



OPPORTUNITY AMERICA

EMPLOYERS & CAREER EDUCATION STATE POLICYMAKERS ON WHAT WORKS

In December 2017, Opportunity America organized and moderated a plenary session at ACTE's annual CareerTech VISION conference. The topic: what states can do to encourage employer engagement in career and technical education. On the panel: the state directors of career education from Arkansas, Kentucky and Tennessee, plus a vice president of workforce education from one of the nation's largest community colleges. Opportunity America president Tamar Jacoby moderated the conversation.



MODERATOR Tamar Jacoby president, Opportunity America

"I think we can all agree – there can be no effective career education without employers. But it can be maddeningly difficult for educators and employers to communicate, much less collaborate. Our topic today: what makes for a good relationship? And what can state policy do to help? How can states provide educators with the tools and templates they need to engage employers and work with them to offer the best possible education for their students?"

Charisse Childers director, Arkansas Department of Career Education

"There are two key ingredients. It starts with one-on-one relationships – the individual teacher and the individual employer communicating with each other about their needs. Number two: teachers and administrators have to be open to change – there's no point in communicating if it leads to the same old same old. But if you are open to change, the possibilities are limitless – once you open the door and the two sides start talking, there's no limit to what they can do together."



Stephen Pruitt commissioner, Kentucky Department of Education



"In my experience, it starts with recognizing the gulf that has to be crossed. Educators and employers are different. They think differently. They talk differently. Educators want to talk about process, employers want to know about outcomes. Sometimes it's so bad, you need an interpreter The other important thing: both sides need to be open to change. The relationship has to be honest – schools have to be willing to recognize when they aren't meeting local labor needs, and they have to let go of some control. But it's a two-way street – employers need to step up and play a bigger role in developing programs."

Heather Justice executive director, Tennessee Office of Career and Technical Education

"I think there are three key elements. The first is that employers need to see results – otherwise they disconnect right away. And educators need to meet them where they're at. It can be as simple as holding the meeting at a time of day they find convenient – which is usually different than it is for educators. Also – very important – educators need to be honest up front. They need to explain the risk of investing and make clear that the employer may not see a return right away The truth is, many companies will want to go step by step – they want to start by dipping their toe in the water."



Steven Partridge VP, workforce & economic development, Northern Virginia Community College



"I like the term translator. The biggest thing that scares off employers is the speed at which we operate – the non-speed. Businesses need things now. Educators can take years to develop a solution. The two groups also have different priorities. Educators want to make sure students are getting college credit. Employers don't care – they're concerned about skills and knowledge Last thing: it sounds technical, but data are really important. There needs to be a lot more sharing of data so employers can get a bead on the talent in the local education pipeline – not just what workers are available now, but what workers are going to be available in what field two or three years down the road."

Opportunity America is a Washington-based nonprofit promoting economic mobility – work, skills, careers, ownership and entrepreneurship for poor and working Americans. The organization's principal activities are research, policy development, dissemination of policy ideas and working to build consensus around policy proposals.