

Toward Standards for Textile Manufacturing: Report on the Firm-Level Application of NACFAM Skill Standards at Malden Mills

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Project Overview

After initiating the Project STEPS incumbent worker training program at Malden Mills Inc., project staff identified the potential of skill standards as a communications tool. After exploring the possible applications of the National Voluntary Skill Standards for the Advancement of High Performance Manufacturing (NACFAM), three attempts to formalize the use of these skill standards, and revision of the project's basic skills curriculum to include skills standards, the potential for developing a standards-based human resource development strategy was validated.

Commonwealth Corporation (formerly the Corporation for Business, Work and Learning) received a grant from the US Department of Labor to implement a skill standards pilot project between early 1999 and spring of 2000 at Malden Mills Industries with technical assistance from Education Development, Inc. The purpose of the project was to facilitate and document for others' use, a firm-level application of the NACFAM skills standards.

Research Summary

The project aimed to answer three questions:

Do the National Voluntary Skill Standards for Advanced High Performance Manufacturing capture the skills required of production workers in textile manufacturing?

How can applicable skill standards be used to develop and implement a standards-based curriculum for production workers?

How can these skill standards be used to assess workers' progress and achievement?

Key Findings

Based on focus groups, surveys, and validation workshops involving experienced workers, supervisors, managers, and labor representatives, the National Voluntary Skill Standards for Advanced High Performance Manufacturing provided a good starting point for identifying firm-based skill requirements and standards. It also seemed to capture some of the skills required of production workers in textile manufacturing.

The project found, however, that several of these manufacturing standards are less relevant for textile manufacturing and that these standards did not sufficiently address the basic language, literacy, and computer skills the textile manufacturing industry expects of its (increasingly immigrant) workforce.

The project has shown how consensus regarding the technical and basis skills requirements of entry-level textile manufacturing jobs can be facilitated between key stakeholders and has illustrated how these requirements can be addressed in curriculum and instruction.

One identified area for improvement was the lack of time given to the establishment of a process for incorporating changes in the curriculum.

Assessment scenarios, guidelines and scoring guides allowed project staff to assess workers' progress and achievement in a fair and meaningful way with high inter-rater reliability.