



211 Sutter St., #401 • San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: 415.762.8275 • Fax: 202.776.0110

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CONTACT: Jennifer Ortega, California State Director, 916-837-3904, jortega@americasedge.org;
Meghan Moroney, Communications Director, 415-450-1913, mmoroney@americasedge.org

Inland Empire Business Leaders Release Report, Cite Skills Gap Concerns *Highlight Linked Learning as Innovative Education Approach and Solution*

ONTARIO, Calif. – Local business leaders met with education officials, teachers, and community leaders today at Walker Corporation’s manufacturing facility to release a new research report by the national business leaders organization READYNATION/AMERICA’S EDGE. Employers shared their concerns about California’s growing skills gap and highlighted the need for qualified candidates to fill middle- and high-skilled positions throughout the Inland Empire.

“We’ve been looking for a quality control inspector and quality engineer for three months. We need candidates who have good problem-solving skills and a basic understanding of how to provide leadership on the manufacturing floor. Another area where we are struggling to find skilled talent is our tool room,” said **Michael Bermudez**, Vice President and General Manager of Walker Corporation.

The report, “*Fortifying the Inland Empire’s Talent Pipeline: Closing our “Skills Gaps” through Linked Learning*,” forecasts considerable job growth in the technical and professional job sectors and estimates that, by 2020:

- 66 percent of the jobs created in California will require some type of formal education beyond high school;
- 50 percent of the high-growth and high-wage jobs in the Inland Empire will require an associate’s degree or higher; and
- 96 percent of jobs in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) occupations will require some postsecondary education.

Recognizing that today’s K-12 students will become tomorrow’s workforce, Inland Empire business leaders spoke out in support of regional education reform efforts currently underway to help reverse the skills gap. [Linked Learning](#) was cited as an innovative education approach that infuses career relevance into students’ daily curriculum and offers real-world work experiences.

"Inland Empire employers are seeking a highly talented workforce in industries that are critical to California’s economy,” said **Michael Gallo**, President & CEO of Kelly Space & Technology, Inc. “To build a robust talent pipeline, young people must understand what it takes to get a good job. Exposing students to career options early and helping to direct their paths is vital to building our future workforce."

Linked Learning is transforming high school education by helping students understand why they need to know what they are being taught in the classroom, and it keeps them engaged in school.

As of February 2014, America's Edge merged with ReadyNation to become ReadyNation/America's Edge.

These “career academy” pathways are comprised of approximately 200 students who stay together as a cohort, typically with the same teachers, for the duration of their high school experience. This helps inspire a sense of teamwork while students work to develop the 21st-century skills that employers today desire and demand: effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Throughout the state, Linked Learning career pathways are being tailored to regional hiring needs.

“In San Bernardino City Unified, our pathways focus on high-demand sectors such as teaching, manufacturing, logistics, and health care. These are industries that we know will continue to grow here in the Inland Empire. Our goal is to have every one of our 49,000 students in a career pathway by 2017,” said San Bernardino City Unified School District Superintendent **Dr. Dale Marsden**. “The key to our success is collaboration. We have developed some great partnerships with post-secondary institutions, employers, and other community partners.”

California members of READY NATION/AMERICA’S EDGE are calling for continued support of Linked Learning to prepare students for success in both college and careers.

“In order to reverse this widening skills gap and strengthen our pipeline for a more qualified workforce, high school education must be both rigorous and relevant,” said **Jennifer Ortega**, California State Director of READY NATION/AMERICA’S EDGE. “We applaud Inland Empire education and business leaders for embracing Linked Learning as a regional school improvement strategy and as a workforce readiness initiative.”

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READY NATION/AMERICA’S EDGE is a membership organization of more than 1,000 business leaders who work to strengthen businesses and the economy through effective investments in children and youth.