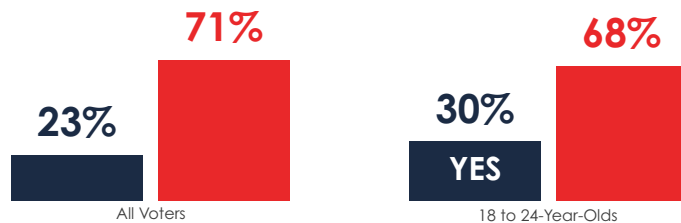


# Today's Workforce Skills

MAY 2023

**TENNESSEE HAS LED THE WAY IN EDUCATION INNOVATION.** Over the last decade, state leaders have enacted policies that hold K-12 students to high expectations for college and career readiness and made strategic investments to fund higher education institutions based on student outcomes instead of enrollment. At the same time, Tennessee has seen significant economic growth, with the state estimated to add 3.5 million jobs by 2028. However, a [recent SCORE poll](#) found that Tennesseans believe our K-12 education system is not adequately preparing students with the skills they need for careers. Additionally, many think our postsecondary education system is not teaching the right skills to prepare students for work.

*Do you believe Tennessee's high school graduates are properly prepared for a job?*



Source: SCORE, December 2022

**More than 70% of Tennessee voters and 68% of young adults DO NOT believe high school graduates are properly prepared for a job.**

## DURABLE SKILLS ARE CRITICAL SKILLS THAT PREPARE STUDENTS TO MEET TODAY'S WORKFORCE NEEDS.

While today's employers continue to value highly technical skills in specific occupations, across all industries [durable skills](#) remain highly valued in Tennessee's job market. Also known as "transferable skills" or "soft skills," durable skills are abilities and qualities that are applicable across different job roles, industries, and settings. These skills include how to use what you already know — such as critical thinking and communication — with leadership skills. Unlike technical skills or hard skills, which are specific to a certain profession or field, durable skills are considered more universal and can be applied across different contexts.

Over 61 million US jobs — and [1.2 million Tennessee jobs](#) — required job applicants to demonstrate at least one durable skill across multiple industries, according to an [America Succeeds](#) study of 80 million job postings over the last two years. In order to prepare students for success in their careers, durable skill development, coupled with the most in-demand technical skills, should be incorporated more thoroughly into how students learn and grow in both K-12 and postsecondary education.

## TENNESSEE BUSINESSES ARE FACING DIFFICULTY IN FINDING WORKERS TO MEET THEIR EMPLOYMENT NEEDS.

Employers continue to say that students are not receiving the skills needed to be prepared for today's job market. A recent Boyd Center survey of Tennessee business leaders revealed that nearly seven out of 10 leaders believed there are not enough appropriately trained workers. Further, more than 40 percent of these executives believe that stronger education and training are needed to expand the supply of future workers and ensure students are prepared for jobs with the most in-demand skills today. As Tennessee's economy continues to grow, K-12 and higher education must rise to meet these workforce needs by providing greater skills-based, workforce-relevant learning opportunities to students so that Tennessee students can fill Tennessee jobs.

*Is there an ample supply of local workers who are appropriately trained for your employment needs?*



Source: Boyd Center for Economic & Business Research, Tennessee Business Leaders Survey, Winter 2023

**Two-thirds of Tennessee business leaders say there are not enough appropriately skilled local workers.**

## TENNESSEE POLICY SHOULD EMBED THE MOST IN-DEMAND SKILLS INTO THE STATE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM.

Today's students will one day enter the workforce. To make sure every student is equipped with the durable and technical skills necessary to succeed, state leaders should consider the following actions:

- **Strengthen and use connections between education and workforce data.** Tennessee has a robust longitudinal data system that contains education and workforce information. The state should examine whether K-12 and higher education programs, including career and technical education (CTE) programs, are effectively leading to desired workforce outcomes. This data should be utilized to evaluate how education programs are equipping students with the skills to succeed in in-demand careers.
- **Embed workforce and postsecondary metrics into Tennessee's K-12 accountability system.** Tennessee has rigorous academic standards and comprehensive high school graduation requirements. However, the state should pursue improvements to the Ready Graduate indicator in order to hold schools and districts accountable for preparing students for workforce success beyond high school.
- **Incentivize work-based learning programs across high schools and postsecondary institutions.** As Tennessee workforce opportunities continue to grow and change, the state should invest in high-quality work-based learning opportunities within programs of study in K-12 and higher education. Work-based learning provides students with experiential opportunities to develop and practice durable and technical skills in a workplace setting.
- **Develop a statewide definition for quality, noncredit training programs.** Shorter-term noncredit training programs can provide Tennesseans with timely and stackable training for a specific career. To ensure students receive the highest caliber of training outside the traditional classroom setting, Tennessee should identify a quality definition that prioritizes high-wage and high-demand training in careers that require durable skills.