Cleveland
Bridging The Talent Gap Employee Community Report

This project is made possible with support from

The Graduate! Network’s Bridging The Talent Gap Initiative

Submitted January 2019
Dan Ash PhD
Hadass Sheffer
Bridgett Strickler
Zach Zimmerman

http://graduate-network.org
www.bridgingthetalentgap.org
Introduction

The Bridging The Talent Gap Employee Survey was administered to retail sector employees in Cleveland from August 31, 2018 through December 31, 2018. There were 264 completed or partially completed surveys.

This report covers multiple perspectives of the employee education ecosystem by detailing five landscapes.

- Education status. This section explores the education attainment of employees and their education goals, with overviews on credential completions, credentials currently being pursued, plans for seeking credentials in the future, and those credentials employees do not plan to complete.

- Education currently being pursued. This section describes the education credentials and education majors being sought by employees with focus on their perception of the education experience, benefits, challenges, support for, and motivations in pursuing their chosen education goals.

- Plans for future education goals. This section includes description of employees education focus, notions of planned timeline for completion, and motivations for planned education goals.

- Rejection of future education goals. This section covers the reasons employees provide for not pursuing future education, with closer examination of the academic, work based and personal factors in their decision.

- Employee perception of employer support for education. This section explores employees’ understanding of the current education benefits employers provide, support type, level, perceptions of why more employees do not take advantage of these benefits, perceptions on the role education benefits play in achieving important organizational goals, and potential initiatives to create an enhanced education friendly workplace.

The results of this survey should be used to provide collective insight and inform future action, including the following:

- Gain insight into employees’ perspectives of education status, goals, potential benefits, and barriers.

- Gain insight into employees’ perspectives on employer support for education, ways employers can provide support for education goals and improve education benefits.

- Provide context and information to guide discussions, initiatives and policy considerations with community education support organizations.
Demographics

Age. Figure 1 shows the distribution of survey respondents by age. Notable for the purposes of this project is the higher than expected percentage of respondents for the 18-24 and the 65+ age groups. This is helpful in examining the youngest group’s education profile given that they represent 24 percent of retail employees nationwide (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017) who have some college but have not yet completed their degree.

Figure 1. Age distribution of retail employee survey participants

Gender. Forty percent of respondents were female while 58 percent were male. Two percent preferred not to say.

Language skills. Thirteen percent of employee survey respondents report they have bi- or multi-lingual skills.

Ethnicity. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the retail employees participating in the survey. Respondents had the option of identifying as many designations as they wished. Six percent chose more than one category.
Worker profile

*Hours worked per week.* Figure 3 shows that most retail employees participating in the survey were either full-time employees (40 percent) or part-time with more than 20 hours (24 percent). The percent who reported drastic variation in their average work hours was higher than expected at 22 percent compared with 9 percent for retail employees across sites participating in this initiative.

*Level of employment.* Figure 4 portrays the level of employment for retail employees participating in the survey. The data reveal that a substantial portion of respondents occupy the work level designations that are especially useful for developing college completion
initiatives: Forty-three percent of workers are entry-level. When non-supervisory/management mid-level employees are included, the percentage of respondents jumps to 70 percent.

**Figure 4. Level of employment**

![Bar chart showing the percentage of respondents in different levels of employment](chart.jpg)

**Education Status Landscape**

**Overview**

Table 1 shows the education goal and progress status for retail sector employees in Cleveland.

**Table 1. Education goal status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diploma/Degree</th>
<th>Number of respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school or equivalent</td>
<td>192 (71%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate or technical credential</td>
<td>26 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>41 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced degree (Masters, MD, PhD, etc.)</td>
<td>148 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 (11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Numbers may total more than individuals completing the survey because individuals may have completed multiple credentials.

Table 2 shows the status of those in your community who are looking toward their education/learning future. Each row represents the number of workers who have not completed the credential listed and their plans for doing so either currently or in the future. Based on responses from your community, 30 percent of employees are currently working on one or more credentials, while 45 percent plan to work on one or more credentials in the future.

**Table 2. Education progress**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education status</th>
<th>Number of respondents (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry-level new worker</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entry-level, with more than one year in the job</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-level (but not in supervision or management)</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-level (supervisor, management, etc.)</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Currently working on it (%) | Plan to work on it in the future (%) | Do NOT plan to complete (%) 
--- | --- | --- 
High school or equivalent | 22 (29%) | 3 (4%) | 52 (68%) 
Certificate or technical credential | 13 (5%) | 25 (10%) | 203 (84%) 
Associate's degree | 24 (11%) | 19 (8%) | 203 (84%) 
Bachelor’s degree | 43 (35%) | 31 (25%) | 50 (40%) 
Advanced degree (Masters, MD, PhD, etc.) | 11 (5%) | 88 (40%) | 122 (55%) 

Note: Numbers may total more than individuals completing the survey because each respondent may provide responses to multiple credentials.

---

**Landscape Reflection**

- Create a work team made up of retail employees who volunteer to consider how to make the workplace more education friendly. Share the following survey outcomes and develop team recommendations on how to implement these enhancements.

- Review Table 1 (above) to identify those degrees completed, being worked on, and those degrees respondents do not plan to complete. Based on this information, consider the following education friendly enhancements and support offered by employers that respondents identified as helpful in achieving education goals.
Figure 5. Education friendly support provided by employers considered helpful in achieving education goals among respondents

For your consideration:

- Which support items are most prevalent? Are the costs associated with these types of support reasonable, and do employers have the capacity for offering them?
- Which support items can employers provide among these results that can be initiated quickly with little cost?
- Which items can education providers and other community groups support, promote or offer to enhance these initiatives?
- If you would like to take action on these data, please contact Julie Szeltner, Senior Director of Adult Programs at jszeltner@collegenowgc.org.
Current Education Pursuits Landscape

Those who are currently working on completion of their education represent an important group of employees. They have taken on the challenge of advancing their learning and professional capacity while juggling the ongoing demands of work responsibilities and personal life commitments. Employers can benefit from the perseverance and proactive character of these working learners by partnering with them in their quest. Our research shows that education support has a profound influence on employers’ ability to achieve organizational goals such as increasing customer/client satisfaction, employee loyalty and involvement, and worker retention.

A good starting point for optimizing workers’ learning efforts and your community’s success is an objective understanding of the experiences they go through as they seek to complete their credentials. Respondents of the BTTG Employee Survey have provided a window into their lives by reflecting on their experiences and motivations in taking on their education goals. The following sections detail their perspectives.

Benefits, Support, and Challenges

Eighty-six percent of respondents currently working on their education believe the personal benefits they will gain from completing their education goals are worth the effort. Seventy-eight percent say their efforts will also produce professional benefits.

One of the more important aspects of education success concerns the support learners gain from important people in their life. Research on success in college repeatedly shows that this support from multiple sources contributes to perseverance and progress. Among respondents currently working on one or more education goals, 86 percent say they have support from their family to continue and complete their education goals, while 75 percent experience a sense of support from their employer. Finally, 76 percent say they have support from the faculty and staff at their school.

Conversely, challenges employees face work against achievement of their goals. Figure 6 displays the percentage of respondents identifying challenges in four areas. These data show that the greatest challenge working learners experience concerns financing of education costs with 60% identifying this factor as a challenge to working on their education goals.
Motivation

Figure 7 indicates the various motivations employees have for pursuing their education goals. The most common motivation is working learners’ goal to advance or change their career, with 76 percent of respondents identifying this factor as a motivation.

Figure 7. Employee motivations for pursuing education
Landscape Reflection

- A good starting point for helping employees succeed in their education goals is to consider how they are currently progressing toward their education goals. [EE Frequencies 7 Agree + Strongly agree from Valid Percentage column] percent of your community’s employees who participated in the survey and are currently pursuing completion of a credential think they are making good progress toward these goals. How is this figure influenced by their perceived benefits, support, challenges and motivations as described above? This information provides a basis for meaningful discussion and can point to some ways you can support their success.

- If you are interested in learning more about partnering with College Now Greater Cleveland to take action on these data please contact Julie Szeltner, Senior Director of Adult Programs at jszeltner@collegenowgc.org.
Future Education Plans Landscape

Employees planning to complete their education credentials represent the potential an employer has for building toward a common beneficial future for workers and the employer. This information is instrumental in organizational planning of education benefit programs and staffing decisions for the future. Respondents planning to complete their education in the future shared critical information on the ways they might be motivated to take action on their plans, their anticipated timeline for taking action, and the learning focus they anticipate pursuing.

Education interests

Figure 8 lists the educational focus areas retail employees are considering in their education plans.

**Figure 8. Education interests of those planning to complete their education in the future**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Focus Area</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science, Mathematics, and Technology</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public and Social Services</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-/Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Professions</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Humanities</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Action Triggers

Employees looking toward future education opportunities identify multiple triggers that would help them move from *considering* their education future to *taking action* on it. Figure 9 shows these triggers according to the categories of academic, work-related, and personal considerations.
Figure 9. Triggers for taking action on education plans.

**Academic triggers.** The nature of academic institutions and programs can be intimidating and overwhelming for many thinking about the demands, financial investment and time needed to succeed in their education goals. Respondents identify gaining more time to devote to education (48%) as the most likely academics related trigger for taking action on their plans. Additional items and their relative importance in terms of how often they are mentioned are shown in Figure 9 above.

**Work-related triggers.** When workers consider how they should take action on their education goals, the effect such plans have on their work life is critical. Respondents identify the need for more information on careers and professional opportunities related to their education goals (34%) as the most likely work-related trigger for taking action on their plans. Additional items

**Personal triggers.** Improved financial ability (58%) and more support from my family (19%) are the most cited personal triggers for taking action on education plans.
and their relative importance in terms of how often they are mentioned are shown above in Figure 9.

**Personal triggers.** Personal concerns are often the most enduring barrier to taking action on education plans. They stem from long standing relationships and well-established viewpoints on their capabilities and capacity for success. Respondents identify the need for improved financial ability (58%) as the most likely personal trigger for taking action on their plans. Additional items and their relative importance in terms of how often they are mentioned are shown in Figure 9 above.

**Need for education guidance**

The partnership between employees seeking education credentials and employer support is a shared benefit for all. Our research shows substantial gains in applied work skills for labor pools of workers with an Associate’s or Bachelor’s degree according to more than 1,500 employers in our national dataset. Employers can play a pivotal role in this achievement of education goals by creating bridges between employees considering completion of a credential and professionals who can guide and encourage learners to persist. Survey participants planning to seek credentials in the future were asked if they knew when they would take act on these plans. Those who were uncertain or did not have a timeline for returning to their education were further asked if they would like suggestions or guidance on how to achieve their education goals. Of these respondents, 57 percent indicated they would like such guidance.
Landscape Reflection

A common problem among those considering their future education plans is the accuracy and reliability of their expectations. Especially for first-generation learners entering college course work or any learning after high school, preconceived notions of the complexity, costs, potential benefits and a host of other concerns conspire to create a sense of feeling overwhelmed at the thought of acting on their wishes. It is important to keep in mind that the opinions mentioned in this section are perceptions, not cold hard facts. Some perceptions may be accurate but others may be well off the mark.

Education plans are often characterized by unrealistic expectations and changing education focus. The perceptions described here can provide a solid foundation for understanding, communicating with and reaching out to employees who are considering their education future. Some ideas for using these data include the following:

- How important are work-related triggers to your community’s retail employees considering future education? What work-place changes or specific barriers can you identify that can be reduced or removed to help these employees?
- How important are financial triggers for these employees considering future education plans? Are there education benefit plans you can encourage in your community to address some of these concerns, especially for skills employers seek in their employees?
- What kind of timeline do retail employees have for acting on their education plans? How can your community leaders and initiatives encourage timely action and build those plans into your community’s projections for the future and your community’s education attainment goals?
- Share those triggers, barriers and concerns retail employees express with local colleges, universities and learning providers. Seek a systematic understanding of how they are addressing these concerns. What are some of the best ways you have for communicating how learning institutions are addressing employees’ concerns?
- How might your community provide information opportunities for employees who want guidance from education professionals on how to initiate their plans? What organization/learn institution/learning consortium might be most effective in offering such guidance?
- If you are interested in learning more about partnering with College Now Greater Cleveland to take action on these data please contact Julie Szeltner, Senior Director of Adult Programs at jszeltner@collegenowgc.org.
Rejecting Future Education Opportunities Landscape

It is important to remember that deciding the limits of education attainment is not inherently problematic. Not all learners will attend graduate school or complete an advanced degree. Thus, this section will focus on those credentials most commonly pursued and useful for employers: certificates/technical credentials, Associate’s degrees, and Bachelor’s degrees.

The survey concentrated on reasons respondents identify for their decisions along with their willingness to reassess their decision. Figure 10 portrays these reasons across three categories: academic, work-related and personal, for the three credentials mentioned above.

Figure 10. Reasons for not planning to complete certificates, Associate’s degrees, and Bachelor’s degrees.

### Academic reasons

- The credential I selected is not needed for my educational goals: 34%
- Financial aid is too complicated or difficult to get: 7%
- Keeping up with coursework is too stressful: 5%
- I don’t think I will “fit in” with other learners: 2%
- I am not academically prepared: 2%
- I don’t believe the faculty/staff will be helpful when I need help: 0%

### Work related reasons

- I don’t need more education for my career goals: 37%
- More education would not result in a better job or increased pay with my employer: 18%
- My career goals have changed: 11%
- My work schedule interferes with my coursework: 7%
- There are too many courses I am required to take that have nothing to do with my career goals: 5%
Finally, among respondents who are not planning to complete education credentials 45 percent express willingness to reconsider their decision. Of those respondents, with 27 percent said they would welcome suggestions or guidance on achieving their education goals.

Landscape Reflections

Making decisions to discontinue education are complex and sometimes based on misinformation. Employers can reach out to these employees in at least two ways:

- Explore the reasons often cited by employees and create information outreach that addresses the concerns expressed, with some potential solutions.

- Develop a community wide effort to reach out to those employees who may be open to reconsidering their decisions. Partnering with a community organization is a useful and effective way to initiate this outreach.

- If you are interested in learning more about partnering with College Now Greater Cleveland to take action on these data please contact Julie Szeltner, Senior Director of Adult Programs at jszeltner@collegenowgc.org.
Employees’ Perceptions of Employer Support for Education Landscape

Successful organizations understand all too well the need for a well-educated workforce. The necessity to quickly adapt to changing markets and business practices place a premium on the agile employee who can contribute to organizations’ success. A highly educated work-force increases your region’s ability to thrive.

Supporting education among employees has become a mainstay of those highly successful companies. Eighty-seven percent of *Fortune’s Best 100 Places To Work* provide tuition assistance for their employees with many of these offering associated perks to enhance this benefit, such as paid child care and paid sabbaticals.

Employees’ accurate understanding of these benefits is central to their optimal impact on both employers and employees. This landscape explores employee’s perceptions of your community’s education support and compares how employers’ and employees’ understanding of this benefit coincide and differ.

**Education Benefit Basics**

We asked both employers and employees about the types of benefits offered in your community. Figure 11 compares these perspectives.
**Education Benefit Usage**

Employers often struggle with the most effective way to encourage employees to take advantage of their education benefits. Table 3 below shows the frequency of responses for employees versus employers concerning reasons why employees do not take advantage of employer-provided education benefits.

**Table 3. Reasons employees do not take advantage of education benefits**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees are too busy or otherwise committed to pursue learning or education.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of knowledge about our employer’s education support program</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of promotion by management</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I see little or no problem with our employer’s education benefits.</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are no incentives or benefits for employees to pursue learning or education. 33% 19%
Lack of interest in our employer’s education program 21% 13%
Employees do not need these additional benefits. 15% 11%
I don’t know. Not applicable 11%
There are few or no options for learning or education in our area. 8% 7%
It is too difficult for employees to access our employer’s education program. 3% 4%

Education Effects on Organization Goals

Employees have solid opinions on how various business practices and benefits, including education benefits, might impact their workplace success. Despite their knowledge of the actual effects, their opinions and viewpoints can have substantial influence on the overall success you seek. Table 4 compares the average rating employees give with employers’ ratings on a scale of 1 (little influence) to 100 (very influential) regarding how much influence your education support has on achieving each of nine organizational goals.

Table 4. Influence of education program on employer achievement of organization goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Management rating</th>
<th>Average employee rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of employees’ professional skills</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of employees’ leadership skills</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing employee engagement/organizational loyalty</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing customer/client satisfaction</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing worker productivity</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker retention</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee advancement within your organization</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing profits/savings</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment of new employees</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Landscape Reflection

A first step in ensuring the most effective use of education benefits is to establish a common understanding among employees and management on how the benefit is administered and what is and is not provided by the employer. Moreover, it is critical that employers understand the perspective of the employee in this effort. Management may have created a meaningful outreach only to find that misunderstandings create very different assessments of the benefit. Some actions to address these issues include the following:
• Initiate an information program on how education support operates in your region, focusing on those areas most at odds between employees and management in Table X [from Education Benefit Basics subsection]
• Using the comparative data in Table X [from Education Benefit Usage subsection],
  o Set up a workplace team made up of employees and management to explore ways you can enhance and increase utilization of education benefits offered in your community.
  o Create a workplace team to explore employees’ understanding of the potential influences of education on meeting organization goals, especially focusing on those areas rated most highly by employees.
• If you would like to take action on these data, please contact Julie Szeltner, Senior Director of Adult Programs at jszeltner@collegenowgc.org or visit our website: https://www.collegenowgc.org/adult-programs-and-services/.

This project is made possible with support from Walmart