

Southern Growth Policies Board Forum
“Building the Next Southern Workforce”
Huntsville/Madison County Workforce Coalition
January 8, 2007

Approach 1: Focus on Educational Achievement

Skill requirements for jobs are rising across the board. A high school degree is no longer a ticket to success. We need to focus on raising educational achievement and promoting postsecondary education for everyone.

What can be done?

- Reduce high school dropouts and get those who have dropped out back on track.
- Ensure that everyone has the basic skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education.
- Redefine high schools and promote more seamless transitions to postsecondary education, such as through dual enrollment programs with community colleges.
- Develop outreach and support programs to increase minority and disadvantaged enrollment and retention in postsecondary education.

In Support:

- More than three-quarters of the nation's fastest growing jobs require at least some postsecondary education.
- The weekly earnings for workers with bachelor's degrees were 60 percent higher than those with high school degrees in 2005.
- The U.S. ranks fifth among developed countries in terms of college participation rates, but drops to 16th in terms of college completion.

In Opposition:

- There are plenty of good jobs that require less than a college degree. Parents and counselors need to know about and promote these opportunities.
- It's too expensive to expect everyone to get a postsecondary degree. How will we pay for this?
- It's unrealistic to expect everyone to go on to postsecondary education. Some are just not cut out for it.

How does this apply to Huntsville/Madison County?

- We need to promote more hands-on tech and applied skills
- Upgrade tech training
- Supply chain, need to understand end demand
- A regional job board is needed for post-secondary level jobs
- You can't just use one approach for all kids (need more programs, options, and assessment tests)
- Need more parental involvement in K-12
- Change in curriculum for more tech skills (legislature)
- Start career education programs younger (4-6 grade)
- K-12, not just 9-12, connected to community needs assessment
- Relate expenditures to end results
- Need continuity in assessment , opportunities for self assessments
- Increase industry partnerships
- Overachieve – strive for excellence

- Collaboration between education and parents, not just focus on college
- Job shadowing
- Increase dual enrollment between high school students and industry
- Culture change, starts at birth (ethics)
- Systemic problems, capture influence of media & technology
- Need a leader
- Need more involvement from the parents.
- Need to project the demand from the perspective of the workplace
- Strengthen linkages between K-12, community colleges and trade schools

Approach 2: Focus on Serving Industry

Businesses create most of the jobs in the region, so we should focus on serving their needs. Workforce skills need to match workplace needs. What good does it do to get a degree if you don't have the right skills to get a job?

What can be done?

- Work with business to identify skill sets needed for workers in various industries and develop certification programs around them.
- Boost investments in community colleges.
- Promote high school career academies and other school-to-career programs.
- Connect workforce development programs on a regional basis.

In Support:

- More than 80 percent of manufacturers say they are having trouble finding qualified employees.
- The current role of businesses in workforce development is often superficial and/or sporadic.
- A recent survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce showed that well over half of businesses weren't aware of workforce development centers in their area.

In Opposition:

- This approach ties us to industries that may not be around in the future.
- It's hard to change the curriculum rapidly enough to meet changing employer needs.
- We need to teach the ability to learn, not work-specific training. This approach doesn't promote creativity or holistic thinking.

How does this apply to Huntsville/Madison County?

- Disconnect between industry and schools, provide incentives to connect stakeholders
- Image problem: business needs vs. education
- Focus on community college, school to career (AIDT award winning)
- Promoting careers at the high school level, career academics
- Incentives for industry to work with education to promote careers
- Better for industry to define needs and technology
- Coop, job shadowing
- Help with soft skills
- Need education to focus on workplace linkages
- More money, better spending of existing money
- Promote critical thinking, work problems in the classroom
- Industry assessment so education can serve long term, not just immediate
- Industry in class (everyone's job)
- On the job training in high school for technology, European approach
- Teacher in –service /experience in industry (more than a day)
- How to break out of education and industry cocoons
- Swap from higher ed to industrial

Approach 3: Focus on Workforce Traits

Technological advances and global competition have increased the pace of change for today's businesses. As a result, workers can expect to change jobs-and even careers-many times throughout their work life. The best preparation is the development of a good work ethic, a value for lifelong learning, and transferable skills such as flexibility, teamwork and self-initiative.

What Can Be Done?

- Include ethics education and soft skills, such as communication and team building, in the school curriculum at all levels.
- Expand opportunities for lifelong learning through flexible and affordable strategies.
- Teach entrepreneurial skills and encourage entrepreneurial attitudes.
- Get parents more involved.

In Support:

- Workers need to be prepared for job changes. Recent data show that Baby Boomers held an average of 10.5 jobs and had 4.9 spells of unemployment between the ages of 18 and 40.
- Flexibility and the ability to learn are critical components of innovation.
- In 2005 survey, manufacturers rated "basic employability skills," such as timeliness and communication, just as important as technical skills.

In Opposition:

- Character is difficult to teach and impossible to measure.
- Parents, not schools, should be responsible for character development.
- A nice smile and good listening skills aren't enough in today's technological world.

How does this apply to Huntsville/Madison County?

- Better career paths/assessments for students (K-12, post secondary)
- Soft skills included
- Connect counselors to industry
- Educate parents, not entitlement to job
- Ethics need to be taught (also on company boards)
- Start with ethics basics in kindergarten
- Teachers work with industry in summer, summer tours
- Lead by example, lifelong learning and keeping with technology
- Industry in classroom has more impact than a teacher or parent
- Inertia in schools, basics needed but also need flexibility, get ahead of industry curve
- Teach life long skills to teachers (model life skills)
- Inquiry based learning for teachers (taught at Vandy, other regional schools?)
- Kids don't know how to work with people who aren't like them, need to start early
- Developing top students into top adults (get them to HSV, keep them here through coop programs)
- Look at what other communities have done, don't reinvent the wheel
- Develop clear messages for kids; deliver to community groups so they can share
- Identify leader, articulate message, weave tapestry of education/industry/life skills
- Involve industry in career counseling process

Synthesis of Discussion of the Three Approaches

Commonalities:

- Need to recognize new means of communication (podcasts, MySpace)
- Need collaboration
- Need flexibility
- Long-term commitment and strategic approach
- Need for culture change

Conflicts/Trade Offs:

- Money
- Institutional self interest
- What is assessed, what teachers have to do vs. industry needs
- No commonalities among assessments; not looking at results; assessments are based on information, not skills
- Consistency between all levels of assessment
- Lose the silver bullet mentality.

Action Steps for Huntsville/Madison County:

- Start with problem statement tailored to community, assess needs, prioritize
- Benchmarking share plans/progress
- Go to powers that be in state education; get top down action planning (finance curriculum)
- Story told by collaborative group of industry/education/community
- Need money to do more
- Develop a plan for industry involvement, assessment of existing programs
- Specific plan for Huntsville/MC/North Alabama and go forward, bring Montgomery with us
- Don't get bogged down by "is it legal, can we afford it?"