



SEVEN IN 10 HIRING MANAGERS AGREE THAT STUDENTS ARE

unprepared for the workplace and lack the necessary skills to succeed there. STEM education is combating these numbers by preparing students with many of the skills required for success in today's rapidly growing industries; however, over half of current hiring managers agree that there is one skill that still needs to be taught to those in non-creative majors: creativity.¹

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Creativity, design and the arts drive innovation, and innovation is required for economic growth. A movement toward STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) education, as championed by the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), has led educators and administrators to consider the importance of the arts in preparing students for 21st-century jobs. RISD states on its website: "The goal is to foster the true innovation that comes with combining the mind of a scientist or technologist with that of an artist or designer."²

Effective career and technical education (CTE) programs have begun implementing this philosophy of teaching and fostering creativity. Students in these programs are encouraged to take classes where they learn to develop creativity, engage in critical thinking and master the technologies needed to amplify the impact of their innovative ideas. While schools like RISD point to an increase in student skills—problem

solving, flexible thinking and risk taking—as hallmarks of success for their arts-based model, these soft skills are difficult to quantify. Often, the missing element in these programs is verifiable proof of the skills learned, as well as their potential application in a technology-laden work environment.

At the Academy for Digital Arts and Media at Viera High School, administrators chose to address this issue by integrating official industry-recognized certifications into their curriculum. In addition to the creative skill sets of innovation and problem-solving, graduates of the program also possess a verifiable credential. Viera High School Principal Jim Hickey contends, "When students receive a certification, they are able to present it to an employer. It gives them something more than just a high school diploma to show what they have accomplished."³

It is essential for students entering college or the workforce to possess the critical thinking and creative talents demanded by future employers, but they also need to be able to connect the dots between their creativity and their core business and technical skills. While many hiring managers think that problem solving and critical thinking (58 percent) and creativity and innovation (41 percent) will be the most in-demand skills over the next 12 months, 82 percent believe these skills must be applied to core business and technical problems using conventional skills.⁴

The Arts and Industry-recognized Certifications

As a companion to arts-driven education, industry-recognized certifications are essential for students entering college or the workforce. These

Table 1. Career and Professional Academy Performance Report, 2010–11⁵

Performance Indicator	Non-CAPE	CAPE No Cert	CAPE + Cert
Average GPA	2.46	2.58	3.0
12th Graders earning a diploma	73.9%	85.9%	96.1%
At least one accelerated course	22.9%	25.4%	41.2%
At least one disciplinary action	20.6%	20.5%	10.9%
Chronically absent	16.3%	15.7%	9.9%

certifications provide verifiable proof of a student's skills to college admissions officers and hiring managers. Earning a certification in digital media has helped many students pursue successful careers in STEAM. Krystal Howell was offered a paid internship at NASA's Johnson Space Center. Ariel Leonardo Gutierrez was admitted to the Honors College of Miami Dade College for mechanical engineering. Oscar Iván Corzo landed his first job as an app developer.⁶

Students benefit from the pairing of innovative educational approaches with industry certifications, but so do their teachers and administrators. The relationship between industry certifications in CTE courses and student outcomes has been studied in Florida. Implementing industry certifications led to higher GPAs, less absenteeism and increased graduation rates. The table shows the results of adding industry certifications into Florida's career and professional education (CAPE) academies.

Certification also achieves the goals set forth in the U.S. Department of Education's report, "Investing in America's Future: A Blueprint for Transforming Career and Technical Education," which states that in addition to ensuring every student in our country is college- and career-prepared with a high school diploma or the equivalent, "[t]he students participating in effective CTE programs graduate with industry certifications or licenses ... that employers use to make hiring and promotion decisions."⁷

This report also specified that the reauthorized Perkins Act was to be specifically tied to measureable learner outcomes. One of the four core principles required by CTE programs in order to qualify for Perkins Funding demands "[m]eaningful accountability for improving academic outcomes and building technical and employability skills in CTE programs for all students, based upon common definitions and clear metrics for performance."⁸ Industry certification, combined with the soft-skill benefits of arts-based

education, not only meets the philosophical and practical demands of today's employers, but it also addresses the measurable outcomes demanded from educators. Students become the ultimate beneficiaries and are solidly prepared for college and career.

Digital Badges

Additionally, these certifications can now be shared via LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, blogs, websites and other digital platforms in the form of a digital badge. Digital badges are now available for many industry-recognized certifications. Adobe is among the companies leading this movement by offering digital badges, through Acclaim, to candidates who earn an Adobe Certified Associate (ACA) certification.

Badges issued through Acclaim can be verified by clicking on the badge. Each badge includes metadata that shows who earned the credential, what was accomplished and the organization that issued the badge. This transparency makes it easy for students to represent online their full range of abilities to academic institutions and employers.

Meeting the Demands

The opportunities available in STEAM are growing every day. As an educator committed to preparing your students for future college and career opportunities, it is imperative that you not only develop your students' creativity, but that you also validate their creative skills and tie them to the practical, technological skills demanded in the 21st century by offering industry-recognized certification. Tech

ENDNOTES

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8. Ibid.

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