



MISSISSIPPI

STATE WORKFORCE INVESTMENT BOARD

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Smart Start Bridges the Soft Skills Gap

One of the biggest challenges companies face is the skills gap.

There is much discussion among workforce professionals, human resources managers, and the media on the job skills gap. Discussions range from the need for workers to possess middle-skills in high demand industry sectors to the lack of soft skills in all sectors. Having the right mix of skills is now critical to the success of individuals, businesses, and the economy.

Responding to the needs of business owners in Mississippi, Governor Phil Bryant identified soft skills as a key tenet of Mississippi's workforce plan. Governor Bryant and the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) in partnership with community colleges and WIN Job Centers recently launched Mississippi Works Smart Start classes. The classes provide individuals with the training needed to gain essential soft skills necessary in the workplace.

Soft skills or non-technical skills have become widely acknowledged as necessary for workplace success. But it comes as no surprise that hard skills are more important in the recruitment and selection criteria. Companies are keen on hiring subject matter experts with technical skills and relevant experience.

In a recent survey of company executives, when asked about the impact of a soft skill credential in the hiring process, less than 50% stated that it would have a bearing on the applicant's chance for employment. Yet, it is the number one reason for losing an employee.

Bridging the Soft Skills Gap



Some companies hire for Reason 1, and some companies hire for Reasons 1 and 2. But most companies lose people because of Reason 3, and all companies could benefit from Reason 4, Smart Start Classes. Staff turnover and a continuous cycle of recruiting, hiring, and retraining, is a reliable indicator of a soft skills gap.

Improving Skills for Workplace Success

The Smart Start Class is a comprehensive series of courses to help individuals improve skills necessary for workplace success; including;

BASIC SKILLS - workers who possess foundational skills in reading can more readily learn job specific skills.

COMMUNICATION – how to have productive conversations, group and individual interactions. A person with good communication skills can be easier to work with and better relate to customers and co-workers intimately driving good business outcomes.

TEAM BUILDING – how to be a productive team member. Team members with good emotional judgment and teamwork skills can help foster better workplace culture.

WORKPLACE DISCIPLINE – how personal behavior can enable or interfere with success on the job. Workers with strong self-management skills could require less oversight and be more reliable.

PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS – how to address problems, think critically and produce good answers. Critical thinkers and problem solvers can identify potential issues before they become significant and implement optimal solutions.

Smart Start classes also include an assessment of workplace readiness.

The assessment measures basic workplace skills in applied mathematics, reading for information and locating information. Test questions are based on situations in the everyday work world and measure “real world” skills that employers believe are critical to job success.

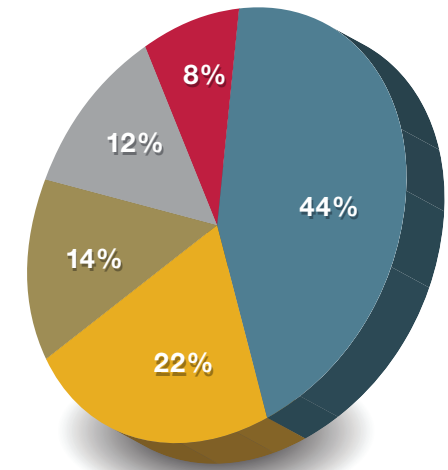
THE **APPLIED MATH ASSESSMENT** measures critical thinking, mathematical reasoning, and problem-solving techniques for situations that occur in today’s workplace.

THE **GRAPHIC LITERACY ASSESSMENT** measures the skills needed to locate, synthesize, and use information from workplace graphics.

THE **WORKPLACE DOCUMENTS ASSESSMENT** measures the skills people use when they read and use written text such as memos, letters, directions, signs, notices, bulletins, policies, and regulations on the job.

SMART START CLASSES fuel the pipeline for work ready individuals. More than 7,000 individuals have taken advantage of Smart Start classes, which are provided at no cost. The classes are available on-line in a self-paced training format and at community colleges and WIN Job Centers. Training leads to a MS Works Smart Start credential and students can be awarded college credit.

Which of the following do you feel BEST defines the “gap” in the U.S. workforce skills gap?



- Lack of soft skills (i.e., communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration)
- Lack of technical skills
- Lack of strong leadership skills
- Lack of computer based technology skills
- NA — I do not think there is a skills gap in the U.S. workforce

Source: ADECCO/CNBC

While the tug of war between the importance of soft skills versus hard skills will continue, the fact is that both skills are necessary for success in the workplace.

For more information on how to access Smart Start classes, contact James Williams at jwilliams@swdb-ms.org or Sandy Crist at scrist@mccb.edu.