Building the Next Workforce
Georgia Discussion Forums: Consolidated Results

In Support of the
Southern Growth Policies Board

Prepared for

Governor's Office of Workforce Development
State Workforce Investment Board
Georgia Department of Labor Workforce Investment Board
U.S. Economic Development Administration

Prepared by

**Georgia Tech's Enterprise Innovation Institute and
the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through the Southern Growth Policies Board, Governors and other key leaders of thirteen states and Puerto Rico jointly investigate economic development issues of high priority across the South. Each year, an issue is selected for in-depth research that results in policy and action recommendations for implementation at local, state, and regional levels. A critical part of the effort to explore the issue is the facilitation of community-based forums. In 2007, the key policy question was "What can we do to build a competitive workforce for the future?"

At the beginning of 2007, the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, State Workforce Investment Board and the Georgia Department of Labor initiated a broad-based and collaborative partnership for conducting regional discussion forums to gather input on Southern Growth's policy question in Georgia. These forums were also sponsored by the U.S. Economic Development Administration, hosted by Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) across Georgia, and supported by a university team comprised of faculty from Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia. The forums were facilitated by staff from these two universities as well as from Georgia State University and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

The 2007 forums became the platform to generate dialogue concerning key workforce development challenges and to discuss actions and creative solutions, including the Georgia "Certified Work Ready Community" (CWRC) program, for addressing these challenges. The forums helped foster awareness for the CWRC program and, as of May 2007, 72 of Georgia's 159 counties had committed to participate. As a result of the efforts of the WIBs, Georgia's forums included approximately 800 stakeholders across the state. Following are some of the common threads expressed at many of the forums.

- Developing a competitive workforce was widely viewed as an area with critical challenges and opportunities for Georgia that must be addressed.
- The current workforce was largely seen as needing development in hard skills, soft skills, and life skills. Likewise, young people, the emerging and future workforce, were viewed as needing greater preparation in these skills.
- Many problems in the workforce were seen as symptoms of systemic problems in society at large. Lack of parental involvement and issues relating to the home environment were frequently cited as major barriers.
- A "disconnect" between businesses and educators was regularly observed, with stakeholders calling for greater interaction and coordination.
- Georgia was viewed as having strength in the programs that support business training and retraining needs but there is also an evident lack of awareness of the existence and value of such resources.
- Workforce development was largely seen as being a "shared responsibility," which requires a holistic approach – among employers, educators, economic developers, social service organizations, the faith-based community, and several others.

Given the growing globalization of the state's economy, Georgia's future economic prosperity hinges on its ability to develop a competitive workforce. This necessitates the greatest sense of urgency in addressing the state's challenges through collaborative solutions. To that end, for many stakeholders, these forums provided a unique and first-time opportunity for them to come together and discuss potential solutions with other stakeholders in their region. The forum participants largely saw the dialogue to be of value for discovering new ways of working together, called for it to continue in a regional context, and were greatly interested in following up with ACTION.

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ABOUT THE FORUMS

Georgia's 2007 forums were conducted in support of the Southern Workforce Summit and as part of the Southern Growth Policies Board's annual effort to explore pertinent economic development issues. Georgia's participation in Southern Growth is led by the following Trustees:

Governor Sonny Perdue
Representative David Casas
Chris Clark, CEcD
Nancy Cobb
O.B. McCorkle
Senator Jeff E. Mullis

This effort was sponsored by the Governor's Office of Workforce Development and State Workforce Investment Board, the Georgia Department of Labor, and the U.S. Economic Development Administration and hosted by Workforce Investment Boards across Georgia.

Debra Lyons
Governor's Office of Workforce Development

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Georgia Department of Labor

Phil Paradice
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ABOUT SOUTHERN GROWTH

The Southern Growth Policies Board is a non-partisan public policy think tank based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina. Formed by the region's Governors in 1971, Southern Growth develops and advances visionary economic development policies by providing a forum for collaboration among a diverse cross-section of the region's governors, legislators, business and academic leaders, and the economic and community development sectors. Supported by the governments of 13 Southern states – Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia – and the commonwealth of Puerto Rico - Southern Growth provides a gathering place for regional collaboration.

The Board's research focus encompasses the major drivers for economic development in the South – innovation and technology, globalization, the changing nature of the workforce, and the vital role of the community. Southern Growth provides its members and the region with authoritative research, discussion forums, and pilot projects that define the critical issues shaping the South. The Board develops new regional strategies for economic development and identifies best practices to facilitate action.

For further information on Southern Growth or the forums, visit www.southern.org or contact:

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INTRODUCTION

Through the Southern Growth Policies Board, Governors and other key leaders of thirteen states and Puerto Rico jointly investigate economic development issues of high priority across the South. Each year, an issue is selected for in-depth research that results in policy and action recommendations for implementation at local, state, and regional levels. Southern Growth's annual study cycle includes strategy retreats, state-level policy dialogues, local discussion forums (conducted by volunteer and service organizations across the South), and secondary research. Following is the timeline of events that have resulted in Georgia's significant involvement in this effort.

- In 2005, Southern Growth Policies Board launched its "Southern Innovation Initiative" noting that "The South's competitiveness relies on establishing a culture of innovation – the ability to continuously invent and bring high value products and processes to the global marketplace."

- In 2006, consensus was raised among stakeholders across the South, including nearly 400 in Georgia, during discussion forums on innovation and technology held for Southern Growth that "building knowledge" – that is, building a high performance workforce – is a pre-requisite to all other approaches for fostering innovation. Participants often stated that without building a high performance workforce, there is not a need to even bother to pursue the other approaches. Georgia's participation was coordinated through Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia and in partnership with the Georgia Centers of Innovation and more than a dozen other local and regional partners across the state. Faculty members from the two universities developed a report detailing the findings and policy implications resulting from the forums.

- Also in 2006, as a result of the forums on innovation and technology, Southern Growth identified "Building the Next Workforce" as its policy focus for 2007. Building the Next Workforce is a natural follow-on to the findings of the innovation and technology discussion forums. Southern Growth selected Georgia to host a state-level policy dialogue.

- In 2007, Georgia once again answered the call for action by Southern Growth to coordinate discussion forums across the state. Specifically, at the beginning of 2007, the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, State Workforce Investment Board and the Georgia Department of Labor initiated a broad-based and collaborative partnership for conducting these forums. Southern Growth provided facilitation materials to support the discussion forums. The Georgia team customized these materials to include topics and questions tailored to the state and specific regions within the state. In February, local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) planned and hosted 12 regional discussion forums across Georgia. Coordination support was provided by Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia. The forums were facilitated by staff from these two universities as well as from Georgia State University and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

The 2007 forums became the platform to generate dialogue concerning key workforce development challenges and to discuss actions and creative solutions, including the Georgia "Certified Work Ready Community" program, for addressing these challenges. The forums helped foster awareness for the CWRC program and, as of May 2007, 72 of Georgia's 159 counties had committed to participate. As a result of the efforts of the WIBs, Georgia's forums included approximately 800 stakeholders across the state. Representatives from business, economic development, education, local government, non-profit, and workforce development organizations participated in each forum.

The fundamental question for the 2007 policy research project was:

"What can we do to build a competitive workforce for the future?"

This question was addressed at all of the regional forums by posing specific questions and open dialog. Five discussion themes were pursued, summarized by the propositions below.

- 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.

- 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.

- Serving business and 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?

- Regional issues: Local and regional issues, challenges, and realities can become unfocused in the "big picture" of policy development. Yet often the most creative and effective answers to these challenges are invented at a local level. Examples of issues that vary in priority across the state are: the rapidly growing foreign-born population, concentration of elderly workers, persistent poverty, development of key economic sectors, brain drain, and barriers to effective local partnerships.

- Creative solutions, including "Certified Work Ready Community" program: Georgia has long been a leader in devising innovative private and public sector solutions to workforce development challenges, and many states have implemented duplicate programs. While there is a broad array of programs and services offering creative solutions to many of the challenges and questions related to building the next workforce, the state is always looking for fresh and creative approaches.

In total, the discussion forums resulted in a rich variety of insights and suggested next steps. This report provides an overview and summary of the discussions and results. It is an umbrella report to the twelve reports that cover the individual regional forums.

The authors of this report express grateful appreciation for the leadership and sponsorship provided by the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, State Workforce Investment Board, and Georgia Department of Labor and the support provided by the U.S. Economic Development Administration. And the conducting of these forums would have not been possible without valuable contributions from the local Workforce Investment Boards, Georgia State University, and the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. This effort also benefited from advice and guidance provided by the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, Georgia Economic Developers Association, Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education, and the University System of Georgia (ICAPP Program).
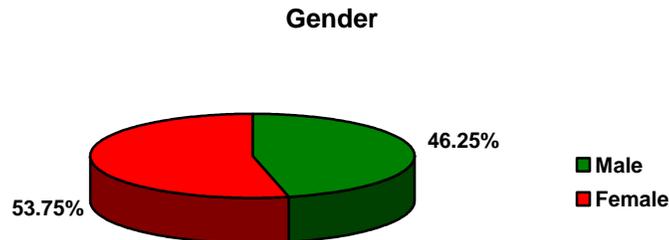
FORUM PARTICIPATION

Georgia's forums reached approximately 800 stakeholders across the state. Representatives from the government, education, the non-profit sector, the business community, and other sectors participated in each forum. Following is a breakdown of attendance by region:

Region 1: 50	Region 5: 40	Region 9: 32
Region 2: 48	Region 6: 68	Region 10: 48
Region 3: 106	Region 7: 99	Region 11: 91
Region 4: 50	Region 8: 61	Region 12: 55

In addition, a second forum in Region 1 was hosted by the Dalton-Whitfield Chamber of Commerce and supported by the university facilitation team for 63 participants.

While coordinators of the forums made a significant effort to invite and encourage as widespread participation as possible, it is important to note that participation was optional and, therefore, based on self selection. As a result, some groups had more representation than others.
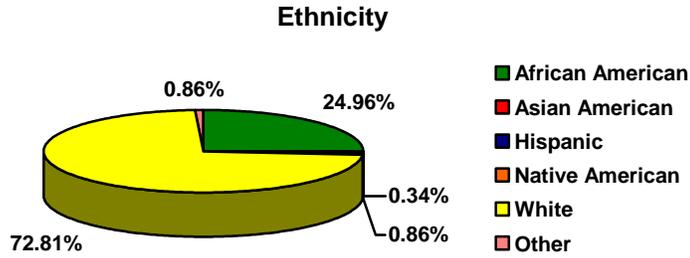
Women outweighed participation by men in six of the 12 forums. The remaining six forums had a higher participation of men than women. Taking the state as a whole, more than half of Georgia's participants in the forums were women.

Gender

46.25% Male
53.75% Female

Participation by women was most evident in Region 12. Region 9 had the highest male participation of the forums.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
Male	55.56%	52.50%	36.62%	43.75%	61.76%	56.82%
Female	44.44%	47.50%	63.38%	56.25%	38.24%	43.18%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
Male	40.43%	52.17%	62.50%	46.34%	39.76%	31.37%
Female	59.57%	47.83%	37.50%	53.66%	60.24%	68.63%

The vast majority of participants were White (72.81 percent). One-fourth of the stakeholders were African Americans. However, the degree of diversity was limited as the other racial and ethnic groups had only fractional representation.

Ethnicity

- ■ African American
- ■ Asian American
- ■ Hispanic
- ■ Native American
- □ White
- ■ Other

0.86%
24.96%
0.34%
0.86%
72.81%

Some regions enjoyed more diverse representation than others. For example, more than half of the participants in Region 6 were African American.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
African American	5.13%	4.76%	44.00%	25.00%	5.71%	53.19%
Asian American	0.00%	0.00%	1.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Hispanic	0.00%	0.00%	1.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Native American	2.56%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
White	92.31%	95.24%	49.34%	75.00%	94.29%	46.81%
Other	0.00%	0.00%	4.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
African American	16.33%	26.67%	4.17%	45.65%	17.44%	26.92%
Asian American	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Hispanic	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Native American	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.65%	0.00%
White	79.59%	73.33%	95.83%	54.35%	77.91%	73.08%
Other	4.08%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Approximately half of the forums' stakeholders were between the ages of 50 and 64, accounting for the largest share of participants. About one-third were in their 30s and 40s. The retiree workforce (65 years and older) was lacking in representation accounting for a small share of the participation. An even smaller fraction of the participants were less than 30 years of age indicating that these forums largely lacked the benefit of participation by the emerging and future workforce.

Age

0.17% 6.36%
7.56%
36.25%
49.66%

- ■ 17 & younger
- ■ 18-29
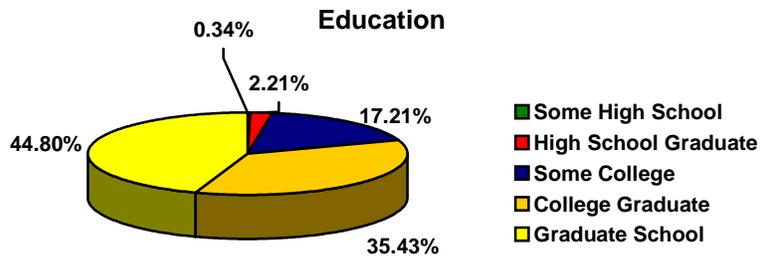- ■ 30-49
- ■ 50-64
- □ 65 & Older
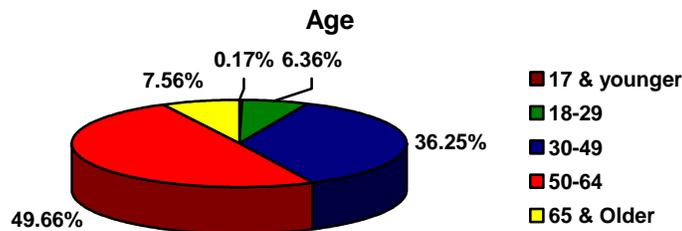
There was virtually no representation from the 17 and younger age group, with only one participant present at the Region 11 forum. Regions 5 and 8 did not have any participants under the age of 30. Region 3 had a higher share of such participants than the other forums.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
17 & Younger	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
18-29	7.69%	7.14%	12.33%	3.13%	0.00%	8.33%
30-49	25.64%	23.81%	27.40%	40.62%	32.43%	43.75%
50-64	53.85%	59.53%	57.53%	43.75%	51.35%	43.75%
65 & Older	12.82%	9.52%	2.74%	12.50%	16.22%	4.17%

| Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
17 & Younger	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.18%	0.00%
18-29	2.09%	0.00%	4.17%	10.64%	7.06%	1.89%
30-49	37.50%	40.00%	20.83%	46.81%	34.12%	50.94%
50-64	58.33%	44.44%	50.00%	42.55%	50.58%	43.40%
65 & Older	2.08%	15.56%	25.00%	0.00%	7.06%	3.77%

Participants were highly educated overall, with over 80 percent indicating they had a college or graduate degree when asked to provide their highest level of educational attainment. The largest share of participants reported to have attended graduate school.

Education

0.34%
2.21%
17.21%
44.80%
35.43%

- Some High School
- High School Graduate
- Some College
- College Graduate
- Graduate School

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
Some High School	0.00%	0.00%	1.33%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
GED	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
High School Graduate	5.41%	2.44%	0.00%	3.13%	2.78%	2.08%
Some College	27.03%	7.32%	10.67%	9.38%	25.00%	10.42%
College Graduate	29.73%	39.02%	36.00%	31.25%	38.89%	39.58%
Graduate School	37.83%	51.22%	52.00%	56.25%	33.33%	47.92%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
Some High School	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.14%	0.00%
GED	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
High School Graduate	4.08%	0.00%	8.33%	2.13%	2.27%	0.00%
Some College	12.24%	15.56%	33.33%	25.53%	26.14%	13.21%
College Graduate	46.94%	24.44%	29.17%	34.04%	38.64%	24.53%
Graduate School	36.74%	60.00%	29.17%	38.30%	31.82%	62.26%

More than one-third (36.58 percent) of the participants indicated they were employed in government. Education, which included post-secondary institutions, accounted for the second largest share of participants. Together, education and government accounted for more than half of the participation. Approximately one out of every 6 participants represented business interests.
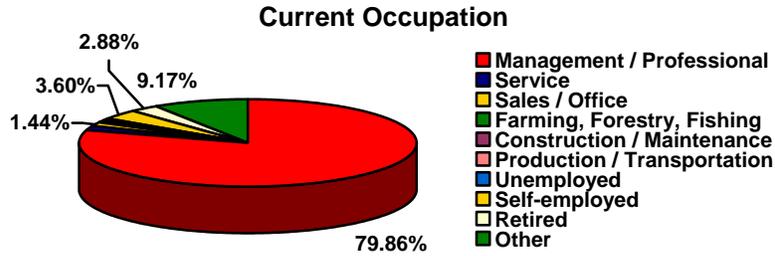
Employment by Sector
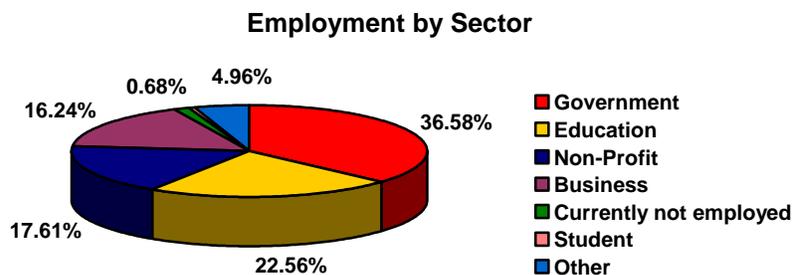
The only forums where government employees did not make up a majority of participants were Regions 4 and 10, where they were outnumbered by education sector employees. Business participation was highest in Region 8.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
Government	33.33%	50.00%	38.35%	25.00%	34.28%	29.17%
Business	17.95%	16.67%	8.22%	18.80%	14.29%	25.00%
Nonprofit	12.82%	16.67%	30.14%	9.40%	20.00%	25.00%
Education	25.65%	14.28%	20.55%	28.10%	22.86%	18.75%
Student	2.56%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Currently not employed	0.00%	2.38%	0.00%	3.10%	5.71%	0.00%
Other	7.69%	0.00%	2.74%	15.60%	2.86%	2.08%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
Government	36.73%	26.67%	54.17%	29.79%	45.46%	35.85%
Business	18.37%	26.67%	16.67%	2.13%	14.77%	20.75%
Nonprofit	16.33%	20.00%	12.50%	17.02%	10.23%	18.87%
Education	20.41%	17.78%	8.33%	36.16%	21.59%	24.53%
Student	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.13%	2.27%	0.00%
Currently not employed	0.00%	4.44%	0.00%	4.26%	0.00%	0.00%
Other	8.16%	4.44%	8.33%	8.51%	5.68%	0.00%

The vast majority (79.86 percent) of the participants indicated they held management and professional occupations. Another 9.17 percent reported to hold service occupations. The distribution of participants by their current occupation was fairly similar across the forums.

Current Occupation

- Management / Professional
- Service
- Sales / Office
- Farming, Forestry, Fishing
- Construction / Maintenance
- Production / Transportation
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Retired
- Other

2.88%
3.60%
9.17%
1.44%
79.86%

More than half of the participants reported they lived in a rural community. Over one-fourth indicated they lived in a suburban area, while nearly one-fifth indicated that they hailed from an urban area.

Type of Community

- Rural
- Suburban
- Urban

19.38%
52.08%
28.55%
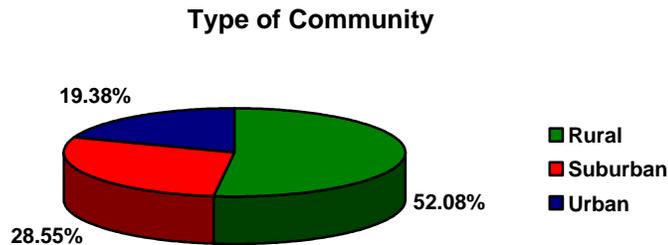
Stakeholders with rural origins accounted for the majority of participants in most forums, with a few exceptions. Region 3 had the smallest share of participants from rural areas and highest percentage of participants from urban and suburban areas. Regions 6, 8, and 12, also had more participation by urban and suburban stakeholders than those with rural origins. Region 9 had the most rural and least urban/suburban participation of the forums.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
Rural	53.84%	66.67%	6.76%	58.06%	51.35%	44.68%
Urban	17.95%	4.76%	33.78%	3.23%	27.03%	14.89%
Suburban	28.21%	28.57%	59.46%	38.71%	21.62%	40.43%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
Rural	70.21%	44.44%	79.17%	65.96%	77.65%	41.18%
Urban	21.28%	26.67%	12.50%	19.15%	11.76%	27.45%
Suburban	8.51%	28.89%	8.33%	14.89%	10.59%	31.37%

HIGHLIGHTS OF DISCUSSION

Workforce development was widely viewed by stakeholders across Georgia as an area of critical challenges and opportunities for the state that must be addressed. The future workforce – the state's youth - was widely described as needing greater preparation for today's jobs and tomorrow's opportunities. The current workforce – the state's adults – was largely seen as needing greater development in the skills and talents needed by the state's businesses to be competitive in a global economy. Participants called for the need to build a more flexible, transitional, and creative workforce and largely linked it to Georgia's future economic development potential.

For many stakeholders, these forums provided a unique and first-time opportunity for them to come together and discuss workforce development challenges and potential solutions from a regional perspective. A common conclusion among the forums was that the dialog was valuable and informative - resulting in the discovery of new ways of working together- and that the dialog should continue, in a regional context.

Following are select points made by stakeholders in various regions regarding three of the main discussion themes – educational achievement among the emerging and future workforce, current workforce traits, and serving industry. As is the case with forums of this nature and scope, the participants offered highly generalized observations. Two other discussion themes are also briefly highlighted in this section - issues of regional importance and creative solutions.

The Emerging and Future Workforce

By far, educational achievement garnered the greatest level of discussion region-to-region than any other discussion theme. The general consensus among the vast majority of forum participants was that greater efforts are called for in preparing young people with the skills and talents required by the state's competitive industries. Stakeholders across Georgia provided many valuable insights relevant to their region. The following summarizes some of the common threads of discussion at the forums.

▪ **Emphasis on the value of education and hard work is lacking.** Stakeholders across Georgia saw the need for greater emphasis on the importance of education, hard work, and life-long learning among young people. The inability among today's youth to see the value of these pursuits was widely discussed as a national challenge. Other cultures were praised for more strongly stressing the importance of learning as a core part of everyday life. Stakeholders called for greater efforts to help people see the "What's In It For Me?" relating to education and hard work.

▪ **Educational achievement is strongly linked to the home environment and societal issues, and is cyclical and intergenerational in nature.** Across the state, stakeholders called for continued efforts to "break the cycle" on intergenerational challenges. Participants identified several challenges affecting educational achievement, such as: teen pregnancy, drug or substance abuse, the feeling of being "uncared for" and consequent low self-esteem, poverty, racial barriers, and lack of parental involvement. The link between educational achievement and family income was discussed in several forums. For example, pursuing higher education was observed to be generally encouraged less frequently within lower income families.

- **Many of today's youth have a greater sense of self-entitlement.** Stakeholders largely saw today's youth as having unrealistic and higher expectations, such as expecting higher returns for less effort, than previous generations. It was discussed how young people in previous generations were forced to engage in hard work - and therefore learned the value of such work - at an earlier age through daily chores or other situations. In addition, this was also linked to parental attitudes and noted as being cyclical and intergenerational in nature.

- **Young people are largely lacking in hard, soft, and life skills.** Georgia's young people were generally seen as needing greater proficiency in *hard skills* such as reading, writing, math, science, problem-solving, and critical thinking; *soft skills* such as work ethic, integrity, commitment, professionalism, and maintaining interpersonal relationships; and *life skills* such as how to dress appropriately, handling finances, managing households, and taking care of themselves. This was a focal topic of discussion at every forum.

- **The earliest possible intervention is needed for addressing barriers to educational achievement.** Predominantly, stakeholders advocated the need to address issues before high school with several suggesting this occur as early in elementary school as possible. Participants discussed the lack of an effective early intervention system that identifies high risk students, those needing remedial help, and those needing gifted services. It was discussed how students who experience problems in later grades fell behind in earlier grades. In terms of how early to start efforts, some participants noted how students sometimes mentally drop out in second grade. Others suggested greater focus on early childhood development, including reaching children as early as ages 0 to 5.

- **Dropouts and low achievers impact the learning environment for all.** Participants discussed concerns about how potential dropouts and lower achievers can have a negative impact on the learning environment in terms of affecting the performance of other students. They discussed how disruptive behavior by some students can distract others from learning. It was also shared how high achieving students may experience peer pressure to not perform as well as they have the potential to perform. Participants also called for greater efforts to help lower achieving students become higher achievers.

- **Greater career counseling and coaching is needed statewide.** Generally, participants saw a need for greater counseling support for young people and many cited the new Graduation Coach program as a step in the right direction. Young people were seen as being challenged in defining career goals and in developing a workable path from A to B to reach such goals. Parents were generally viewed as being unaware of where the economy is heading and the consequent implications for the job market. Participants noted a lack of knowledge about where to find information about career and work opportunities for industry today and in the future. They also stressed the need for better communication of available information to parents. The stakeholders called for providing career guidance to children at the earliest possible age. They also suggested providing individualized or customized assessments rather than trying to categorize students into common groups.

- **Many young people need remedial training.** Employers and higher education professionals alike shared frustrations relating to the lack of preparedness among the workforce in regions across the state for entering the

workforce or post-secondary educational options, whether it be two-year or four-year degree pursuits. It was estimated that anywhere from six-to-12 months is spent on training first year students before they can begin regular instruction.

- **One key missing link for students is in real-life application.** Across the state, participants called for greater connectivity between business and schools, between real life application and what students are learning. Participants called for the better alignment of high school and post secondary education curricula to real life skills required and to those skills which match the region's available and emerging jobs. They discussed the need to help students visualize how what they are learning in math and science can be applied to solving real world problems. Providing students with relevant work experience and exposure to the business / employer community was widely advocated. Several participants called for increased "vocational training" in high school and noted how such training was more available for previous generations. In addition, participants suggested increasing efforts to show students how they can apply what they're learning to every day life situations (e.g., how to use their math skills to manage their finances.)

- **Technical college carries a cultural stigma.** Leaders in several forums discussed how there continues to be an emphasis on the pursuit of a four-year degree and how parents and students assign negative connotations to a technical degree. It was discussed in several forums how children are encouraged to see the four-year college option as the only option to be successful. The lack of understanding among parents regarding viable and desirable career options made possible through a technical education was discussed. Participants also discussed how technical college pursuits are not as strongly encouraged by school counselors or student peers.

- **Access to technology can help and hinder.** Some participants discussed the technology crutch, how technology tools (computers, calculators, etc.) have dissuaded learning of basic mathematical and grammar concepts. Others discussed how student's early adoption of and interest in entertainment technologies could be leveraged to help foster more workplace type technical skills.

- **Programs that work should be expanded and leveraged.** Stakeholders identified a number of effective programs implemented in various communities across the state and noted how such programs are either (a) underutilized, (b) limited in capacity, or (c) short-term due to funding or other constraints. Participants largely recognized the pervasive nature of the challenges and a long history of working to address the challenges through a number of programs, and called for the need to strengthen and replicate programs and ideas that work.

- **Educational achievement is a shared responsibility.** Generally, stakeholders recognized a variety of factors affecting educational achievement and concluded that the solution does not just rest with one organization or entity but through a collaborative effort. Leaders discussed how the root cause of educational achievement problems cannot be found affiliated with a single source and that the responsibility for addressing these concerns is shared - by parents, school administrators, teachers, the community at-large, etc. Strengthening the home environment and improving positive parental involvement was advocated across the state. Many called for greater collaboration among various entities (government, education, labor, business and industry) for addressing educational achievement issues.

▪ **Other**. Participants discussed a number of other issues affecting educational achievement such as changes in political administration, demographic shifts, the influence of the media, lack of adequate support for children with special needs, and the financial strength of the school district, among others. Regarding the latter, it was shared how in one of the state's more rural and resource constrained regions, text books are not available for every student.

Participants were asked a number of questions – framed by Southern Growth – before and after the forum relating to whether they support specific measures to improve educational achievement. For example, they were asked to indicate whether they agreed with including soft skills in the school curriculum. The majority of participants indicated they "somewhat agree" with this action and, when reviewing the share of such responses received before and after the forums, it appears that such support increased notably.

Include Soft Skills in Curriculum?
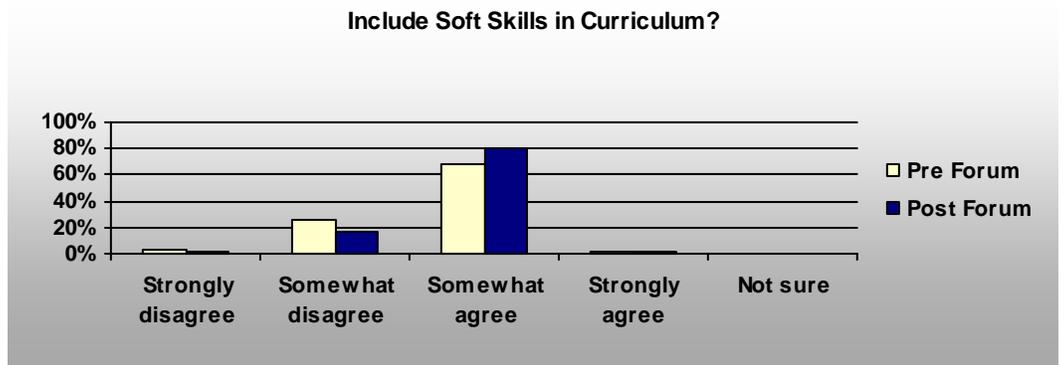
Participants were also asked to indicate whether they agreed with developing outreach and support programs aimed specifically at minority and disadvantaged students IN ORDER TO increase their enrollment and retention in post secondary education. The "somewhat agree" responses accounted for the largest share and increased following the forums, while the share of "disagree" responses dipped after the forums.

**Develop Programs for Minority and Disadvantaged Students?**
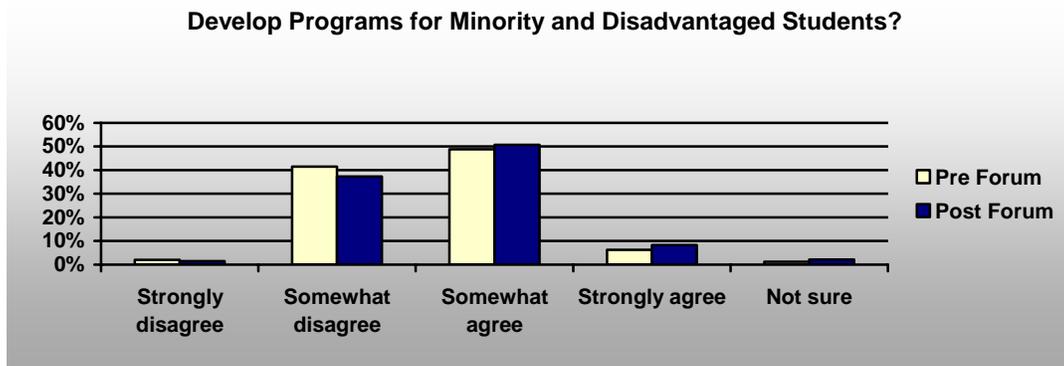
Whether entrepreneurial training should be provided in K-12 was another question posed to the participants. The lack of major shifts in the share of responses provided before and after the forums for this question signals that there may not have been much change in opinion.

Provide Entrepreneurial Training in K-12?
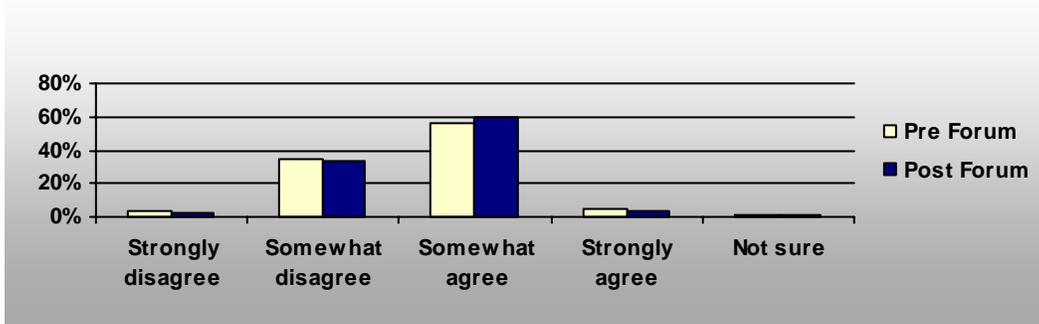
To gauge the degree to which participants supported investing in the promotion of post-secondary education for everyone, they were asked to indicate whether they thought communities should do so EVEN IF it meant raising taxes. While the largest share of participants somewhat disagreed with this approach, the share of such responses was lower after the forums than before the forums. The most notable difference was in the share of the "somewhat agree" responses which was higher following the forums, indicating some willingness to personally invest (via taxes) in promoting post-secondary education for all.

Promote Post-Secondary Education for Everyone EVEN IF It Means Raising Taxes?
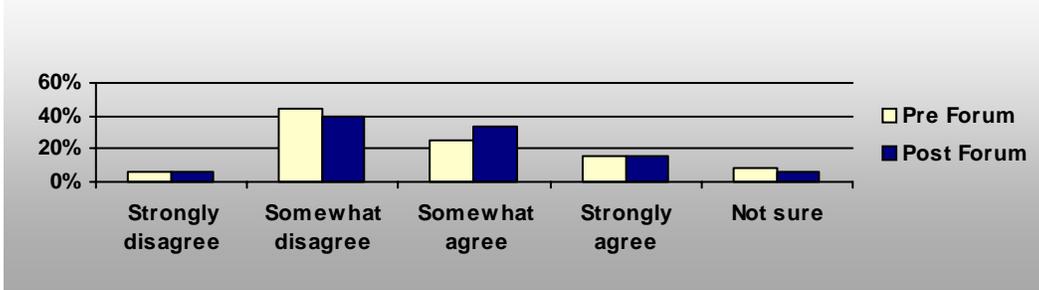
The Current Workforce

Leaders across Georgia in rural and urban regions alike identified several workforce traits that hinder the ability of the state's businesses to be competitive not just within a national and global context but also within a local and regional context. Notably, many of the traits the stakeholders observed regarding the current workforce were similar to those they observed when discussing the state's youth or its emerging and future workforce. Participants called for significant improvements in fostering more desirable workforce traits and largely linked it to Georgia's future economic development potential. The following summarizes some of the common threads of discussion at the forums.

▪ **Much of the existing workforce is significantly lacking in "soft skills" and "life skills."** Workers in many regions were described as lacking job pride and self-accountability. Participants discussed how it is difficult to find workers who will arrive to work on time, work consistently, and stay with a given employer for a reasonable duration. Tardiness, absenteeism, and dropping out of

work were largely recognized by stakeholders as tied to habits rooted in an individual's youth and school experiences. It was also observed that there is a lack of a professional mindset among the workforce in terms of dealing with management, co-workers, and customers. Across the state, they discussed the lack of team leadership, relationship building, customer service, self-confidence, self-drive, confidentiality, and other professional aptitudes. Participants also noted a tendency to "dress down" rather than use professional attire. While the technical colleges were noted to foster the development of soft skills, participants generally saw the need to start much earlier. Beyond this, financial illiteracy was also shared to be evident among many workers.

- **Current workers are also largely lacking critical "hard skills."** It was shared how employers often have to provide remedial training in basic skills to their adult workforce. Beyond math and science, participants discussed how workers lack the critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills required by today's industries. Lack of technical skills was also identified with participants discussing the need for workers to better update their skills for using today's technologies, especially displaced workers. The need for remediation was largely recognized as directly tied to educational achievement issues. Beyond this, participants also saw the need for fostering entrepreneurship in the workforce.

- **Employers are challenged in finding a "drug-free" workforce.** In regions across the state, leaders discussed how difficult it is to find workers who are drug-free. While some observed that workers in their region have difficulty passing a drug test, others shared how many drug-users have mastered how to pass drug tests. In one region, it was shared how two-out-of-five applicants will not pass a drug test. In another region, it was shared how local employers will accept individuals with a criminal background who are drug-free over workers who have a history of abusing drugs but have not engaged in criminal activity. The challenge in finding workers without a criminal background was discussed in some regions.

- **Many workers have a sense of self-entitlement.** Participants discussed how many workers have the mindset that they are owed something by society without having to work hard for it. Stakeholders also described the workforce as expecting immediate gratification and as having unrealistic expectations. Displaced workers from the textile industry were mentioned repeatedly as an example of a group of workers who expected to be paid relatively high wages for their minimal educational achievement because they had been successfully paid such wages in their previous work. As with the youth, participants saw adult worker attitudes as derived from one's upbringing and being cyclical and intergenerational in nature.

- **Lack of loyalty in today's generation.** Leaders observed that while it was at one-time common for an individual to work for a company for 20 to 30 years, this is much less common today. Some attributed this to how today's workers do not bear any loyalty to their employers and will shift from job-to-job-to-job. Others discussed a change in work culture where today's employers are not as loyal to their employees as in previous generations. Whatever the case, participants agreed that these dynamics pointed to the increased need for workers to develop transitional and transferable skills and talents.

- **Today's workforce is comprised of multiple generations.** Leaders discussed how today's workforce includes individuals in their 20s working with individuals in their 60s or older. Participants largely observed that older workers

have had greater experience in the work environment and dealing with people in a professional manner and therefore are more likely to have the desired soft skills. At the same time, many stakeholders saw younger workers as having a greater likelihood of having the adaptable technology skills desired by employers. In some regions, it was suggested older workers, including young retirees who are recruited to re-engage in the workforce, could mentor younger workers. It was also suggested that younger workers could help older workers update their technical skills.

▪ **Georgia has a growing foreign-born workforce.** Participants across the state noted a greater influx of residents from other countries. The growing Hispanic workforce was a topic of discussion at several forums, with some leaders praising their work ethic and others noting challenges relating to language and cultural barriers. It was observed how some urban and high growth regions are becoming more multicultural in makeup and efforts to better integrate the new workforce were suggested. This was also seen as having a significant impact on the educational environment within the local school system.

▪ **Many workers are transportation-poor.** In the rural regions of the state, participants observed how there are significant portions of the workforce who lack the means to afford a personal automobile. In such areas, public transportation was also observed to be limited or non-existent. As a result, it was shared how such workers cannot access the jobs available in their region or surrounding their region. In the urban regions, leaders discussed challenges related to congestion and, for some areas, also noted the lack of personal transportation and access to public transportation.

Participants were asked a key question related to workforce traits before and after the forum by Southern Growth to better gauge their priorities. Specifically, participants were asked if they think communities should develop transferable workforce traits EVEN IF it meant the community's workforce is less prepared technically. As with the other approaches, the "somewhat disagree" responses accounted for the largest share of responses, but in this case to a higher degree after the forums. At the same time, there was a significant difference in the share of "somewhat agree" responses provided by participants – with the share being much higher after the forums than before the forums. In other words, it appears that for a number of participants, while they may support developing transferable workforce traits, they do not do so at the expense of preparing workers with the needed technical skills.


**Develop Transferable Workforce Traits
EVEN IF Workers Are Less Prepared Technically?**
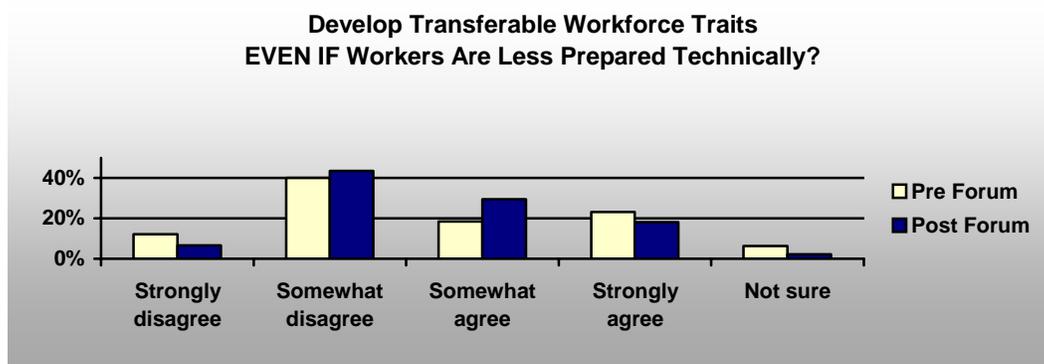
Serving Industry

Georgia's industry was largely characterized as competitively challenged due to the lack of a "ready" workforce. Generally, participants echoed several of the reasons they shared when discussing educational achievement and workforce traits during this part of the forum. While specific industry needs largely varied region to region, the following summarizes some additional common threads of discussion at the forums.

- **Strong business support is provided in Georgia.** Across the state, stakeholders provided praise for the support for industry provided through organizations such as the Georgia Department of Labor, Georgia Quick Start, the local Workforce Investment Boards, the Technical Colleges, the University System, and others. However, it was also commonly shared that businesses are not very knowledgeable about the resources and programs available to assist them in training and retraining their workforce.

- **Greater business-to-education connectivity is needed.** Participants across Georgia called for greater business involvement in education. Not only was this seen as valuable for the career mentoring and skill development of students, but also for ensuring that student learning better fit with the needs of local industry. Leaders saw businesses as having the potential to play a greater and more critical role in developing the future workforce to suit their needs.

Participants were asked some key questions related to serving industry before and after the forum by Southern Growth to better gauge their level of support. For example, participants were asked to indicate whether they think communities should focus on serving industry EVEN IF it meant a time-consuming overhaul of public education. While the largest share of participants somewhat disagreed with this approach, the share of "somewhat disagree" responses was lower after the forums than before the forums. At the same time, the share of "somewhat agree" responses was higher following the forums.

**Focus on Serving Industry
EVEN If it Means Overhaul of Public Education?**
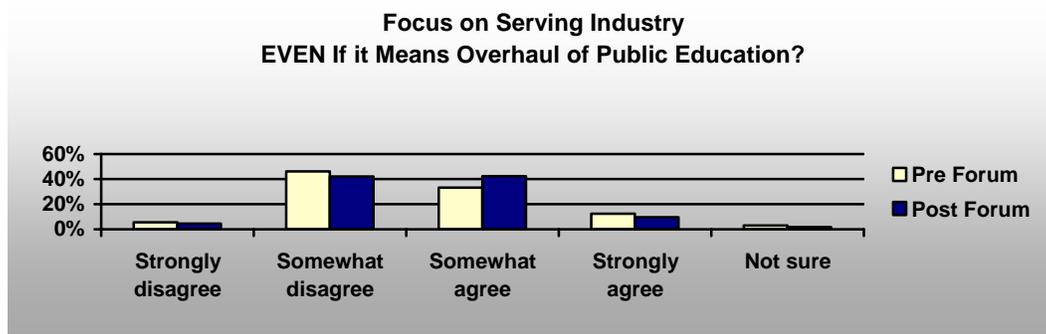
The stakeholders were also asked to indicate if they agreed with boosting investments in industry-based programs at community colleges. The "somewhat agree" responses accounted for the largest share of responses before and after the forums and the shift in responses signal some increased support for such programs. The share of "somewhat disagree" responses provided after the forums was noticeably a smaller share than prior to the forums.

Invest in Industry-Based Programs at Community Colleges?
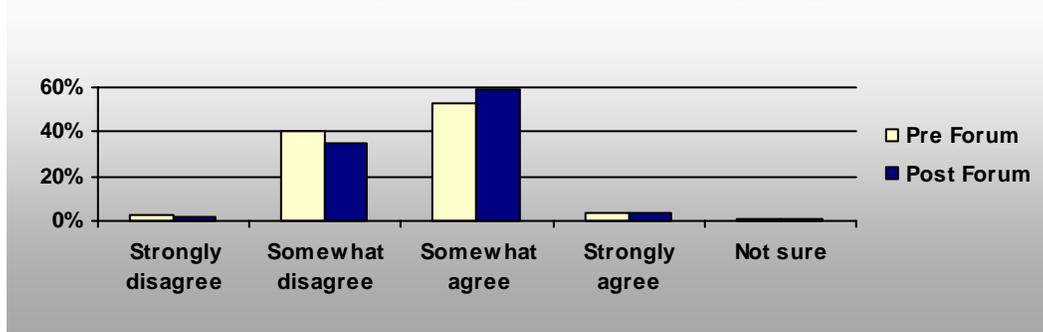
Regional Issues

Workforce Investment Board leaders across Georgia identified questions of regional importance for their region. The insights gathered at the forums regarding these issues are detailed in each region's individual report. However, a review of such issues points to some areas of commonality and some areas of distinctiveness. For example, several regions were concerned with recapturing displaced workers and dealing with industry shifts. A number of regions were interested in learning how to foster greater collaboration and coordination among the various players in the workforce development arena. The maximization and coordination of regional resources was also discussed in more than one region.

There were also a number of unique issues identified by various regions ranging from leveraging the growth affiliated with aging and foreign-born populations and handling growth affiliated with KIA and Fort Benning to realizing opportunities affiliated with the alternative fuel industry.

This section includes a region-by-region capsule look at the questions considered of regional importance. A review of these questions showcases the diversity in the workforce development priorities of the state by region.

Region 1

- The number of manufacturers in the region has been declining in recent years. How do you feel this is impacting workforce availability and quality and demand for workforce?

- The region's population is aging and becoming more diverse, particularly with a growing Hispanic population. What do you believe regional demographic changes mean for workforce development?

- Do you feel it is appropriate or beneficial to collaborate across state boundaries, with southeastern Tennessee and/or northeastern Alabama, on workforce development? If so, what do you feel are the best ways to collaborate?

- Entrepreneurs are vital to our regional economy, but the region also has a relatively high rate of small business bankruptcies. Should workforce development seek to reduce small business failures? How might it do so?

Region 2

- This region has seen many textile and manufacturing plant closures such as Johnson and Johnson, Rabun Apparel (Fruit of the Loom), Marconi, Coats and Clark and Milliken Mills. What role does workforce development play in efforts to recruit new industry? Are there other strategies, beyond industrial recruitment, that might lead to more stable and predictable demand for labor?

- This region, like many others, has a high drop-out rate. What can be done to instill the importance of "work" in our high school students? (What initiatives are in place to lower the drop-out rate and help students transition to the workforce or further their education?)

- As social service funding becomes smaller, it becomes even more important for agencies to coordinate and avoid duplicating efforts. What local or regional efforts are being made to address this issue? What types of regional collaboration or coordination would you like to see occur?

- Our region is geographically diverse with both rural and highly developed areas. Both areas, however, seem to struggle with transportation initiatives. Is transportation a barrier to workforce development and employment? In what ways, and what is being done to address this issue? What else could be done over the next few years?

- The demographics of the Georgia Mountains area have changed dramatically. The area has seen a population increase primarily due to an influx in the Hispanic population. We have also seen a larger number of "older workers" relocating to the area in preparation for retirement. What new challenges have arisen as a result of these changes in the local demographic dynamics? How are these challenges being met?

Region 3

- The Atlanta region's 55 and older population is growing significantly. The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) projects the 55 and older population to increase significantly by 2030. And as many as two-thirds of the 55 and older population are reported to not work. Employers are increasingly concerned with the growing "brain drain" of talent and experience resulting in shortages of workers, skills, and talent. At the same time, the Atlanta region is growing as a major destination for retirees who could potentially be contributing members of the region's workforce and volunteer base. What are your thoughts on these dynamics?

- The Atlanta Region is seeing greater diversity in its population – as more and more people of different cultures are moving into the region. This trend is expected to continue to grow as the region's role in the global marketplace continues to grow. School systems across the region are seeing evidence of this demographic shift in the classroom with Black enrollment significantly up in the majority of school systems and Hispanic and Asian enrollment up throughout the region. What are your thoughts on these dynamics?

- In October 2006, ARC reported that metro Atlanta's population is expected to hit 7 million by 2030. Addressing the current and future "mobility" needs of the Atlanta region is expected to be a growing challenge. What are your thoughts on these dynamics?

Region 4

- The decline of manufacturing has led to the displacement of mature workers. Currently, we have the highest number of dislocated workers displaced by foreign trade in the state. What should the region do to re-capture these workers?

- The traits of the emerging workforce are low basic skills and an overall disinterest in attaining skills necessary for work. What are your thoughts about ways we can engage and prepare youth of diverse backgrounds and abilities, and not just the top ten to thirty percent?

- There are two events to impact the western side of our region – (1) BRAC Initiative and (2) the arrival of KIA in Troup County. How should the region prepare for the expected population increase?

Region 5

- How do we develop a nimble and flexible workforce that can change to meet the shifting demands of a global economy? How can we prepare our workforce for the biotech sector without becoming stranded if any one sector does not develop? Was the loss of Novartis due to a workforce issue?

- Fostering entrepreneurship and workforce development are usually seen as separate processes. Do you see ways that workforce development and entrepreneurship development activities can be better integrated in this region?

- Do you feel early childhood education plays a role in workforce development? What can be done to improve early childhood education to make it a part of your workforce development strategy?

- Many organizations address workforce development in the region (Georgia Department of Labor, school systems, WIBs, Family Connection, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, chambers of commerce, etc.). How can collaboration and sharing of information among these entities be improved to strengthen workforce development efforts?

Region 6

- Do you support having a coordinated approach for economic diversification? Why or why not? What are the obstacles to this approach? What can be done to overcome these obstacles? What else can be done in this region to make this coordinated effort happen?

Region 7

- Oftentimes, traditional institutional barriers such as turf issues, federal mandates, etc. provide disincentives for school systems to participate in a community or region's workforce development efforts. This typically results in superintendents, teachers, administrators, and even elected officials to not engage the other players in the community and region charged with workforce development, including the business community. What are your views on this phenomenon in Region 7?

- How can we engage school systems and their personnel and students to focus on existing industry and business needs?

- A specific issue for the region is the idea that the workforce simply doesn't have the motivation and/or self-esteem to want to keep a job. What are your thoughts? What can be done to reverse this trend?

- Another particular issue for the region is the unwillingness of businesses and industry to hire those without a high school degree (or GED), those that have been convicted of a crime, and/or those that are perceived to be part of the "drug trade." What are your general thoughts on these issues? What would cause businesses and industry to be more willing to hire these folks?

- The region has experienced several recent plant closings resulting in un-and-under-employment for those who were working in those plants. The general consensus [regarding a challenge] in trying to recruit other industry is that these folks who have been displaced do not have transferable skills to other sectors. What can you say about this for the region?

Region 8

- With the expected future growth of the region affiliated with the BRAC initiative for expanding Fort Benning and the recent KIA project, what impact will this growth have on the region's workforce?

Region 9

- With the high number of plant closures and layoffs within our region, how can we link employers with laid off workers as we develop customized training programs for employers individualized needs?

Region 10

- How do we define and coordinate regional resources for effective utilization in the region?

- How knowledgeable do you think businesses and government are in your community and region about faith-based programs and initiatives?

- What would be the regional impact of the development of alternative fuel sources on the workforce?

Region 11

- How can we maximize the utilization of resources available in the region in order to strengthen our workforce development efforts?

Region 12

- There seems to be a "disconnect" between educational and workforce providers, regional businesses and the available and potential workforce, thereby threatening the effective, sustainable economic growth that would raise average incomes and improve quality of life in the region. How should this disconnect be addressed?

- How can we reach and develop programs targeted to the needs of the "hidden" workforce in the region? (The "hidden" workforce concept in our area typically includes the long-term unemployed, military spouses, persons with disabilities, and

workers displaced from low-skill occupations who have not obtained additional skills.)

- What do you think is the major barrier keeping those within the region who want to work from doing so – lack of available jobs, lack of sufficient training, inadequate transportation services, lack of childcare, or something else?

- The Georgia Department of Labor is projecting a significant number of "creative class" jobs for the region. What can we do to better prepare our workforce to fill these jobs?

Creative Solutions

Proposition: Georgia has long been a leader in devising innovative private and public sector solutions to workforce development challenges, serving as an inspiration for many other states. While there is a broad array of programs and services offering creative solutions to many of the challenges and questions related to building the next workforce, the state is always looking for fresh and creative approaches.

There are a wide variety of programs and service providers that offer solutions to many of the challenges and questions related to building the next workforce. Indeed, Georgia has long been a leader in devising innovative private and public sector solutions to workforce development challenges, and many states have implemented duplicate programs.

The new Georgia Certified Work Ready Community (CWRC) program was a key topic of discussion at all forums. Generally, participants had numerous questions and wanted to learn more before deciding on how it should be employed in the region. Thus, the forums became a statewide starting platform for introducing the program, for opening discussion to gather meaningful input and suggestions for its implementation, and for identifying follow-up opportunities to address participant questions.

It appears the forums may have had some fairly short-term impact. By the end of May 2007, 72 of Georgia's 159 counties had committed to become Certified Work Ready Communities, according to the Governor's Office of Workforce Development. These counties are:

Appling	Dougherty	Jackson	Oglethorpe	Towns
Baldwin	Douglas	Jefferson	Peach	Troup
Barrow	Elbert	Jenkins	Pickens	Twiggs
Bartow	Fannin	Jones	Pike	Union
Bibb	Floyd	Laurens	Polk	Upson
Brooks	Forsyth	Long	Putnam	Walker
Bulloch	Franklin	Lowndes	Rockdale	Walton
Butts	Gilmer	Macon	Schley	Ware
Catoosa	Grady	Madison	Seminole	Warren
Chattooga	Greene	Marion	Stephens	Wayne
Clarke	Gwinnett	Meriwether	Stewart	Webster
Cobb	Hall	Mitchell	Sumter	Wilkes
Coweta	Harris	Monroe	Talbot	
Crisp	Hart	Muscogee	Thomas	
Decatur	Houston	Oconee	Toombs	

Georgia Counties Committed to Become
Certified Work Ready Communities – May 2007
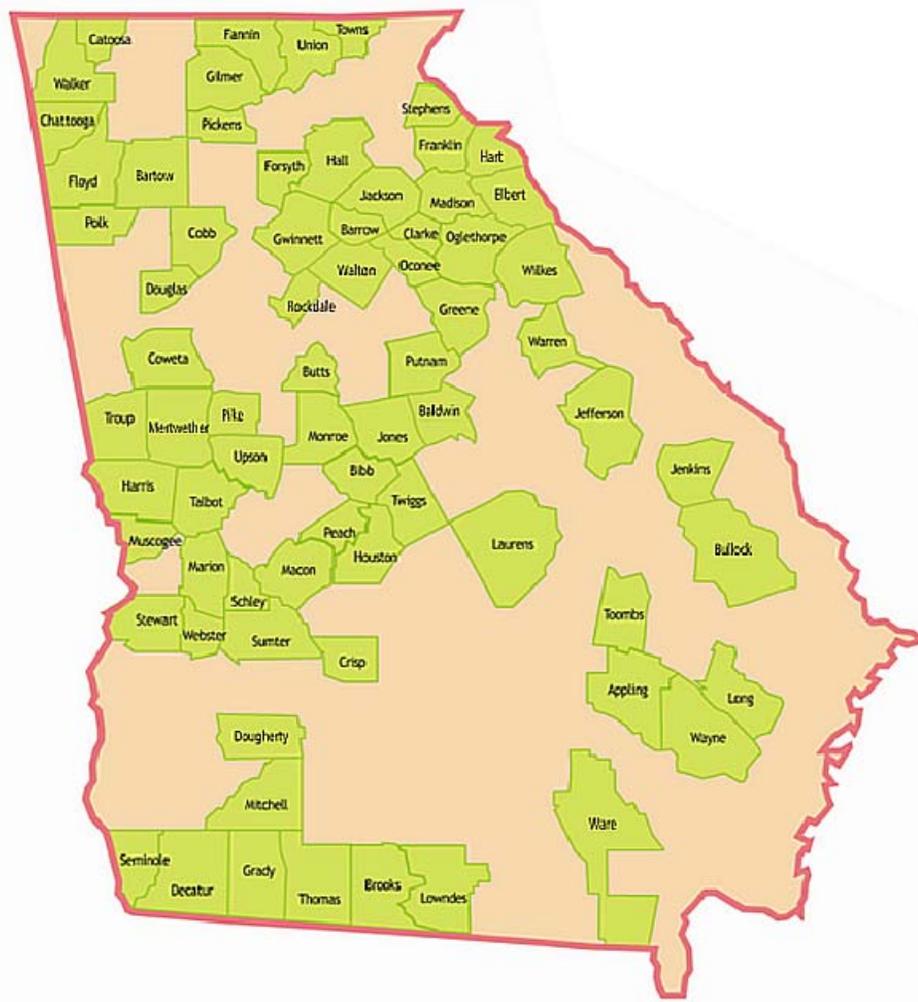
Beyond introducing the program, the forums provided valuable early "market intelligence," and program administrators have taken a number of actions in response. Suggestions offered were generally along the following lines.

- Wide-spread buy-in is critical for success: throughout communities, regions and the state; among all stakeholder groups. There is a need for a public relations educational initiative to market the program.

- Businesses, especially, must be educated about program value, in terms of bottom line profitability.

- Share success stories as quickly as possible.

- The program's unique features need more emphasis because the Work Keys component is often the sole focus of people when they first hear about the program.

- The program is a great start as a new initiative to address workforce issues and link objectives to economic development. There is opportunity to think beyond limits of the current program design to contemplate "What's next?"

Georgia's Regional Workforce Development Forums of 2007   24

- Examine implementation of program features in middle school; high school is a late stage, sometimes too late, in teaching skills necessary in the modern workplace.

- Assure that the program is integrated into career planning. Utilize the program to demonstrate to students what is required to achieve certain specific jobs and incomes.

- Assure that specific workforce sectors (elderly, veteran, disabled, etc.) can be served.

- Assure that all participants, especially including disadvantaged/challenged persons, are fairly profiled and assessed and have incentive to improve.

- Assure that communities are fairly profiled and see the incentive in supporting the program.

- Establish safeguards that sustain the program beyond current political administration.

- Integrate program information into business recruitment and retention efforts; and leverage it as a powerful tool in economic development.

- Consider mandating participation in the program as a high school exit requirement.

Forum participants brainstormed other creative solutions to Georgia's workforce challenges. Many existing programs were identified as having proven value. Some existing programs were described as under-funded and "out of favor politically" even though their effectiveness had been widely acknowledged. There appeared to be a general consensus to call for a grass roots movement to get a broad cross section of citizenry educated, involved, and committed to resolving workforce challenges as a community responsibility.

Also the forums were nearly unanimous in their identification of apprenticeships, mentoring, career counseling, separation of students by aptitude, and benchmarking of other regions and states as viable solutions. Greater business involvement was a commonly stressed recommendation. When discussing more business involvement with youth, one participant captured a commonly voiced suggestion, "young people have a limited concept of how to get from point A to point B, and we need to create a culture that understands moving up a continuum, that shows them how to advance." Other specific suggestions often offered include the following.

- Bring regional stakeholders together to examine workforce needs for emerging industries.

- Benchmark other regions to create models for success.

- Look to military institutions to provide templates for soft skill development.

- Better align high school curriculum with industry needs.

- Provide remediation as early as possible before high school graduation.

- Continue to expand efforts in job coaching, mentoring, career mapping, and role modeling at the earliest possible age.

- Provide better access to full-time affordable, accessible, and quality childcare services.

- Provide better access to transportation services.

- Provide more diversity training.

- Leverage the many excellent existing programs provided by public & private sector, at state & national levels. All could be more consistently applied. Examples include Skills USA, Junior Achievement, Georgia REAL Enterprises, Education Rocks, CHOICES, ROTC, Boys & Girls Club, and Century 21, to name a few.

IMPLICATIONS

Participants were asked to pick a singular statement to best describe their thoughts about what should be done to build a competitive workforce. As shown in the bar chart below, both before and after the forums, the largest share of stakeholders indicated that they had "a general sense" of what needs to be done; this share was essentially unchanged after the discussions. The second-largest share was indicated by those who reported having "a definite opinion," and this share appeared to increase notably as a result of the discussions. Just a small fraction had indicated that they were "not at all sure," a number that was even smaller following the forums. These results support the notion that the forums attracted stakeholders already interested in workforce development – and in some cases engaged in supporting leadership roles – and therefore were already aware of surrounding issues. They also indicate that the discussions made some difference in participants' thinking about workforce development solutions.

**Participant Thoughts on
Building a Competitve Workforce**
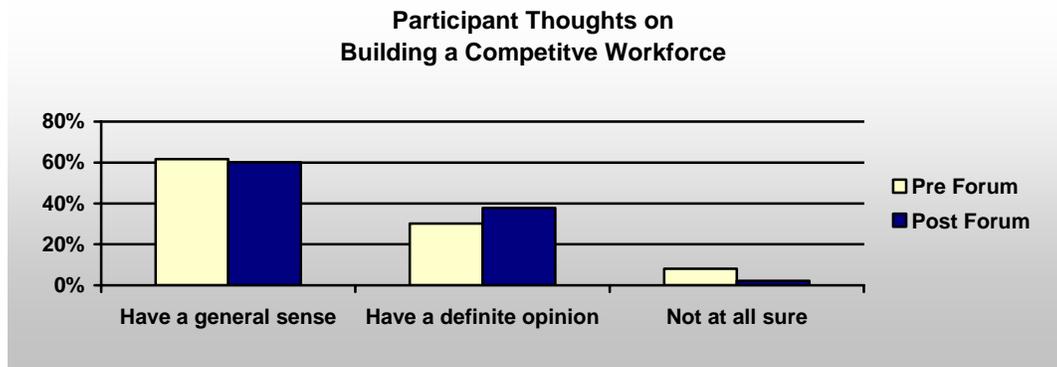
Two post-forum survey questions indicate the degree to which participants' thinking changed, and the aggregate responses are shown in the two pie charts below.

Participants were asked "Are you thinking differently after participating in the forums?" Almost half responded "yes," which is notable given the high participation by government and education leaders who had likely, given their roles in workforce development, already committed significant time and effort considering the issues.

**Are You Thinking Differently
After Participating in the Forum?**
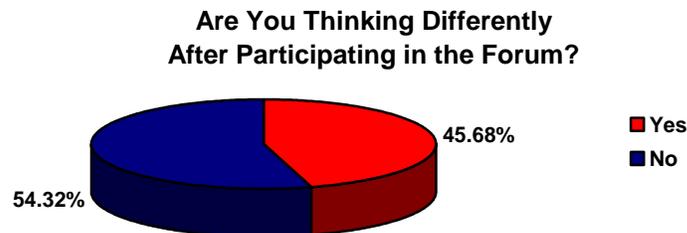
This sentiment of thinking differently was shared by at least one-third or more of participants in forums across the state. It was especially the case for Region 4 where 69.2 percent indicated they thought differently following the forum.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yes	48.48%	52.94%	39.02%	69.23%	50.00%	35.90%
No	51.52%	47.06%	60.98%	30.77%	50.00%	64.10%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
Yes	38.64%	41.67%	40.00%	33.33%	49.25%	52.27%
No	61.36%	58.33%	60.00%	66.67%	50.75%	47.73%

Another post-forum question was "Do you see new ways to work together on issues?" The vast majority, over three-quarters, answered "yes," which is quite significant given the high level of participation by government and education stakeholders.

Do You See New Ways To Work on Issues?

22.59%

77.41%

■ Yes
■ No
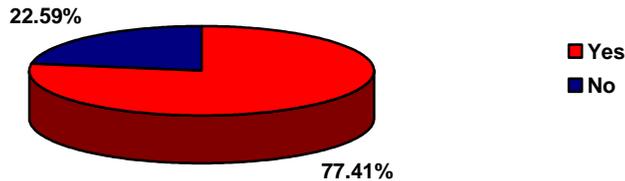
This positive view was reflected by participants in forums across the state, with participants in Region 2 indicating a unanimous "Yes". By these responses, the forums appeared to provide opportunities for learning and ideation for those who attended.

Region	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yes	80.65%	100.00%	70.27%	80.95%	80.00%	81.08%
No	19.35%	0.00%	29.73%	19.05%	20.00%	18.92%

Region	7	8	9	10	11	12
Yes	77.50%	73.68%	80.00%	70.97%	70.49%	79.49%
No	22.50%	26.32%	20.00%	29.03%	29.51%	20.51%

These responses also indicate the discussion forums were quite successful in educating participants and in generating ideas for further progress in creating the next workforce.

Clearly something happened during the discussion forums that led to positive change in participants' minds. Based on notes taken during the forums by independent "scribes" and based on assessments by the facilitators, the following factors are offered as the underpinnings for these changes of mind.

- There was across-the-board acknowledgement of the critical nature of the issues discussed at these forums. These issues are critical to more than the necessary strategy of "maintaining a competitive edge in the global economy" in that they translate to quality of their families' lives in the future.

- Many problems in the workforce were seen as symptoms of systemic problems in society at large. Some solutions will need to focus on the societal causes rather than the workforce symptoms. The need to "break the cycle" was often repeated.

- The forums revealed a widespread acknowledgement of shared responsibility, beyond just businesses and educators. "It all comes back to a community responsibility." Stakeholders acknowledged a crucial lack of adequate understanding generally about workforce issues, challenges, available options, and feasible solutions. They called for everyone to be better informed and to make personal commitments for improving themselves and for improving the overall quality of our collective workforce.

- Many participants saw the forums as indicative of the state's momentum in a positive direction, and momentum that they might join with and even increase. They connected three distinct aspects of the forums and that, with a continuing positive dialog among community stakeholders, led to a sense that they can increase this momentum by working with their fellow citizens at the local/regional level. Three distinct aspects inspiring this sense are: (1) the aura and promise of the new Certified Work Ready Community program, (2) the broad-based collaboration of local, regional, state, and multi-state agencies that the forums represent, and (3) their open, candid, and cooperative discussions that addressed solutions as well as challenges.

- The forums yielded universal discussion that jobs require more than just "skill sets." Success in today's workplace – professional as well as technical and service positions – was acknowledged to depend on worker adaptability, flexibility, and possession of the "right attitude." These discussions most often focused on "soft skills" as opposed to technical or job content skills. The soft skills discussions included expressions of the following needs for the modern worker:

Interpersonal skills	Understanding of what a job is
A work "ethic" or attitude	Appreciation for life-long learning
Self-drive and initiative	Connection of education to "real life"

- At the same time, forum participants called for the strengthening of hard skills as well, such as math and science, to enable greater capabilities in problem-solving and creative thinking – and the need to expose individuals to real-life applications was identified across the state.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

Given the growing globalization of the state's economy, Georgia's future economic prosperity hinges on its ability to develop a competitive workforce. Overall, the state's current and future workforce was largely seen by forum participants as competitively challenged. Some of the reasons offered were region-specific while many more appear to be more universal and pervasive in nature, affecting employers throughout Georgia and the nation. While that may be the case, these challenges require the greatest sense of urgency for addressing through collaborative solutions. To that end, for many stakeholders, these forums provided a unique and first-time opportunity for them to come together and discuss potential solutions with other stakeholders in their region.

Each of the regional forums had its own "personality" and produced some findings that were unique among them all. It is important to recognize the unique distinctions among the forums because, very often, the most creative and effective solutions are

devised and implemented at the local and regional level, done so by the people who have the most to gain by success and have the most to lose by maintaining the *status quo*. Potential next steps for local and regional action are detailed in the various regional forum reports.

While there were notable distinct differences among the forums, there was also a surprising degree of uniformity in terms of the principal concerns that were raised and the resulting conclusions and next steps that were suggested. The more common suggestions have been categorized in this section within three tiers on the basis of the frequency with which they were encountered, i.e. based on the number of regions in which they were expressed.

As these suggestions for next steps offered by the participants are highly general in nature, they require further investigation and exploration by the various workforce development vehicles serving at the local and regional level to determine their fitness and suitability for their locale's unique situations.

TIER 1: COMMON TO NEARLY ALL FORUMS

A.   Promote & Inform

- Initiate a campaign to promote the value of education & work.
- Provide more information to parents, students, K-12 counselors about career & work opportunities and their requirements.
- Launch a grass-roots public relations campaign.
- Establish ways for different perspectives to be communicated and synthesized into common goals. Because there are many stakeholders with very different perspectives, concerted and honest communications can clear the air of misperceptions and mistrusts.
- Create a one-stop web portal for workforce development resources, programs, services, opportunities, values, etc.

B.   Cultivate Soft Skills

- Incorporate soft skills education in the K-12 system.
- Reinforce importance of soft skills through community organizations.
- Focus soft skills training on teamwork, leadership, work ethics, appreciation and need for life-long learning, acceptance and value of diversity.
- Provide soft skills exposure & training to parents and other adults.

C. Bolster Hard Skills

- Continue and broaden efforts to strengthen math, science, reading, and writing competencies.

- Cultivate stronger creative thinking and problem-solving capabilities.

D. Strengthen the Home Environment

- Ally with faith-based organizations, youth service organizations, and others engaged in family-oriented services in order to "break the cycle" of dynamics that destroy or damage children's family support systems. Work with them rather than tell them what to do and how to do it.

- Create opportunities that increase parental involvement in children's education and their support for community improvement through workforce initiatives.

- Improve access to childcare and transportation services.

- Engage community leadership development groups and civic clubs to advocate and act for family "enrichment" throughout the community.

TIER 2: COMMON TO MOST FORUMS

A. Engage Employers

- Expand opportunities for business-youth connections, interactions.

- Expand job shadowing, for teachers & students.

- Enlist service providers to capitalize on employer networks, in a strategic manner.

- Continue and enhance support for Career Fairs.

B. Collaborate, Partner

- Foster a concerted and honest dialog among community groups can clear the air of misperceptions and mistrusts.

- Establish consistent, ongoing dialog among regional and local workforce development leaders; include employers, parents, educators, students, grandparents, faith-based and other non-profit representatives.

- Meet and share regularly; be alert for opportunities to partner.

- Achieve broader-based community involvement with K-12.

- Share best practices within and across regions; adapt best practices from other states.

- Identify and leverage champions – those who will commit to lead.

- Continue the dialog.

C. Reemphasize Technical Education

- Campaign to increase parents' and students' and guidance counselors' awareness of technical college opportunities and the value of technical college education.

- Continue to expand technical college opportunities.
- Expand reach of dual-track certificates within high schools.

D.   Tie K-12 Education to Real Life

- Increase number and range of classroom ties to community organizations and activities; regional, state, national, and international events.
- Bring more everyday problem-solving situations into the classroom.
- Especially relate topics in math and science to real life and intriguing situations in order to engage curiosity and creativity.
- Work with all ages of youth on seeing answers to the question "What's in it for me?" which they associate with school and work. Provide lessons about real-life consequences of ill choices.
- Guard against "social promotions" and better align promotions according to how the real world works.

TIER 3: COMMON TO MORE THAN HALF OF THE FORUMS

A.   Investigate Regional Solutions

- Expand regional economic development and workforce development efforts in order to pool limited resources, to focus more effectively on certain job types that are present or needed across several communities, and to address common concerns and implement solutions suited to area's unique needs. For example, the Certified Work Ready Community program would be much more effective if it were implemented on a regional basis than separately in individual communities; some will and some won't.

B.   Focus on Specific Workforce Segments

- Identify and recruit from other areas technically skilled workers that are in short supply locally. This would be more viable as a regional strategy.
- Promote bilingualism in all people. Globalism and cultural diversity are realities of modern life.
- Older workers and retirees are under-utilized assets. Find ways for employers to examine opportunities to recruit, deploy, and best utilize older workers. Help create ways to foster the transfer of knowledge & life experience among workers of different age groups.
- Examine ways that enable tapping into the hidden workforce; e.g. childcare and transportation services.
- Continue focus on adult training and retraining.

C.   Strengthen Mentoring

- Help employers establish mentor relationships between older and younger workers.
- Set up mentoring opportunities in community and extracurricular activities for the K-12 age group. This can be especially effective in teaching soft skills and providing stable role models for youth from troubled homes.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is based on a compilation of feedback offered by approximately 800 Georgian stakeholders attending 12 regional discussion forums conducted across the state during Winter 2007, in support of the Southern Growth Policies Board's Southern Workforce Summit.   The forums were sponsored by the Governor's Office of Workforce Development, State Workforce Investment Board, Georgia Department of Labor, and the U.S. Economic Development Administration. Development of this report is based on a joint effort facilitated by a team of faculty and staff from the Georgia Institute of Technology, Georgia State University, and University of Georgia:

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