

ADVANCING YOUR Frontline Workforce With Employer-Sponsored Education Benefits



Best Practices for a Successful Program

GED Testing Service | March 2017

About GED Testing Service

The GED® test has opened doors to better jobs and college programs for more than 20 million graduates since 1942. The GED® test is accepted by virtually all U.S. colleges and employers. As the creator of the one official GED® test, GED Testing Service has a responsibility to ensure that the program continues to be a reliable and valuable pathway to a better life for the millions of adults without a high school diploma. The organization continues to develop several new, innovative programs like GEDWorks™. GED Testing Service is a joint venture between the American Council on Education and Pearson.

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The statistics concerning poorly educated working adults are daunting. Nearly 40 million working adults in the U.S. don't have a high school diploma. 36 million people in the U.S. (24 million who are in the workforce) score below level 2 on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's international literacy assessment. That means they cannot compare and contrast information or integrate multiple pieces of information. Meanwhile, there is growth of middle skill jobs that companies report having a difficult time filling. In fact, an estimated 2.5 million new, middle skill jobs (those that require post-high school education but not a four-year college degree) are expected to be added to the U.S. workforce, accounting for nearly 40 percent of all job growth.

For decades, many employers have been offering educational assistance, typically in the form of tuition reimbursement for employees pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees, as a benefit to attract and retain talent. For millions of Americans, especially those who fill entry-level and frontline jobs, the lack of a high school diploma is an insurmountable barrier to taking advantage of these popular reimbursement programs. Thankfully, workers who have not completed high school are not without hope.

There is a movement among employers through UpSkill America to invest in the education and training of workers in ways that make it possible for frontline and entry-level workers to build on their education and move up in their careers. Foundational education, such as a high school equivalency diploma, is a critical stepping stone for many of these workers, without which they are unable to pursue their future career goals and reach their potential.

UpSkill America is an employer led movement to expand opportunity for American workers and help our economy and communities thrive by promoting training and advancement practices to help workers progress in their careers and move into better-paying jobs. Employers across the nation

are joining the movement because they see that helping their workers is not just good corporate citizenship, it's good business.

Companies that invest in their workers report improved recruitment, employee engagement, and retention. In fact, UpSkill America recently partnered with Lumina Foundation to release a report that showed one company's education reimbursement program resulted in employees staying 8 percent longer, receiving 10 percent more promotions, 7.5 percent more transfers and netted a return on investment of 129 percent for the company.

On behalf of the nation's 24 million frontline workers, UpSkill America wishes to thank employers that invest in the education and training of their workers. We've seen so many employers, such as those mentioned in the pages of this report, committed to helping workers take the first steps to improving their career prospects by supporting them in completing their GED® credential through our partners at the GED Testing Service.

If you would like to learn more about how your company can make smart investments in the education and training of your frontline workers, please visit us at UpSkillAmerica.org and sign up to join the movement.

Jaime Fall
Director
UpSkill America

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What is foundational education?

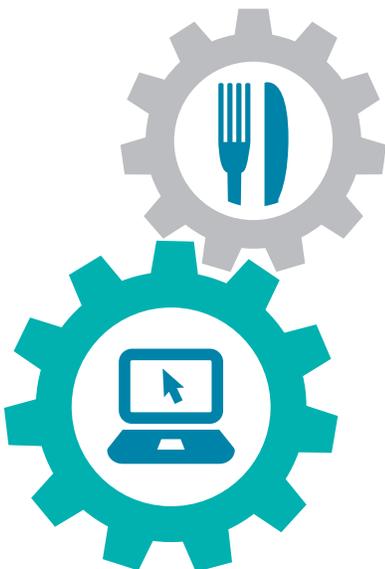
Foundational education refers to programs of study leading to skills and credentials typically associated with high school graduates. Depending on an employee's needs, the program may offer help with basic literacy and numeracy skills, English Language Learning (ELL), and instruction leading to a high school diploma or GED® credential.

Executive Summary

More and more employers recognize the need to offer a foundational education program to their workers. This type of program allows working adults to develop necessary literacy and numeracy skills, achieve English language proficiency, and gain the skills needed to attain their high school diploma or GED® credential if they did not complete high school.

Working adults in need of this benefit require widely varying levels of support. These workers are typically in high-attrition jobs with minimal earnings. Some may lack basic literacy or numeracy skills while others require very little work to achieve their credential. Many adult learners may benefit from English Language Learning (ELL) programs, or require assistance with soft skills and life skills. Adult learners, like all students, have varying degrees of motivation and discipline. For students that are easily discouraged and often lack academic self-esteem, building a program with the necessary support infrastructure in place is essential.

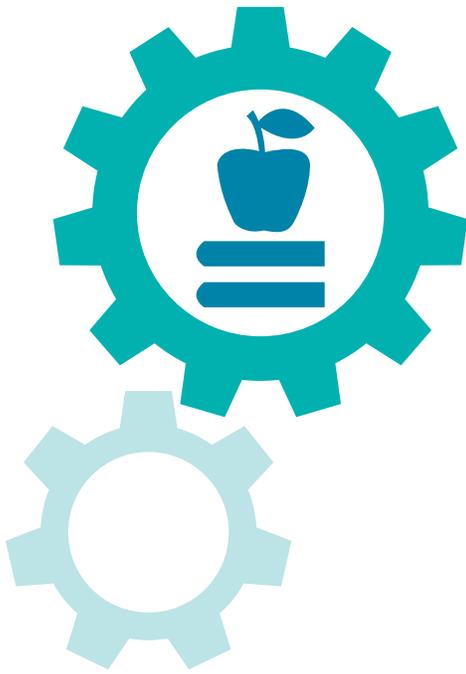
This white paper identifies key components of an employer-sponsored foundational education program that will help drive worker engagement and success, particularly among frontline and entry-level workers. These findings are based on the performance of participants in GED Testing Service's GEDWorks™ high school equivalency employer program, as well as feedback from participating employers – including Taco Bell, KFC, and Southeastern Grocers. While the insight gained here is specific to GEDWorks™, the findings are likely applicable across any basic foundational education program.



Four key components that were identified to help drive worker success include:

- 1 eliminating the barrier of requiring the worker to pay upfront for participation
- 2 guidance and encouragement from a personal advisor
- 3 recognizing workers who have successfully completed the program
- 4 establishing a degree of employer involvement

By incorporating these aspects into a foundational education program, employers can help drive greater worker engagement and results.



Why Foundational Education Is Essential

Many U.S. employers understand the value of offering education programs to their employees. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), 61 percent of employers offer undergraduate educational assistance while 59 percent offer graduate educational assistance.^[i]

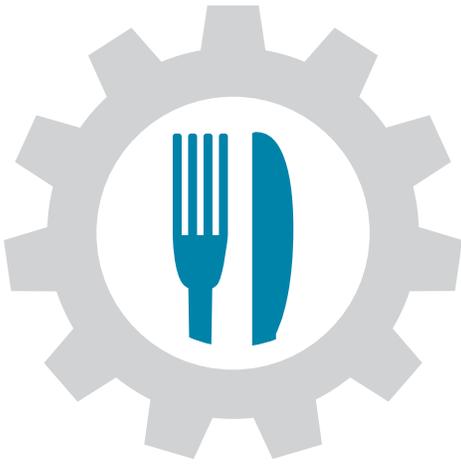
Less often do you hear about employers offering assistance for basic foundational education. But there are nearly 40 million American adults, or nearly 1 in 5 working adults, without high school diplomas.^[ii] In industries like retail, food service, construction, and health care, that percentage is even higher, especially for those working in entry-level frontline jobs.

40 million

There are nearly 40 million American adults, or nearly 1 in 5 working adults, without high school diplomas.

Jill Mason, Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness with Southeastern Grocers, observed that when her company first considered offering a GED® program to their workers, they were surprised at the number of associates in entry-level or hourly roles without a high school credential. Jessica Woodburn, Marketing Director with Hospitality Restaurant Group had a similar revelation about her franchise workers. “I actually think the GEDWorks™ program is a more needed program than our [college] scholarship program, with double the number of people who signed up for GEDWorks™ compared to those going to college.”

These frontline workers, who desire to advance within the organization and acquire new skills, lack the basic education needed to access higher education benefits. While many



companies offer undergraduate or graduate education benefits for workers, providing access to a foundational education program means workers who are not yet eligible for postsecondary education can now take advantage of an educational benefit. Neglecting the development of workers without foundational education has a sizable impact on the U.S. economy. Additionally, companies are unable to realize the benefits that can be gained from providing these necessary skills.

Help Retention and Recruitment

Foundational education programs can help companies attract and retain workers. “These programs are giving KFC restaurant operators a tool that may impact recruitment and retention in a very positive way,” says Krista Snider, Managing Director at the Kentucky Fried Chicken Foundation. “It is a powerful benefit in discussions with current and future employees.”

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— Krista Snider, Kentucky Fried Chicken Foundation

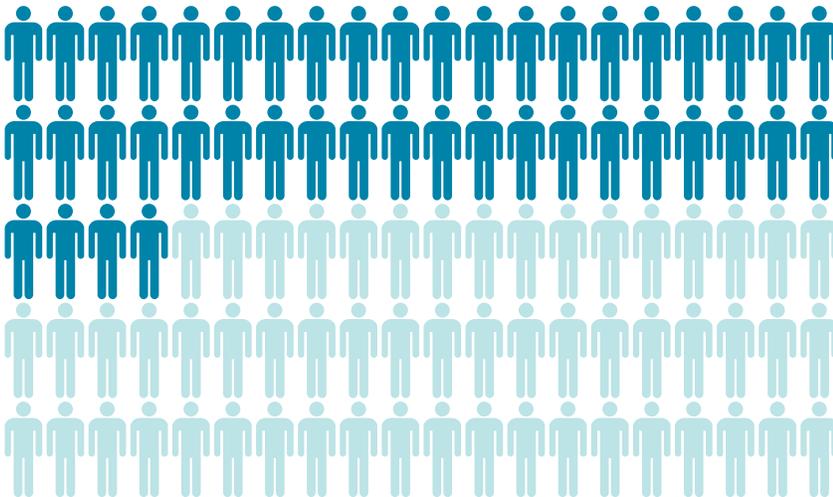
These programs can differentiate employers during the recruitment process. It shows that employers are investing in their workers and providing them with ways to enhance their skills and develop a career path within the organization. With frontline worker turnover as high as 100 percent for some employers and the cost of recruitment approaching \$5,000 per frontline job^[iii], there is a significant financial benefit to reducing turnover. A program that allows workers to earn their high school diploma or equivalency credential while working can help retain this workforce.



Upskill Your Workforce

Today, 54 percent of U.S. jobs are middle skill jobs, but only 44 percent of workers have the skills to fill these positions^[iv]. Middle skill jobs require more than a high school diploma, but less than a 4-year college degree. They may require a certificate, training or apprenticeship program, or an associate's degree. More than 50 percent of companies report that it is becoming increasingly hard to find workers to fill these middle skill jobs^[v]. With foundational education, employers offer their frontline workers an opportunity to pursue the further training needed to fill the growing number of middle skill jobs. In fact, the middle

But only **44%** of workers have the skills to fill these middle skill positions



skill job crisis is only expected to grow. An estimated 40 percent of all new job growth — amounting to 2.5 million new jobs^[vi] — will be middle skill jobs. With educational benefits, like foundational education, companies can develop a strong internal talent pipeline.



Adults over the age of 25 who do not have a high school diploma

National Economic Impact

Nationally, 12 percent of adults over the age of 25 do not have a high school diploma^[vii]. Research has shown that these individuals have a higher unemployment rate — 8 percent for a high school dropout versus 5.4 percent for a graduate^[viii]. Additionally, high school graduates on average earn \$9,000 more each year than their non-graduate counterparts^[ix]. This costs the economy \$1.8 billion in lost tax revenue annually^[x]. That's less money going into the economy, less money to support families, and more financial resources distributed through national and state government assistance programs.



Americans who believe how well a company treats its workers determines whether a company is a good corporate citizen

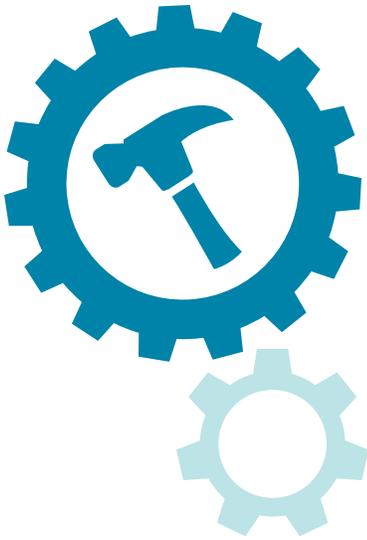
Corporate Social Responsibility Efforts

Offering a foundational education program can also be an important component of a company's corporate social responsibility efforts. By investing in worker education for its frontline workforce, who are likely on the lower end of the wage spectrum, not only does a company improve productivity and retention, but it also helps build up the company's reputation. According to the GolinHarris report, *Doing Well by Doing Good 2005: The Trajectory of Corporate Citizenship in American Business*, 69 percent of Americans believe how well a company treats its workers determines whether a company is a good corporate citizen^[xi]. Companies with a positive reputation benefit from the goodwill of both consumers who want to patronize socially responsible companies and workers who want to work for a socially responsible company.



According to Rebecca Bodestean, Senior Analyst of Organizational Development at Taco Bell, the company’s investment in their frontline associates’ education goes beyond just investing in their employees.

“It’s about changing the lives of people. If we can make a difference, even if that difference doesn’t directly improve our restaurants, the cost is minimal compared to the tremendous positive impact it has in the lives of our people.”



Unique Needs Of Foundational Education Students

Employers quickly discover that participants in foundational education programs require substantially varying degrees of support and educational programming and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not likely to yield optimal results.

Some students lack basic literacy or numeracy skills, while other students might be challenged with English Language Learning that must be addressed in parallel to their other studies. For more advanced students, they might only require a few hours of instruction to earn their high school credential. These are also adults that for whatever reason did not do well in a traditional academic setting. Many of these adults may lack academic self-esteem and self-confidence.

As the creator of the official GED® test, GEDTesting Service understands the needs and characteristics of foundational education participants well. GEDTesting Service has been serving these adults for over 70 years and during that time, has opened the doors for more than 20 million graduates to better jobs and post-secondary opportunities.

GEDWorks™ Created With Unique Needs In Mind

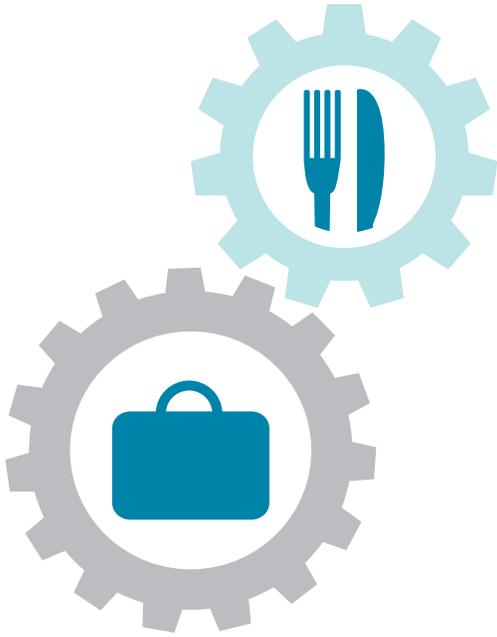
When approached by employers interested in offering a GED® program to their workers, GEDTesting Service began the process of building a new program from the ground up. This program, called GEDWorks™, was specifically designed to meet the unique needs of working adults who aspire to earn their GED® credential. GEDWorks™ is a turnkey solution

GED Testing Service

Over **70**
years of service

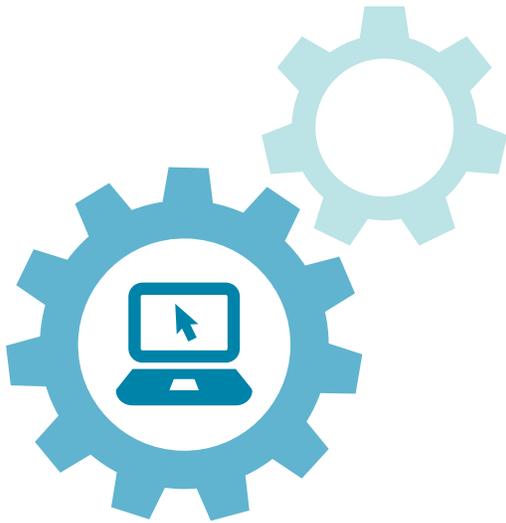
More than
20 million
graduates

Unique Needs Of Foundational Education Students



for companies who want to offer a high school equivalency benefit for their workers. The program is designed to be flexible around busy work schedules and give workers the resources they need to earn their GED® credential.

GEDWorks™ launched in 2015 to a pilot group of four employers — Walmart, Taco Bell, Southeastern Grocers, and KFC. Based upon the success of the pilot, the program is now offered more broadly to national and regional employers. GED Testing Service is in a stronger position than ever to find solutions to the challenges frontline workers face when pursuing their foundational education.



Driving Success In Foundational Education Programs

GED Testing Service has identified several key obstacles that frontline workers face and has developed strategies to drive the engagement and success of program participants. Whether an employer offers the GEDWorks™ program, or any other foundational education programs, the four strategies described below are essential to improving outcomes and should be incorporated into any education program. While the insights gained are based on the experiences of GEDWorks™ participants, they are also relevant to the broader frontline workforce that is pursuing foundational education.

Eliminating the Financial Barrier For Students

Most traditional corporate education programs reimburse employees for out-of-pocket expenses related to pursuing higher education degrees. They require workers to pay for tuition, books, and testing fees upfront. Once workers have successfully completed the program, they submit their expenses to the company for reimbursement.

While this is a popular model for many corporate education programs, it poses significant challenges for frontline workers. These workers, many of whom live paycheck to paycheck and support families, need a program where they can pursue educational opportunities that doesn't interfere with their ability to pay for basic living expenses. "In our company, [the classic reimbursement model] would never work," says Jessica Woodburn, Marketing Director with Hospitality Restaurant Group.



“If we’re not paying and we have the worker pay out of pocket, we’re not touching as many of the workers that we can. They just can’t afford it.”

— Rebecca Bodestean,
Taco Bell

“It’s only \$75 or \$150, but to these workers, that could be a paycheck,” she says, “that could be food for the month.” Workers would see greater success from a program that doesn’t require them to pay out of pocket.

“It would have taken a while – a lot longer – for me to actually get my GED® diploma if I didn’t have Taco Bell paying for it.” said Lynzie Coffman, a 2016 graduate.

Requiring workers to cover the costs of the program significantly diminishes the number of workers that would be able to participate, making the program less effective and impactful for an organization. For example, one GEDWorks™ employer has had a traditional reimbursement program in place for the GED® test for decades, and was surprised how few of its associates took advantage of the program. Since incorporating GEDWorks™, that company’s enrollment has increased fivefold. “If we’re not paying and we have the worker pay out of pocket, we’re not helping as many of the workers that we can” says Rebecca Bodestean, Senior Analyst of Organizational Development at Taco Bell. “They just can’t afford it.”

Personal Advisors Drive Engagement

Participants in foundational education programs often need the encouraging pat on the back or the firmer conversation about keeping on task. One engagement tool that is particularly effective within the GEDWorks™ program is a personal advisor. Employees have access to GED Advisors™ who can help them throughout the program.

What is so special and effective about GEDWorks™ is that every single student in the program has a personal advisor who is helping them every step of the way. I believe that, hands down, is why this program works and why it will continue to work. I think if you took away that aspect, we would be seeing very different results.

— Krista Snider, Managing Director, Kentucky Fried Chicken Foundation

“With these students – if no one cares, they’re not going to get it,” says Rebecca Bodestean, Senior Analyst of Organizational Development at Taco Bell. “They’re not going to put in the work.” Advisors act as coaches and motivators as well as hold students accountable. This is a role that is critical to achieving strong educational outcomes.

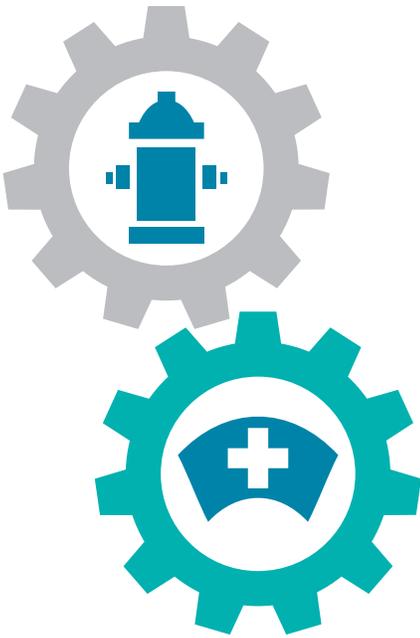
In any given year, only 10-20 percent of individuals who indicate interest in the GED® testing program actually follow through and achieve their credential^[xiii]. With many priorities to balance, education sometimes takes a backseat. But with the right support structure, workers can succeed.

Personal advisors provide workers with moral support and encouragement as well as helpful study reminders. GEDWorks™ graduate Mary Stritehoff remembers her experience with her personal advisor. “She would push, but not too much,” she said. “Like if I got caught up on something, she would encourage me to keep going.”

Individuals who never graduated from high school have already struggled with a traditional schooling program, and benefit from having a personal advisor who can guide them through the process.

Student Recognition Helps Build Awareness and Motivation

Acknowledging the accomplishments of workers participating in a foundational educational program has also proven to be effective in increasing program awareness and creating a stronger bond between the employee and the company. Recognition has also resulted in significant public relations visibility for the employer, both at local and national



levels. Several methods of recognition that employers have implemented as a part of their program include:

Graduation Parties. Workers get a chance to celebrate their success with their employers, managers, co-workers, families, and friends. Their success is also made visible to other co-workers, which can help increase awareness of the program. In fact, Taco Bell facilitates graduation parties by providing resources to restaurants.

“We have an area where the manager or the franchise can go and order supplies, like a graduation cap, gown, decorations, or ideas on how to throw a party and get a cake,” says Rebecca Bodestean, Senior Analyst of Organizational Development at Taco Bell.

“I just found out today from my manager that I got a letter in the mail congratulating me on graduating. It feels good to be recognized.”

— Jasmine Morales,
GED® graduate

Letter of Recognition. Acknowledging a worker’s accomplishment in a letter or certificate can be a positive experience for the worker. “I just found out today from my manager that I got a letter in the mail congratulating me on graduating,” recalls 2016 graduate Jasmine Morales. “It feels good to be recognized.” Also, when presented in a company setting such as a meeting or ceremony, it helps to increase awareness of the program to other workers. This is a strategy employed by one GEDWorks™ employer — every associate who completes the GED® program gets a letter of congratulations from the CEO of the company, and it’s an opportunity to recognize the associate at the local level.

Rewards Program. Some companies have implemented a rewards program, which enables GEDWorks™ participants to earn points that they can redeem for prizes and gift cards as they work towards their GED® credential. According to

70%

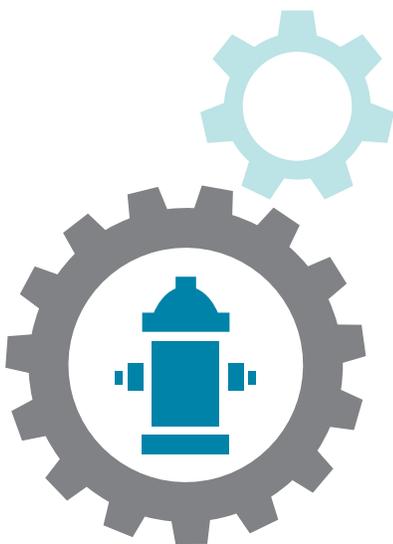
GEDWorks™ students who indicated that the **rewards program** made them more motivated to complete the program

Patricia Gartman, 2016 graduate, the rewards program “was even more motivation to keep going and not stop [with the GEDWorks™ program].” The rewards not only keep workers engaged in the program, but it encourages them to finish the program faster and increases their likelihood of completion. In a recent survey of GEDWorks™ students, nearly 70 percent of students indicated that the rewards program made them more motivated to complete the program^[xiii].

By recognizing workers who complete the program, companies are acknowledging the success of workers and spreading awareness to other potential program participants. They’re also showcasing their core values and commitment to education and worker development. According to Krista Snider, Managing Director, Kentucky Fried Chicken Foundation, it “shifts the culture in a very positive way” when workers see one of their co-workers benefitting from a program like GEDWorks™. Jill Mason, Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness has noticed this impact at Southeastern Grocers. “Associates [are] seeing our core values in action and seeing them brought to life and encouraged through linked recognition programs.”

Employer Involvement Increases Ownership

Some companies expect managers to encourage eligible workers to participate in their educational programs. For instance, at one GEDWorks™ employer, “personnel managers, training coordinators, and members of management and supervisory management have a responsibility to know about these programs so that when associates express an interest they know to recommend



High performance companies are

2.5x more likely

to reward managers who encourage workers to participate in development programs

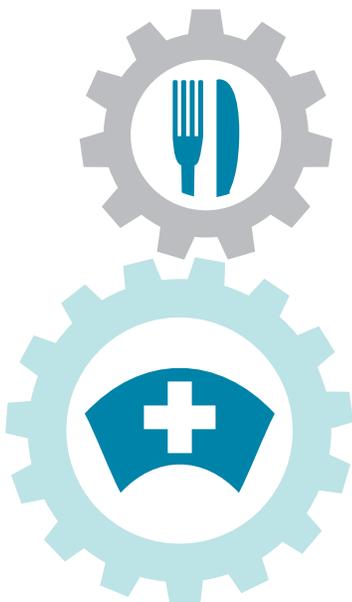
them and set them on the path to start that process,” says the Director of Learning.

Employer involvement ultimately benefits the company’s performance. According to a 2016 report from i4cp, *Developing America’s Frontline Workers*, companies that are considered “high performance” are 2.5x more likely to reward managers who encourage workers to participate in development opportunities^[xiv].

In addition, when employers have access to data on program activity, they can play a bigger role in the worker’s journey. For instance, GEDWorks™ employers can monitor worker participation and performance in the program. “This allows leadership to be involved and help those associates take the next step,” according to Jill Mason, Senior Director of Organizational Effectiveness, Southeastern Grocers. For many companies, this involvement is a corporate goal they strive for to improve worker engagement.

Smaller organizations or franchises have the unique opportunity to take a more personalized approach to help workers meet their educational goals. Jessica Woodburn, Marketing Director – Hospitality Restaurant Group and a Taco Bell franchisee recalls a recent experience with a GEDWorks™ participant:

“She had to work on the day that the GED® test was available and she didn’t have a ride. We decided to give her the day off and take her to the exam. We are trying to reach out to the folks who we know are actively enrolled and say let us help you – what can we do to help you get to the next step.”





Conclusion

Many employers are unaware of, or underestimate, the demand for foundational education programs among their workers. Such programs are a critical component of any educational benefit offered to frontline workers, without which higher education programs would be out of reach. Whether a company is offering GEDWorks™ or other foundational education programs, it's important to acknowledge that adults who participate in these programs didn't succeed in a traditional education setting in the first place. By incorporating several best practices and strategies into these programs, including eliminating the financial burden for students, connecting workers to a personal advisor, recognizing worker success, and establishing employer involvement, employers will find that their workers succeed at a higher rate, which in turn means a higher return for the company.

Featured Employers

KFC

Krista Snider, Managing Director, Kentucky Fried Chicken Foundation

KFC Founder Colonel Harland Sanders was passionate about helping people be their best selves through education. To continue his legacy, the Kentucky Fried Chicken Foundation, an independent charitable organization — with the support of KFC Franchisees and the KFC Corporation — offers educational assistance programs for KFC U.S. restaurant employees.

Education philosophy: At KFC, we encourage people to be their best selves — to learn and grow in a culture of inclusion. We always seek to learn more and share our know how with others. Everyone can grow here.

Southeastern Grocers

Jill Mason, Sr. Director – Organizational Effectiveness, Southeastern Grocers

Southeastern Grocers LLC, parent company and home of BI-LO, Harveys and Winn-Dixie grocery stores, is the fifth-largest conventional supermarket chain in the U.S. and the second-largest conventional supermarket in the southeast based on store count.

Education philosophy: Our values of *We care passionately* and *We constantly try to do better* underpin our commitment to offering associates access to opportunities where they can stretch, learn and grow.

Taco Bell

Rebecca Bodestean, Sr. Analyst – Organizational Development, Taco Bell

Jessica Woodburn, Marketing Director – Hospitality Restaurant Group, A Taco Bell Franchise

Based in Irvine, California, Taco Bell is a subsidiary of Yum! Brands, Inc. Taco Bell serves more than 2 billion customers each year in 6,400 restaurants with more than 80 percent of which are owned and operated by independent franchisees and licensees.

Education philosophy: We believe everyone deserves the right to Live Más — and we're constantly inspired by the creativity it takes to get there. Taco Bell focuses on building the capabilities of every team member so they are able to Live Más.

- [i] Society for Human Resource Management. 2013 Employee Benefits: An Overview of Employee Offerings in the U.S. retrieved from https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/benefits/documents/13-0245%202013_empbenefits_fnl.pdf
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