

NEWS RELEASE

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Survey Assesses Business Attitudes Toward Tennessee's Workforce and Public Education System

Tennessee businesses clearly understand the role education plays in today's modern global economy and recognize the importance of a skilled workforce to their competitiveness and the economic development prospects of the state. But they have concerns over the state's labor force quality, labor force availability, and the quality of public schools in Tennessee, according to results of a survey released by the University of Tennessee's Center for Business and Economic Research (CBER).

Out of 618 Tennessee Business Roundtable members responding to an online survey administered by CBER, over 82 percent gave the state's public schools a grade of C, D or F in preparing students for entry into the job market. [View Graph](#) More than half said Tennessee's public education system is worse than the average state's education system.

"To me the results of this survey suggest a resounding endorsement by the Tennessee business community of the state's participation in the American Diploma Project," says Comptroller of the Treasury John G. Morgan. "It seems to me that the course the governor and the General Assembly have charted to insure a high school diploma means that a student is ready for the workplace or higher education is exactly the right thing at the right time."

Despite the poor marks given to the state's public schools, 73.3 percent of those surveyed indicated that they would reallocate spending in the state's budget toward pre-kindergarten and elementary/secondary education. [View Graph](#) "It is surprising that only 8.4 percent indicated that they would prefer tax relief," states Dr. Matt Murray, CBER associate director and University of Tennessee professor of economics. "But businesses clearly want more accountability and improved outcomes in exchange for more education spending—something that was clear from the open-ended remarks received from the survey."

While 77 percent thought the state's two-year colleges and four-year universities adequately prepared students for a job, two-thirds indicated that it would be harder or much harder to find skilled workers ten years from now. "Labor force growth is expected to slow in the years ahead due to lower birth rates. At the same time, large numbers of people from the baby boom generation will be retiring, taking with them a significant stock of formal training and work experience. As these trends transpire, the economy will see a greater need for a more highly skilled workforce," adds Dr. Murray. The trend is already evident, with almost 73 percent of the business leaders surveyed indicating that the quality of the Tennessee workforce has stayed the same or has decreased in the last 10 years. [View Graph](#)

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But the problems go well beyond the classroom, with business leaders giving poor marks on student discipline, leadership and initiative—factors that may be influenced more by the home environment than the school. The results demonstrate the need to invest more in education, secure improved outcomes from the public schools and more broadly engage society in promoting education.

The survey is a component of a much broader project—Education Crossroads—that examines the many ways that education affects Tennessee and its residents. Education Crossroads provides the public and policymakers with easy-to-access data and information on the role of education in affecting the economy and, more broadly, quality of life.

To find out more about Education Crossroads and to view the complete business [survey report](#), please visit www.educationcrossroads.com.

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Download Full Survey (pdf/1.44 MB): <http://www.educationcrossroads.com/BusinessSurveyNF.pdf>

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