

College and Career Ready Task Force

Recommendations to Governor Robert Bentley

In January 2013, Governor Robert Bentley issued an Executive Order establishing the Governor's College and Career Ready Task Force. The Governor assembled leaders from education, industry and government in an effort to produce a series of recommendations designed to leverage the strengths of education and industry to improve educational outcomes and to promote workforce and economic development within the State.

College and career readiness is particularly important to Alabama now, as the economy continues to grow and add jobs. Ten year industry forecasts show a significant rise in demand for skilled workers, particularly those with a high school degree and some industry credentials, and also for those with bachelor's degree and above.

The Governor's Task Force sought to identify and analyze areas deemed most critical for today's leaders. The Task Force therefore concentrated its efforts on initiatives that:

- Enhance education and industry collaboration on an ongoing basis,
- Ensure appropriate development of essential professional skills,
- Increase participation of high-wage and high-demand career pathways within the State of Alabama by informing students in a one- on - one setting about educational access, articulation, and the variety of opportunities available to them in the skilled trade arena.

Recommendation: Statewide Workforce Council

The Task Force recommends legislation that will establish a statewide workforce council to be called the Alabama Workforce Council. The council shall be comprised of an appointed group of business and industry senior managers from across the state. Its purpose is to aid the Chancellor of the Alabama Community College System, the Superintendent of the Alabama Department of Education, the Council of College and University Presidents and their Governing Boards in formulating policies, developing innovative educational workforce programming, and discussing issues related to the workforce development needs of the state. It will also promote coordination and collaboration across PK-12, two-year colleges, four-year universities and business and industry on the local and state levels. The council will seek input from the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Alabama Office of School Readiness (prekindergarten programs), and the Alabama State Board of Education to ensure continuous emphasis on pre-kindergarten through graduate education.

The statewide workforce council will be tasked with reviewing and developing recommendations associated with, but not limited to, the following:

- A. Streamline and align the existing workforce development functions of the State.
- B. Increase awareness and educate students on available opportunities in the various industry sectors.
- C. Create a statistical feedback loop between industry and education.
- D. Propose funding opportunities to increase established industry-funded and Education Budget allocations to be used as scholarship programs for college technical education and dual enrollment programming.
- E. Enhance public relations and marketing associated with career readiness and skilled craft trades.
- F. Develop a mechanism that will ensure continuous emphasis on pre-kindergarten through graduate education.
- G. Provide leadership and recommend standards for increasing membership and expanding operations of the existing ten Regional Workforce Development Councils.
- H. Identify and address critical unmet needs such as specialty skills in a specific region of the state.
- I. Develop a methodology to guide program decisions and gauge the success of students as they enter the workforce.

The Task Force believes that establishing a statewide workforce council will ensure perennial coordination, collaboration and continuity between all stakeholders involved in workforce development across the state.

Recommendation: Business Sector and Career Pathways Approach

It is recommended that The Workforce Council develop a proposal for a Business Sector and Career Pathways approach for college and career readiness. By adopting and applying such a framework, Alabama will move toward becoming a true workforce development "system" with a common language and mindset in which to discuss, plan, implement, manage and evaluate programs and activities. Such an approach allows business and education partnerships to (1) identify business sectors, or clusters, that are vital to Alabama's current and future economy, (2) identify the critical occupations and related skill sets of those occupations, (3) better align state education and training programs and resources to address those needs while (4) providing educators a means to engage directly with business and industry across traditional boundaries.

Using this recommended approach, education leaders, workforce development policy makers, and industry executives, can remain engaged in a collaborative fashion. Implementation of this approach will create a coherent sequence of career education, career exploration, and career counseling activities in K-12, leading to rigorous academic and career courses that begin in high school and lead to associate degrees, bachelor degrees and beyond, and/or an industry recognized credential, certificate or license. These career pathways are developed, implemented and maintained by partnerships involving educators, community leaders, and employers. Business engagement and ongoing leadership is vital.

Recommendation: Career Coaches Program

The Task Force recommends the development and implementation of a comprehensive, integrated career guidance program for all Alabama students. The State has experimented with this model to a limited degree and with much success; the Task Force now recommends that the Workforce Council recommend ways to expand this career coach concept to ensure adequate coverage to serve students in all public middle and high schools in Alabama. It is recommended that the Workforce Council make recommendations as to how to best use the career coach as a delivery vehicle for materials, media, and job opportunities, from the business sector to public school students.

The program should provide for career coaches and case managers with traditional and non-traditional students and their influencers at home, school, and across workforce development organizations. These career coaches will inform students and their influencers concerning career options, and help them develop courses of study outlined in the Career Pathways model described in that recommendation.

Recommendation: Career Marketing, Communications, Public Relations, and Image Campaign

This initiative seeks to implement a comprehensive, integrated marketing, public relations and grassroots communication plan for those occupations and career pathways that are projected to be most vital to economic growth and that are projected to have the greatest disparities in supply and demand and which show the greatest promise for rewarding careers.

More specifically, this recommendation would result in the development of a comprehensive, integrated, multi-sector, electronic, career information internet portal which describes all the elements of the critical occupations identified in the sector and career pathways approaches described in that specific recommendation. This portal will utilize a proven marketing approach for targeted audiences as opposed to a "governmental" website.

Recommendation: Student Credentialing and/or Earning Dual Enrollment Credit

In keeping with Alabama's strategic plan for education, known as PLAN 2020, the Task Force recommends that K12 schools statewide implement and/or expand industry credentialing programs. K12

students will have the opportunity to earn specific industry credentials and/or college credit through technical dual enrollment. Dual enrollment provides for greater success in higher-level training and a high level of college completion.

The Alabama State Department of Education, in partnership with postsecondary and higher education, will define appropriate credentials and technical dual enrollment opportunities based on industry input as well as the Accelerate Alabama Plan. The credential list should be defined and revised over time by industry advisory committees from each industry sector. These lists should reflect regional workforce needs and should change based on new and existing industry needs over time. Due to a shortage in skilled labor, it is recommended that the State of Alabama find ways to increase technical dual enrollment scholarships for all interested and qualified Alabama high school students.

Recommendation: Statewide Soft Skills Training

The Task Force recommends that the Workforce Council the need for Alabama public high school student and Alabama community college student to receive soft or essential skills education as a part of their required curriculum or program of study. It is further recommended that all four-year college and university students receive soft or essential skills education as a part of their required curriculum. Recognizing the importance of soft or essential skills in the workplace, committee members were unanimous in recommending its availability to all high school and college students. Most community colleges presently offer some sort of soft or essential skills education, so expanding successful programs to address this particular recommendation would be achievable.

Conclusion:

Ultimately, by moving forward with a successful implementation of these recommendations, and by continuing with the many successful education and workforce development programs already in place such as Accelerate Alabama, our state should see improvement across several key metrics including:

- Improved high school graduation rates,
- Reduction in remediation in high school graduates entering into higher education,
- Higher levels of skill attainment and educational achievement overall,
- Higher workforce participation rates,
- Increases in average per capita income, and
- Greater economic growth (state GDP).