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Skills Currency: Building a Common Language Between Education and Employment

Insights from ERP's First Pilot with Students
Translating Learning Into Earnings

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Executive Summary

Many students leave high school without a clear roadmap for achieving gainful employment and economic mobility. According to the Schultz Family Foundation's [Broken Marketplace study](#), **48% of young adults** report that they don't know where to go for information about educational and employment opportunities, while **46%** report feeling unprepared or unsure of their preparation for the jobs of the future.

Yet every student leaves high school with something of value: **skills**.

Throughout their K-12 educational journeys, students spend thousands of hours reading, writing, solving problems, conducting research, analyzing information, collaborating with peers, and developing capabilities that employers seek in the workforce. Yet students have little understanding of the skills they have developed, how those skills are valued in the labor market, or which occupations may be a strong match for their strengths.

At the same time, employers often struggle to identify the skills emerging from the education pipeline even though nearly two-thirds of employers use skills-based hiring practices for new entry-level hires according to the [National Association of Colleges and Employers](#). While K-12 educational institutions are required to collect extensive information about student achievement, there is currently no widely adopted employer-led system for translating that educational achievement into workforce-relevant skills signals to match talent supply with employer demand.

The lack of a common language to identify skills represents one of the most significant infrastructure gaps between education and employment.

Educational Results Partnership (ERP) launched its **Skills Currency initiative** in 2025 to address this challenge and improve the efficiency of talent-to-job matching. At the core of the initiative is an algorithm that translates academic performance into workforce-relevant skills and aligns those skills with labor market demand.

Importantly, Skills Currency does not ask educators, schools, or students to do more. Instead, it seeks to *translate and derive additional value* from the teaching and learning already happening in K-12 schools.

In Spring 2026, ERP partnered with **Rowland Unified School District** in Los Angeles County, California to pilot the first phase of Skills Currency--providing students with skills profiles. ERP delivered personalized skills profiles to all **1,038 Rowland USD seniors** through its SkillSight platform. Following implementation, **298 students** participated in a survey to provide feedback about the value of receiving this information.

The findings suggest that when students gain greater visibility into the skills they have developed through school, they are better able to understand their top skills, identify destination and starter occupations aligned with those strengths, and have greater confidence in the value they can offer to future employers.

The Missing Infrastructure Between Education and Employment

State governments provide roughly half of all K-12 education funding nationwide. Combined with local and federal investments, taxpayers contribute hundreds of billions of dollars annually to support student learning and development. These investments generate an extraordinary amount of information about student achievement and skills.

Yet despite decades of investment in educational accountability, student achievement measurement, and data systems, there is currently no widely adopted employer-led system for translating K-12 educational achievement into workforce-relevant skills signals that students and employers can use to match with each other.

As a result, students are developing valuable skills, but they graduate high school without understanding:

- What skills they possess
- Which skills are most valuable in the labor market
- Which occupations are aligned with those skills
- What earnings those occupations may provide
- Which employers may be seeking those skills
- How to communicate those skills to employers

At the same time, employers have limited visibility into the actual capabilities of students emerging from the education system since there is no common language connecting the two.

ERP'S BELIEF

Addressing the skills visibility gap represents one of the most important opportunities to strengthen the infrastructure connecting education and employment. Students need to know what skills they have as a starting point when making important decisions about what to do after high school — whether that is employment, post-secondary education, skills training, military service, an apprenticeship, or a combination of these experiences.

Why ERP Launched Skills Currency

Nearly two years ago, ERP began exploring a simple but important question:

"Can academic performance be translated into meaningful workforce-relevant skills signals that help students and employers better match talent with jobs?"

To explore this question, ERP engaged academic performance measurement experts, skills validation specialists, labor market data experts, workforce leaders, government officials, educators, and researchers. These conversations revealed a recurring challenge: educational systems generate extensive information about student academic performance, but very little of that information is translated in a way that helps students understand their job skills or helps employers understand the skills of students emerging from the talent pipeline.

At the same time, many emerging workforce initiatives — including Learning and Employment Records (LERs), skills-based hiring systems, workforce talent marketplaces, digital credentials, and competency-based learning initiatives — depend upon the availability of meaningful skills information.

ERP launched Skills Currency to figure out how to use academic performance data as a valid and reliable source of workforce-relevant skills signals employers can use for identifying and hiring talent.

According to [YouScience's 2025 State of the Future U.S. Workforce Report](#), data from 450,000 middle and high school students revealed a significant gap between students' demonstrated aptitudes and their awareness of in-demand career opportunities, suggesting that many students may be unaware of careers that align with their strengths.

"I personally don't feel like I know what jobs I would be good at..."

— **Anonymous Student**

To further explore this issue, ERP conducted student listening sessions with students across two high schools. Consistent with the findings reported by YouScience, almost all of the student participants indicated that they were uncertain about their strongest skills and the careers that aligned with those skills. Students also expressed strong interest in free tools that could help them better understand the connection between their academic performance history, workforce-relevant skills, and future career opportunities.

How Skills Currency Works

At the center of the initiative is the **Skills Currency algorithm**. The algorithm analyzes multiple forms of academic performance data accumulated throughout a student's high school experience to generate a skills profile. Together, these indicators provide evidence of student learning and skills development across multiple years, subjects and contexts. The following academic data are used to make up a student's skills profile:

1 High School Course Grades

Cumulative grades across all courses taken throughout the student's high school career.

2 State Assessment Results

Standardized test scores in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science.

3 Lexile® Measures

A Lexile® measure is a MetaMetrics® supplemental measure used to describe reading ability and text complexity on a common scale.

4 Quantile® Measures

A Quantile® measure is a MetaMetrics® supplemental measure used to describe mathematical ability and mathematical content complexity on a common scale.

5 Lexile® and Quantile® Career Database

Data from the Lexile® Career Database and Quantile® Career Database, licensed from MetaMetrics®, were used to identify the literacy and quantitative demands associated with occupations.

The algorithm evaluates patterns within these educational signals and translates them into **workforce-relevant skill and skill-level indicators**. Those indicators are used to create individualized skills profiles that help students better understand their demonstrated strengths.

Students receive their skills profiles through ERP's **SkillSight platform**. The profiles are then connected to occupational skill requirements and labor market information, allowing students to explore occupations, industries, and earnings aligned with their demonstrated skills and where those skills are in-demand in the labor market.

Note: Lexile® and Quantile® are registered trademarks of MetaMetrics, Inc. and are used with permission.

ERP's First Student Pilot: Rowland Unified School District



Connecting Students to Opportunity

In Spring 2026, ERP partnered with Rowland Unified School District to conduct the first student pilot of SkillSight — delivering personalized skills profiles to **1,038 high school seniors** in Los Angeles County, California.

ERP staff worked directly with students in classrooms to introduce the platform, help students access their profiles, and guide them through the experience. Students were able to:

- Understand and explore their strongest workforce-relevant skills
- Understand how those skills were reflected in their educational achievement
- View high-earning occupations aligned with their demonstrated skills
- Explore destination jobs connected to their strengths
- Identify destination-aligned starter jobs available immediately after high school
- Better understand pathways into careers of interest by seeing the educational attainment of the people currently employed in each occupation

The pilot was designed not only to test the technology, but also to better understand how students respond when presented with a personalized view of their skills profile and the labor market opportunities and earnings that can be accessed with their skills. Following implementation, **298 students** completed a survey to assess the impact of receiving a skills profile.

What We Learned

The pilot demonstrated that students are eager to better understand the skills they have developed through school and how those skills connect to future employment opportunities. When provided with individualized skills profiles, students reported greater awareness of their top skills in the labor market, stronger connections between skills and in-demand occupations, and increased confidence in the value they can bring to the workforce.

83%

reported that SkillSight helped them better understand their skills and strengths

82%

reported that SkillSight helped them identify opportunities that matched their skills

76%

reported that SkillSight increased their confidence in the value they could bring to an employer

Students Gained Greater Awareness of Their Skills

83% of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that SkillSight helped them better understand their skills and strengths.

Students Better Understood Occupations Aligned with Their Skills

82% of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that SkillSight helped them identify opportunities that matched their skills.

Students Reported Greater Confidence in Their Workforce Value

76% of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that SkillSight increased their confidence in the value they could bring to an employer.

These findings suggest that helping students better understand their skills may play an important role in establishing relevance between their K-12 education, jobs where their skills are in demand, and downstream earning potential. It also improves career navigation by assisting students in making more informed decisions about their futures.

From Skills Awareness to Employment Connections

Helping students understand their skills is an important first step. Awareness of skills can increase motivation and confidence, helping students see the relevance and connection between their learning and earnings. For many students, K-12 education feels disconnected from future opportunities. Assignments feel like boxes that need to be checked for completing a high school diploma rather than an exercise in skill development. However, when students understand how their learning translates to skills — and how those skills translate into earnings and opportunity — the long-term value of learning becomes more visible.

The broader objective of the Skills Currency Initiative is to more efficiently match talent to jobs by creating a stronger connection between education and employment based on skills. ERP envisions a future in which students can:

- Understand the skills they have developed
- Communicate those skills effectively
- Explore jobs aligned with those skills
- Connect directly with employers seeking to hire people with those skills

Employers also benefit when skills become more visible earlier in the talent pipeline. By providing a clearer picture of the skills students have demonstrated through their educational experiences, employers may be able to identify emerging talent and fill in-demand positions sooner and with higher success rates.

"Skills Currency is not intended to steer students toward a particular pathway. Instead, it helps students make more informed decisions by better understanding the skills they have developed and the opportunities aligned with those skills."

Not every student's journey should look the same. For some, the right next step may be a four-year college or university. For others, it may be community college, technical training, military service, an apprenticeship, immediate employment, or some combination of work and continued learning. Skills Currency is designed to support all pathways by helping students understand their strengths and where their skills are most in-demand.

Building a Larger Skills Ecosystem

ERP recognizes that no single initiative will solve the challenge of creating stronger connections between education and employment. Across the country, organizations are investing in Learning and Employment Records (LERs), skills-based hiring systems, workforce talent marketplaces, digital credentials, competency-based learning initiatives, and new approaches to measuring and validating skills.

Skills Currency is complementary to these efforts.

While many initiatives focus on communicating skills or helping employers interpret skills information, Skills Currency focuses on an earlier challenge: generating workforce-relevant skills signals from educational experiences already occurring in K-12 schools to maximize the value of taxpayer investments.

In this way, Skills Currency is intended to contribute to a broader infrastructure that helps students understand their skills, communicate them, and connect directly to gainful employment and economic mobility.



What's Next

The Rowland Unified pilot represents an important first step in developing a scalable employer-led talent to job matching system, but significant work remains. ERP is currently focused on the following priorities.

Employer Engagement & Validation

Working with employers and workforce partners to understand how skills profiles align with workforce demand and hiring practices.

Improving Skills-to-Job Matching

Refining how educational evidence is translated into workforce-relevant skills and how those skills connect to occupations and labor market opportunities.

Expanding Student-to-Employer Connections

Exploring how skills information can help connect students directly with employers whose workforce needs align with demonstrated student strengths.

Continuous Improvement

Evaluating, validating, and refining the Skills Currency algorithm through research, pilots, and ongoing stakeholder feedback.

Phases of Development



An Invitation to Collaborate

Skills Currency is still in its early stages. The pilot represents an important milestone in ERP's ongoing effort to build a scalable solution for aligning and connecting education and employment. Creating a common language between education and employment will require collaboration across sectors and similar initiatives.

ERP looks forward to exploring alignment with similar initiatives and working with partners who share the belief that:

- Students should leave high school with a clear understanding of their most marketable skills for achieving gainful employment and economic mobility
- Employers should have better visibility into the skills of emerging talent
- Educational investments should be leveraged to provide value that extends beyond the classroom

Employers

Help validate workforce-relevant skills and explore new ways of identifying and hiring emerging talent.

Educators & School Systems

Adopt SkillSight for free and make skills profiles available to students and counselors.

Researchers & Measurement Experts

Strengthen methodologies and contribute evidence to the initiative.

Policymakers & Workforce Leaders

Explore how existing educational investments can generate labor market value for students, employers, and local economies.

Learn More & Get in Touch

Organizations interested in learning more, exploring partnership opportunities, or participating in future pilots are encouraged to contact:



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About Educational Results Partnership

Educational Results Partnership (ERP) is a nonprofit data science organization dedicated to improving educational outcomes and expanding economic opportunity through data, research, and innovation. For more than two decades, ERP has worked with educators, policymakers, employers, and community leaders to improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and help students succeed in school and beyond.

ERP is best known for developing tools and initiatives that make educational information more accessible, meaningful, and actionable for students, families, educators, employers, and decision-makers.

Through the Skills Currency initiative, ERP is exploring how educational achievement can be translated into workforce-relevant skills signals that help strengthen the connection between education and employment. By helping students understand the skills they develop through learning and helping employers better understand emerging talent, ERP seeks to create greater value from existing educational investments while expanding opportunities for students.

Learn more at edresults.org

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PILOT PARTNERSHIP

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GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP

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DATA, RESEARCH & VALIDATION

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