The Issue

The business community has a vital stake in ensuring that our schools are producing graduates ready for college and the workforce. According to the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy, U.S. companies invest nearly $4 billion annually to support education in countless ways with varying results.1 But for all of the contributions business leaders make to improve our nation’s schools, we have yet to see the kind of transformational improvement that needs to be made to prepare our workforce to compete in the global economy. Companies are increasingly facing a shortage of well-educated and skilled workers, which is a serious threat to our nation’s competitiveness. In fact, the Council on Foreign Relations recently reported that our failure to educate students threatens the United States’ ability to thrive in a global economy and maintain its leadership role.2

The magnitude of the problem is staggering. Two-thirds of 4th and 8th grade students are unable to read at grade level, and many are unable to read at all.3 This inability to impart fundamental literacy skills leaves many students who do graduate from high school woefully unprepared for the rigors of either college or a career.

Seventy percent of 4th and 8th grade students score below grade level in math while the business community continues to face challenges in hiring employees in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math.4 It is estimated that during this decade 13 million students will drop out of school, costing our nation more than $3 trillion.5

Other nations have been hard at work seizing the opportunity to educate their students to higher achievement levels. On the latest international benchmark, American students ranked 17th in science and 25th in math among 34 of the world’s most advanced economies.6

Put simply, we can no longer afford the status quo if we are to retain our economic prominence.
About the Business Education Network

The Business Education Network (BEN) aims to lead a movement of businesses of all sizes and sectors dedicated to addressing the educational needs of our nation with a unified voice and coordinated actions. BEN is unique in three key ways:

- **Its access to leading education experts.** BEN—through its staff and team of advisers—is informed by decades of experience and leadership in both education and business.

- **Its broad reach** through the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s membership and communication capabilities. BEN’s affiliation with the U.S. Chamber provides an expansive network of corporate supporters unsurpassed by other organizations.

- **Its comprehensive approach** to the challenges facing the business community in education. In building a coalition of cross-sector business leaders engaged in pre–K to 12th grade education policy, programs, and research, BEN strives to ensure a solid pipeline throughout our nation’s education system.
Together We Can Make a Significant Impact

The goal of BEN is to impact education in the United States by profiling successful education initiatives and programs in the business community that have improved student achievement. BEN provides **insight, visibility, and connections** by bringing business leaders together who are working to improve student achievement in their communities.

- **Insight**
BEN provides resources on how business leaders can effectively engage in improving education and maximize the return on investment. The network will commission research and literature to help the business community evaluate programs worthy of support and investment.

- **Visibility**
BEN inventories and highlights successful partnerships between the business community and teachers, school leaders, and other local stakeholders to replicate what works and learn from others’ successes. By heightening visibility of corporate programs in education and leveraging the significant reach of the U.S. Chamber, policymakers, the education community, and the public will be more informed about investments the business community is making in education.

- **Connections**
BEN will host discussions, meetings, and events that connect business leaders not only with their peers but with teachers, school leaders, and policy experts who are working to improve student outcomes.
What’s Next?

No single company, organization, or program can make the necessary improvements and changes to our education system alone. Together, we can leverage our resources, amplify our power, and begin the work of remaking our education system into a world leader once again.

About Us

The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is the nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America’s greatest economic resource, its workforce.

Contact

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1  www.corporatephilanthropy.org/pdfs/giving_in_numbers/GivinginNumbers2011.pdf
2  www.cfr.org/united-states/us-education-reform-national-security/p27618
3  www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx
4  http://nationsreportcard.gov
5  www.all4ed.org/publication_material/EconImpact
6  www.oecd.org/topic/0,3699,en_2649_37455_1_1_1_1_37455,00.html