Assessment of the Technical Training Needs of the Lawrence Community:

How the Current System Is Working

Report to the USD 497 Administrative Task Force
on Technical Education

For a study sponsored by Heartland Works

Prepared by
Susan M. Mercer

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Acknowledgements

How the Current System Is Working

Executive Summary

The Policy Research Institute at The University of Kansas conducted four focus groups with former students, technical educators, counselors, and high school administrators from Douglas County schools. Additionally, three individual telephone interviews were held with recent graduates of Lawrence and Free State High Schools. The purpose was to gain a better understanding of how well the current system of technical training is working.

Background Information

In the focus groups with area businesses held in the fall 2004, a number of businesses expressed concern over the lack of employability skills among applicants and new employees. While some businesses have technical training needs, they said they do not look to the county high schools for assistance with this training. Rather, most conduct specialized, in house training of their workers or utilize specialized training offered by the companies that manufacture their equipment.

Based on this information, the task force requested a second set of focus groups to be held with representatives of Douglas County High Schools and their former students, with the goal of gaining an understanding of each group's perspective on workforce preparation issues. In February and March 2005, separate focus groups were held with superintendents and high school principals, technical instructors and counselors, and former students to examine their perspectives. Telephone interviews with a few additional former students were held in March and April. While not every Douglas County public school district participated in the administrator and technical educator/counselor focus group sessions, each district was invited to participate. The former student focus group and interviews included only former high school students of Lawrence public schools. The former students either graduated or should have graduated from a Lawrence high school within the past five years.

Administrators, Counselors, Educators
Administrators were surprised to learn that technical training was not a greater concern of employers and that soft skills were higher on the list of needs. In fact, one administrator stated that what he heard from the business community was that they wanted more technical education. Administrators said that soft skills were being addressed through curriculum that begins (for some districts) in grade school or (for others) in junior high and includes coursework or activities at the high school levels.

Overall, counselors and technical educators were less surprised than administrators to hear that soft skills were an issue with employers. A number of counselors stated that they were frustrated that they could not do more to assist students with career planning and job placement, particularly if the student was not college bound or perhaps would have been better served by an alternate career path. Counselors and technical educators would like to see additional opportunities for soft skills training/workforce readiness offered in schools. Like administrators, counselors and technical educators would like to see technical training expand the offerings within their schools. Technical educators said there is a strong need for additional or updated

offerings within the technical training curriculum to include new areas of student interest and to meet changing employer needs. Some specific programs suggested include hospitality, culinary arts, health care fields, construction/building, and graphic design and printing. A few Douglas County school districts have programs in these fields.

Most Douglas County school districts allow students from other districts to participate in their technical education programs when a similar program is not available in their home district. However, barriers such as distance between schools, and coordination of school schedules, transportation issues, and lack of awareness prevent many students from participating.

Many Douglas County school administrators stated a desire to expand technical offerings but are hampered by constraints such as budgetary issues, facilities, and a perceived lack of community and parental support. The lack of parental support relates to parental desires for their students to take college preparatory coursework rather than pursue potential careers with technical education or alternative career paths. Administrators, teachers, and counselors agree this is a major issue. Administrators, teachers, and counselors would all like to see an increased involvement in technical education programs by the business community. In a few cases, this is happening with good success.

One group of teachers and counselors would like to see a county-wide cooperative of technical training programs that combine the strengths of all the county schools together in a central location. The program would include articulation agreements with places such as Emporia State University, Pittsburg State University, and Johnson County Community College.

Former Students
For a certain group of students, the traditional structure of high school did not serve their needs. Former students who are now participating in the diploma completion program struggled with the inflexible pace and structure of high school, the social environment and peer pressure, and a lack of offerings that matched their interests. Some found the teachers and structure intimidating. These students said the Lawrence Diploma Completion Program (LDCP) offers the right blend of structure, relaxed environment, specialized pacing, and instructional assistance.

The LDCP students stated that they wished they had known the value of a high school diploma while they were still in school; however, they are uncertain as to whether or not that knowledge would have kept them in school at the time. Students believe that a GED is not as valuable to employers and are very happy the LDCP offers them the opportunity to receive a traditional high school diploma.

Many former students (including those who completed high school) were frustrated by the limited amount of career development assistance and counseling they received in high school. They did not believe they were well prepared for employment and desired more help with soft skills, such as resumes, applications, interviews, w-2 forms, body language, how to ask questions about a job, as well as on-the-job etiquette, including the unspoken rules. Like administrators, teachers and counselors, they would welcome increased involvement from the business community in career development and exploration programs.

Former students who were either in college or enrolled for the upcoming year stated that they too struggled with the process of choosing a career and applying to college. They would like more personalized attention from counselors and teachers, and more time for exploring career opportunities. In particular, former students would like to hear about career paths and opportunities from people in those careers.

It appears there is a lack of awareness about career opportunities in Douglas County. None of the former students we talked with had any knowledge of potential careers in the Douglas County area that did not require a college degree. A few had very limited knowledge of potential careers in Douglas County for college graduates. However, many expressed a strong desire to have careers in Douglas County.

Former students in the LDCP were asked to describe a model program that would help prepare them for the workforce. Many of the topics discussed relate to "soft skills" and mirror the topics that employers said they want addressed as well. Key components to the student-designed program include: employer involvement, information about jobs and career paths, how to complete pre- and post-employment forms, how to develop a resume, telephone skills, on-the-job etiquette, interview training, goal-setting, and job shadowing. The program would be housed in a community building or in a local high school, and the program would be open to anyone.

Summary

The needs of the business community, schools, and students are highly interrelated. The business community wants access to motivated workers possessing basic employability skills. Employers want to play a more active role in career education to increase awareness of local opportunities for good paying jobs and careers. Schools want to prepare students to be successful in the workforce, college, and other post-graduation pursuits. Schools are also interested in engaging the business community in order to create practical linkages between education and the workforce. Students want to understand how what they learn in the classroom transfers to the jobs and education they will pursue after they graduate. Students crave more in depth information from the business community about career options and pathways, applying for jobs, and being a good employee. Each group—the business community, schools, and students—has a stake in the success of the other group. Working together may offer the best opportunity for successfully meeting the needs of all the stakeholders. Developing a cooperative technical education program in Douglas County is one tangible way to address the needs of the business community, schools, and students.

How the Current System Is Working

Overview

The Policy Research Institute at the University of Kansas conducted four focus groups with current Douglas County secondary school administrators, secondary school teachers and counselors, and former Lawrence USD 497 high school students participating in the Lawrence Diploma Completion Program who should have graduated from a Lawrence high school within the past five years. In addition, PRI conducted three interviews with graduates of USD 497 who received their diploma within the past five years.

This round of focus groups was designed to learn what former high school students, technical instructors, school counselors, and administrators see as the workforce preparation and technical education issues. Specifically, the focus groups sought to answer six questions:

1. How prepared to enter the workforce do students believe they are when they leave high school? And, how prepared do secondary school administrators, teachers, and counselors believe students are?
2. What gaps do students, administrators, teachers and counselors perceive in their high school education regarding workforce preparation?
3. How do students become prepared for the workforce? (What resources do they utilize?)
4. How do students learn about career opportunities and the training requirements? (Do they know about career opportunities within Douglas County?)
5. In what ways would administrators, counselors, and teachers like to enhance cooperative relationships with area businesses for workforce preparedness?
6. What new programs are administrators, counselors, and teachers interested in developing to assist students with workforce preparation?

Definitions
Douglas County public school districts included in this study: Baldwin City, Eudora, Lawrence, and Perry. Unless otherwise noted, the phrases "Douglas County schools" or "schools" refer to all of the aforementioned districts. (Although the Perry school district is located in Jefferson County, its catchment area includes Lecompton, which is located in Douglas County.)

Superintendents and principals from Douglas County schools participated in the focus group sessions. Unless otherwise noted, the term "administrators" refers to this group of participants.

Vocational/technical faculty and high school counselors from Lawrence High School and Free State High School participated in the focus group sessions. Unless otherwise noted, the term "educators" refers to this group of participants.

Former students of Free State High School and Lawrence High School participated in the focus group and interview sessions. All former students either completed high school within the past five years or *should have* completed high school within the past five years. Unless otherwise noted, the term "students" refers to this group participants. In cases where the discussion refers

to only one of the two types of former students, the appropriate designation ("graduate" or "non-graduate") has been added for clarity.

Methodology
Potential participants were identified in consultation with Dr. Bruce Passman, Executive Director of Student Services, Lawrence Public Schools, and co-chair of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce/USD 497 Task Force on Career Technical Education. Douglas County School superintendents and high school principals received a letter from Bruce Passman introducing the study. (The letter is included as Appendix A.)

For the administrator focus group, the Policy Research Institute telephoned and e-mailed each administrator to solicit participation in the school administrator focus group. Each participant received a confirmation e-mail a few days before the focus group. The focus group was held at the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce.

A list of teachers and counselors from each Douglas County school was provided by Dr. Passman. The Policy Research Institute contacted individuals from each Douglas County school through e-mail to request their participation in a focus group session. The response rate was very low and we were unable to find a common time for the interested persons to meet. As an alternative, two small focus groups were held at Lawrence and Free State High Schools and were comprised of teachers and counselors from the respective schools. Principals at each building recruited participants.

One former student focus group session was held at the Lawrence Diploma Completion Program in Lawrence. Participants were recruited by Sharen Steele, Director of the Lawrence Diploma Completion Program. This group included students who should have completed high school within the last five years and were currently enrolled in the Lawrence Diploma Completion Program. With one exception, all participants were formerly enrolled in a Lawrence public high school. The other student was a former high school student from another county who had relocated to Lawrence.

A second former student focus group session was to be held with recent graduates (within the past 5 years) of Lawrence and Free State High Schools. Dr. Passman provided a list of recent graduates and the Policy Research Institute attempted to recruit participants for the focus group session. However after several unsuccessful attempts to schedule a session with recent graduates, a series of telephone interviews were conducted instead. This group of former students included one who was currently in college and two who were currently in the workforce, but were enrolled at KU for the fall 2005 semester.

Overall, 22 people participated in the study. Table 3.1 provides a breakdown of participation statistics.

The focus group protocol was customized for each of the three focus group session categories; however, a core set of themes were included throughout all groups. The student interview questions followed the same set of questions utilized in the student focus groups. The protocols are included as Appendix B. Each session was moderated by the same PRI focus group facilitator and assistant. Each session was digitally-recorded and the facilitator and assistant took notes.

The facilitator conducted the focus group interviews and analyzed the focus group sessions and telephone interviews. In addition, the facilitator wrote this report.

Table 1
Focus Group Sessions and Participants

Date	Group Type	Participants
	Focus Groups	
Feb. 24	Lawrence Diploma Completion Program Students	8
March 8	Douglas County Superintendents & HS Principals	4
March 10	Free State High School Technical Faculty & Counselors	4
March 15	Lawrence High School Technical Faculty & Counselors	3
	Interviews	
Mar./April	Recent graduates of LHS/FSHS	3

Source: Assessment of the Technical Training Needs of the Lawrence Community, Policy Research Institute, The University of Kansas, April 2005.

Report Contents
This report summarizes the overall findings, organizing the results topically, including both similarities and differences in views between participants or participant types. The report includes many verbatim quotes, illustrating the various participant points of view. Verbatim quotes are indented and italicized. The designations [A], [E], or [S] immediately following the quote passage indicate the source of the quote: administrator, educator, or student.

Care should be taken in generalizing the findings, since the number of participants is too small to be fully representative of the general population. However, the ideas expressed by focus group participants often provide important insight that can lead to greater understanding of a particular issue or subset of issues.

Background

Douglas County business leaders who participated in the fall 2004 focus groups discussed the importance of soft skills training for new and existing employees. (A brief summary of the business focus group findings in included as Appendix C.) A number of participants expressed concern and frustration about the lack of soft skills possessed by new employees. Although some businesses have technical training needs, they said they do not look to Douglas County high schools for assistance with this training. Instead, most conduct specialized, in house training of their workers or utilize specialized training offered by the companies that manufacture their equipment.

This series of focus groups was designed to study what former high school students, technical instructors, school counselors, and administrators see as the workforce preparation and technical education issues.

Findings

Analysis of the focus groups and interviews reveals many common themes across two or more participant groups—administrators, educators, and students. It is interesting to note that most of the overlap of topics common to two groups occurs between educators and administrators or educators and students.

While the overlap of a topic among all three participant group types does not automatically mean the given topic is or should be a top priority, it may give strong clues in that direction and provides a good starting point for this discussion. Similarly, topics discussed only by one group can provide valuable, and often new, insight into that group.

Technical Education: Terminology and Perceptions
When it comes to technical education, all program names are not equal. According to administrators and educators, the labels used for technical programs are nearly as important as the programs themselves. They said the traditional name for technical education, "vocational" education, becomes an instant barrier in people's minds that is difficult to cross. People are stuck on decades-old images of programs designed to prepare students for a specific job rather than a career. Educators and administrators point to the wide array of career training programs that can be found in many high school technical education programs, with even more opportunities available at the community college and post-secondary technical education levels.

> *It's a baby-boomer's perception. Everybody on the block wants to be able to say, 'Johnny and Sherrie are going to college.' In '55, '60, vocational became a dirty word as the service economy became reality and now technical [economy].* [E]

> *…[T]raditional vocational is seen as dead end. It's for "those other people's kids." Or they came from that and their job dried up and went away.* [A]

> *We're still stuck in an industrial arts mentality. The industrial arts is to show you basically what the vocation looks like. The vocational is to train you and prepare you for on the job. But it requires the same equipment that you would find on the job.* [E]

> *I try to use the word technical.* [A]

> *What you call it is important around here.* [A]

> *Vocational education almost takes on a stigma. Technical education is not for kids who are failing, it's for kids who can do anything. I'm trying to put a different spin on it here because we're dealing with perceptions that we're trying to create some option to failure.* [A]

> *To break that perception cycle, we have to start earlier, almost in grade school. We're going to have to get some seed of a program started so people can see you can do this in a formal way. We have to put some kind of school-to-career type program in place and people have to see that it is working. Seeing is believing around here. There's not a lot of vision around here. Lawrence is a pretty tight, conservative place. It's hard to sell vision and ideas.* [A]

Technical Education: The University Influence
According to educators and administrators, another aspect influencing community attitudes about technical education is the perception of parents that college is *the* pathway to their children's success. They attribute this attitude to the presence of the University of Kansas.

> *…Part of it is the culture of Lawrence, which becomes the culture of the schools, which is 'everybody's going to college.' We're in a college town. Nobody talks about vocational education or that kind of thing here. I have tried for the last 5 years to get Lawrence refocused because all of our kids don't go to college.* [A]

> *This is a college town, and in general our population…sees the greatest thing their child could achieve is a college degree. Regardless of what employment they're capable of seeking, that college degree is very important to most parents and they see that as their [child's] road to success, which is a good thing to have. The difficult thing is that they don't see any other option as a viable option.* [A]

> *The jobs [available] are not necessarily post four-year degree.* [A]

> *We're not addressing the need for a large percentage of students graduating high school.* [A]

Educators and administrators recognize that there are alternate, and sometimes more fitting, paths to success in lieu of a college degree. Educators struggle with how to best serve student needs when parents have conflicting ideas or plans.

> *I have parents who come in here and say, 'You know, I'm embarrassed to say this, but my child wants to go to Johnson County Community College and study culinary arts.' They're apologizing. And I'm thinking, 'Well you know, they'll make a lot more money with that than with a lot of other things.' It's like it's an embarrassment.* [E]

> *I had a parent conference…The mother said, 'We saw little Johnny in his crib and imagined him in engineering school at KU. What have you done with my son?...All of a sudden he's got all these car magazines all over his bed. He's doing this, he's doing that. This is not what we wanted our son to do. What have you done?' And I've heard this more times than not. And I said, 'Do you understand the transportation industry? Do you understand where he can be at in a very short amount of time with this level of enthusiasm?' So we have to educate parents… 'He can be a person, a son that you're very proud of, but he is looking at it in a very different angle. He can go off to school and graduate in 9 months. These are the students that have gone on before him who are sitting at the $50,000 to $100,000 [salary] range at the age of 21. This is the diversity in the field that he can choose…'* [E]

> *Where are we downfalling? Thinking that everyone is college material. Folks, they're not. I can walk down the hallways and say, 'You're not college material. It's not that you couldn't be. It's that you don't want to be. You don't want to put in the time. You don't*

want to put in the effort. You see no need in it. So why are we trying to force you into an unsuccessful mold and we know it?' And that's the saddest part about the situation. [E]

Lawrence is a college town. The majority of people that are vocal are looking a KU. [E]

We keep [all students] in college bound courses. We don't know what else to do. It's a funding issue and a philosophy of Lawrence: we go to college. We're all sitting here with college degrees, and we believe in that, but we also know the reality of so many people, that it's not for everybody. [E]

If you look at who does go to technical colleges, a lot of them have BS degrees. They couldn't get a job. [E]

Technical Education: Existing High School Programs and Facilities
All Douglas County high schools have some technical programs, with most having one or more highly regarded, successful program, such as automotive/collision repair, hospitality, culinary arts, commercial construction, health careers, printing, and general business.

Eudora High School has a cooperative program with DeSoto High School that offers career technical education programs such as collision repair, culinary arts/hospitality, health careers, printing, and landscaping. They have a dedicated building (the former middle school) in Eudora separate from the high school. EHS expanded their career technical education programs because they were sending students to other districts for technical education—a practice that was very costly to the district.

> *We have 96 kids at Eudora, mostly from Eudora High School or DeSoto High School, with about eight students from Lawrence.* [A]

In addition to more traditional vocational offerings, Perry-Lecompton High School has an innovative commercial construction program with its own facility. The program is a partnership with the commercial construction industry and remains full.

> *Contractors donated labor or materials at cost or some other level of donation to put up the construction building for what we estimate at about half cost. Contractors assist with teaching modules alongside teachers. It's been excellent. In fact, the Kaw Area Technical program has decided to start a program exactly like ours.* [A]

Also, Perry-Lecompton High School includes technical education as an educational component for most students.

> *Virtually all of our students are going to be involved in technical education at some point because it's been such a focus in our school district for a good number of years. In fact, for a school our size, we would probably be the exception because we have a staff member who really focuses on coordinating the program. It's more of a career ed., but the similarities and the lap over is significant. We actually constructed a facility a few years ago for a construction science class. In our high school we really focus on that*

area. In fact at times, we have a certain percentage of our population who thought maybe we went a little overboard and shortchanged the college bound focus. Probably not, but... [A]

Lawrence high school programs include mostly traditional vocational offerings. Core offerings such as family and consumer science (foods, childcare/development, sewing, interior design, etc.), woodworking/shop, and business can be found at both Lawrence High and Free State High Schools. Students interested in automotive technology must participate in the program offered at LHS because FSHS does not have an adequate facility. The LHS auto tech program also includes an arrangement with a local car dealership. However, few students (25 to 30 per year) from FSHS make the trip to LHS because of transportation and scheduling issues between the schools.

We really have a very small group of industrial tech because we don't have the facilities. When this [building] was built, that part of the facility was cut. We have the beginning courses of a couple of areas. [A]

There's not what I would call any highly technical type of vocational training. [A]

We don't even have a shop area in the building. [E]

We do not have the facility here to support [technical education]. We don't really have the lab here [at FSHS for fields such as interior design, culinary arts, child care, and graphic design.] A lot of those kids who are interested could find entry-level positions where they could be skilled [if we had those offerings]. …We have kids who are really interested in culinary arts lumped into the same class with kids who want to learn to cook to survive. There's not class for them to [study culinary arts]. They're fairly turned-off with the idea that they would be lumped into a class with someone who [finds] boiling water is a challenge. [E]

I've had more kids I could send to culinary arts than you could shake a stick at. Hotel/motel management could be filled 3 times a day. We need a separate facility for this type of operation. [E]

The community's not interested in this. If you go out of this district, you'll see all these types of programs offered. If they were going to have it (here), they would have had it years ago. If [the community] would have wanted it and if the employers would have wanted it and the schools would have wanted it, you would have had it years ago. They're just not interested. [E]

Most programs offer the option for students from other districts to participate, but barriers such as geographic distance between programs, coordination of schedules, transportation costs, limited program openings, and program awareness prevent many potential students from participating in programs offered in other districts.

[We] send students to Eudora, Topeka, because Lawrence doesn't have the programs. It's pretty difficult…Students are responsible for own transportation. [A]

Our program is full, but if we had space [students from other districts] could participate. [A]

Technical Education: The Role for the Business Community
Educators and administrators believe that industry involvement is necessary for moving technical education forward in Douglas County. Examples from around the world as well as within the county demonstrate the difference business involvement can make.

Students also said they want to see greater business involvement. The survey findings suggest businesses may be willing to take the step toward closer ties with education as well.

Part of it just has to do with the country we're living in. …In Japan, the marriage between business and education is so tight. When you go into a high school in Japan, there'll be 150 students, that as they start as sophomores, they'll be training with Toyota equipment and the day they graduate they're in a high paying job with Toyota. And you see that across the board in terms of industry, and even small businesses. There are some places in the United States that do that, but it's not something I see a lot of. [A]

[Here] there's not really a marriage between business and education. It's more, 'Well, you give us this raw product that has these soft skills and we'll teach them how to do the technical stuff.' What [business] fails to realize is that if you're going to hook these kids into it, they've got to come in and work with us in schools. There isn't any reason that with as many people as we have around here, that we couldn't have some little seamless program. They just say, 'Well can you teach them to be on time?' That's not how you hook kids. [A]

[We] need a "let us in" mentality from businesses. One of the successes that we've had is the association of general contractors saying, 'let us come in and partner with you because we need folks and we need folks that have exposure to these trades. We're willing to put out money, we're willing to commit our time come in and help teach because we need the folks and we're willing to get after it.' And that's completely different than us sending out a survey and saying, 'what do you need?' [A]

We had a manufacturing corporation donate $100,000 of press equipment for printing [program]. [A]

We have a company willing to donate $20,000 in equipment [after a recent upgrade] for an industrial maintenance/mechanics program. [A]

It only works if [businesses] can find a niche in relating to the school. It all gets down to relationships in the end. If you can find niches in those relationships, then I think you've got something. [A]

You've got to get some recognizable interest – recognizable by students, staff and the community. Recognizable in that if I have success here, I can go out and be a success..

> *What are the businesses out here that could be real attractors and how can they fit with the high school. …Can I find four or five businesses…willing to go in with both feet, teach with you, train kids, put them out in particular places where they can work.* [A]

As a start, administrators and educators suggest interested businesses ask a few questions of themselves:

> *What can you (business) bring to the table?* [A]

> *Are businesses willing to make the investment given the uncertainty of the returns?* [A]

> *How much do our employers want to step up to it?* [E]

Administrators who have worked closely with business on technical education caution that once industry gets involved, the expectations for both the program and the business must be realistic to avoid conflict.

> *Whoever's going to come in and work with the kids, they need a dose of reality. High school kids, they're weird sometimes. And if you have this image of this kid coming out and going to work with you as a mature, accomplished…* [A]

> *The first year we put contractors in our school teaching kids, they were ready to give it up. This is not what they expected. Kids, sometimes act up. …Surprisingly, after they figured out what was going on, they've been fine with it. Their expectations changed…this is what these 16, 17 year olds really are.* [A]

> *We're putting these kids in a position where they have potential.* [A]

> *To me, you start with one. If we can't make one of these things work, then that's a model.* [A]

To be clear, educators and administrators are quick to point out that many members of the business community are working with education in numerous ways already. However, they would welcome even greater involvement and have heard businesses express a desire for a deeper involvement in education.

> *Businesses are wonderful. I've never had a problem placing a student for the coop. We have more spots than we have kids. [E]*

Technical Education: Collaboration as a Solution
Just as Eudora has found success in technical education by working cooperatively with other school districts and the business community, educators, and administrators believe Lawrence and Douglas County can achieve success by combining efforts. Key partners for the collaboration include Douglas County school districts and businesses, plus higher education entities. Collaborative efforts could provide opportunities for enhancing the quality of all programs by combining strengths and conserving resources by eliminating duplication of offerings.

It would be important, especially in the Douglas County area, especially as districts and try to avoid situations where we would be competing for the same kinds of kids. If we can do that, I think there are some things we can offer each other. [A]

Haskell has a lot of nice equipment, but we don't have access. [A]

We've got to get a few spokes in a wheel and start limping along. People will get excited and pump resources into it. ...some visible options with an employable end to them for those kids who just don't realize that that's a path they can take. [A]

At least one educator has a specific plan for advancing technical education in Douglas County:

Take the strengths of Lawrence, Eudora, Johnson County [Community College], and we incorporate a school [in Douglas County] where students come in and the interests of their study, like culinary arts, automotive, business, and we teach toward that. It's not a vocational school, it's a technology academy coop. and students are brought in their senior year, and they will get their senior English, their senior math, their senior history, but it applies to their interest. Their senior sciences, everything applies to their interests. For instance, senior science—automotively, we [can] do ground samples to see if we're polluting it with oils. We can take water samples. And these students will demand to come to school. It's a super-duper idea, but everyone's afraid of change.

> *Johnson County is willing to move to Lawrence. They're land locked. ...They're willing to move their vocational program to the same building we're in. So our high school students are in the same building with college kids. When they complete their high school education, they already know what college students are experiencing so they can step right into an accredited program either as second semester freshman or second year students. We're making solid small transitional steps for the students that thought they couldn't do it at all. In a program that accelerates them. But yet, as you're hearing, we're trying to close them into a high school. We're trying to college prep 'em and they're fighting us. So let's give them what they want. It's what we want. It's a win-win situation. It's extra money, but money well spent.*

> *I looked at the old E&E plant, 600,000 square feet. Johnson County wants to expand this to everything, plumbing, heating, building trades, nursing, everything that's under this [technical] envelope. But the E&E building is $4.2M. And Johnson County goes, "so." There'd be some renovation involved. But there is money in so many different schools. And they all have needs. Why can't we combine all the funds into one to fit everybody's needs? Greenbush is available;, Carl Perkins is available at this time. You have the college funding from Johnson County. We have all these pockets of gold everywhere, why can't we combine them together and make one solution?* [E]

Technical Education: Motivation to Stay in School
Educators and administrators discussed the estimated five to 10 percent of students whose needs are not being met in the traditional high school setting. They also see a technical training program that integrates business and industry into the educational process as one way to motivate students who might otherwise drop-out or struggle.

So many of the young people that walk into my program, they don't have enough confidence in themselves to think that they can be educated. I hate to say it that way. But they have a stigma about themselves that, 'hey, maybe I just can't learn.' And so what we work on in the classroom is: 'You are learning a field that you desire, you'll be surprised how quickly you motivate yourself and start wanting to go to school.' [It] gives kids a chance to visually see the future and how they get there. [E]

You could have an education program where the math, and other things tied-in in an applied sense. That's where we're going to pick up an interest from our students. And, frankly, pick up some interest from some students that I think we're losing, that just don't see any meaning, if they're not thinking about college, or don't see a lot of relevance in a lot of the stuff we're putting them in. [A]

It's almost like they don't have a voice here. [E]

If we had programs like that, they would beat us to the job everyday. [E]

Parents are so afraid that if their kids get into our program sometimes, that they're not going to have enough of the academics to make it at KU or K-State or whatever. But what it's going to do is turn them on fire. …It comes back a million fold. [E]

One of the goals we have is that our students are like the vehicles we use to work on – we want a good product when they leave our shop. … If you add all their courses together, they're mine for a year. So I know their parents, I know their dog, I know their last girlfriend. I know their strengths, I know their weaknesses. So we are able to have a real close one on one with the development of the child. [E]

[S]tudents need to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Once they know the expectations and the reason behind it, they rise to meet expectations. [E]

I tell them, 'Nobody's going to hand you the keys to your castle. You have to build your own. Let me show you how you can do this.' Those that have an environmental problem (at home)…we try to break them away from that. [E]

Technical Education: Other Threats

One group of educators were particularly concerned about the impacts that No Child Left Behind and proposed cuts in federal funding for the Carl Perkins grant program and other funding programs would have on technical education programs. However, when asked about No Child Left Behind, administrators stated that they were not concerned about any effects it could have on technical education.

What I see now is a total turn around [in government program emphasis]…I think they're going to hurt our programs because they're going to say that you're going to have to take all this academic coursework and you're not going to have room for electives and our programs. [E]

Unless the philosophy of the federal government changes. I see one that's going to hurt exactly what these employers want and that's no child left behind. Because parents are going to become afraid, oh my goodness, kids are not going to be prepared for KU. [E]

I think the point of No Child Left Behind is to privatize every school. Because no school can meet the requirements. Because you have to upgrade, upgrade, upgrade, and eventually every school will be put on probation. Eventually every school is going to have a problem. [E]

This is how we're going to meet No Child Left Behind... If we can tie academics to vocational, they will jump start No Child Left Behind beyond belief. [E]

My take on the No Child Left Behind is that they're looking at the reading and the math, those areas. And if students aren't meeting that, they're going to need additional funds to provide something extra for those kids that need support. And they're going to take the money from vocational programs. [E]

The Case for Employability Skills

In the focus groups with business leaders and from the survey of employers, we learned that employers desire workers with better employability, or "soft", skills. These are the same skills students said they want to learn more about in high school.

They do have career...not really a class, but programs in certain classes where you sit down, answer a bunch of questions on a computer and it will tell you what you are going to be. Once it told me that I was going to be an embalmer, that I would stuff dead bodies for a living. And I thought about that, and thought, wow, that says a lot about my character. And, uh, I don't think that's the way to go. I think that's the right idea, but I think they should do it differently. [S]

It needs to be one on one. Not in a group setting. [S]

What I think they should do is have a career class for the whole year your junior or senior year, or at least for a semester. And let you have a credit for it. That way they could teach you how to do a resume, the steps of an interview, and pretty much teach you the process of interviews and the right and wrong ways about going to find a job. Things like that. [S]

I think it would teach younger adults how to do things better. And basically, it would teach them, 'Hey, somebody's trying to teach me how to do this. And when I get out of high school I'm not going to know everything, but at least I'll know something about it. Yeah, I may not get it right the first couple of times, but it's ok.' In high school, you don't get any heads up about what the work environment's going to be. [S]

When I got my first job, I had no idea what was going on. I just showed up when they told me to and answered questions. At the end of the interview, he [threw] me an apron and

said get to work. I was just thrown into a job. And I'm lucky I got it, but I didn't know anything about what was going on and it would have been nice if I had. [S]

I didn't know anything about a w-2 form when I got a job. [S]

I had to look stupid and go and ask for my W-2 form back because I filled it out wrong. [S]

I think the career shadow thing is still a good idea. I followed a photographer and I loved it. I still want to be a photographer. That's what I'll be going to college for. [S]

Students talked extensively about the importance of a program or class that would help to prepare them for the workforce. Even students bound for or in college stated a desire for more assistance from high school teachers and counselors with career planning as well as with the college application process.

A lot of the information is available from many sources, but it's all really general. They don't give you details like body language and stuff, tone of voice, that's the stuff I want to know. [S]

There was one week in senior consumer math and one week in business where they discussed jobs and for me that was pretty much it, plus the career day in 9th grade. [S]

I had a class my senior year about applying for jobs, giving speeches, doing resumes and it was really good. I think it was required. [S]

It was hard to find a job [after high school]. I knew I needed references and I knew how to do an application, but I would have been clueless if I needed to do a resume. The one class I had that talked about resumes was not helpful. Nothing in my high school experience would have taught me how to write a more complete resume. [S]

We asked the student focus group participants to each design their own 'model program' for employability training. The characteristics they discussed are listed below:

- Community based (located in a high school or separate, possibly in a public library, or own building) or included as part of the high school curriculum (either required or strongly recommended.)
- One to two months in duration; if the program is part of the high school curriculum at least one semester up to two full years, during junior and/or senior year.
- For current or former high school students, including drop-outs
- Engages area business leaders or employees who would: teach job skills, tell about jobs (what they do, how many hours they work, etc.), discuss career path steps, and discuss likes and dislikes about the job or career.
- Assist students with developing a resume and how to properly fill out applications and post-employment forms, such as W-2 forms. Discuss how to make a phone call about a job.

- Cover the interview process; conduct mock interviews, have role playing skits that show the right and wrong ways to act and dress for interviews. Include information about body language, tone of voice, questions to ask in an interview.
- Discuss other topics related to finding and keeping a job, including the unspoken/unwritten employment rules, on-the-job etiquette, attendance, and how to dress.
- Include topics such as goal-setting, including understanding the steps to a career and mapping out a plan for achieving career goals.
- Utilize job shadowing, but for longer periods that a day.

Though the non-graduate former students would now jump at the chance to participate in a program with the characteristics described above, when asked about whether or not they would have taken such a class when they were in high school, the responses were mixed.

> *If I knew the things in high school that I know now...*[S]

> *I think personally that it should be required. It's something you need to know outside of high school.* [S]

Exchange City, a one-day program in Kansas City that many area sixth grade classes often utilize, was mentioned by students as another good approach to career education that could be expanded for older students. For example, they suggested that the program could be lengthened and made more challenging, giving students a better taste of some career opportunities. (Careers participants can explore at Exchange City include banking, city government, law enforcement, business management, advertising, printing, accounting, and food service.)

> *Exchange City is good, but you think of it as a field trip, a day of fun. Why couldn't they do it when you are older and make it more challenging?* [S]

Educators indicated that they are teaching students employability skills, but concede that more time could be spent on these activities.

> *We don't have a class here that's mandated for kids where they learn how to fill out applications. In a couple of the English classes they will run through those things. So you're relying on the kids to figure that out for themselves. If they bring it to us, we will help them.* [E]

> *There used to be a program that was funded through soft money that was called Careers. ...but when the money's not available, that's one of the first things to go.* [E]

A few educators said they try to do more within their regular classes. One technical teacher said that in his advanced class, he bases one-third of his students' grades on soft skills, including attendance, to encourage students to treat their education as they would a job.

> *[I tell students,] 'As a teacher it is unfair for me to grade you on a personal level, but I am grading you as an employer. You are going to be an employee.' So I make it very clear that this is where that grade comes from.* [E]

Although the administrators agreed about the importance of soft skills, there was some disagreement about how much is already happening in schools, how much more is needed, and whose responsibility it is.

> *You're not going to get out of ninth grade civics in Lawrence without filling out a job application, without going through an interview process, without someone then critiquing you about what you wore, what you said. I think [employers] gravitate, and this is a criticism, to the lowest common denominator. I think we're producing kids who can do those things. I don't know whether they're applying. We're certainly doing that now.* [A]

> *My instinct is that the portion that they really want to hire are not going to be employed at this point because kids have higher aspirations than what [employers are] asking for.* [A]

> *Just showing up on time is not going to get you the kind of job I'm talking about.* [A]

> *I'd like to see parents do [soft skills training] before they get to school. Part of it is a cultural aspect.* [A]

One administrator talked about a new standardized testing program in his district that specifically tests for entry-level employability skills. All students in the district must pass the test in order to graduate.

> *If a kid pays attention, they can pass this thing, but they do have to pass it. Kaw Area Technical School uses it as an entrance requirement. Once they pass they are finished with it. …We're able to tell kids and parents, that, 'We're guaranteeing that if you graduate, you have the minimum level in math reading, [for entry level] employment.' A pretty good percentage of freshmen pass it.* [A]

Keeping Options Open
While in high school, students may believe they have 'it all figured out' and claim they do not need help. But once they graduate or leave high school, they quickly learn there is a lot they do not know. Educators and administrators know the importance of keeping an open mind about career opportunities, educational pursuits, and pathways to careers, but they struggle with getting this message through to students.

Activities such as job shadowing, participatory sixth grade field trips to Exchange City, and cooperative programs with businesses at the high school level are examples of tangible ways students gain insight into careers they might not otherwise consider. Yet one-time experiences such as Exchange City and one-day job shadowing may not offer students the type of exposure they want at the most effective time in their education. Still, educators and administrators said that the earlier and more varied the exposure to opportunities, the better.

Business leaders also advocated for increased awareness of local career opportunities. They mentioned several career opportunities in Lawrence that students are not pursuing due to an apparent lack of awareness. Such options include careers that do not require a college degree, but have strong earning and advancement potential. Other local opportunities allow employees to work at their company while earning a college degree and have advancement opportunities within the company once the degree is completed.

> *I think a lot of high school students think they have it planned out… You need to have an open mind. I think that [Lawrence Diploma Completion Program] shows you a little bit about that. I think that if the high schools could do that. ...They could show you there are other options and to keep an open mind.* [S]

> *Kids have to be exposed early on. They have a pretty limited view of what's out there. But if you take them to a career fair type of thing, they'll see a lot of other things out there. You're not pushing them in a direction, you're just exposing them. They don't have a very good idea [of the options].* [A]

> *At some point kids need to see that there's something down there that leads them to go down this path.* [A]

> *I think exposure is critical to making good decisions—information and exposure.* [A]

> *[The student says,] 'I want to be a podiatrist.' [Students] don't have any idea what the level of commitment is, what's involved, and what the competition's going to be like.* [A]

> *Preparation comes from experiencing. It doesn't necessarily come from information. It's the smorgasbord approach to opportunity.* [A]

> *[We took a field trip to the East Hills Industrial Park] because [students] don't know anything about the jobs.* [E]

> *We always stress that you need to diversify your education and your skills.* [E]

> *We're constantly opening the door and showing them things.* [educator comment]
> *We try to expose them to a lot of different things and we use interest inventories. Then we look at the results and try to encourage them to pursue those interests by maybe taking a class.* [E]

Goal-Setting
While goal-setting is related to employability skills, it has additional implications. Students, educators, and administrators all discussed the importance of setting goals as a way of giving students direction as they plan their careers. Students, educators, and administrators also agree that this is one area that could be given more attention in the high school curriculum.

…Offer a class to where they teach you skills that you need in the real world—or help you to plan or make some kind of plan, setting goals, what kinds of steps you need to take to teach you how. [S]

I think it would be better for a lot of high school graduates to have someone actually teach them and explain to them the right way to fill out an application, the wrong way, and pretty much help them set up their future. Have them write down their goals and talk about it, things like that. I think young adults would be a lot better off, and [would] *have a heads' up.* [S]

Relating the Curriculum to the Future

Student complaints about the apparent irrelevance of their high school coursework are nothing new. Still, even educators and administrators agreed that there is room for improvement in relating coursework to real life applications. In fact, some educators and administrators said that what many students need in order to be successful and to apply themselves is to understand the purpose behind what they are being asked to do.

I learned the Civil War 4 times. I know every battle, every skirmish, every shot fired in that war. That's the same for WWI, II. It's really annoying. [S]

It's good to know your history and everything, but a lot of what you learn in high school…I have yet to go through life and have to do an algebra problem. [S]

You learn all the core skills, but you don't know anything about how it works in the real world. [S]

You're in class [thinking] 'What is this teaching me. I'm not going to need this when I graduate from high school.' But if they show you how you're going to need it, then it might be a little bit more interesting. [S]

They're just shoving information down our throats and asking us to regurgitate it. They're not telling us to think about it. [S]

The only jobs that require calculus, that I know, require at least 8 years of extended math beyond high school. So why are they teaching it in high school? I'm not saying 'Calculus is bad; they shouldn't be teaching it.' I'm saying maybe they should show us where it would be useful. [S]

My most valuable classes were my math classes because you see it everywhere and it's one of the hard classes. The other classes don't prepare you for college, except maybe English writing classes. [S]

[Students say] 'Why do I need Algebra I? All I'm going to be is a drywaller.' I try to explain, 'Well, you may have to figure area, and stuff like that.' And that just goes in one ear and out the other. And to a certain extent they are right. [E]

You can weave [employability] stuff into a program. This kid has to have some kind of vision. Kids work from the end back. 'This is what I want to be.' That's how they think. They can't see what the end of it is. You can't be vague. [A]

They have to see how it's connected with the career they're going to do some day. [A]

If we could [relate curriculum to career interests], these kids would never allow me to breathe because it ties into their interests. They would want more, more, more. …We have to be focusing on what is going to be their next step out of high school. I do not want to set kids up for a fall and that's what we do sometimes. We set these kids up for disaster. We allow them to come late for school. We ok everything sometimes we aren't even allowed to flunk them. When they set out in to the real world, it doesn't work that way. [E]

Career Counseling and Job Placement
Most educators and administrators readily admit that their career counseling programs cover only the basics and job placement services are minimal. This is due to a number of factors, including high student-counselor ratios coupled with limited time and other demands.

We probably do less in terms of job stuff, I'd say pretty minimal…We do some career inventories, but as far as making a connection, it doesn't exist. We give them a diploma. The career education piece begins somewhat back in junior high and they get a little bit more in high school but I don't feel it's very significant. [A]

In our brand new high school, we developed a career counseling center and it's underdeveloped as well. And it's just the way high schools are set up. I don't know how much time you can spend on career counseling because of the vast array of ways kids can go. You just don't have a whole lot of time to do those types of things. [A]

It's something that, what I've read, is that if you don't have it imbedded in a course curriculum, it tends to get a lack of focus. And if it is in a course curriculum, there's all sorts of different directions it can go. [A]

We are not in the job placement business. I always try to say get a focus on something, get [post secondary] technical education, get a skill. At least if you go someplace and get trained, they'll help you with job placement. [E]

If we can help them [with job placement] we will. Businesses call in and we place jobs on the bulletin board. [E]

It's tough to identify kids who may not be going to college. It's tricky. It's like spring break coming up in two weeks. A lot of these kids feel like they ought to be going on these great vacations and they're embarrassed to say they're staying in Lawrence. It's almost like they're embarrassed—they may not want to tell their friends that they're not going on to higher ed. [E]

However, one administrator pointed to his program as an exception:

> *We have a proactive career education program and those kids are counseled specifically to what their plans are, each kid is. There are some kids that won't participate in the process. In fact, each kid has classes that are aimed toward that [finding employment post graduation]. Each kid has the opportunity.* [A]

Two technical educators talked about programs they offer that can lead to post-graduation employment. In one program, students who take business courses or have an interest in business can be placed in after school jobs with businesses in areas such as banking and proofing. Seniors who have a flexible schedule can be placed in on-the-job opportunities with these same businesses and can earn credits.

> *Quite a few of them stay with that company. A lot of my kids, probably 80 to 85 percent, go on to college. A lot, if they stay in Lawrence, continue working for the employer. Most of the kids who have gone on to college are [studying] business.* [E]

In another program, students can take a series of automotive courses that progress through the levels of automotive repair and culminate in a three hour per day course (Tech 3) that lasts a full year. Tech 3 is structured much like a job in an automotive shop. To be admitted into the program, students must apply for one of 30 available spaces. Last year there were 80 applicants.

> *We are looking for students who have the true desire to take this to a career. We expect them to bring their own tools and their own work gear. And we supply the equipment. It's a working environment. They have to work with the same equipment they would in a shop—the computers, the ticket writing, the documentation, the legalities of working in a shop environment, OSHA standards—all those things are applied. So once they leave our program they can step right into any shop and be quite comfortable and [students] have done that. We still let them know that even though they've had our experience they're still going to be an apprentice in that shop.*
> *Out of those advanced students, I can safely say probably 90 percent go on to post secondary education. We have close ties with our advisory board. [With their help we] can place them in the field before graduation so they can make sure it's what they want.*
> *We want to give them that exposure to their field of choice before graduation. If they find out that that field of choice…is not meeting their goals, they have time to stop, step back, and re-evaluate. We have counselors and people involved so that we can help them before they graduate.*
> *The population that did not go off and experience a shop atmosphere before graduation, and also chose not to go on to post-secondary education, I would say very few or none of them are still in the field. They'll go and they'll attempt, [but] they just don't have the confidence that they need. The last one just left a real good job…and is a stock boy at Wal-Mart now.* [E]

Transition to the Workforce
For most students, finding a job after high school was difficult. They faced obstacles such as competition from college students, a tight job market, and a lack of understanding about the process of finding a job. While some of their high school coursework included topics such as resumes, mock interviews, and a 9th grade one-day career shadowing experience, most felt ill-prepared to search for and secure a job.

> *There are a lot of telemarketing jobs. I've done telemarketing before and it's just something I can't do.* [S]

> *I think with the university, it makes it a little more difficult to have a career here. It's so populated with the KU students, especially right here.* [S]

> *I know a lot of people who commute to Topeka or Kansas City because they can't find a job here.* [S]

> *A lot of times you have to pick a job that nobody wants or knows about. I don't know anybody who would want a 911 dispatch job. And that's exactly why I want it. Well, I would like it – it operates computers…everything I like…But yeah, I picked a job that nobody else would want that I could potentially like in the future.* [S]

To help figure out how to navigate the job market, the students often turn to family members or friends for guidance. Generally, they were unaware of local organizations that offered this type of assistance.

> *I was 16 when I got my first job and I didn't know anything about [the process]. I didn't know how to go about doing the interview process. I talked to my mom about it because my mom was the assistant manager at a couple of places. …She sat down with me and said, 'Ok you're going to be an [applicant] interviewing for a job and I'm going to be the hiring manager. I'm not your mother anymore.'* [S]

> *My mom went so far as looking at applications because I had people that weren't even calling me back for interviews. She looked to see what I was doing wrong at that first step.* [S]

Students also said they had no knowledge of the career opportunities available in the Douglas County area. However, many indicated that they have an interest in learning about such opportunities.

> *After college, my goal is to stay here [in the area]. But I don't know about any of the career opportunities here.* [S]

Students who graduated and were college-bound expressed some frustration with the assistance they received in the college application process. These students too seemed reluctant to ask for help from teachers or counselors even when they wanted or needed it.

> *I felt they [school] did a very poor job of helping me prepare for college. They had brochures in the office, but no one talked to me about it. My counselor didn't meet with me.* [S]

> *No one would help me [with the college process]. I didn't know what I was doing. I was in the gifted program, but no one pushed me. The gifted office had a class specifically for applying to college, but I didn't find out about it until it was too late. It was never offered to me. I think it's the school's job to do that.* [S]

Dropping Out & Finding Success
Although students chose to drop out of high school for a number of specific reasons, in most cases, their individual needs were not met by the traditional high school setting. Whether the school system somehow failed them, personal/family issues created seemingly insurmountable circumstances, or individual maturity made success too difficult, the high school structure simply did not work. The Lawrence Diploma Completion Program [LDCP] offered these students a second chance at success and an opportunity to earn their high school diploma from the high school they left. The paragraphs below tell the individual 'stories' of a few of these students and offer insight into what went wrong in the traditional high school setting as well as what makes the LDCP work so well for them.

> *I had a high school teacher tell me I wasn't going to be anything when I leave high school. I'm like, 'You're the teacher, you're not supposed to be saying stuff like that.' I told my principal and he said, 'Well, I don't believe she said that.' I'm like, 'Ok, what am I supposed to do about that?' Here [at LDCP] I know I'm not going to have to go through anything like that. …I didn't get along with anybody…I tried the GED, it didn't work. Then this [LDCP] came up and it's a whole lot better.* [S]

> *For me, it wasn't, 'Ok, I'm going to stop going to school.' It was more like, 'Ok, I need to go to school' and I went and then I didn't. It was kind of off and on. I knew I needed to go I just could not go 'cause I would, you know, sleep all day. And that was my fault. But this [LDCP] allowed me to …finish it that way. It's kind of like I really wanted to do it, but I couldn't finish. ... Teachers are intimidating to me. I don't know why. …If I talk to my [high school] history teacher, I'm afraid I'm going to ask a dumb question, or if I'm going to interrupt him...Here they don't meddle when I don't need it. They only help when I need help. I like this because at school I just sit there and not listen to the teacher. Here I do the work and if I need help, I can ask.* [S]

> *I had a child, it was too much stress having a kid, going to class, "the drama of high school." …So I dropped out because of that. I couldn't deal with the pressure of high school – being up all night with the baby, and then get up at six in the morning to go to school. I would go some days and some days I wouldn't make it. I did complete [that grade]. But I started [the next year] and I'd go one day out the week and thought, 'Man,*

this is just not going to work.' I like the fact that no matter how long you stay away, you don't have any make up work. You're still on track. [S]

I was sort of in the same situation she was. They're not my kids, but I have [younger siblings] and I dropped out when I was 16 because my mom was trying to work a full-time job and pay the bills and everything. But she needed a babysitter because we didn't have any extra money to pay for one. And so it was me who took care of [sibling]. She worked a third-shift job. And she would leave at 3:30. I'd get home at 3:20. I'd have like 10-15 minutes to get home from school. And most of the time I had to walk. I had to be home by 3:30. I never had time to do my homework or anything. ...A lot of teachers that are in classrooms all day, they speak to you like you are first graders, like they need to explain every last detail or you're not going to understand it. [LDCP] helps me out a lot because it's more one-on-one. You're not sitting in a classroom until the bell rings. You can interact with more people and get help from more than one teacher. It just makes it a lot easier. [S]

For me the biggest thing was, it's my choice. Whereas when I was in high school, I felt like I was forced to go everyday but now I can say, ok, this is when I'm going to go...It's more adaptable and flexible to my needs. ...Teachers here are accessible and personable. ...The fact that you don't have to take tests is nice. Because for a lot of people, you've got the book smarts, you can do the work, but the moment you put that title of the test, you freak out and your mind goes blank. You can't do it...One of the biggest things, is high school students are close to adults. ...If high schools would talk to them like they are adults, not belittle them, that in itself, would help them gain confidence. ...You get an actual diploma from the school you would have graduated from. People say, 'Oh, you're getting your GED.' I'm actually getting my high school diploma. You hear 'diploma' and it actually raises you up in people's minds. [S]

For me, I like it a lot better because I had a hard time at school. None of my family, except for one has graduated from high school... I'll be the second one. I can come in here and help people out. I like it a lot. ...When [high school teachers] speak to you, they kind of make you feel like a little kid. They talk down to you. These teachers treat us like adults. [S]

Increasing Self-Confidence

Aside from the flexibility of the LDCP, these stories illustrate the importance students placed on feeling respected and valued by LDCP teachers. The product of this was an increase in self-confidence—these students are confident they will finish this program and are optimistic when discussing their career aspirations upon completing the program. Several students plan to pursue coursework at the junior college or technical college level in careers such as medical office assistant, computer technician, photography, or nursing. Others are developing career plans or already have a job they enjoy.

We asked students to tell us the most important lessons they had learned as a result of their experiences and we have highlighted these below:

> *If you put your mind to it, you can do it.* [S]

> *I can do this, I can do this – positive reinforcement, reprogram your mind.* [S]

> *You have to be very patient to complete not just this program, but anything in life. You might not get it the first time, but you just keep trying and eventually you'll get it. You have to be patient.* [S]

> *I think if there's one thing this course has taught me, it's endurance. …I think that will help me in my job.* [S]

> *You've got to be a positive thinker. Because if you have negative thoughts, it's going to take you forever to do it. I started about a month ago, at first I thought I couldn't do it. I wasn't getting anything done. Then I finally said, 'wait a minute I can do this.'* [S]

Summary and Conclusions

The needs of the business community, schools, and students are highly interrelated. The business community wants access to motivated workers possessing basic employability skills. Employers want to play a more active role in career education to increase awareness of local opportunities for good paying jobs and careers. Schools want to prepare students to be successful in the workforce, college, and other post-graduation pursuits. Schools are also interested in engaging the business community in order to create practical linkages between education and the workforce. Students want to understand how what they learn in the classroom transfers to the jobs and education they will pursue after they graduate. Students crave more in-depth information from the business community about career options and pathways, applying for jobs, and being a good employee. Each group—the business community, schools, and students—has a stake in the success of the other group. Working together may offer the best opportunity for successfully meeting the needs of all the stakeholders.

Appendix A
Letter to Douglas County Area Public School Administrators

LAWRENCE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

To: Area Superintendents and High School Principals
From: Bruce Passman, Executive Director of Student Services, USD 497
              Co-Chair of the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce/USD497 Task Force on
              Career Technical Education

Date: February 10, 2005

RE: Policy Research Institute Study

As you may be aware, a career technical education task force was formed through a partnership between Lawrence Public Schools and the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce. The overall charge to this task force is to study and generate recommendations regarding career/technical education needs for Douglas County students and for business and industry in our area.

To assist us with this project, the Policy Research Institute (PRI) of the University of Kansas was commissioned to conduct an extensive evaluation within our area. The evaluation includes surveys, interviews, and focus groups with a representative sample from business and industry as well as from leaders and faculty members from the public schools. We would greatly appreciate your commitment to participate in the evaluation process. Your perspectives and those of your staff members will be critical in determining gaps and needs in career technical education opportunities for our students and for the workforce.

Susan Mercer and Genna Hurd are the principal investigators from PRI who will facilitate the public education component of the evaluation. They will be contacting you in the very near future in order to schedule a focus group for school leaders (Superintendents and High School Principals) and for career technical education faculty and counselors. The focus group sessions will last no longer than two hours. Please let your counselors and teachers working in that area know that they may be contacted by either Genna or Susan.

We are anxious to complete the study and to begin planning for career technical education needs that may be identified. At the next meeting we will share the results with the Task Force of which superintendents are members.

Thank you in advance for your help with this important and timely project.

Appendix B
Focus Group Protocols

Administrator Focus Group Protocol

1. About what percent of your students are college bound, what percent will attend technical school, and what percent will not further their education? (Of the ones who attend college or technical school, about what percent will finish?)

2. Tell us about the technical programs your school offers.

3. Tell us about courses or programs offered that teach life or soft skills? (Does this include all students?)

4. If a student is not planning to attend some type of post-secondary education, is he/she assisted with job placement? (If so, how and how successful is this? If not, why not? Where are grads sent for work placement assistance?)

5. Is there pressure from parents not to place students because they want their kids to attend college? Is this a problem?

6. What role *should* schools have in preparing students for the workforce?

7. What does your school do to help prepare students for the workforce? (Programs, activities, business partnerships, shadowing, mentoring, guest speakers, etc.)

8. What (if any) specific programs at your school assist students with the transition from school to work? (What role do counselors play in this transition?)

9. Within your school, what gaps do you see in preparing students to enter the workforce?

10. What existing programs would you like to enhance to better prepare students for the workforce? What new programs would you like to see developed? What are the barriers to making these changes?

11. In what ways are Douglas County businesses involved in this process? How well is this relationship working?

12. What kind of direct contact do teachers have with businesses?

13. What opportunities are there for your students to learn about career opportunities in the Douglas County area?

14. What role *should* the business community have in helping prepare students for the workforce? What are the barriers?

15. Is there anything we didn't discuss today that you believe is important for us to know?

High School Technical Educator and Counselor Protocol

1. About what percent of your students are college bound, what percent will attend technical school, and what percent will not further their education? (Of the ones who attend college or technical school, about what percent will finish?)

2. Tell us about the technical programs your school offers. (About what percentage of your students are involved in these programs in some way?)

3. Tell us about courses or programs offered that teach life or soft skills? (Does this include all students?)

4. If a student is not planning to attend some type of post-secondary education, is he/she assisted with job placement? (If so, how and how successful is this? If not, why not? Where are grads sent for work placement assistance?)

5. Is there pressure from parents not to place students because they want their kids to attend college? Is this a problem?

6. What role *should* schools have in preparing students for the workforce?

7. What does your school do to help prepare students for the workforce? (Programs, activities, business partnerships, shadowing, mentoring, guest speakers, etc.)

8. What (if any) specific programs at your school assist students with the transition from school to work? (What role do counselors play in this transition?)

9. Within your school, what gaps do you see in preparing students to enter the workforce?

10. What existing programs would you like to enhance to better prepare students for the workforce? What new programs would you like to see developed? What are the barriers to making these changes?

11. In what ways are Douglas County businesses involved in this process? How well is this relationship working?

12. What kind of direct contact do teachers have with businesses?

13. What opportunities are there for your students to learn about career opportunities in the Douglas County area?

14. What role *should* the business community have in helping prepare students for the workforce? What are the barriers?

15. Is there anything we didn't discuss today that you believe is important for us to know?

Former Student Focus Group Protocol

1. How old were you when you got your first job? How did you go about getting it? (i.e. who helped you, what did you do, how did you hear about it?)

2. How difficult was it for you to find a job after leaving high school? (If it was difficult, what made it so? If it was easy, why was it easy?)

3. What was the one thing that helped you most in your job search?

4. Upon graduation (or when you left school), how prepared were you to enter the workforce?

5. What were some of the problems you encountered as you started looking for work?

6. How did you learn about job openings?

7. What opportunities for careers do you know about in the Lawrence or Douglas County area?

8. How did you learn about career opportunities in the Lawrence and Douglas County area?

9. Do you know what it takes (skills, training) to get into those careers?

10. How did you learn about the training requirements for those careers?

11. How do you know where to go to get that training?

12. What's the most important training you've had and how did you get it?

13. How much did you learn about career opportunities and training while you were in high school?

14. In what way(s) did high school help prepare you for the workforce? (Specific programs? Resume development or mock interviews? Etc.)

15. What else could schools do to help prepare students to enter the workforce?

16. What role could the community take in helping students prepare for the workforce?

17. If you could design the perfect program that would help you prepare for the workforce or for a career, what would it look like? Take a few minutes to think about this and jot down some ideas. (Consider: What would be the key pieces? Who would be involved? (Would it involve the high school? The community? A business or businesses? Some other group?) What would it look like? How would it be structured? Where would it be located?)

18. Is there anything we didn't discuss today that you believe is important for us to know?

Appendix C
Business Focus Group Summary

Two focus group sessions with Douglas County employers were held on November 4, 2004 at the Lawrence Chamber of Commerce. Participants included 10 members of the business community; six in the morning session and four in the afternoon session. (Three additional confirmed participants did not attend.) Each session lasted approximately two hours.

Workforce Recruitment
Frequent Sources/Approaches to Hiring
    Prefer referrals from current employees
    Some look to competitors for employees
    Lawrence Workforce Center; Kansas Job Link
    Display signs in business windows
    Use company website
    Temp agencies
Less Frequent Sources/Approaches to Hiring
    Recruiters
    Job Fairs
    Newspaper ads
    Trade publications

Hiring Process
Described as a "pretty frustrating process"
    Applications incomplete, messy, etc.
    Unreasonable expectations for pay and work (time off, schedules, benefits, etc.)
    Poor self-presentation (attire, interview skills)
    Turnover rate high
    Training costs high
Want trainable employees with basic skills
    Fit organization culture
    Good work ethic – willing to work
    General computer skills (basic)
    Careers are possible in local industry
    Attention to quality
Some prefer high school grads to college grads
    College students have high(er) expectations that are often unrealistic
    College students also lack practical experience

Training
Jobs too specialized for outside training
    regardless of source of employee, must be trained
Few used outside programs
    Exceptions: new equipment (utilize equipment manufacturer training services)
    Johnson County Community College – specialized for company; worked well
Void in manager training

     Especially transition from employee to manager/supervisor
Maintenance, electrical, industrial maintenance technology
No need or expectation for local community/technical college

Missed Opportunities
Tech sales – opened satellite office elsewhere
Rethinking future product lines and equipment purchases – cheaper equipment with lower skill levels required to operate
Concern about lack of large labor pool to handle expansion (up to three times current size)
Considering outsourcing because of high turnover and small labor pool

Role for High Schools
Basic job/life skills training
     Basic reasoning/logic/problem solving
     First impressions matter
     Getting along/teamwork
     Applying for a job/interviewing/resumes
Make sure students understand how important a diploma or GED is
Parents have a role too…
Need programs for non-college bound
     Vo-tech/"craft" training
     Give insight about career opportunities that are available through local companies that are
     good paying positions
Program for juniors/seniors to visit East Hills Business Park; offered fall 2003; students toured facilities, talked to human resources; learned about opportunities and expectations; valuable opportunity to show students what a job at their business is really like

Lawrence Workforce Center
Looked at very favorably
Good resource on many levels
Potential for cooperative program with high school students
Basic job readiness training
Recruitment resource