



## For Immediate Release

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### **“Soft Skills” Have Hard-Hitting Value In Today’s Workplace, Research Shows**

WASHINGTON, D.C., May 31, 2017 – Students will be better prepared for fast-growing jobs in all career sectors if they develop an academic mindset, learn how to communicate effectively and take an analytical approach to solving problems while in school, according to a new study by the Center on Education Policy. Other skills that are essential for a wide range of jobs include learning how to learn, developing self-control, and working collaboratively, the study found.

“While these skills and abilities are often called ‘soft skills,’ our study shows they have tremendous value in the workplace. Ideally all students should be given the opportunity to develop these skills and abilities as they progress through school,” said Maria Ferguson, CEP’s executive director.

The CEP report, *Building Competencies for Careers*, drew on information from the Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) database sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor. O\*NET uses surveys of job holders and occupational experts to determine the characteristics of more than 900 occupations. To conduct the study, CEP researchers and other experts “linked” the knowledge, skills, abilities and workstyles required for a diverse sample of 300-plus O\*NET occupations to the deeper learning competencies as defined by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. Using these matches, researchers analyzed how relevant each of the six deeper learning competencies were for individual occupations, specific categories of jobs and for the whole sample of occupations.

While all of the jobs analyzed by CEP require one or more of the deeper learning competencies, experts found several competencies to be most important. Developing an academic mindset, a competency about which prominent education researchers like Carol Dweck and Angela Duckworth have written extensively, was highly prized across all of O\*NET’s jobs and occupations. Also important were personal initiative and the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively.

These competencies were found to be most important for what O\*NET calls Bright Outlook occupations – those that are expected to grow rapidly, have a large number of openings or are new or emerging. The deeper learning competencies also were more important for occupations requiring higher levels of experience, education and training than for entry-level type jobs.

“As the study suggests, elementary and secondary schools that consciously teach these kinds of competencies along with subject area content will better prepare their graduates for careers,” said Matthew Frizzell, one of the study’s authors. “But this isn’t just the responsibility of schools. Families, communities and business leaders also play a role in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to develop these important skills.”

The report, *Building Competencies for Careers: Linking O\*NET’s Occupational Elements with Deeper Learning Competencies*, can be downloaded from [www.cep-dc.org](http://www.cep-dc.org). A technical appendix with the methodology and raw data is also available.

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*Based in Washington, D.C., and founded in 1995, the Center on Education Policy at The George Washington University is a national advocate for public education and for more effective public schools. The Center works to help Americans better understand the role of public education in a democracy and the need to improve the academic quality of public schools. The Center does not represent special interests. Instead, it helps citizens make sense of conflicting opinions and perceptions about public education and create conditions that will lead to better public schools.*