is a job skill which contributes to lowering the cost retraining workers. Students first responses were *regular and punctual reporting to work* as the top choice and *neat, accurate, and thorough with quality of work* was a close second. It showed that the students' priority is themselves first, their quality of work second, and all the other job skills followed. The Colby STW Committee used the research data to analyze the feedback from the community area businesses. They studied the responses carefully to decide if modifications or adjustments needed to the classroom instructions. These adjustments would better facilitate the growing and changing needs of our STW curriculum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As I near the completion of my Masters degree in Guidance counseling, it was a journey that I did not know if I would have finished without the support and guidance of many individuals on this project. First, I would like to thank my wife, Lisa, for the support, encouragement that she gave me to finish the project when I became discouraged because of the complexities of this task.

To my advisors at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. Dr. Dennis Van Den Heuvel, one of the first professors I met in my graduate interview meeting. He made me feel welcome and has been an influence in my education at Stout. Thanks to Dr. Ven Den Heuvel and Dr. Donald Stephenson for taking my raw ideas and shaping them into something that could be useable and presentable.

To Dr. Mary Hopkins Best for keeping me on the right track with insight on classes and scheduling and the knowledge of administration regulations that guided me safely through the obstacles in the graduate program.

To Lynn Polzin for her computer knowledge and skills and time spent providing a sounding board for my thoughts. Also for the insight and direction about how this project should proceed.

Finally, to my children Lindsay, Kiley, and Lexi. The time, money, and resources I spent on my education did not happen without a more personal price. Remember that with hard work and determination, you can accomplish your goals and nothing takes the place of a quality education. My hope is that I may be able to set an example by demonstrating that goals that are worthwhile never come

easily. However, the personal self-satisfaction of attaining these goals and the gaining of knowledge is priceless.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The fundamental purpose of education in any society is to maintain the cultural heritage and to improve both society and the individual. Thus, the nature of schooling and the form it takes are defined within the context of a particular society. In the US, education serves to promote the interrelated goals of self-development, citizenship, and employment. (Hartoonian, 1996)

The School-to-Work (STW) Initiative is a very vital topic in education today. Federal and state governments spend millions of dollars to reach and train students who do not plan to go on to a four-year college. Many of these students tend to go to a two-year community college or technical school; others go straight into the workforce.

Many employers complain that students come to the job site and are ill-prepared, or lack job skills, to be productive employees. The private sector complains that they spend a lot of money and training time on persons who still have to be fired because they do not have the skills to be an adequate employee. The private sector is clamoring for schools to educate students along the guidelines that employers use to hire and evaluate people in their lines of work. Skills that employers feel are important include: problem solving competencies; motivation toward work; communication skills; consistent daily attendance; teamwork; and basic math skills.

Another complaint from business is that schools do not help the students make a connection between skills taught in school and how they relate to the workplace. One problem is that the skills that the student perceives to be important for a successful and productive employee vary from what the employers perceive makes a successful and productive employee. This means that if students do not change their perceptions of what employers want, they will be dismissed for working because of the different perceptions of what employers expect and value in their employees. As educators, we need to closely reexamine and realign the skill expectations of the student employees to closely parallel the future employment needs of the work force for the new millennium.

Colby School District has offered a School-to-Work Program (STW) for the past eight years. The Colby School District was made up of four small rural communities totaling 4,800 people and covering an area of 270 square miles. Historically, the economic sustenance in the district primarily comes from light commercial manufacturing and heavy agriculture emphasis. Agriculture and many small to medium size industries create the economic base of this predominantly white community. This community consists of primarily middle class people with varying socioeconomic backgrounds. The ethnic origins are quite heavily dominated by Catholic, German, and Eastern European influences

Data has been collected in the study on job skills which are important to the employer. The investigator taught many students who needed these skills at the high school level because they did not have a post high school educational

option. The majority of the student employees work in one or two business areas. The community is expanding with new businesses due to a major highway project, which continues to expand throughout the area. This expansion is creating jobs and an increased demand for service-oriented labor which will continue for some time. With this increase in labor demand, the Colby community must (1) help increase college placement numbers in either technical colleges or four-year colleges; (2) increase our local employment rates and job longevity of our graduates; and (3) help educators combine real-world application with academic knowledge (National School-to-Work Learning and Informational Center, 1998).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between Colby High School students' perceptions of important job skills for being a successful, productive employees and potential employer perceptions of job skills characteristics of successful, productive employees. Hopefully this research will assist the Colby School District's STW program and provides a stronger, more accurate skills program for our students in two ways: (1) it will help students understand their employers' desires; and (2) it will help guide curriculum planning for Colby students entering the workplace.

Definition of Terms

Career map: A planning document that identifies a coherent sequence of secondary and post-secondary (if appropriate) courses and experiences a student

needs in high school to be prepared to enter and complete post-secondary education and/or a chosen career area.

Consortium: A group of two or more school districts, employers, and other partners which are organized around the common goal of establishing a school-to-work system in the community.

Cooperative Education Program (Co-op): A program which integrates career-related vocational classroom instruction with work-based learning. Competency profiles are developed locally between the supervising teacher and the employer. State industry skill standards are currently under development for some co-op programs by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Internships: Programs which integrate paid or unpaid work experiences with an integrated school-based curriculum. Program emphasis is on student experiences in all aspects of the business or industry and is documented through a portfolio of achievements.

Job Shadowing: A career exploration experience for students who observe specific jobs or occupations in a business setting. May include brief hands-on activities for some job tasks. Students do not perform productive work and are not paid for this activity.

JPTA: Job Training Partnership Act (29 USC. 1512).

Registered Apprenticeship Program: A program registered by an apprenticeship agency.

School-Based Learning: A component of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act

which in Wisconsin includes

- * assessment of student's academic and work readiness skills, which is integrated with career planning;
- * career awareness and career exploration and counseling for all students (beginning no later than the 7th grade);
- * selection by students of a career major no later than the beginning of the 7th grade;
- * curriculum articulation with post secondary education (technical and university);
- * the use of integrated and applied curriculum in a school-to-work context;
- * coordination with community services as needed to support all student populations in the school-to-work activities;
- * data collecting and program evaluation

School-to-Work Coordinator. A local position assigned/hired to coordinate the required components of a school-to-work system including school based activities, work based activities, and connecting activities.

Skill Standards: The skills defined by industry, labor, and education which students must acquire in order to obtain a skill certificate from the Department of Industry, Labor, & Human Relations and/or any other authorized state or national agency.

Work-Readiness Assessment: The process of assessing a student's readiness for a workplace assignment and/or a paid job. May include an assessment of work

experiences to date, ability to work with others, knowledge of job application and interviewing techniques, ability to accept work-related supervision, and any other basic work skills deemed necessary to be successful in a job setting.

Youth Apprenticeship: A program that integrates school-based and work-based learning for high school students, which is based on state and/or national industry skill standards. The program offers a skill certificate upon successful completion, which is administered in Wisconsin by the Department of Industry, Labor, and Human Relations (DILHR).

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the United States, the national educational system and the business world have been linked together for well over one hundred years. Truancy laws were written to stop the abuse of minor children in the work place. The relationship between American commerce and American education has ebbed and flowed, and stretched the school curriculum (Hartoonian, 1996).

Job Trends in the Past

As America grew, so did the need for better educated, more well-rounded workers to handle the increase in technology from the industrial and informational age. At the turn of the century, a new vocational training program called Youth Apprenticeship came into being where students spent the majority of their teenage years (age 13-19) in an apprenticeship program learning from an artisan or craftsman. This vocational training was not new; it had been happening since colonial times. However, students in the Youth Apprenticeship Program did not stop their formal education to concentrate solely on vocational training. The two programs were blended into one beneficial educational institution. During the Great Depression, many businesses blamed the country's economic problems on the short-sightedness of the American educational system, that it did not turn out

productive employees. As the U.S.A. delved into the World Wars, different types of schooling evolved. In addition to a demand for more science and math classes, higher performance in these areas, and an increase in vocational training was required to keep up both with our enemies and with our allies (p. 2).

As the United States entered the 1950's and 1960's, the educational system branched out into more vocational instruction. The school curriculum focused on college bound students. The percentage of unskilled work force in the 1950's was 60%, and the primary need was for unskilled workers. The need for additional training began to increase with the age of technology and information.

The onset of the 1970's brought STW, or "careers education," new ideas and funding. For the first time, the federal government allocated funds for STW initiatives. This trend was short-lived, unfortunately, and by the early 1980's, funding for the STW programs declined and schools placed less effort and funds toward carrying out this plan (Hamilton, 1997). Most STW programs became a way to get at-risk students out of school. These programs still held the pretense of teaching valuable work skills, but instead became an early release for these difficult students who knew they could negotiate their graduation requirements. Due to the recession in the early 1980's, many STW programs suffered because students were not able to be placed in their community for any type of employment. This was also a time for changes in the structures of factories, particularly in their labor demands. The demand for physical labor had decreased

and the need for more efficient techniques and "smarter" work began (DPI Poole, 1994).

During the 1990's, the country's rapidly changing labor market required educators to rethink traditional education and assess whether or not the present system adequately prepared students for success in the workplace. Funding exploded from the federal government for new STW transition instruction which integrated work skills and vocational educational experiences. In 1994, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act provided short term funding for vocational career education. The goal of this act was to support and develop a work-based program (US Department of Education, 1997).

During the 1990's, the federal government added another incentive to get employers to train and hire STW students in the form of a tax break. With the tax breaks and federal money, Congress helped the schools across America develop competencies, with input from business, for the modern technological age. These standards would be used to evaluate programs meant to prepare students for the current and future work force (Hettinger, 1998).

The School-to-Work issues hold a significant relevance for the future of our economic ways of life. Career awareness, exploration, and preparation will shape how our country grows and competes with other nations in a global market (Winter, 1991). Integrating STW throughout all grade levels develops an awareness of potential careers and develops positive attitudes toward work skills and importance of work in society

(p. 4). Students in grades 6-8 learn about career options, explore interests, and assess their own strengths and abilities in a variety of occupational areas. Older students gain valuable work experience, work-based skills taught at school, and training in vocational areas of their choice. Using these tools provided by the STW program, educators can create a student who is a more valuable, successful, productive, and wealthier person.

Job Trends of the Future

The number of workers will decrease due to the overall lower birthrate for persons who will be entering the work force in the future. With this lower number of workers, the trend will be that four out of every five jobs will be in a business that provides services requiring workers to have more technical skills and more computer skills to obtain these jobs (p. 5). As these trends point out, STW teaches skills that could be a real treasure trove for future workers. The skills young people learn in school would give them a head start on careers and meaningful employment, which would lead to a more productive, successful worker (DPI Poole, 1994). Students in the STW programs will use their problem solving skills for lifelong learning. The teamwork skills they learn while in school will help them as adults adjusting to the changing trends they will face while on the job.

There are some other important trends to be aware of concerning tomorrow's work force. The number of workers will decrease, while the average age of workers will increase. Most new jobs will be in service, information, and advanced technology areas. Sixty percent of today's high school students will work in jobs which currently do not exist. Ninety percent of a jobs beginning in the year 2000 will require some knowledge of a computer. Also, by the beginning of the year 2000, 80% of new jobs will require more than a high school diploma, but less than a four-year degree. Lifelong employment in the same job or company is a thing of the past. Workers will change their jobs at least five or

more times. This requires the skills of a lifelong learning and training (Barkume, 1999).

The rewards for students who stay in school and belong to a work program are greater than for those who do not. Hayden's (1997) research suggests that students who are in work programs experience higher earning levels at work with more prestige and better benefits and health coverage. Young adults who drop out of school are roughly twice as likely to be unemployed than those who have been in a STW program. Also, students who work during their senior year in high school are twice as likely to attend college than those who do not, citing that their experience in the work world made them understand how additional education would be necessary to advance one's career (Matthews, 1997).

Schools, for their part, will have to view employers as customers whose needs must be indirectly gauged. School must accept that a graduate's performance in the labor market is a measure of the school's effectiveness (Capelli & Shapiro, 1998). All businesses and their school districts need to come together in their communities. They need to discuss what skills the students should be able to perform, with written goals and objectives from the employers. These objectives must be measurable, sequential, and start in the lower grades. Schools need to realize that the better "product" or student they turn out, the more secure their own employment is. This translates into increased revenue earned by businesses and, therefore, the more work-based programs schools can offer.

Employers will get students with job skills and attitudes more in line with what they desire. In a study from the United Kingdom, employers agreed to work with schools because of the "civic mindedness" and the public relations it brought. However, employers were pleasantly surprised with how well students did in their work. Due to the STW based learning, the students benefited from both the school and the businesses (Bishop, 1996).

Many of the businesses that had STW programs plan to expand the number of students involved. In addition, they plan to keep many of those students who passed the STW training program as full-time employees. These are significant facts concerning the STW programs and reducing the high school dropout rate. Students involved in a STW program had a higher school attendance rate than the students who were not in a work program, 3.4% to 10.3% (Philadelphia School District Study, 1997). This reduction in the dropout rate is due to the fact that students are learning that a work-based curriculum makes the connection to what they are learning now, and how to apply it later to make more money. STW also serves as a motivator to push students to explore more college preparatory courses or to develop a technical competence as shown by their work experience. These students are leaving STW programs and high schools with a better idea of what they want to do and what career would fit their professional and educational strengths.

The link between the past and present most definitely illuminates a connection between skills and experiences teamed in the STW program and future

successes of the students long after high school graduation. Important job lessons learned from STW involve both personal and social skills. These skills include the realization of what punctuality and reliability mean to businesses and employers (Hamilton, 1994). The experience of being supervised, both in a positive and negative situation, and how dealing with customers is often learned in the STW program first. Another important feature of STW programs is that the consequences for any mistakes students make in the STW programs are less severe than if they did not fall under the STW umbrella. With proper job coaching, counseling, and improvement of attitudes towards work and fostering a strong work ethic, many students go on and learn from those mistakes to become successful in that job. Students are allowed the freedom to make mistakes, and teachers and supervisors use these times to create teachable moments. The effects of mistakes from inexperience are less than if that same person makes the make mistakes years later. The loss of income for rent, car payments, and supporting a family may be a heavier price to pay for mistakes verses correcting them as a high school STW student.

STW also fosters easier transitions to adult life by giving students a head start to learn about the benefits and the pitfalls of their career choices. They tend to have a clear- cut idea of what they want to do upon leaving high school, rather than discovering what they want to do by taking a few courses in college. STW motivates students to be better prepared and to be more focused in their post-secondary educational and employment pursuits. Another facet of many STW

programs is teaching responsibility skills. For example, problem solving skills are learned such as speaking with your boss properly, asking for time off, and calling in when they are sick. Dealing with co-worker problems and learning socially acceptable skills and behaviors represent additional benefits. These important skills are not emphasized heavily in school, however, they are critical skills that will frequently save a student's job. The special needs students will gain the biggest benefit from experiencing extra reinforcement of correct social skills at the job setting. A special needs employee is more likely to be fired, but not because they are unable to perform their job up to standards. They are fired because they are unable to correctly pick up on social cues and they could not get along with co-workers or supervisors.

Increased employability after high school is another highly beneficial outcome of the STW program, and may be the one most important attribute of this program (Dielmann, 1998). In many Youth Apprenticeship (YA) programs, students earn Occupational Proficiency certificates from the state. For example, a certificate can be used in interviews with potential employers to show the Masters of Banking Competency held by a student (Friedman, 1998). In all certified YA programs in this state, students earn high school credit toward graduation, in addition to wages and community college credits if they finish the certification program (Understanding Attitudes About School to Career: Jobs for the Future, 1987). A survey from the Boston Public Schools from 1997 showed that 87% of

students who graduated and were in a STW program were employed, and with many having the same employers as they did before graduation. The national average was 71% for employment after high school, compared with 87% for STW members after high school.

Within the STW program, the students have a specific classroom component, in addition to their work time. The two objectives for this program include: (1) students will gain opportunities for job exploration, vocational assessment, and vocational training; and (2) students will develop positive work attitudes and gain valuable employability skills.

The relationship between schools, businesses, and the community will grow closer due to the fact that businesses need good, productive workers whom the schools produce. Communities, in turn, get tax revenue from productive, successful companies. Schools who involve businesses in curriculum will produce students with job skills closer to their needs and wants. As students work in a community, they are more likely to become good citizens and join organizations which build a stronger community. Interweaving the needs of students, schools, businesses, and the community is important to all persons involved. Therefore, it is in the best interest of everyone to support and continually try to improve and strengthen school-based STW programs to make transitions from STW more effective.

This research project further explores the trends of the past and the future dealing with job skills that will be important to both the employer and the student

in the 21st century. The job skills young people learn in school would give them a head start on their careers and meaningful employment which leads to a more productive, successful worker. The need for investigation into employee job skills prompted the facilitation of updating future STW curriculum. By improving the curriculum, we may be able to produce students who would become lifetime learners. A review of the literature concerning valued job skills revealed that employers are demanding more technical aptitudes than ever before. The review of the literature also indicated that many school districts throughout the United States are lacking in crucial job skills training to meet employer expectations. The survey was designed with both employer requirements and STW curriculum in mind to make the transition for the students more seamless. The research set in motion the need to evaluate the current job skills that employers require of student workers.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between student employees' perceptions of job skills critical to being a successful, productive employee and the perceptions held by the employers of similar job skills.

Demographics

This study was done in the Colby School District, and the surrounding communities of Abbotsford, Colby, Dorchester, and Unity, Wisconsin. The Colby School District was made up of four small rural communities totaling 4,800 people and covering an area of eighteen miles (east to west) by fifteen miles (north to south). Agriculture and many small to medium size industries create the economic base of this predominantly white community. The community is composed of primarily middle class people with varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

The sample student population consisted of a group of 23 Colby High School juniors and seniors enrolled in the School-to-Work (STW) Program and the Food Coop Program who were 16-19 years of age. The high school, with a 98% white population, has 108 senior students, 121 junior students, 115 sophomore students, and 97 freshmen students. Students in the study were in a

paid or unpaid job depending on the employer. The students were enrolled in a one credit course including a classroom component with mandatory work time built in. The students worked on the job sites two hours per day, five days a week during school hours from 1:45 to 3:15 p.m. However, many of the students worked additional hours beyond the two hours allotted by school. The employers consisted of local businesses in Unity, Colby, Abbotsford, and Dorchester, Wisconsin. These employers were involved as the local STW and Food Coop businesses. All of the businesses were paying students except for one business that was unable to do so due to a smaller payroll and work force.

Procedures

The research process was composed of four steps: (1) develop a student/employer job skills survey based on the quarterly evaluations sent to employers; (2) administration of the survey (See Appendix A) to both STW student employees and employers; (3) examine the returned surveys for similarities and differences in the responses from the students and employers; and (4) summarize the data and make detailed recommendations for the improvement of the STW program.

Research Instruments

The survey (See Appendix A) used in this project was developed by this investigator. Feedback was gathered from educators involved with Colby High School's STW and job cooperative programs, administrators, and the Work Force Consortium that the our school district is part of. Past employer and student job

and program evaluations and comments were reviewed. Nine job skills from all of the sources information were chosen to develop a checklist of job skills that were deemed valuable on the job. Students and employers were to rank job skills on the survey from 1 to 9, with one as the most important job skill and nine as the least important job skill held by a successful, productive employee. No male/female information was asked for or retained for this survey. This was done to keep the identity of students protected. The study has face validity based on job skills that employers and employees value.

Incomplete surveys were thrown out. Of the 24 businesses responses, three business responses were disqualified because they improperly deviated from the ranking directions. Of the 23 student workers surveyed, five returned responses that were thrown out due to not properly following the directions.

Survey Procedures

All surveys were delivered to the job site by the investigator of this paper. Parental permission forms were given to those students who were under the age of 18. The responses to both surveys were analyzed, ranked, and charted to examine their perceptions in descending order of important job skills. The responses to the employer surveys were also analyzed, ranked, and charted to determine their perception of important skills. The investigator examined similarities and differences in student employee and employer perceptions. The investigator used the data collected to compare with STW curriculum job skills taught in class to the job skills employers want from the surveys.

Limitations of the Present Study

1. Insufficient sample of business and student response to quantify the success of the program.
2. This study only gathered data in one community and may not be generalized elsewhere.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between workers' perceptions of important job skills for being a successful, productive STW student employee and how their perception compares to employers' visions of a successful, productive employee.

The survey had an excellent return rate of properly filled out questionnaires. A reason for the high rate of return was that employers and student workers believe that their comments were important and needed. A comparison of the STW student employee responses and the employer responses were compiled and an average was obtained. Table 1 below and Table 2, on the following page, separate the rankings and present them in priority order in textual chart format.

TABLE 1: STUDENT RESPONSES IN PRIORITY ORDER

Job Skills	Students
	Responses
Is regular and punctual in reporting for work	1
Neat, accurate, and thorough with quality of work	2
Works safely	3
Cooperates, works well with others	4
Demonstrates willingness to learn	5
Exhibits acceptable personal grooming	6
Accepts constructive criticism	7

Ability to work without a supervisor	8
Good attitude towards work	9

TABLE 2: EMPLOYERS' RESPONSES IN PRIORITY ORDER

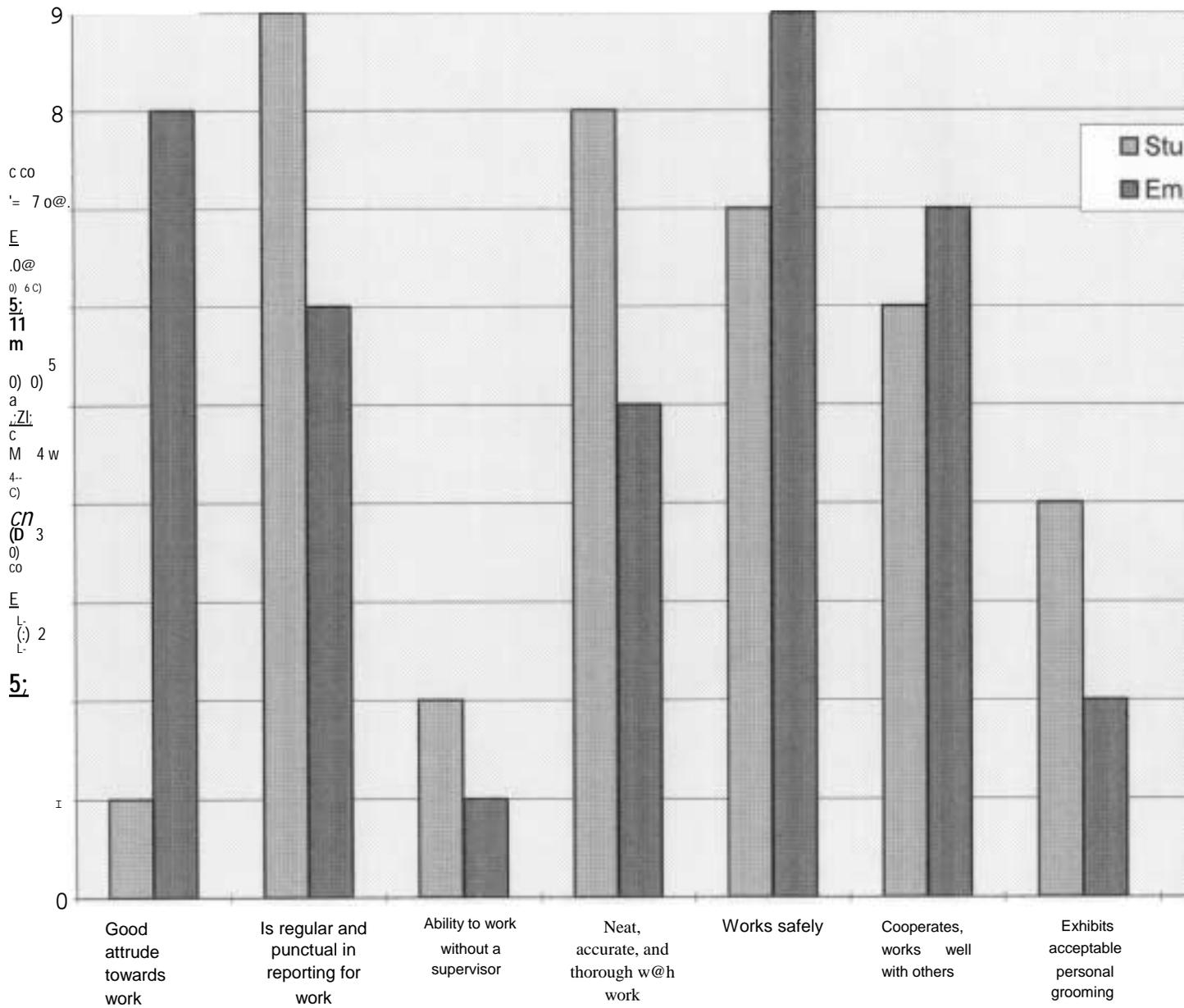
Job Skills	Employers'
	Responses
Works safely	1
Good attitude towards work	2
Cooperates, works well with others	3
Is regular and punctual in reporting for work	4
Neat, accurate, and thorough with quality of work	5
Demonstrates willingness to learn	6
Accepts constructive criticism	7
Exhibits acceptable personal grooming	8
Ability to work without a supervisor	9

In Table 3 on the next page, the job skills are listed in the same order as they appeared on the surveys in the format of a multi-series bar chart. Upon review of the comparison chart of Table 3 there are two responses that are particularly close in the number of same responses.

Works safely and *cooperates, works well with others* were ranked in the top four by both surveyed groups. At the least important rankings, employers and employees alike ranked three of the same skills in their last four ranking levels. Most of the surveyed items were fairly similarly ranked, with the exception of *good attitude towards work*. Interestingly, the employees ranked *work attitude* as the least important. The feedback from the employers ranked *work attitude* as the second most important. The articles pointed that to be successful you need to

have a good work attitude. This research project would seem to indicate that the students in this study have not absorbed the

TABLE 3: JOB SKILLS COMPARISON RANKINGS



message that a good attitude is of great importance. Students score attitude higher than current business because of the business' need to push product and increase production. During a low employment cycle, workers are moving from job to job at a higher rate than ever before. The data suggested this as "what the employer (business) can do for me (employee)."

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Colby High School students perceptions of important job skills for being a successful, productive employee and potential employer perceptions of job skills characteristics of a successful, productive employee. The purpose of this study was also to find what employers thought were important job skills and what students believed were important job skills to be successful employees. A match of some of the nine skills was expected, ranked in order of importance, to coincide with each other. As the data was reviewed, it was noticed that skills that were ranked lowest by the employers were also ranked lower for both student and business. The employer wants an employee to work with the least amount of supervision and still get the job done correctly. This reduces cost and time concerns for the business. On the other hand, student workers have a mind set that they are very capable with the proper training to work productively without someone looking over their shoulder. This ideal neatly ties in with “accepts constructive criticism”, which was equally ranked by students and employers alike. Once the instructions are given and the task is checked for proper

specifications, then the student worker should be able to work without additional supervision.

The review of literature consistently found that student responses to the work skills were centered around their own wants and desires. This was generally in conflict with what would be fair and appropriate for both sides. Many of the articles reported that business were expecting too much from student employees, forgetting that they are 16-18 years of age rather than mature employees with past work experience. It was found that some of the local employers were expecting too much from the students sent to the job sites. They expected job skills that many of their own entry-level workers did not possess. Overall, most employees were satisfied with the student employee they received and would participate in the STW transition program again depending on the student/employee skills and attitude. Many of the employers were unrealistically looking on a long-term basis with these students, instead on a basis of gearing and meshing their needs to what schools/students could offer currently. According to many of the studies, schools and businesses often do not think alike. Businesses were expecting certain job readiness skills, but not informing the area school(s) of their needs. Schools were, and still are, training, and in some cases not training students in job skills. Students should not simply be placed on the job without proper job skills they need be successful.

In recent Wisconsin history, STW and Co-Op incentive programs require that in each school district that desires school aid for STW programs there must

be a classroom component to teach necessary job skills before they get sent out to the job placement. With the shortage of labor and the downsizing of the work force, businesses are demanding quality workers. Along with this demand, the quality of worker skills, unfortunately, are on the decline. Employers are forced to lower their standards to keep their positions filled and production going. In one article, several McDonalds restaurants in an eastern city have a 100% turnover rate each year with their labor force. The article goes on to say that they cannot lower their standards any further nor increase pay as much as other competitors have. Training new employees every year has been very expensive.

With job skills learned at school, and in accordance with advisement from the business community, students will gain the job skills knowledge that will keep them successfully employed for years to come. A variety of employers were asked questions on subject of STW needs. The general consensus of these employer meetings was that a student employee needs to show up on time, do what he/she is told, and do the task with little or light supervision.

Implications from the Research

After examining the returned questionnaires and looking for patterns about employers needs, here are some suggestions for the data from the Colby School District. The Colby STW Committee should use the research data to analyze the feedback from the community area businesses. They should study the responses carefully to decide if modifications or adjustments are needed in the classroom instruction. These

adjustments would better facilitate the growing and changing needs of our STW curriculum. Developing new teaching material to help all students to reach the potential that employers are looking for would be a spin-off benefit from this research project. The investigator also believes that this investigation will aid in the development of new dialogue between the business community and Colby School District to co-develop an outstanding school-wide STW Program that will be mutually beneficial to all. A broader sample of students and employers would provide further insight into valued employee work skills.

Suggestions for Further Study

The first suggestion would be to increase the population of both students and businesses involved. The STW program has grown from 30 students a few years ago to over 90 participants this year. The next study could include every one of the employers in the district who had been in the STW program during the past five years. Along with the same 9-step questionnaire, the study would question in detail the businesses and students on their reasoning for their answers if they choose to divulge their reasoning. The research would also ask for feedback about the negative aspects of the STW program and changes the employers see as improvements. With this information, teachers and businesses could update the program, keep a more accurate pulse on needs of the employers, and keep pace with their needs. The investigator suggests keeping the standards high for the students/workers and emphasize the important skills.

All programs need a means by which to measure their success. With the recommendations from the data gathered and from the study and the examples to improve the program, the Colby area STW Committee can use this data as a tool to improve and update the whole STW curriculum. They can also share the data to open up a dialogue with the Colby-Abbotsford business community to develop a stronger workbase program that best fits the needs of the community at large and the roll of the school to produce a better student "product" for the currently changing work force of the future.

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APPENDIX A

School to Work Student Survey

Please rank the following job skills from 1 (most important) to 9 (least important) to be a successful and productive employee.

- _____ Good attitude towards work
- _____ Is regular and punctual in reporting for work
- _____ Ability to work without supervisor
- _____ Neat, accurate, and thorough with quality of work
- _____ Works safely
- _____ Cooperates, works well with others
- _____ Exhibits acceptable personal grooming
- _____ Accepts constructive criticism
- _____ Demonstrates willingness to learn

Return to Mr. Morgan, in Room 104, by
