

# REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MEETING

Lessons Learned and  
Best Practices



Fall  
**2016**



**Carl Vinson Institute of Government**  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



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## Dear Partners and Colleagues,

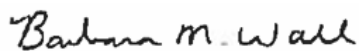
In fall 2015, the Georgia Department of Education launched the Partners Educating Georgia's Future Workforce Initiative. The goal of the new initiative was to emphasize the importance of education and workforce development to economic development. One of the components of the new effort was to host 12 listening sessions across the state with employers, economic development leaders, CTAE professionals, and other educators. The key message we heard across the state in 2015 was the need to create and strengthen partnerships with the business community.

In fall 2016, we hosted six regional economic development meetings across the state. In response to the key issue identified in 2015, these meetings focused on how to build deep and sustainable partnerships between CTAE and the business community.

We heard success stories from existing collaborations, learned about new resources and tools available to build partnerships, and gathered input from teachers, employers, and economic development professionals. These meetings emphasized the important role that CTAE plays in supporting economic development and connecting partners to resources. They also showcased best practices in Georgia. Our CTAE programs across the state are preparing Georgia's future workforce, teaching young adults required employability and technical skills, and preparing them to enter high-demand careers. CTAE plays an ever-increasing role in the state's economic development success.

This report details the lessons learned from the 2016 regional economic development meetings. It is my hope that this document will serve as a resource as you are building partnerships with industry, planning for the next school year, and working to increase your school system's role in economic development. I look forward to working with you as we build stronger and deeper partnerships with industries around the state.

Sincerely,



**Barbara M. Wall, Ed.D**

Director of Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education

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## Introduction

The role of education in supporting economic development has never been more important. Georgia continues to see success in economic development, with many site selection and expansion announcements and a growing economy. Recently, Georgia was named the number one state for business for the fourth year in a row by *Site Selection* magazine. The state's education system, including Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE), is an integral part of Georgia's workforce development pipeline. CTAE exposes students to career options, teaches them high-demand skills, and prepares them for careers and postsecondary education.

Over the past two years, the Georgia Department of Education has placed an increased emphasis on building effective partnerships with business and industry. Stronger links with business and industry will improve student outcomes, assist teachers, and help employers find the talent they need. In 2015, the department held 12 listening sessions around the state aimed at connecting CTAE to local business partners. The 2015 meetings demonstrated how important partnerships with business and economic development are to CTAE.

In fall 2016, the Department of Education hosted six meetings across the state to continue engaging with business, economic development, and CTAE leaders. The meetings had five primary goals, which are listed in the box below. The meetings were also used to collect input from participants on topics related to partnerships between education and business. Over 350 partners participated in the meetings, including economic development professionals, business owners, plant managers, CTAE teachers, administrators, students, and community members. This report details the collective information learned during the meetings, and it serves as a resource and guide for state and local education leaders who are building partnerships to support CTAE.

### 2016 Meeting Goals

1. Emphasize the importance of education and workforce development to economic development
2. Showcase strong partnerships between education and business and industry
3. Connect people through a common vision, mission, and objectives
4. Identify workforce needs
5. Secure support and resources

## Participating Companies and Meeting Locations

### **Houston County**

**September 15, 2016**

Flint Energies  
Frito-Lay  
Houston County Development Authority  
Perdue Farms  
Robins Air Force Base

### **Gwinnett County**

**September 20, 2016**

Cobb Chamber of Commerce  
Community Sustainability Enterprises  
Georgia Apartment Industry  
Education Foundation  
Hire Dynamics  
Siemens

### **Effingham County**

**September 29, 2016**

Colonial Energy  
DRT America  
Effingham County Industrial  
Development Authority  
Georgia Power

### **Calhoun City**

**October 18, 2016**

Mannington Mills  
Northwest Georgia Regional Commission  
Toyo Tire North America  
Voestalpine Automotive Body Parts

### **Morgan County**

**October 19, 2016**

Georgia-Pacific  
Lane Conrads Corporation  
Madison-Morgan County Chamber  
Morgan County High School

### **Berrien County**

**November 9, 2016**

CJB Industries Inc.  
Southern Grace Farms  
Valdosta-Lowndes Chamber of Commerce

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**Thank you to the school systems and sponsors for generously hosting the six regional economic development meetings.**

Meeting facilitation, project management, and report writing were provided by Greg Wilson, David Tanner, Mercy Montgomery, Jan Coyne, Melinda Moore, and Clark Stancil of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. Report editing and design was provided by Karen DeVivo and Jake Brower.

## Partnership Panel Themes

At each regional economic development meeting, a panel of industry and economic development professionals discussed their experiences engaging with educators and students to create deep partnerships that benefit students, teachers, and employers. The goal of the panels was to highlight best practices and examples of effective partnerships between industry and CTAE.

Each regional panel highlighted various needs and opportunities specific to the industries in their community. Several key themes emerged as common needs were shared across the state.

“Soft skills are a consistent theme in workforce needs. It is more than just showing up to work on time but also how you work on a team ...The technical competencies are important, but one person can't save an organization. Employees must work as a team to succeed.”

GEORGIA-PACIFIC

“At a recent meeting with larger employers...acronyms were coming out. As a business partner, I didn't even know what CTAE stood for. The best way to get over confusion is to just talk to them and if something doesn't make sense ask. Make sure you create an environment where that kind of conversation can happen.”

LANE CONRADS CORPORATION

### The Demand for Soft Skills Development

Employers consistently highlighted the need for staff with a strong work ethic as well as critical thinking skills, the ability to work in a team, and other similar soft skills.

### The Important Role That CTAE Plays in Talent Development

Panelists highlighted the role that CTAE plays in shaping their future talent by teaching students soft and hard skills and exposing them to career opportunities.

### The Growing Need for STEM Education, Knowledge, and Skills

Knowledge of core science and math competencies as well as engineering and technology principles are increasingly important in all careers.

### The Value of Collaborative Work and Community Partnerships

Building strong, sustained relationships among business and education partners is key when working to develop positive student experiences.

### The Need for Clear Communication Between Education and Industry

Creating established lines of communication, sharing information, and navigating differences in communication style and terminology is important for keeping conversation flowing and engaging partners effectively.

### The Need for Interaction and Engagement Among Students, Educators, Administrators, and Employers

Providing opportunities for conversation and networking through tours, community discussions, educator externships, hands-on learning, and other innovative experiences is important for all community members invested in student professional development. The panels also highlighted the importance of directly engaging with the business community by attending chamber breakfasts, participating in development authority meetings, and calling at their place of business.

## Cobb Workforce Partnership Construction Sector Partnership

In 2015, construction companies in metro Atlanta reported difficulties recruiting and retaining the workers they needed to be successful. They recognized that one of their key talent sources was high school CTAE construction programs. A group of construction employers, educators, and economic development professionals worked together to launch a collaborative partnership to help provide support and resources to the construction programs in the region.

Through the Cobb Workforce Partnership Construction Sector Partnership, more than 20 employers have become actively involved in supporting the eight construction programs in the region. The group has established school support teams that bring together several construction employers to provide targeted outreach and assistance to the selected schools. In the first year, the partnership helped to provide guest speakers, field trips to job sites, summer internships for students, and materials. The partnership increases the resources and access to industry experts available to construction instructors. The efforts have also increased communication and interaction between the CTAE programs and key local employers.

### Keys to Success

- Clear understanding of the industry's workforce and training needs
- CTAE teachers and administrators actively participating in partnership meetings
- Employers actively engaged and leading partnership efforts
- Ongoing dialogue between employers, CTAE administrators, and teachers
- CTAE teachers clearly articulating and prioritizing their needs (for example guest speakers, supplies, field trips)



## Workshop Themes

At each of the six regional economic development workshops, attendees discussed the role of education in economic development and workforce development, and they conceived solutions to improve and strengthen the work.

### Four questions were discussed at each of the workshops:

1. What is the role of school systems in economic development?
2. How can we improve and strengthen school systems' relationships with business and economic development?
3. What are the barriers to engaging businesses in the work of preparing students for college and careers?
4. What will you do in the next six months to strengthen relationships with business and economic development?

Qualitative response data from each of the questions was collected to capture feedback and ideas from small discussion groups.

## Findings

During the regional workshops, participants discussed their perceptions of CTAE and economic development. Several important themes emerged regarding future efforts to support economic development through partnerships in education. These findings present the subjective views, opinions, and perceptions of CTAE educators, administrators, and staff but do not necessarily reflect current practices of CTAE education. Additionally, these statewide themes represent overarching considerations but do not take into consideration regional differences in economic and workforce development needs, efforts, and approaches.

### Role of the School System in Economic Development

Discussion about the role of the school system in economic development produced the most varied responses among workshop participants. The following key considerations were raised at the workshops across the state:

1. **Workforce Pipeline.** Preparing skilled students to meet workforce needs was frequently mentioned as a key role of the school system in supporting economic development efforts.
2. **Skills Development.** Workshop attendees consistently stated that students must develop skills to be competitive in the workforce. Key target areas mentioned included soft skills, such as listening, following direction, attention to detail; industry-specific skill sets such as technology proficiency; and a strong understanding of basic skills in core subjects. Knowledge and proficiency in both hard and soft skills are necessary for students to be prepared for employment upon graduation.

**3. Education and Information Sharing.** Discussions in each region clearly illustrated the importance of education, dialogue, and information sharing, not only among students but also within local industry. Participants also felt that it is important to educate parents and other stakeholders about workforce development and careers. Overall, participants stated that the education system needs to be informed and educated about local industries and that local employers need to be informed and educated about CTAE.

**4. Work Experience and Exposure to Industry.** Participants across the state highlighted the value of work-based learning experiences for students, including exposure to careers outside of their local communities. These experiences could take a variety of forms, including apprenticeships, internships, or job shadowing, but all are key elements in preparing students to be competitive applicants for high-demand careers.

**5. Alignment with Industry.** Workshop participants stated a strong need for CTAE curricula and experiential learning to align with current and future industry needs. Commonly suggested approaches included increasing CTAE pathway certifications, partnering with industry in response to regional needs, and developing curricula to meet industry demand.

**6. Industry Partnerships.** CTAE educators, administrators, and staff shared a clear desire for establishing a strong, meaningful network of relationships between industry and education. One suggestion was to invite industry leaders into schools to speak with students and educators. Another commonly mentioned approach was to better involve business leaders through advisory committees. Workshop participants also suggested that school leadership should reach out to local businesses to establish processes and opportunities for engaging industry experts.

### **Improve and Strengthen the School System's Relationship with Business and Economic Development**

The question of how to improve and strengthen school systems' relationships with business and economic development produced five primary themes across regional meetings.

**1. Outreach.** Participants across all groups described a need for greater outreach to business and industry. Examples of outreach approaches and opportunities for partnerships include educational leaders serving on boards outside of the school system, greater involvement in local chambers of commerce, participation in civic organizations, community and career fairs, and being willing to go to businesses to invite industry leaders into the classroom.

**2. Improve Communication.** Workshop attendees voiced a need to develop clear, established lines of communication between schools and industry. Approaches such as relationship building with local economic development directors and establishing a common language between educators and businesses were discussed. These strategies would allow industry leaders to share needs and provide input, while also giving educators a means to communicate important information about educational initiatives and goals.

**3. Relationship Building.** Similar to the above themes, participants stated a need to build deep and sustained relationships with industry. This includes developing key partnerships between industry and student organizations, establishing collaborative committees, and building relationships with economic development offices, chambers of commerce, postsecondary institutions, and other school systems.

## FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIPS

# Frito-Lay

In Houston County, a strong partnership between the Houston College and Career Academy (HCCA), The Central Georgia Technical College (CGTC), and Frito-Lay has addressed local workforce needs by connecting students with technical training and employment opportunities within their community. The partners worked together to develop curricula and experiential learning opportunities to train HCCA students in necessary skills. The partners have worked collaboratively to prepare students to step into careers at Frito-Lay or pursue other opportunities after graduation.

Seniors are recruited by Frito-Lay out of the Automotive Maintenance, Engineering, Welding, and other pathways. Following a competitive interview process, employees are hired into entry-level positions. They are expected to continue with postsecondary education through a customized internal training program created by Frito-Lay and CGTC.

These opportunities were developed collaboratively and informed directly by industry. All partners communicated through creative and expansive efforts such as information sharing sessions for students and parents.

This successful partnership highlights the need for engagement of diverse community partners and strong communication among stakeholders as well as the value of aligning efforts with industry needs. This partnership was first conceived when Frito-Lay's plant manager contacted the HCCA principal to discuss the plant's need for more industrial maintenance technicians. Beginning in the 2017–2018 academic year, Frito Lay will recruit students from all grades completing coursework in in-demand pathways to further expand opportunities to meet workforce needs and provide learning experiences for students.

### Keys to Success

- Employer actively engaged and leading the partnership efforts
- Clear understanding of and alignment with the industry's specific workforce skill and competency needs
- Employer commitment to a sustainable program
- Clear communication between education and industry
- Mutual benefits shared by students, teachers, and employer

**4. Industry Education.** Participants felt that more business and industry content should be incorporated into the educational materials of both students and educators. Guest speakers, field trips, presentations on employability skills from industry experts, career fairs that highlight professional opportunities, and other similar experiences allow students to learn marketable skills and better understand local work-force opportunities.

**5. Externships.** CTAE educators and administrators, as well as industry leaders, stressed that teacher externships strengthen relationships between school systems and local industry. Expanding externships for all K–12 education professionals (for example teachers, counselors, and administrators), not just CTAE educators, would allow schools and programs to stay up-to-date on current industry practices and maintain a relevant curriculum to ensure that student learning aligns with industry needs within the competitive workforce.

### Barriers to Engaging Business in the Work of Preparing Students for College and Careers

When asked about barriers to engaging businesses in preparing students for college and career, educators and local leaders mentioned four common concerns:

- 1. Transportation.** Logistical considerations affect the opportunities provided in an educational context as well as the flow of regional labor sheds and the location of employment opportunities. Students may be unable to participate in work-based learning and other educational opportunities if they do not have access to a vehicle. Limited public transportation options, the geographic distribution of jobs, and other transportation-related challenges will require new approaches to delivering experiential learning and building business partnerships.
- 2. Age.** Legal limitations regarding employment age, as well as businesses that may be hesitant to hire or provide internships for students in high school, can limit experiential learning opportunities for students.
- 3. Time.** Allocating time to build and sustain relationships with community partners, design content, and work through student schedule restrictions are significant concerns in adopting innovative approaches to career preparation for students. Educators' time is limited by current responsibilities, so creating flexibility and working to provide time for new initiatives is extremely important.
- 4. Student Engagement.** Student interest and differing levels of self-motivation related to career development play an important role in creating opportunities that are engaging and relevant. One way to build student engagement and interest is to address students' lack of understanding about career opportunities, specifically with local industries.

## Short-Term Action Items

Educators, industry leaders, and administrators developed a variety of short-term action items to strengthen partnerships with industry leaders over the next three months. While building relationships to support workforce development in each community requires a local approach, three universal strategies were highlighted by educators and industry leaders:

- 1. Externships.** Identifying and engaging key partners to connect teachers, counselors, and administrators with industry experiences is important for information sharing and relationship building.
- 2. Chambers of Commerce and Economic Development Organizations.** Attendees identified the important role that their local chambers of commerce and economic development organizations play in bringing the community's business leaders together. Many CTAE leaders are exploring strategies to allow teachers and administrators to fully participate in these organizations.
- 3. Partner with Industry.** Inviting industry representatives into schools, connecting with industry through advisory committees, and developing regional and local partnerships can encourage communication. These are important steps that will allow educators and business leaders to work together to collaboratively address workforce needs.

## Conclusion

This report highlights best practices, ideas, techniques, and solutions for building strong partnerships between CTAE and the business community. It is important to note that building sustainable partnerships is not easy work, but the benefits of a successful partnership outweigh the costs. CTAE students will have better experiences in the classroom, improved connections with the working world, and enhanced skills after graduation. As the state continues to grow and succeed in economic development, the importance of CTAE will only increase.

This report serves as a guide for future planning and implementation related to partnerships with business and industry, building stronger program advisory committees, and CTAE program delivery. Consider the current role of your school system in economic development and how that role could be strengthened. Review the list of barriers that meeting participants developed and identify any barriers that could be reduced or removed. Note short-term and long-term action items that your district could undertake to build deep partnerships with employers and economic development professionals. Stronger industry partnerships will pay dividends for students, teachers, administrators, and the local economy.