

# Motivation Matters:

## Career Challenges Broaden Participation in High-Skills Coursework, like STEM, and in High-Opportunity Careers

**TAKEAWAY #1:** Evidence continues to mount that personal interest and experience are primary motivators to engagement in challenging coursework and demanding careers.

**TAKEAWAY #2:** Adapting the graduate school “case study” methodology (i.e. “career challenges”) to forge explicit connections between course objectives and meaningful career problem solving scenarios shows promise.

**TAKEAWAY #3:** Fewer young people than ever are employed and those who have jobs are not building skills.

**TAKEAWAY #4:** Employers and educators need high-quality and affordable alternatives to connect meaningful, high-growth career opportunities to the thinking, problem solving and communication skills taught in today’s secondary and post-secondary education settings.

**TAKEAWAY #5:** To ensure high quality resources reach today’s young people across educational settings, employers and educators should co-develop career challenges in formats that easily integrate into secondary and post-secondary courses and community volunteer events.

Most high-opportunity jobs require high level skills, especially those taught in STEM and advanced communications courses. Job openings remain unfilled because few people possess these skills. Employers and educators can help by explicitly connecting classroom learning to future careers, thus motivating young people to persist in challenging coursework and to pursue high-opportunity careers.

Current solutions to minimize the opportunity gap target economics over motivation. Young people must have information about the perceived societal value, required skills and educational steps before pursuing a career. Many young people lack the social capital to navigate post-secondary choices and career options. They depend heavily on their educational institution to provide important early work experience, job exposure, career counseling, and hands-on learning.

Studies show young people who can connect their coursework to career aspirations are more likely to complete high-skills courses, but too few high school courses integrate real-world career problem-solving. Although 77% of students want classroom simulations that link on-the-job experience to STEM coursework, only 12% report doing so.

More employer-educator partnerships could expand to include career challenges beyond traditional Career Technical Education (CTE) courses, infusing relevance into high skills STEM and English courses. Consequently, more young people would be motivated throughout their educational experience and positioned to make better informed, focused academic and career choices.

The 114th Partnership, a nonprofit organization, promotes young people’s access to crucial information from employers as well as the application of classroom learning to on-the-job tasks. Young people can use this information to discover what motivates them to engage and better align their education to their life and career goals.

By working with employers and educators to develop and deploy problem-based learning resources for educators and community volunteers, the 114th helps create vital links between young people’s coursework and interests, abstract concepts and hands-on tasks, and theory-based learnings and career choices. These important linkages keep adolescents focused and engaged throughout high school, post-secondary studies, and beyond. Young people from all communities—including those underserved—are thus motivated to pursue the high-skills coursework necessary for success in high-opportunity careers.