

Education researchers at Pearson are conducting a series of summaries around Pearson's PSCs, the nonacademic skills that support employability. This review focuses on teaching and assessing the skill of social responsibility in K-12 and college classrooms. While we found that social responsibility is clearly valued by employers and is good for society, students may not be graduating with sufficient skills in this area. What follows is a summary of the most significant findings.

## Summary Highlights

- » Social is responsibility too important for college, career, and societal success to leave to chance.

### KEY FINDINGS

- » Employers say job applicants should have strong social responsibility.
- » Social responsibility can be explicitly taught.
- » Social responsibility predicts real-world interpersonal, academic, and societal outcomes.
- » There are several improvements to how social responsibility should be taught.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Incorporate social responsibility into K-12 standards—so it's taught.
- » K-12 educators need professional development, administrative support, and technology for teaching social responsibility.
- » Higher-education institutions need to include social responsibility skills in institutional learning outcomes, provide training for faculty, and fund grants that encourage teaching of social responsibility.
- » Employers need to establish relationships with K-12 schools and institutions of higher education so they can provide information about how social responsibility should manifest itself in the workplace.

## What Does Social Responsibility Look Like?

Social responsibility is broadly defined as taking responsibility to behave ethically and with sensitivity toward social, cultural, civic, and environmental issues. Synthesizing across several frameworks for social responsibility, Pearson has defined social responsibility as consisting of four core dimensions of competence:

- 1. Multicultural:** Is knowledgeable about different cultural identities and sensitive toward cultural differences.
- 2. Ethical:** Demonstrates knowledge and awareness of ethical standards and issues, and applies ethical reasoning and standards to make decisions in ethically ambiguous situations.
- 3. Civic:** Is an informed and active citizen at the local, national, and global level, and understands and acts on issues of local, national, and global significance.
- 4. Environmental:** Is knowledgeable about current issues of environmental significance, is concerned about the well-being of the planet and engages in sustainable behaviors.

## Is There a Skills Gap?

Recent large-scale surveys demonstrate the importance employers place on social responsibility. A survey of employers conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) found agreement among employers that social responsibility should be taught to college students, regardless of their field of study. Employers specifically cited the following aspects of social responsibility:

- knowing how to solve problems with people whose views are different than their own;
- building civic knowledge, skills, and judgment;
- gaining intercultural skills.

Additionally, accreditation and professional competence guidelines indicate the emphasis professionals in many fields place on social responsibility. For example, the American Chemical Society's Guidelines for Chemistry Programs in Two-Year and Community Colleges (2015) details the importance of ethics to the academic and professional success of chemists.

Despite the documented importance of social responsibility, recent graduates may be lacking in these areas. A survey conducted on behalf of the AAC&U found that 81 percent of employers rated "ethical judgment and decision-making" as very important in hiring

decisions, but only 30 percent thought recent college graduates were well prepared in this area. Likewise, 56 percent rated “the ability to analyze and solve problems with people from different backgrounds and cultures” as very important, but only 18 percent rated recent college graduates as well prepared.

## What Support Do Educators Need?

Like any skill, social responsibility must be taught explicitly. Educators can no longer assume that students will naturally develop social responsibility as they mature. Rather, instructors should engage in some amount of direct instruction, teaching students the knowledge base required for social responsibility as well as what social responsibility looks like in terms of desirable behaviors. Students must also have opportunities to practice social responsibility with instructor support and to receive feedback on their performance. Teaching and technology grants may help spur more widespread adoption of innovative teaching practices that support the development of social responsibility.

Stronger alignment between K–12, higher-education, and employer stakeholders will help students fully develop the social responsibility skills they need before transitioning to the workforce. Employers

can sit on advisory boards or work with educational institutions to develop programs for teaching social responsibility. In these positions, employers can communicate what experiences will allow students to practice the aspects of social responsibility that will be important in a specific field. These experiences may be particularly effective when integrated into “Capstone” or other transition-oriented courses for older students preparing to enter the workforce.

Employers can support social responsibility in their employees by communicating the value they place on socially responsible behaviors. Employers can establish clear guidelines around ethical behavior and diversity and inclusion and can adopt sustainability initiatives. Additionally, employers can offer additional time off for employees to participate in volunteer or community-services opportunities. Employers can also utilize recruitment, hiring, and compensation strategies to reward candidates who demonstrate strong social responsibility. For current employees, businesses can develop formal social responsibility training programs that are made widely available or support their employees in seeking out external professional development in these areas. Overall, these practices will help incentivize the development and practice of social responsibility.