

Executive Summary

Burnes Consulting was retained as Project Administrator and Project Manager to conduct core and technology competency focus groups for the Northern San Joaquin Regional Collaborative. Burnes Consulting retained as additional staff for this project Patricia Jones of Patricia Jones Consulting. Staff presented survey questions designed by the Department of Education to employers from Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin and Tuolumne counties. We solicited information from twenty-seven employers using two formats, (1) focus groups, and (2) phone surveys. The goal of the project was to detect the gap between what employers want from entry-level employees and what they get.

Besides their responses to the Department of Education's structured, rated questions, we asked employers to discuss three topics: (1) the most important qualities for entry level employees, (2) the top problems with entry level employees and (3) the areas where they want the education system to concentrate to better prepare students for entry level positions.

We found that the largest gaps between what employers want in entry-level employees and what they receive are in:

1. Employee responsibility and dependability
2. Professional demeanor
3. Decision-making and reasoning skills
4. Teamwork

In further analyzing the composite results, entry-level employees exhibit no skills nor attributes that surpassed employers' needs. However, several employee attributes do come close to meeting employers' needs. Using the results from the rated questions, the smallest gaps between expectations and actuality are in:

1. Personal hygiene
2. Technological maintenance and troubleshooting (this is not a desired entry-level skill and was not evident)
3. Technological preparedness
4. Technological application

The answers from the discussion groups closely mirrored those of the rated questions, emphasizing accountability, professionalism and a strong work ethic. However, employers also stressed the need for entry-level employees to have strong basic academic and technological skills. The attached report and appendices detail the results of the four county surveys.

Introduction.

Burnes Consulting conducted San Joaquin Regional Collaborative Focus Groups and phone surveys for the California Department of Education. The goal was to identify the *gaps between the characteristics of entry-level employees and what the employer desires from these employees*. This report describes from whom and how the information was gathered. It then recounts the employers' responses to both rated and discussion questions. The conclusion summarizes the consensus that employers have concerning entry-level employees' qualifications and what the employers need. Details of the findings are in the Appendix.

Methods.

Rated questions. We questioned employers from Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin and Tuolumne counties about what they want in entry-level employees and what they get. We asked them to rate fifteen skills and attributes on a scale of one to three: A one, indicating no importance and A three, indicating a trait that was very important. The employers rated the *importance of the characteristics they need from incoming*, entry-level employees. They then used the same scale to rate what *they are getting* in the work force. We tallied and averaged the scores for each question; the gap was calculated by subtracting the average score for existing traits from desired traits. Tally sheets for each county, and a cumulative tally sheet for all four counties, are in the Appendix.

Discussion questions. Delivery of rated questions supplied by the Department of Education was followed-up by discussions highlighting the most important entry-level employee (1) attributes, (2) problems, and (3) requirements from the education system. The discussion results were ranked by frequency of responses.

Formats. We used two formats to gather the information from employers. First, we scheduled an employer-based focus group for each of four counties. Second, if attendance at a focus group was below seven, we conducted phone interviews with additional employers. We invited seventy-five employers to participate. Twenty-seven employers took part in the study; twenty-five completed the entire survey, one partially concluded the work, and one employer who has not recently hired employees was not included. Of the twenty-seven, nine employers attended focus groups; we interviewed the remainder by phone.

Sample population. The employers represented a broad spectrum in business size and type; a summary of sign-in sheet data is found in the Appendix. Representatives were from companies ranging from two to 7,000 employees. The types of businesses represented included:

- \$ manufacturing
- \$ retail
- \$ recreation
- \$ health care
- \$ banking
- \$ publishing
- \$ transportation
- \$ human services
- \$ government

Results: Rated Questions.

Table 1 summarizes the employers' responses within each category of Department of Education rated focus group questions. To accommodate the employers' time constraints, we deleted some original questions, and combined others. We excluded no categories of questions, nor fundamental principals. The questions we posed to the employers and the details for each county are found in the Appendix.

Of the fifteen rated questions, three of the four largest gaps are in the category of *personal qualities*. These are (1) responsibility/dependability, (2) presentation/ professional demeanor and (3) team work. Under the category, *thinking skills*, the skill of decision making/reasoning reveals a slightly larger gap than team work.

Overall, *personal qualities* are rated as very important traits for entry-level employees. However, other than hygiene, a significant difference exists between what the employers want, and what the employees present. In fact, in the rating scale of one to three, with three being the highest, employers want a three in the personal qualities category. They get most employees rated a one and two.

Many employers pre-screen employees to decrease the gaps in what they want and whom they interview. As an example, one employer related that his company only accepts applications submitted through the computer. Thus they pre-screen for technological skills.

Table 1. Employer responses to rated questions.

ENTRY LEVEL EMPLOYEE CHARACTERISTICS RATED BY EMPLOYERS	AVERAGE DESIRED SCORE	AVERAGE ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEE SCORE	DIFFERENCE (GAP)
Reading	2.85	2.77	0.58
Writing	2.46	2.00	0.46
Arithmetic	2.73	2.04	0.69
FUNDAMENTAL			
Speaking	2.81	2.42	.38
THINKING			
Decision-making and reasoning	2.69	1.73	0.96
PERSONAL QUALITIES			
Responsibility/ dependability	2.92	1.85	1.08
Social, teamwork	2.92	2.04	0.88
Hygiene	2.68	2.60	0.08
Personal Presentation	2.82	1.82	1.00
Integrity and Honesty	3.00	2.36	0.64
TECHNOLOGY			
Basic operations and concepts	2.72	2.20	0.52
Technology preparedness	2.72	2.44	0.28
Application of technology	2.56	2.24	0.32
Research & communication	2.36	1.76	0.60
Maintenance & troubleshooting	1.68	1.46	0.22

Results: Discussion Questions.

We summarize the employers' responses to the three discussion questions and their general comments below. Employers were inclined to separate their responses into the two categories of (a) skills and (b) attributes. Consequently, we reported their responses in that manner. The complete list of all responses is in the Appendix.

1. What things are most important for entry-level employees?

Skills. Employers unanimously want entry-level employees have a basic ability to read, write, speak, and calculate simple math problems. Although in the rated questions, we identified only a small gap between what the employers want and what they get in technological skills and expertise, many cite the importance of entry-level employees having a strong technological base. Employers also want employees who can reason and think critically.

Attributes. Most employers mentioned a positive attitude toward work. They want employees who are willing to learn and can work as a team with diverse groups of people. Basically, they want entry-level employees to be job-ready by understanding and assuming the responsibilities of being employed.

2. What are the top problems with entry-level employees?

Skills. Most employers report that the top skill missing in entry-level employees is job-readiness. New employees lack the skills to be and stay employed. The employee exhibits little skill to transfer school-based knowledge to the workplace. In addition, most employers remarked that although their expectations are low, many employees lack the basic skills of communication, math and reasoning.

Attributes. Of all the topics discussed, consensus was highest and emotions were strongest on the perception that entry-level employees do not have a sound work ethic. Employers related that entry-level employees lack motivation, professional demeanor, courtesy and the ability to work with other employees and the public. The employers remarked that with a positive attitude, they are willing to train and reward employees. However, they expressed frustration at the lack of ambition and conviction of entry-level employees, and the inability of many of them to pass the drug screening.

3. On which areas should educators concentrate to better prepare students as entry-level employees?

Skills. Employers want educators to demand excellence in the basic skills of reading, writing, math and speaking. They related that employees require a sound educational base upon which to build skills in critical thinking, reasoning and good judgment.

Secondly, the employers emphasized the importance of job-training for all students. They want students to have the skills and knowledge to become stable, contributing members of the workforce. Many employers remarked favorably on the Regional Occupational Program (ROP), and suggested that the program be expanded and possibly be a requirement for graduation.

The employers commented on technological skills in two ways. First, several were concerned at the social stratification of students= technological skill base. They expressed concern that poorer school districts and disadvantaged youth will suffer an increasingly larger disparity between their technological exposure and that of more affluent schools and students.

Second, although the gaps were relatively small between what employers want and what they get in technology skills, most commented that these skills were imperative for entry-level employees. The employers surveyed emphasized the importance of maintaining or increasing the technological skill base of students.

Attributes. Employers want educators to teach students to be responsible by holding them accountable for their actions. Examples given by employers included educators not accepting tardiness nor late assignments, and not socially promoting students who do not meet predetermined and challenging standards for basic skills. The employers suggested that raising expectations for students in demeanor, actions and initiative will help entry-level employees develop a job-ready attitude.

The employers further requested that the education system stress the importance of teamwork. If students can learn how to work as a team member, emphasizing the power of collective and critical reasoning, employers feel that they would get an entry-level employee better prepared to work cooperatively.

General comments. At the end of the discussion session, we asked employers to make general comments about education and how it relates to entry-level employees. We listed those that they repeated most often.

1. Employers related that the accepted casual attire of school is not preparing students to enter the workforce. Not only do students not understand how to dress professionally, but they probably do not have a wardrobe appropriate for work.
2. Schools seem to be lowering the bar for social standards, creating an entry-level employee without the social skills or professional demeanor to know how to act appropriately in the workplace.
3. Business people want the schools to put more emphasis on basic job respect and understanding.

Conclusion.

Employers expressed strong concern about entry-level employees= work ethic. Many employees are not dependable. They often will not show up for work, and are not able to prioritize personal and professional responsibilities. Employers also stated that most entry-level employees will not take responsibility for their actions - often blaming others for their mistakes. They further remark that entry-level employees do not present themselves professionally. The employees dress and act inappropriately, and are unwilling to be flexible and customer-friendly.

The employers whom we surveyed from Mariposa, Merced, San Joaquin and Tuolumne counties want the schools to concentrate on teaching the basic skills of math, reading and communication. They want the education system to supplement this basic knowledge with the teaching of and requiring acceptable social skills from students. Further, they want educators to expand the job-readiness programs already used by schools.

Appendix

1. Modified rated questions
2. Sign-in sheet summary
3. Tally sheets of rated questions
 - a. Composite for four counties
 1. Mariposa County
 2. Merced County
 3. San Joaquin County
 4. Tuolumne County
4. Summary of open-ended questions

TALLY SHEET - rated questions

TUOLUMNE COUNTY	Important to have					Worker Skill Level Now					GAP*
	Score tallies			Total Points	Average	Score tallies			Total Points	Average	
	1	2	3			1	2	3			
Reading		3	5	21	2.63		7	1	17	2.13	0.50
Writing		5	3	19	2.38	2	6		14	1.75	0.63
Arithmetic		3	5	21	2.63	3	4	1	14	1.75	0.88
FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS											
Speaking		2	6	22	2.75		8		16	2.00	0.75
THINKING SKILLS											
Decision Making/Reasoning		1	7	23	2.88	3	5		13	1.63	1.25
PERSONAL QUALITIES											
Responsibility and Dependability		2	6	22	2.75	3	4	1	14	1.75	1.00
Social/Team Work			8	24	3.00	2	5	1	15	1.88	1.13
Self Management - hygiene		1	6	20	2.86		2	5	19	2.71	0.14
Professional Demeanor (1)		1	3	11	2.75	1	1	2	9	2.25	0.50
Integrity/Honesty (2)			7	21	3.00		4	3	17	2.43	0.57
TECHNOLOGY											
Basic Operations & Concepts			7	21	3.00	2	4	1	13	1.86	1.14
Technology Preparedness		5	2	16	2.29	1	4	2	15	2.14	0.14
Applies Technology		4	3	17	2.43	1	3	3	16	2.29	0.14
Technology Research	3	1	3	14	2.00	4	3		10	1.43	0.57
Maintenance & Troubleshooting	4	3		10	1.43	4	3		10	1.43	0.00

* Gap = difference between average of what the employers want from entry-level employees, and the average of what they get in entry-level employees.
Higher numbers indicate greater gaps. Negative numbers would indicate that employers are getting more than they need from entry level employees.

- (1) not asked of all participants
- (2) participant unable to complete survey beginning with this question

TALLY SHEET - rated questions

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY	Important to have					Worker Skill Level Now					GAP*
	Score Tallies			Total Points	Average	Score Tallies			Total Points	Average	
	1	2	3			1	2	3			
Reading		1	4	14	2.80	1	2	2	11	2.20	0.60
Writing	1	3	1	10	2.00	2	2	1	9	1.80	0.20
Arithmetic		1	4	14	2.80	1	2	2	11	2.20	0.60
FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS											
Speaking		1	4	14	2.80	1	1	3	12	2.40	0.40
THINKING SKILLS											
Decision Making/Reasoning	1	1	3	12	2.40	1	3	1	10	2.00	0.40
PERSONAL QUALITIES											
Responsibility and Dependability			5	15	3.00	2	3		8	1.60	1.40
Social/Team Work		1	4	14	2.80	1	1	3	12	2.40	0.40
Self Management - hygiene		2	3	13	2.60		2	3	13	2.60	0.00
Presentation	1	1	3	12	2.40	2	3		8	1.60	0.80
Integrity/Honesty			5	15	3.00		4	1	11	2.20	0.80
TECHNOLOGY											
Basic Operations & Concepts	1	1	3	12	2.40		3	2	12	2.40	0.00
Technology Preparedness		1	4	14	2.80		1	4	14	2.80	0.00
Applies Technology	1		4	13	2.60	1	1	3	12	2.40	0.20
Technology Research		2	3	13	2.60		3	2	12	2.40	0.20
Maintenance & Troubleshooting	3	1	1	8	1.60	3	1		5	1.25	0.35

* Gap = difference between average of what the employers want from entry-level employees, and the average of what they get in entry-level employees.
Higher numbers indicate greater gaps. Negative numbers would indicate that employers are getting more than they need from entry level employees.

MARIPOSA COUNTY	Important to have					Worker Skill Level Now					GAP*
	Score Tallies			Total Points	Average	Score Tallies			Total Points	Average	
	1	2	3			1	2	3			
Reading			4	12	3.00		1	3	11	2.75	0.25
Writing		3	1	9	2.25		3	1	9	2.25	0.00
Arithmetic			4	12	3.00	1		3	10	2.50	0.50
FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS											
Speaking		1	3	11	2.75		3	1	9	2.25	0.50
THINKING SKILLS											
Decision Making/Reasoning		1	3	11	2.75	1	2	1	8	2.00	0.75
PERSONAL QUALITIES											
Responsibility and Dependability			4	12	3.00		2	2	10	2.50	0.50
Social/Team Work		1	3	11	2.75	1	2	1	8	2.00	0.75
Self Management - hygiene			4	12	3.00			4	12	3.00	0.00
Presentation			4	12	3.00	1	2	1	8	2.00	1.00
Integrity/Honesty			4	12	3.00		1	3	11	2.75	0.25
TECHNOLOGY											
Basic Operations & Concepts			4	12	3.00		1	3	11	2.75	0.25
Technology Preparedness			4	12	3.00			4	12	3.00	0.00
Applies Technology		3	1	9	2.25	1	1	2	9	2.25	0.00
Technology Research	2		2	8	2.00	2		2	8	2.00	0.00
Maintenance & Troubleshooting	2		2	8	2.00	2		2	8	2.00	0.00

* Gap = difference between average of what the employers want from entry-level employees, and the average of what they get in entry-level employees.
Higher numbers indicate greater gaps. Negative numbers would indicate that employers are getting more than they need from entry level employees.

TALLY SHEET - rated questions

MERCED COUNTY	Important to have					Worker Skill Level Now					GAP*
	Score tallies			Total Points	Average	Score tallies			Total Points	Average	
	1	2	3			1	2	3			
Reading			9	27	3.00	1	5	3	20	2.22	0.78
Writing		1	8	26	2.89	1	5	3	20	2.22	0.67
Arithmetic		3	6	24	2.67	2	5	2	18	2.00	0.67
FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS											
Speaking		1	8	26	2.89		1	8	26	2.89	0.00
THINKING SKILLS											
Decision Making/Reasoning	1	1	7	24	2.67	5	3	1	14	1.56	1.11
PERSONAL QUALITIES											
Responsibility and Dependability			9	27	3.00	4	3	2	16	1.78	1.22
Social/Team Work			9	27	3.00	2	5	2	18	2.00	1.00
Self Management - hygiene	1	3	5	22	2.44	1	4	4	21	2.33	0.11
Presentation			9	27	3.00	5	2	2	15	1.67	1.33
Integrity/Honesty			9	27	3.00	1	5	3	20	2.22	0.78
TECHNOLOGY											
Basic Operations & Concepts	1	2	6	23	2.56	2	4	3	19	2.11	0.44
Technology Preparedness		1	8	26	2.89		7	2	20	2.22	0.67
Applies Technology		2	7	25	2.78	1	6	2	19	2.11	0.67
Technology Research		3	6	24	2.67	4	5		14	1.56	1.11
Maintenance & Troubleshooting	3	5	1	16	1.78	6	3		12	1.33	0.44

* Gap = difference between average of what the employers want from entry-level employees, and the average of what they get in entry-level employees.
Higher numbers indicate greater gaps. Negative numbers would indicate that employers are getting more than they need from entry level employees.

TALLY SHEET - rated questions

FOUR COUNTY TOTAL	Important to have					Worker Skill Level Now					GAP*
	Score tallies			Total Points	Average	Score tallies			Total Points	Average	
	1	2	3			1	2	3			
Reading	0	4	22	74	2.85	2	15	9	59	2.27	0.58
Writing	1	12	13	64	2.46	5	16	5	52	2.00	0.46
Arithmetic	0	7	19	71	2.73	7	11	8	53	2.04	0.69
FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS											
Speaking	0	5	21	73	2.81	1	13	12	63	2.42	0.38
THINKING SKILLS											
Decision Making/Reasoning	2	4	20	70	2.69	10	13	3	45	1.73	0.96
PERSONAL QUALITIES											
Responsibility and Dependability	0	2	24	76	2.92	9	12	5	48	1.85	1.08
Social/Team Work	0	2	24	76	2.92	6	13	7	53	2.04	0.88
Self Management - hygiene	1	6	18	67	2.68	1	8	16	65	2.60	0.08
Presentation	1	2	19	62	2.82	9	8	5	40	1.82	1.00
Integrity/Honesty	0	0	25	75	3.00	1	14	10	59	2.36	0.64
TECHNOLOGY											
Basic Operations & Concepts	2	3	20	68	2.72	4	12	9	55	2.20	0.52
Technology Preparedness	0	7	18	68	2.72	1	12	12	61	2.44	0.28
Applies Technology	1	9	15	64	2.56	4	11	10	56	2.24	0.32
Technology Research	5	6	14	59	2.36	10	11	4	44	1.76	0.60
Maintenance & Troubleshooting	12	9	4	42	1.68	15	7	2	35	1.46	0.22

* Gap = difference between average of what the employers want from entry-level employees, and the average of what they get in entry-level employees.
Higher numbers indicate greater gaps. Negative numbers would indicate that employers are getting more than they need from entry level employees.