

CHAPTER IV

Readiness of High School Graduates for the Workplace

Two national surveys asked employers how well they believed high school graduates were prepared for the workforce. Peter Hart in *Rising to the Challenge* found that 45% of the employers indicated that public high school graduates are not prepared with the skills to advance beyond entry-level jobs.¹²⁹ In *2005 Skills Gap Report - A Survey of the American Manufacturing Workforce*, 84% of the employers indicated that the pre-college education system is not doing a good job in preparing students for the workplace, and 51% specifically identified mathematics and science deficiencies.¹³⁰

Another approach to measuring readiness is to test students on their workplace skills. WorkKeys, an ACT assessment, provides information concerning the readiness of students for the workplace.¹³¹ The minimum skills required for specific job profiles are determined, and student scores are compared to these job profile skills.

In Illinois, students complete the Applied Mathematics and Reading for Information WorkKeys as part of the PSAE. Each test is scored on a scale from 7 (highest) to 3 (lowest skill level). Three-fourths of the jobs were rated as a level 3 or 4.

In 2005, at the top end of the scale, over 35% of all Illinois students who took the WorkKeys in Applied Mathematics scored at level 6 or 7. Asian students (55%) and white students (44%) scored at levels 6 and 7 more often than did black students (8%) and Hispanic students (16%).¹³²

On the other hand, 8.2% of all Illinois high school students scored lower than the level required by any of the job profiles. Over twice as many low-income students scored below the level required on the lowest job profile (17%).

Figure 32 Percentages of Illinois Students and Job Profiles at Each Level on Applied Mathematics WorkKeys in 2005



In summary, there is a relationship between academic preparation and workforce preparation. Students in groups with the highest levels of college readiness are the same as those with the highest levels of workforce preparedness. As with the other student indicators, Illinois low-income students are the least prepared for both college and the workforce.