

**Partners for a Prosperous Athens**  
**June 26, 2006, Clarke Central High School**  
**Workforce Citizen Committee**  
**DRAFT SUMMARY**

The Workforce Committee began its data collection processes this evening and will continue that over the next meeting or two. By the end of August we will have to have an interim report prepared on our work and findings. After that, we'll suggest implementation strategies to effectively address the problems.

The Education Committee has identified over 100 locations for focus group efforts throughout Athens. In order for the focus groups to get the same information from the facilitators, training classes have been created. Vivian Fisher is asking for volunteers to take the training and help with the focus groups. The schedule is short notice, but anyone interested in facilitating groups who cannot make it to the scheduled training sessions should contact Vivian. The Workgroup Committee has 8 volunteers to go through the training for the focus group interviews.

The date and times for the (initial) training sessions were:

Wednesday June 28, 5-6:30

Thursday June 29 12-1:30

Contact Vivian Fisher: [vhfisher@uga.edu](mailto:vhfisher@uga.edu) or 706-542-6167

Much of the evening was dedicated to hearing from four presenters:

- Sonuel Devlin (Department of Labor) on the Importance of Soft Skills;
- Mike Ingram (Department of Labor) on the Range of Employment Services at the DOL;
- Lynn Johns (Athens-Clarke County School District) on K-12 Preparation for Work Opportunities;
- and
- Red Petrovs (President, CSS Consulting) on Large Employer Feedback

Presentations were made in a "round-robin" style, with each presenter visiting each Workforce Workgroup for 10 minutes of commentary and 5 minutes to respond to questions before moving on to the next group. The following is a compilation of notes on the presentations and discussions taken by members of each workgroup. Handouts are available as a separate document to download, [wf\\_handouts\\_6-26-06.pdf](#).

**Sonuel Devlin, Department of Labor: The Importance of Soft Skills**

Handout: Sean Hewitt. "9 Soft Skills For Success,"

Soft skills are "the non-technical, intangible, personality-specific skills that determine your strengths as a leader, listener, negotiator, and conflict mediator." (Hewitt, p. 1) The hard skills are such things as experience, education, skills, etc. Employers like employees with winning attitudes; team players and effective communicators who exude confidence, possess creative skills, accept and learn from criticism, motivate themselves and lead others, multitask and prioritize to do lists, and see the big picture.

DOL has both hard and soft skills programs. Soft skills training assists "cyclers": those who can't keep jobs, because they don't show up on time or at all, etc., although many have technical skills. Soft skills are taught through discussion, role-playing, and learning case studies.

Gene works with individuals with special needs; Glenn: Latino, works with school boards; Sherry Kaplan works with teachers and takes referrals.

It's difficult to get teachers outside of special ed. programs to identify students; referrals not being made. Need to continue educating teachers to get them to refer students (have to have parental permission), starting in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (have to be in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade).

How to bring awareness of programs to young people in criminal justice systems? DOL has vocational rehab, Top Step (Stanley Johnson: Ex Offenders); GoodWorks: TANF population; Jobs for GA Grants (Loretta Smith: work with seniors).

How get people to understand their need to learn soft skills?

Example: working with high school job readiness and retention; discussions; worked with 200 students; piloted at Cedar Shoals a program for soft skills; mock trials of students deemed guilty of not being prepared (emphasized importance of dress and attitude).

Why are Department of Labor resources such as workshops not fully utilized? Need for marketing to expand awareness of resources in community.

### **Mike Ingram, Department of Labor: The Range of Employment Services at the DOL**

Handouts: "Identifying your Skills," "Job Search Workshops at Athens Career Center," and "Services Available to You"

Michael Thurmond, the current head of DOL, changed the department from an "unemployment office" to a resource for job seekers: one-stop career centers. The Athens office provides 22 computers for job searches, resume writing, and GED tutorial program. There are specialists in resume writing on the staff, so job seekers can get help writing resumes and then post digital copies via email or WWW. DOL staff also provides soft skills training, such as how to do a job interview; employers look for applicants with soft skills, since they can teach the hard skills needed in their workplace. In addition, someone from the UGA Career Services Center comes in 3 times per week to work one-on-one with people who need computer skills. The DOL office connects with Athens Technical College and works with the school system. The program "Teachers in Industry" pairs teachers with workers in local businesses so that teachers can see first-hand what skills are required on the job.

DOL also works with the school system to try to develop soft skills in students. Students need to understand what work is and why they need the skills. Parents need to play a role, because teachers can't do it all.

Oliver Rubber Closing: half didn't know how to use the computer; needed to set up email accounts. DOL staff have been there twice to conduct information meetings about Medicaid / PeachCare and the transition.

DOL collaborates with other state agencies, such as Department of Family and Childrens Services and the Pardons and Paroles Board. DFCS helps provide services to job seekers while they search for jobs. TOPSTEP is a program to help offenders assimilate into the workforce.

Since DOL is a state agency with no funds earmarked for marketing, they can only publicize their services through word-of-mouth, newspaper articles and announcements, and job fairs (held in the spring and fall).

*What is Department of Labor doing to prepare applicants with hard skills for potential new biotech employers?*

Department of Labor doesn't know what hard skills are desired by these employers. The Chamber of Commerce and ACC Economic Development Committee are responsible for obtaining this information, and Athens Tech will receive that information for the purposes of developing an instructional curriculum.

### **Lynn Johns, Athens-Clarke County School District Director of Applied Learning and School-to-Career Education: K-12 Preparation for Work Opportunities**

Handouts: "Clarke County School District Adopt A Class," "About Keytrain," "KeyTrain Courses," and "KeyTrain Career Skills Outlines"

Lynn Johns is in her 9th year with school district 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade vocational education. The school district provides exploratory programs to see if a career is right for students, and a focus on career and technical education (workforce preparation). There is an early motherhood initiative to help students prepare for the GED. The Even Start Family Literacy Program serves families with children under the age of eight whose parents are in need of a GED or ESOL classes.

In middle school, Family and Consumer Science focuses on finance, personal skills, personal development, family issues (has math and science integration); Principles of Technology focuses on health science, drafting, video broadcasting, physics, and technology; and Business focuses on keyboarding, word processing, spread sheets, data bases.

In high school, electives include auto mechanics, construction, business (keyboarding to web design), graphic arts, marketing, health occupations, and agricultural science, which is building a greenhouse. There is a work-study program for school credit, where students can gain skills and experience, and a youth apprenticeship program so they can see which careers are right for them.

The challenge for vocational education is that parents often expect their children to attend college, whether the child has the interest and ability or not. They don't understand that those who are good with their hands can make a very good living if they learn the right skills. Having a college degree is no guarantee of a good job. Students don't like to talk about wanting to attend Athens Tech to learn plumbing or other skills, because they're afraid they'll be laughed at.

Clarke County School System has been using KeyTrain for about 4 years. It is a web-based skills development program with curriculum derived from ACT, developed as a training tool for the WorkKeys assessment program. It gives employers a common language to use to determine a potential employee's skill level. The employee can see what level he or she is, and what other skills are needed, on average, to be able to do a particular job. For example, a lawyer has a basic skills set, and if a student learns those skills, the chances of getting a job as a lawyer are high. Three areas are tested with six levels each: reading for information, locating information, and applied math. At level 3, students should be able to get 30% of the jobs; level 4, 65%; and level 5, 95% of jobs available to them. See the

Adopt A Class is a collaboration with the Chamber to send message to students to stay in school. Nine businesses made a 3-year commitment to give presentations to middle school students that will encourage them to get their high school degrees. See the handout for more information.

#### *How tying to ATC?*

Have a tech prep partnership with ATC. ATC foundation donated 5 scholarships per year; if a student stays in school, will have a scholarship; dual enrollment.

#### *Why do "Dual Seal" graduates score higher on standardized tests?*

Learning may be improved as a result of application of academic skills to real-world

problems by students.

### **Red Petrovs, President, CSS Consulting: Large Employer Feedback**

Handouts: Georgia Department of Labor “2005 Georgia Area Occupational Wages: Workforce Investment Area #9, Northeast Georgia” and “Employer Learning Community Questions”

“Area Occupational Wages” indicates that if the unemployed/underemployed in Clarke County had a high school education and the soft skills necessary to get and keep a job, they would be able to find a job that paid them more than “poverty-level” wages.

On June 9, 5 major employers, representing around 4500 jobs, discussed employment challenges. Among them is educational attainment: job applicants could not pass 8th grade reading level test, although they had graduated from high school. Employers would rather have applicants who have a GED, because they know what they are getting. The applicant pool in the area is large enough that employers don’t have to hire those who don’t already have a basic education. There are many opportunities for good jobs in the area for those who have more than just a high school education.

*To what extent do these employers rely on temp services?*

Depends on the company. For example, Power Partners go through a temp agency, because they have a WorkKeys profile established (defines what the hard/soft skills are required); turnover has decreased from 50% to 3%. Most companies go through DOL.

*What do employers think about employees with prior criminal history?*

Varies by company: UGA disqualifies applicants with a felony as does Merial, because they produce meds, and there is always a possibility of getting sued.

*Are employers willing to hire people without English skills?*

Very dependent on company.

### **Discussion comments**

#### *Special Populations*

Information was focused on things that individuals need to tap into jobs that presumably exist. We heard about services, but were left with the question of what are the reasons people don’t have those skills? What are the experiences of those who are using those services? Are there jobs for them to take? Can people get to the job or job interviews? DOL is on the east side?

ASK FOCUS GROUPS TO ENGAGE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN THROUGH PROCESS

ASK DOL/LEISURE SERVICES/ELFE TO SEE IF POTENTIAL FOR PARTNERSHIP

SCHOOL CULTURE: students say it doesn’t matter; how does school culture impact development of soft skills? Huge combo between family and school to ensure development of those soft skills

SPECIAL POPULATIONS: need to hear more about TOPSTEP program, new immigration law: how can an employer sponsor so?

#### *Skills Development*

Actions Recommended:

A. Improve soft skills of workforce.

B. Define needs of potential new biotech employers and deploy that information immediately to all training resources. Consider improvements to transferable skills such as literacy and job-related skills specific to this type of employer. Consider potential for expanding training resources beyond Athens Tech to public schools and UGA.

C. Improve workforce access to existing services so as to fully load and utilize those resources. Analyze what workforce development resources are available and what barriers to utilization exist. Implement corrective action to remove barriers. Effectively advertise services to needy workforce populations.

D. Improve workforce motivation. Apply all extrinsic motivations possible. Develop intrinsic motivations to improve skills and access services. Sow and then cultivate hope and vision.

### *Resources*

Find a means for the Department of Labor to market its underutilized services. Currently there are no 'publicity' funds available.

This marketing tool may also be used to advertise or market other non profits that offer services.

We need to brainstorm marketing ideas. There was a suggestion to partner with the Marketing Department in UGA's Terry Business College. (A UGA class prepared and presented two competing plans to market the Classic City High School.)

Investigate the differences (or the perception of differences) between rural and urban workers. Discussion on this topic included: rural employees may have been raised with more day to day responsibility; there may be a difference in family structure; the traits that the employer finds undesirable may be those traits that help the urban employee to succeed in their community environment.

Investigate what additional skills or support is needed to prepare individuals for the job market. Identify which skills are most important for young people to secure and keep jobs.

Some employers disqualify employees with a criminal record. Merial's drug manufacturing facility was cited as an example. Companies need to review this policy. Perhaps the DOL could maintain list of companies that hire employees with a criminal history and the DOL might steer applicants to companies most likely to hire them.

There is a need to develop a database of all available resources and actively publicize those resources to those who need them.